The Acts of the Apostles

William Kelly

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Prefaces

Newly translated from an amended text.

Third Edition

Prefaces

Prefaces to the First Edition

[Acts 1 - 14]

The interesting and instructive nature of this inspired book, the complement of the Gospel by the same writer, has drawn out special commentaries not a few in ancient as well as modern times. Nevertheless it seems desirable that it should be set out in the light of the Holy Spirit’s presence and action, as well as of our Lord’s return: truths by no means adequately represented in any such work known to the author, conscious as he is of his own manifold shortcomings. He trusts, however, that the reader may be helped by such suggestions as are here brought together in His grace Who alone can bless, but Who loves to bless the feeblest through the name of the Lord Jesus which shines in the Acts from the beginning of the book to the end.

[Acts 15 - 28]

The reader has now before him the second volume of this exposition which completes the work. He who has devoted time and labour to this end, as he sought the gracious direction of our God, can but pray for His abundant blessing on His word where His children seek to grow in spiritual understanding and enjoyment of what is alike reliable and precious. The book is rich none

the less because we have not much of the Twelve (notwithstanding its traditional title), though a great deal of Peter first, and of Paul last, and truly the last becomes first, whatever man might wish. But everywhere it is the Lord Jesus exalted on high, yet actively working by the Holy Spirit below, whether in the service of individuals in no way confined to apostles, or in the assembly as well as the kingdom of God. May grace recall believers to imperishable truth from the ever-swelling desire for development or invention, from confidence in human tradition or in the progress of the age: soon to be judged by Him Who is coming.

Second Edition

Originally published in two volumes, crown 8vo, the work is here reissued in one volume, demy.

London, May, 1914 [Editor]

Editor’s Note To The Third Edition

The Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles by W. Kelly is a series of articles in The Bible Treasury (Vols. xiv-xviii; 1882-9). They were issued as two volumes in 1890, and again as a bulky single volume in 1914.

As these editions are now out of print and inaccessible, a new edition has been prepared for the use and profit of present-day readers and searchers of the Holy Scriptures, and particularly of the Book of the Acts.

The changes and corrections are few, relating mainly to some orthographical and similar details.

Mr. Kelly’s translation of his amended text of the Acts which appeared separately in the preface to the second

edition (1914) has in this third edition been attached to his comments on the verses as they occur.

The inspired history of the foundation of the church of God on earth at the descent of the Holy Spirit, along with its earliest institutions and practice affords invaluable guidance to those who desire in ecclesiastical matters to be ruled by the will of God rather than by the councils and organizations of fallible men. With this end in view, the new edition of W.K's commentary on that history has been prepared for reissue.

March, 1952

W. J. Hocking

Acts 1

Acts 1

First of all we see man in an entirely new place — man risen from among the dead and ascending to heaven. The risen ascended man, Christ Jesus, is the new starting-point of the dealings of God. The first man afforded the great and solemn and saddening lesson of human responsibility. The cross had just closed the history of the race; for Jesus in no way shrank from all that was connected with the creature responsible here below, but met it to God's glory. He alone was capable of doing all; He alone solved every question; and this as a perfect man, but not a perfect man only, because He was very God. Thus was glory brought to His Father all through His life, — to God as such in His death; and glory to God not merely as one who was putting man to the test, but who was removing from before His face the root and the fruits of sin; for this is the wonderful specialty of the death of the Lord Jesus, that, in Him crucified, all that had hindered, all that had dishonoured God, was for ever met, and God infinitely more and after a better sort glorified than if there never had been sin at all.

Thus on the setting aside of the old creation, the way was clear for man in this new place; and we shall see this in the blessed book before us-the Acts of the Apostles, although I am far from meaning that the title is an adequate statement of its contents: it is but its human name, and man is not capable even of giving a name. It is a book of deeper and more glorious purpose than acts of the apostles could be, however blessed in

their place. Flowing down from the risen man in heaven, we have God Himself displaying fresh glory, not merely for but in man, and this so much the more because it is no longer a perfect man on earth, but the working of the Holy Ghost in men of like passions as ourselves. Nevertheless, through the mighty redemption of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Ghost is able to come down holily and righteously, willing in love to take His place, not merely in the earth, but in that very race that had dishonoured God down to the cross of Christ, when man could go no lower in scorn and hatred of that one man who in life and death has thus changed all things for God and for us.

Accordingly this first chapter, and more particularly the verses (1-11) that I have read, show us the groundwork, by no means unconnected with all that follows, but the most fitting introduction, as the facts were the necessary basis of it; and this the more strikingly because at first sight no man perhaps could have understood it thus. Indeed I doubt that any believer could have scanned this until there was a fair measure of intelligence in the revealed truth of God. And I do not mean merely now that truth which, being received, constituted him a believer, but the large infinite truth which it is the object of the Holy Ghost to bring out in this book as also throughout the New Testament. At first sight many an one may have found a difficulty why it was that the Spirit of God, after having in the gospel of Luke shown us Jesus risen and Jesus ascended, should take it up again in the beginning of the Acts. If we have had such questions, we may at least learn this lesson, that it is wise and good, yea, the only sound wisdom for us, and that which pleases our God, to set it down as a

fixed maxim that God is always right, that His word never says a thing in vain, — that if He appear to repeat, it is in no way repetition after a human infirm sort, but with a divine purpose; and as the resurrection and the ascension too were necessary to complete the scheme of truth given us in the gospel of Luke, so the risen man ascending to heaven was necessary to be brought in again as a starting-point by the very same writer, when God gives by him this new unfolding of the grace and ways of God in man.

We see then the Lord Jesus risen from the dead. We have the remarkable fact that He does not act independently of the Holy Ghost in His risen character any more than as man here below. In short, He is man, although no longer in that life which could be laid down but risen again; and the blessedness of man always is to act and speak by the Holy Ghost. So with the Lord Jesus, until the day in which He was taken up, it is said, after that He, through the Holy Ghost, had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen. Resurrection does not supersede the Holy Ghost. The action of the Holy Ghost may be very different in resurrection, but there is still the blessedness of the power of the Spirit of God working by Him even though risen from the dead. It is not only that the disciples needed the Spirit of God, but that Jesus was pleased still through the Holy Ghost to deal with us so. But this is not all. Assembled with them, He explains that the Holy Ghost was to be given to themselves, and this not many days hence. It was the more important to state this great truth, because He had said a short time before “Receive ye the Holy Ghost;” and the ignorance that is natural to us might have used the words in John 20 to deny the further power and

privilege that was about to be conferred in the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. They were both of the deepest importance. It is not for us to compare for our preference. But of this I am persuaded, that to have the Holy Ghost according to the Lord's words on the resurrection-day has its own blessedness as decidedly as the gift of the Holy Ghost sent down from above: the one being more particularly that which forms the intelligence of the new man; the other, that power which goes forth in testimony for the blessing of others. I need not say the order too was perfect, — not in power for others first, but as spiritual intelligence for our own souls. We are not fit vessels for the good of others until God has given us divine consciousness of a new being according to Christ for ourselves.

But there is more still. It was necessary too that they should know the vast change. Their hearts, spite of the blessing, had little realized the ways of God that were about to open for them. Thus not only do we hear the Lord intimating that the promise of the Father must be poured out upon them, but further, even after this, they asked Him whether He was at this time about to restore again the kingdom to Israel. This furnishes, as our foolish questions often do, the inlet for divine instruction and guidance. We need not always repress these enquiries from the Lord: it is well to let that which is in the mind come out, especially if it be to Him. Nor must His servants be impatient even at the curious questions of those that least understand; for the importance is not so much in that which is asked as in the answer. Certainly this was ever the case with our Lord and the disciples. "It is not for you," says He, "to know the times and the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own

authority, but ye shall receive power." The measures and the fit moments that had to do with earthly changes were in the sole control of Him to whom all belonged. "But ye shall receive power" (for the two words are different), "after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me." It was not the time for the kingdom in the sense of manifested power; and this was in their desires. The kingdom in a mysterious form no doubt there is, and we are translated into it., and it is in the power of the Spirit. But emphatically it was to be a time of testimony till He returns in glory. Such is our place. Blest perfectly according to all the acceptance of Christ exalted in the glory of God, our business is to be witnesses to Him. And so the Lord tells the apostles, "Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Then we have the finishing touch, if one may so say, to this introduction. The Lord ascends to heaven, but not with whirlwind nor with chariot of fire. It is not simply that He was not, for God took Him, as is said of Enoch, but in a way more suitable to His glory it is written here that "he was taken up, and a cloud" (the special token of the divine presence) "received him out of their sight."

While they looked steadfastly toward heaven, they hear from the angels who stood by them in white, that this Jesus that was taken up from them should thus come in like manner as they had beheld Him going into heaven.

Thus the only true foundation is laid, and heaven becomes the point of departure — not the earth, nor the first man, but the second man, the last Adam, from the

only place that was suitable for Him according to the counsels of God. Such is the basis of Christianity. Altogether vain and impossible, had not redemption been accomplished, and a redemption by blood and in the power of resurrection. Redemption in se does not give us the full height and character of Christianity: man risen, and ascended to heaven, after the full expiation of sins on the cross, is necessary to its true and complete expression.

A further scene follows, by no means possible to be absent without a blank for the spiritual understanding. It must be proved manifestly that God had given even now a new place of blessing, and a new power too, or spiritual competency, to the disciples. At the same time they would have to wait for power of the Spirit in gift to act on others. Accordingly we see the disciples together, “continuing with one accord in prayer and supplication;” and in those days Peter stands up, and brings before them the gap made in the apostolic body by the apostasy and death of Judas. Observe how he brings out with an altogether unwonted force the scripture that applied to the case. This was in virtue, not of the promise of the Father for which they were waiting, but of that which they had already from Jesus risen from the dead. Hence without delay the disciples proceed to act. Peter says, “Of these men which have companioned with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be a witness with us of his resurrection.”

It will be noticed that the words “ordained to be” are left out. Every one ought to be aware indirectly, if not from his own knowledge, that there is nothing in Greek to

represent them. There is not, and there never was, the smallest pretence of divine authority for their insertion. It is hard to say how godly men endorsed so pure an interpolation — with what object can be easily surmised: it does not require a word from me.

“And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.” For these two had qualifications, as far as man knew, suitable to the requirements for an apostle, being the companions of the earthly path of the Lord Jesus. They had seen Him risen from the dead. Unable to judge between them definitely, the rest spread the matter before the Lord who must choose His own apostle. The mode of the disciples in this case, it is true, might seem peculiar to us; but I have no doubt that they were guided of the Lord. There is no reason from scripture to believe that Peter and the others acted hastily, or were mistaken. The Spirit of God in this very book sanctions the choice that was made that day, and never alludes to Paul as the necessary twelfth apostle. To do so would be, in my judgment, to weaken if not to ruin the truth of God. Paul was not one of the twelve. It is of all consequence that he should be permitted to retain a special place, who had a special work. All was wisely ordered.

Here then they prayed, and said, “Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen.” Man never chooses an apostle; apostles did not, could not, elect an apostle: the Lord alone chose. And so they gave forth their lots after a Jewish fashion. The twelve apostles were clearly, as it seems to me, in relation to the twelve tribes of Israel, “and they gave forth their lots.” This was sanctioned of God in the Old Testament when Israel was before Him; it

will be sanctioned of God when Israel returns on the scene in the latter day. No doubt, when the assembly of God was in being, the lot disappears; but the assembly of God was not yet formed. All would be in order in due time. “They gave forth their lots;1 and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.” We shall find a little later, yet before Paul appears, that “the twelve” are recognised. So says the Spirit of God.

But now, when the day of Pentecost was running its course, they were all with one accord together; for God put the disciples in waiting in the attitude of expectation and prayer and supplication before Him. It was good that they should feel their weakness; and this was indeed the condition of true spiritual power, as it always is for the soul (if not for testimony, certainly for the soul). “And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” The manner of the Holy Spirit’s appearing thus it is well to notice. It was exactly adapted to the intent for which He was given. It was not, as in the gospels, a testimony to the grace of the Lord, although nothing but grace could have given Him to man. It was not, as we find it afterwards in the Revelation, where mention is made of the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. The tongues were parted; for it was not a question of people being now made to speak of one lip. God was meeting man where he was, — not setting aside the ancient judgment of his

pride, yet graciously condescending to man, and this to mankind as they were. It was no sign of government, still less of government limited to a special nation. The parted tongues clearly showed that God thought of the Gentile as of the Jew. But they were “as of fire;” for the testimony of grace was none the less founded on righteousness. The gospel is intolerant of evil. This is the wonderful way in which God now speaks by the Holy Ghost. Whatever the mercy of God, whatever the proved weakness, need, and guilt of man, there is not nor can be the least compromise of holiness. God can never sanction the evil of man. Hence the Spirit of God was thus pleased to mark the character of His presence, even though given of the grace of God, but founded on the righteousness of God. God could afford fully to bless. It was no derogation from His glory; it was after all but His seal on the perfectness of the work of the Lord Jesus. Not only did He show His interest for man, and His grace to the evil and lost, but, above all, His honour for Jesus. There is no title nor ground so secure for us. There is no spring of blessing that we are entitled so to boast of as the Lord: there is none that so delivers from self.

At this time too there were dwelling at Jerusalem men from all nations, we may say, generally speaking, under heaven — “Jews, devout men.” And when it was noised abroad that the Holy Ghost had thus been given to the congregated disciples “the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speaking in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all of these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new the (or sweet) wine. But Peter, standing up with eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem." For he first addresses them on a narrower ground than that into which he afterwards branches out, and both with a wisdom that is not a little striking. Here he is about to apply a portion of the prophecy of Joel. It will be seen that the prophet takes exactly the same limited ground as Peter does. That is, the Jews, properly so called, and Jerusalem, stand in the foreground of Joel 's prophecy: so admirably perfect is the word of God even in its smallest detail.

The point he insists on, it will be noticed, was this — that the wonder then before them in Jerusalem was after all one for which their own prophets ought to have prepared them. "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." He does not say that it was the fulfilment of the prophet. Men, divines, have so said, but not the Spirit of God. The apostle simply says, "This is that which was spoken." Such was its character. How far it was to be then accomplished is another matter. It was not the excitement of nature by wine, but the heart filled with the Spirit of God, acting in His own power and in all classes. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and

your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." There he stops, as far as Joel is concerned.

Then, verse 22, he addresses them as "men of Israel," not merely of Judea and Jerusalem, but now breaking out into the general hopes of the nation, he at the same time proves their common guilt. "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it."

And this the apostle supports by what David had spoken in Psalm 16: "I foresaw the Lord always before my face." The same psalm affords the clearest proof that the Messiah (and no Jew could doubt that the Messiah was in question there) would be characterised by the most absolute trust in God through an His life; that he was to lay down His life with trust in God just as unbroken and perfect in death as in life; and finally that He would stand in resurrection. It is the psalm therefore of

confidence in God that goes right through life, death, resurrection. It was seen in Jesus, and clearly not applicable to David its writer. Of all whom a Jew could have put forward to claim the language of such a psalm, David would have been perhaps the uppermost one in their hearts. But it was far beyond that famous king, as Peter argued: “Men [and] brethren,2 let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.”

Thus the fresh and notorious facts as to Jesus, and no one else, completely agreed with this inspired testimony to the Messiah. Nor was it confined to a single portion of the Psalms. “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear.” But David is not ascended into the heavens. Thus Peter cites another psalm to show the necessary ascension of Messiah to sit at the right hand of Jehovah, just as much as he had shown resurrection to be predicted of Him as of no other. “for he says himself, Jehovah said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool.” Who was the man that sat at God’s right hand? Certainly none could pretend it was David, but his Son, the Messiah; and this entirely corresponded with the facts the apostles had beheld personally. “Therefore let all the house of Israel

know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." Thus the proof was complete. Their psalms found their counterpart in the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus the Messiah. God had made Him "both Lord and Christ;" for here the testimony is very gradual, and the wisdom of God in this we may well admire and profit by. In meeting the Jews, God condescended to put forth the glory of His own Son in the way that most of all attached itself to their ancient testimonies and to their expectations. They looked for a Messiah. But apparently all was lost. for they had refused Him; and they might have supposed that the loss was irretrievable. Not so: God had raised Him from the dead. He had shown Himself therefore against what they had done; but their hope itself was secure in the risen Jesus, whom God had made to be Lord and Christ. Jesus, spite of all that they had done, had in nowise given up His title as the Christ; God had made Him such. After they had done their worst, and He had suffered His worst, God owned Him thus according to His own word at His own right hand. Other glories will open there too; but Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, as Paul says, was to be raised from the dead according to his gospel. Timothy was to remember this; and Paul can descend to show the connection of the glorious person of the Lord Jesus with the Jew on earth, as he loved for his own relationship to behold Him in heavenly glory. Thus the link with the expectations of the earthly people, though broken by death, is reset for ever in resurrection.

Surprised, grieved, alarmed to the heart by that which Peter had thus forcibly brought before them, they cry to him and the other apostles, "Men [and] brethren, what

shall we do?" This gives the opportunity for the apostle to set out in the wisdom of God a very weighty application of the truth for the soul that hears the gospel: "Repent," says he, which is a far deeper thing than compunction of heart. This they had already, and it leads to that which he desired for them: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." There is no true repentance unto life without faith. But it is according to God that repentance is put forward here rather than faith. The Jews had the testimony of the gospel, as well as the law; and now it had been pressed on them by Peter. Because they believed that testimony, brought home to their consciences, as we have seen, their hearts were filled with sorrow.

But the apostle lets them know that there is a judgment of self that goes far below any outburst of grief, any consciousness and hatred, even of the deepest act of evil, as undoubtedly the crucifying of Jesus was. Repentance is the abandonment of self altogether, the judgment of what we are in the light of God. And this was to be marked, therefore, not only by the negative sign of giving themselves up as altogether evil before God, but by receiving the rejected and crucified man, the Lord Jesus. Hence, to be baptized each one of them in His name for the remission of sins follows; "and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

This, therefore, is entirely distinct from faith or repentance. Believing, they had of necessity a new nature they had life in Christ; but receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost is a privilege and power beyond; and in this case it was made to be attendant on one's being

baptized as well as repenting, because in Jews it was of the utmost moment that they should give a public witness that all the rest and confidence of their souls lay in Jesus. Having been guilty of crucifying the Lord, He must be manifestly the object of their trust. And so it was that they were to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

But indeed this gift is always consequent on faith — never identical with it. This is as sure as it is important to assert and to insist on, as well as to believe. It is no question of notion or tradition, the subject of which runs in quite another direction. I do not even allow it to be an open question, nor a matter of opinion; for plainly in every instance of each soul, of whom Scripture speaks, there is an interval however short. The gift of the Holy Ghost follows faith, and is in no way at the same instant, still less is it the same act. It supposes faith already existing, not unbelief; for the Holy Ghost, though He may quicken, is never given to an unbeliever. The Holy Ghost is said to seal the believer; but it is a seal of faith, and not of unbelief. The heart is opened by faith, and the Holy Ghost is given by the grace of God to those that believe, not in order to their believing. There is no such thing as the Holy Ghost given in order to believe. He quickens the unbeliever, and is given to the believer. Although we do not hear of faith in the passage, yet from the fact that the converted only were called on to repent, we know that they must have believed. True believing necessarily goes along with true repentance. The two things are invariably found together; but the gift of the Holy Ghost is consequent on them both.

And so the apostle explains. He says, “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” His

words seem to carry a sense beyond Israel: how far he entered into the force of them himself it is not perhaps for any of us to say. We know that afterwards, when Peter was called upon to go to the Gentiles, he found difficulties. It is hard to suppose, therefore, that he fully understood his own words. However. this may be, the words were according to God, whether or not fully appreciated by Peter when he uttered them. God was going to gather out of the Jews themselves and their children, but, more than that, “those that were afar off, as many as the Lord our God should call.”

And then we have the beautiful picture that the Spirit of God gives us of the scene that was now formed by His own presence here below, “Then they that [gladly]3 received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.” They were added to the original nucleus of disciples, and “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, [and] in breaking of bread and prayers.”

Thus, after being brought into the new association, there arose a need of instruction; and the apostles were pre-eminently those that God vouchsafed in the infant days of His assembly. Inasmuch as it was of the utmost importance that all should be thoroughly established in the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ, they had a place peculiar to themselves, as above all others chosen of the Lord to lay the foundation of His house, and to direct and administer in His name, as we see through the New Testament. And then as the fruit of it, and specially connected, there was “the fellowship” of which we next read. Next followed the breaking of bread, the formal expression of Christian fellowship, and

the special outward sign of remembering Him to whose death they owed all. Finally, but closely following the Lord's supper, come "the prayers," which still showed that, however great might be the grace of God, they were in the place of danger, and needed dependence here below.

"And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common." This peculiar feature is found in Jerusalem, beautiful and blessed in its season, but, I have no doubt, special to the Jerusalem condition of the church of God. We can easily understand it. in the first place all that composed the church were at that time in the same place. We can feel readily, therefore, that there would be a real and strong family feeling, but I doubt whether their mutual affections then rose higher than the sense of their being God's family. They really did constitute the body of Christ; they were baptized by one Spirit into one body; but to be that one body, and to know that such they were, are two very different things. The development was reserved for another and still weightier witness of the glory of the Lord Jesus. But having in its strength the sense of family relationship, the wonderful victory of grace over selfish interests was the fruit of it. If he or she belonged to the household of God, this was the governing thought — not one's own possessions. Grace gives without seeking a return; but grace on the other side seeks not its own things, but those of Christ.

Another trait is, that all savoured of divine as well as family life. The breaking of bread every day, for instance, was clearly a striking witness of Christ ever before their hearts, though also a kindred effect of the

same feeling. Thus they sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as one might have need.

And they “continued daily with one accord in the temple.” This is another peculiarity. There was by no means as yet a manifest severance of the tie with Judaism, at least with the circumstances of its worship. We know that in principle the cross does make a breach, and an irreparable one, with all that is of the first man; but the power of old habits with the joy that overflowed their souls made them for the moment to be, I may say, better Jews. There was that now within which was far stronger liquor than had ever filled the old skins of the law, and these were sure to be broken in no long time. But for the present nothing was farther from the disciples’ minds: they continued daily with one accord in the temple. Along with it was joined this new element — breaking bread at home; not “from house to house,” as if it were a migratory service. There is no real ground to infer that they shifted the scene of the Lord’s supper from one place to another. This is not the meaning. The margin is correct. They broke bread at home, in contrast with the temple. It might be the very same house in which the breaking of bread always took place. They would naturally choose the most suitable quarters, which combined convenience as to distance with commodiousness in receiving as many brethren and sisters as possible.

Thus these two features were seen to meet together in the Pentecostal church — the retaining of Jewish religious habits in going up to the temple for prayer, and at the same time the observance of that which was properly Christian — the breaking of bread at home. No wonder the new-found joy overflowed, and they were

found “eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.” There is no reason to confound the breaking of bread with eating their meat. They are two different things. We find the religious life, so to speak, expressed in their going up to the temple, and in their breaking bread at home. We find the effect upon their natural life in their “eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people.” There is the same double character.

“And the Lord added to the church,” or “together,” (for there is a fair question that may be raised as to the text in this last clause) “daily such as should be saved,” or those that God was about to separate from the destruction that was impending over the Jewish nation, and, further, to bring by a blessed deliverance into the new Christian estate. The word σωζομένους does not express the full character of Christian salvation which was afterwards known. Of course we know that they were saved; but this is not what the word in itself means. It is simply that the Lord was separating those that were to be saved. The English version gives it on the whole very justly. Carefully remember that the meaning is not that they were saved then. The phrase in Luke has nothing to do with that question; it refers simply to persons destined to salvation without saying anything farther.

In the next chapter (Acts 3) a miracle is related in detail, which brought out the feelings of the people, especially as represented by their leaders (Acts 4). In going up to the temple, (for the apostles themselves went there,) Peter and John met with a man that was lame; and as he asked for alms Peter gave him something better (as grace, poor in this world’s resources and estimate,

always loves to do so). He tells the expecting man, “Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have given thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.” The man instantly rises, according to the power of God, and is found with them, “walking, and leaping, and praising God; and all the people saw him.”

This arrests universal attention, and Peter preaches a new discourse — that which has been justly enough called a Jewish sermon. It is thus evident that his indication of the Christian place of blessing in the chapter before (Acts 2) does not hinder him from setting before the men of Israel (for so he addressed them here), first, their awful position by the rejection of Jesus, and, next, the terms that God in His grace sets before them in answer to the intercession of Christ. “The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his” — not “son,” but “servant Jesus.” We know Him (and the Spirit of God, who wrote this book, infinitely better knew Him) to be the Son of God. But we must always hold to what God says; and the testimony of God did not yet — and especially in dealing with the Jews — set forth all the glory of Christ. It was gradually brought out; and the more that man’s unbelief grew, so much the more God’s maintenance of the Lord’s glory was manifested. And so, if they had with scorn refused Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go, — if they had denied the Holy One and Just, and desired a murderer to be granted, — if they had killed the Prince [leader, originator] of life, whom God raised from the dead, they had simply shown out what they were. On the other hand, His name, through faith in His name, (and they were witnesses of its power,) had made this man strong,

whom they saw and knew: “Yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.”

And then he calls upon them to repent, and be converted, that their sins might be blotted out, so that times of refreshing might come from the presence of the Lord. “And he shall send Jesus Christ, who was fore-appointed for you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” God has accomplished His word by Moses the prophet; for Moses in no way took the place of being the deliverer of Israel, but only a witness of it, a partial exemplification of God’s power then, but looking onward to the great Prophet and Deliverer that was coming. Now He was come; and so Peter sets before them, not only the coming, the Blesser’s arrival and rejection in their midst, but the awfulness of trifling with it. Whoever would not bow to Him was to be cut off by their own Moses’s declaration: “Every soul who will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people.” And so it was that all the prophets had testified of those days: and they were the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with their fathers, saying unto Abraham, “And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.” The Seed was now come. It was for them, therefore, to declare themselves. Alas! they had already set up their will against Him; but at His intercession (what grace!) God was willing to pardon it

all, did they but repent and be converted for the blotting out of their sins.

Thus we have here an appeal to the nation as such; for in all this it will be observed he does not speak a word to them of the Lord Jesus as Head of the church. We have no hint of this truth yet to anybody. Nay, we have not Jesus spoken of even in the same height as in the preceding chapter 2. We have Him in heaven, it is true, but about to return and bring in earthly power, blessing, and glory, if Israel only turned with repentance to Him. Such was the testimony of Peter. It was a true word; and it remains true. When Israel shall turn in heart to the Lord, He who secretly works this in grace will return publicly to them. When they shall say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of Jehovah," the Messiah will come in fulness of blessing. The heavens will retain Him no more, but give Him up who will fill earth as well as heaven with glory. No word of God perishes: all abides perfectly true.

Meanwhile other and deeper counsels have been brought to light by the unbelief of Israel. This unbelief comes out in no small measure in the next chapter, which follows but might properly have formed a part of Acts 3; for in sense it is a continuous subject. "And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand." Then, on the morrow, we have the council; and Peter, being by the chiefs

demanded by what power or name they had wrought the deed, filled with the Holy Ghost, answers, “Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all,” (he is throughout bold and uncompromising) “and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.” Thus again reference is made to their own testimonies. “Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

Unscrupulous as they were, they were thus confounded by the calm confidence with which the truth armed the apostles; and the more so, because their tone and language gave evidence that, whatever the power of the Holy Ghost wrought, it did not set aside ‘their condition as illiterate men. Their words, etc., bore no polish of the schools; and truth spurns, as it needs not, dialectic subtlety. This magnified, therefore, the power of God so much the more, as man’s skill was null. But at the same time there was the witness of the miracle that had been done. In presence, then, of the apostles clothed with the irresistible might of the Lord, and of the man whose healing silently attested it even as to the body, they could only command them to go aside, while they conferred together. A guilty conscience betrays its conscious weakness, however wilful. God invariably gives sufficient testimony to condemn man. He will prove this in the day of judgment; but it is certain to our

faith now. He is God, and cannot act below Himself when it is a question of His own revelation.

On such occasions even those who profess most are apt to speak together, as if there were no God, or as if He did not hear them saying, “What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it.” They would, if they could. Their will was engaged (sad to say!) against God, against the truth, against Jehovah and His anointed. “But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they may speak henceforth to no man in this name.” Thus their lack of conscience could not be hid: witness their opposition to facts that they knew, and to truth that they could not deny. The apostles cannot but take the real seat of judgment, searching the hearts of their judges: “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. And being let go, they went to their own [company].” It is seen in this passage bow truly it has been said that we have a new family. They went to their own [company], and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.” Accordingly we find them speaking to God in a new manner, and suitably to the occasion: “Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen race, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood

up, and the rulers were gathered together in this city [these last words being wrongly omitted in the received text] against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy servant [again it is servant] Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy servant Jesus." And God answered. "When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost." They had received the Holy Ghost before; but to be "filled" with Him goes farther, and supposes that no room was left for the action of nature, that the power of the Holy Ghost absorbed all for the time being. "They were filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness." Such was the effect. They were to be witnesses of Him.

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things in common." The Spirit of God repeated this, I suppose, as having a further proof of His action on their souls at this time, because many more had been brought in. "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought

the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet," — a slightly different development from the second chapter. There we find that there was what might seem a greater freeness, and perhaps to some eyes a more striking simplicity. But all is in season, and it seems to me that, while the devotedness was the same (and the Spirit of God takes pains to show that it was the same, spite of largely increased numbers, by the continued mighty action of the Holy Ghost), still with this advance of numbers simplicity could not be kept up in the same apparent manner. The distribution made to each before was more direct and immediate; now it takes effect through the apostles. The possessions were laid at the apostles' feet, and distribution was made to every one according as he had need. Among the rest one man was conspicuous for the heartiness of his love. It was Barnabas, of whom we are afterwards to hear much in other ways of still more lasting moment.

But there is rarely a manifestation of God in the church without a dark shadow that accompanies it from the evil one. And farther we find this immediately. We are not to be alarmed by the presence of evil, but rather to be sure that where God works Satan will follow, seeking to turn the very good in which the Spirit acts into a means for introducing his own counterfeit to the dishonour of the Lord. Thus in the present instance Ananias and Sapphira sell some of their property, but keep back part of the price; and this was done deliberately by concert for the purpose of gaining the character of devotedness without its cost. in principle they made the church their world, in which they sought to give the impression of a faith that confided in the Lord absolutely, while at the same

time there was a secret reserve for themselves. Now the manifest point of that which was then wrought by the Spirit of God was grace in faith: there was in no way a demand. Nothing could more falsify the fruit of the Spirit of God here than converting it into a tacit rule: there was no compulsion whatever in the case. Nobody was asked to give anything. What was gold or silver, what houses or lands, to the Lord? The worth of it all depended on its being the power of the Spirit of God — the fruit of divine grace in the heart. But Satan tempted them in the manner here described; and Peter, by whatever means he arrived at the conviction of it, arraigns the husband alone first. “Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost It is a solemn thing to remember, that all sin now is against the Spirit. There may be, no doubt, the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against Him; but in truth all sin is sin against the Holy Ghost; and for this simple reason, that He has taken His place here. In Israel the sin was against the law, because the law was the testimony that God set in His sanctuary. By the law sin was measured in Israel; but it is not so for the Christian. There is now a far more serious and searching and thorough standard. Those that use the law now as a measure among Christians lower the test of judgment incomparably. Such a misuse of the law for righteous men does not at all prove that they are anxious about holiness or righteousness; it is a proof of their ignorance of the presence of the Holy Ghost, and the just and necessary effects of His presence. One has no thought, I repeat, of implying that it is not well meant. To be sure it is. It is simply that they do not understand the distinctive character of Christianity.

But this is a most serious error; and I doubt much whether all who in appearance and by profession take the place of owning the presence of the Spirit of God have by any means an adequate sense either of the privileges which are theirs or of the gravity of their responsibility. Now, Peter had. The days were early. There was much truth that had yet to be communicated and learnt; but the power of the presence of the Holy Ghost made itself felt. He at least seems to have realised the bearing of all, and so he deals with the sin of Ananias as one who had lied to the Holy Ghost. He bad kept back part of the price of the land. “Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?” It was still his own. “Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.”

Forthwith Ananias comes under the judgment of the Lord. He fell asleep, and great fear came upon all them that heard these Words. “And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter said to her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?” Thus there was an appeal to her conscience, without an atom of harshness in it. She had longer time to weigh what they were about; but in truth it was a conspiracy; not so much to injure others as to exalt themselves; but the end was as bad as the means were evil and odious in the sight of God. Christ entered into none of their thoughts or desires. Many a thing has been said untruly since, which was not so judged of God. But there was an especial offence at this time, in that, He having wrought so wondrously in blessing man with the

best blessings through Christ our Lord, the practical denial of the presence of the Spirit should have so deliberately and quickly manifested itself for the express purpose of exalting the flesh which Christianity has set aside for ever. Hence Peter says, “How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and they shall carry thee out.... And great fear came upon all the church.”

Then we find the Lord accomplishing His word: greater works were to be done by them than even He Himself had wrought: never do we hear of the Lord’s shadow curing the sick. And believers were the more added to the Lord. The unbelievers were warned, “and of the rest durst no man join himself unto them.” Souls that bowed to the word were attracted, multitudes both of men and women; and the enemy was awed, in some quarters alarmed, and irritated in others. “The high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, and were filled with indignation. They laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.”

But the angel of the Lord shows his power; for this chapter is remarkable in giving us a picture not merely of the sweet activity of grace, but of divine power in presence of evil. We have seen the positive interference of the Spirit of God. At the end of the chapter before we had the second witness of it, after the foundation laid, and first witness given, in chapter 2. But here we have the proofs of His presence in other ways — power in dealing with the evil, and judging it within the church of God; next, power by angelic deliverance; thirdly, power by men in providence. Gamaliel in council is just as truly the effect of God’s power working by man, as the angel

in opening the doors of the prison and bringing the apostles out, — not, of course, so wonderful, but as real a part of God's working in behalf of His assembly and servants.

But there is another case. The very same men who were delivered by divine power are allowed to be beaten by man. Nay, not only do they take it quietly — these men about whom all the power of God was thus seen in action in one form or another; but they rejoice that they were counted worthy to suffer. Are we prepared for the same thing? Be assured, brethren, if we have any tie with Christ by grace, we belong to the same company: it is our own company; it is a part of our own heritage of blessing. It is not, I admit, according to the spirit of the age to deal with us after the same sort; but there is no real change for the better in the world to hinder the outbreak of its violence at any time. Is it not well therefore for us to realize to what we belong, and what the Lord looks for from us, and what it is He has recorded for our instruction as well as comfort?

After all this then we find that "they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." It is impossible that a human authority could be entitled to set aside the direct command of the Lord Jesus. The Lord had commanded them to go and preach the gospel to every creature. Men had forbidden this. It is very clear that the apostle Peter gives the prohibition only a human place now (Acts 5:29). If men had told them to be silent, and the Lord bid them preach, the highest authority must be paramount.

Another form of evil betrays itself in the next chapter (Acts 6); and here again we find in the very good that God had wrought evil murmuring is found. It is not merely individuals as before; in some respects it is a more serious case: there are complaints heard in the church — the murmuring of Grecians against the Hebrews (that is, of the foreign speaking. Jews against the Jews, proper of the Holy Land), because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. This forms the occasion for the provisional wisdom of the Spirit of God.

We have already seen with abundant evidence how truly the church is a divine institution, founded upon a divine person (even the Holy Ghost) coming down and, making it, since redemption, His dwelling-place here below. Besides, we may now learn the working of this living power that is drawn out by the circumstances which call it forth. It is not a system of rules; nothing is more destructive of the very nature of the church of God. It is not a human society, with either the leaders of it or the mass choosing for themselves what or whom they think best, but the Spirit of God who is there meets in His wisdom whatever may be necessary for the glory of Christ. All this is preserved in the written word for our instruction and guidance now.

Here we have the institution of seven men to look after the poor who were in danger of being forgotten, or in some way neglected — at any rate, so they had complained. To cut off the appearance of it, and at the same time to leave the apostles free for their own proper work of a more spiritual kind, “the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve

tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

Thus we find two things: not only the apostles formally appointing, but the multitude of the believers left to choose, where it was a question that cone the distribution of their gifts. On the part of that governed the church of God, there ought not to be the appearance of coveting the property of God's people, or the disposal of it. At the same time the apostles do appoint those who were thus chosen over this matter. They were called of God to act, and so they do. "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word."

The principle of the choice too is striking; for all these names, it would appear, were Grecian. What gracious wisdom! This was clearly to stop the mouths of the complainants. The Hellenists, or Grecians, were jealous of the Palestinian Jews. The persons appointed were, judging from their names, every one of them Hellenists, or foreign-speaking Jews. The troublers ought to have been not only satisfied but somewhat ashamed. Thus it is that grace, while it discerns, knows how to rise above evil; for murmuring against others is not the way to correct anything that is wrong, even if it be real. But the grace of the Lord always meets circumstances, and turns them to a profitable account, by a manifestation of wisdom from above. The field was about to be enlarged; and although it was but a poor root of man's complaints which led to this fresh line of action, God was moving over all, could use these seven, and would give some of them a good degree, as we find in Stephen soon and in Philip later. But He marked it in another way too, which showed His approbation. "The word of God increased,"

spite of murmuring; “and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly;” and a new feature appears — “a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

Stephen then, full of grace and power (but One could be said to be full of grace and truth), is found doing great wonders. This draws out the opposition of the leaders of the Jews, who “were not able to resist the spirit and the wisdom with which he spake. Then they suborned men, who said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.”

Accordingly, thus accused, Stephen answers the appeal of the high priest, “Are these things so?” And in his wonderful discourse (Acts 7), on which I can but touch, he sets before them the prominent facts of their history, which bear on God’s question with the Jews at this moment. God had brought out their forefather Abraham, but He never gave him actually to possess this land. Why, then, boast of it so much? Those who, according to nature, vaunted loudly of Abraham and of God’s dealings, were clearly not in communion with God, or even with Abraham. Spite of the love and honour that God had for their forefathers, he never possessed the land. Why, then, set such stress on that land?

But more than this. There was one of the descendants of the fathers who stands out most especially, and above all of the family of Abraham, in the book of Genesis — one man who, more than any other, was the type of the Messiah. Need I say it was Joseph? And how did he fare? Sold by his brethren to the Gentiles. The application was not difficult. They knew how they had treated Jesus of Nazareth. Their consciences could not fail to remind them how the Gentiles would have willingly let Him go, and how their voices and will had prevailed against even that hardened governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate. Thus it was manifest that the leading points of Joseph's tale, as far as the wickedness of the Jews, and the selling to the Gentiles, were rehearsed again in Jesus of Nazareth.

But, coming down later still, another man fills the history of the second book of the Bible, and indeed has to do with all the remaining books of the Pentateuch. It was Moses. What about him? Substantially the same story again: the rejected of Israel, whose pride would not hear when he sought to bring about peace between a contending Israelite and his oppressor, Moses was compelled to fly from Israel, and then found his hiding-place among the Gentiles. How far Stephen entered intelligently into the bearing of these types it is not for one to say; but we can easily see the wisdom of God; we can see the power of the Holy Ghost with which he spake.

But there was another element also. He comes down next to their temple; for this was an important point. It was not only that he had spoken of Jesus of Nazareth, but they had also charged him with saying that He would destroy this place, and change their customs. What did their own prophets say? "But Solomon built

him a house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in [places] made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?" In short, he shows that Israel had sinned against God in every ground of relationship. They had broken the law; they had slain the prophets; they had killed the Messiah; and they had always resisted the Holy Ghost. What an awful position! and the more awful, because it was the simple, truth.

This brought out the frenzied rage of Israel, and they gnashed on him with their teeth; and he that charged them with always resisting the Holy Ghost, as their fathers did, full of the Holy Ghost looks up into heaven, and sees the Son of man, and bears witness that he sees Him standing at the right hand of God. And thus we have what I began with: we have the manifestation of the character of Christianity, and the perception of its power, and the effect produced upon him that appreciated it. We have not merely the Lord going up to heaven, but His servant, who saw heaven, open, and Jesus, the Son of man, standing at the right hand of God.

But there is more: for while they rushed now to silence the mouth which so completely proved their nation's habitual sin against the Spirit, they stoned him indeed, but they stoned him praying, and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." They could not silence the words that told how deeply he had drunk into the grace of the Lord Jesus. They could not silence his confidence, his peaceful entrance into his place with Christ, associated consciously with Him as he was. And then we learn (it may be without a thought on his part) how grace

conforms to the words of Jesus on the cross, and certainly without the smallest imitation of it, but so much the more evincing the power of God. For Jesus could say, and He alone could say rightly, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” Jesus alone fittingly could say, “I commend my spirit.” He who could lay down His life, and could take it again, could so speak to the Father. But the servant of the Lord could say, and rightly and blessedly, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Nor was this all; the same heart that thus confided absolutely in the Lord, and knew his own heavenly portion with Jesus, kneels down and cries with a loud voice. This was not directed to Jesus only: no loud voice was needed there: a whisper would be enough for Him. The loud voice was for man, for his dull ears and unfeeling heart. With a loud voice he cries, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” What simplicity, but what fulness of communion with Jesus! The same who had prayed for them reproduced His own feelings in the heart of His servant.

I shall not now develop this subject more than other scenes of the deepest interest, but just simply and shortly commend to all that are here the beautiful witness that it affords us of the true place, power, and grace of a Christian.

Acts 8 - 12.

We are now arrived at a turning-point in the history, not merely of the church, but of the unfolding of the truth of God, and the manifestation of His ways. The death of Stephen, therefore, has in various points of view a great significance. And no wonder. His was the first spirit that departed to be with Christ after the Holy Ghost was

given. But it was not merely one who departed to be with the Lord, which was far better; it was by the act of the Jews in the infuriate spirit of persecution. The very same people had done it who had so lately received with the utmost favour (not the truth, nor the grace of God, which is inseparable from His truth, but), at any rate, the mighty impress of the grace as well as of the truth which had produced unwonted largeness of heart, unselfishness of spirit, and joy and liberty, that struck the minds of the Jews accustomed to the coldness of death in their own system.

But now all was changed. What was most sweet soon became bitter, as it often is in the things of God. And when they understood the bearing of that which God had wrought here below — that it judged man; that it gave no countenance to the religiousness in which they boasted; that it showed most convincingly, and so much the more bitterly because convincingly, what God all through His testimony with them had expressly intimated, by the prophets as well as in the types of the law itself, that He had deeper purposes; that nothing on earth could satisfy Him; that it was in His mind, on the proved ruin of Israel, to bring in heaven and its things for a heavenly people even while here below: — now that this was made manifest, above all, in the testimony that Stephen had rendered to the very man that they had rejected and crucified, seen in glory at the right hand of God, it was unbearable. Could it be otherwise, when, spite of proud unbelief and conceit of distinctive privilege, they were forced to feel that they were none the less the constant resisters of the Holy Ghost like their fathers, who had been guilty themselves, and suffered the consequence of their guilt in their

prostration to the Gentiles; to feel now that they themselves were no better, but rather worse; that there was the same unbelief bringing out its effects even more tremendously; that they were guilty of the blood of their own Messiah, who was now risen and exalted in the highest seat of heaven? All these things were pressed home by Stephen; indeed, I have simply touched on a very small part of his most telling address.

But the close lets us see more than this. There was the revelation now of Christ as an object for the Christian in heaven, and the revelation of Him too in a way entirely outside the narrow boundaries of Judaism. Stephen speaks of Him as Son of man. This is an essential feature of Christianity. Unlike the law, it addresses all; there is no narrowness in a rejected heavenly Christ. By the Holy Ghost there is imparted all the firmness of a divine bond, and all the intimacy of a real living relationship of the nearest kind. At the same time, along with this is seen universality in the going out of both the truth and grace of God, which could not but be foreign to the law. And although its character had to be yet more brought out by another and far greater witness of divine things who was still in the blindness of Jewish unbelief — at this very moment himself taking his own miserable part, though with a good natural conscience, in the death of Stephen, — all told powerfully upon the Jews, but lacerated their feelings to the utmost.

I have already touched upon the practical effects, and therefore will not enlarge on these now. My object, of course, is simply to give a sketch of the important book now before us, endeavouring to connect (as, indeed, evidently the chapter does connect) what was coming with what was past. Saul was consenting unto Stephen’s

death, and Saul was the expression of Jewish feeling in its best aspect. It was now guilty of resisting unto blood, not merely as their fathers had done, but the heavenly testimony of Jesus. Nevertheless the God that vindicated the honour of the crucified Jesus did not forget the martyred Stephen; and though there was an outburst of persecution, which scattered abroad throughout the region of Judea and Samaria all the believers that were in Jerusalem except the apostles, devout men were not wanting who carried Stephen to his burial. Clearly they were not Christians; but God has all hearts in His keeping. And they "made great lamentation over him." This was suitable to them. Theirs was not the joy that saw into the presence of God. They felt in a measure, and justly, the tremendous deed that had been done. And as there was reality at least in their feeling, they made suitable lamentation. But "as for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and dragging off men and women, committed them to prison." Religious persecution is invariably ruthless and blind even to the commonest feelings of humanity.

"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word;" for the God who not only has hearts at His command, but controls all circumstances, was now about to accomplish that which He had always at heart, making the disciples to be witnesses of Jesus to the very ends of the earth, though first of all to Judea and Samaria. Accordingly we find, as the testimony had gone forth throughout Jerusalem at least, so now the old rival of Jerusalem comes within the dealings of God. Philip, who had been appointed by the apostles at the choice of the multitude of the disciples to care for the distribution to the poor, goes down to the

cities of Samaria preaching Christ. This did not at all flow from his ordination. His appointment was to take care of the tables. His preaching Christ was the fruit of the Lord's call. Where man chooses for human things, we have the Lord recognising it. He would have His people, where they give, to have a voice. He would meet them in grace, stopping complaints, and showing that He honours and confides in their suitable choice. But not so in the ministry of the word or testimony of the Lord. Here the Lord alone gives, alone calls, alone sends forth. Philip, besides being one of the seven, was an "evangelist," as we are told expressly in another part of this very book (Acts 21:8). It is important to distinguish between the two things — one, the charge to which man appointed him; the other, the gift which the Lord conferred. (Eph. 4) I merely make the remark in passing; though it will not be needed for most here, it may be for some.

Philip goes down, then, preaching Christ; "and the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." But the testimony of miracles is apt to act upon the flesh. They are, indeed, a sign to unbelievers, and that such is the result we find shown us by the Spirit of God in the chapter before us. However graciously given of the Lord as a token to attract the careless minds of men, they are dangerous when they are made the resting-place and the object of the mind; and this was the fatal mistake made then, and not merely there but by many millions of souls from that day to this. Faith never rests on any other ground than God's word. All else is vain, and apt to accredit. as well as entice man. There was indeed the unmistakable action of the Spirit

of God on this occasion — the power that cast out unclean spirits and healed the sick, as well as the means of spreading joy throughout that city for the souls of men. Evidently it was power in external display, then so richly manifested, which acted on the fleshly mind of Simon, himself having the reputation of a great one, and before this the vessel of some kind of demoniacal power — the miserable power of Satan, with which he dazzled the eyes of men. But now finding himself eclipsed, like a wily man, his object was to avail himself of this superior energy if it were possible. His aim was not Christ; it was all for himself. He wished to gain fresh influence, not to lose his old: why not, by this new method, if possible, turn things to his own account?

Accordingly, among the train of those that received the gospel and were baptized, Simon is found. Philip had not the discernment to see through him: evangelists are apt to be sanguine. It may be that the Lord had not allowed the true character of Simon to be manifested to every eye at that moment. It did not escape the discerning eyes of Peter a little afterward. But as we are told here, “When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women; and Simon himself believed also.” Scripture does show, though it does not sanction as divine, a faith that is founded on evidence. And it continues still. So John often speaks of it; and the very one that tells us most of the divinely given character of true faith — who most of all lets us into its secret power and blessedness, even eternal life as bound up with it, — that same John is the one who more than any other furnishes instances of a mere humanly produced faith. Such was the faith of

Simon. The gospel of Luke also describes what is similar; that is to say, a faith not insincere but human, not wrought of the Spirit but founded on the mind yielding to reasons, proofs, evidences, which are to it overpowering; but there is nothing of God in it: there is no meeting between the soul and God. Without this, faith is good for nothing, nor is God Himself honoured in His own word. Power was what struck Simon's mind — himself a devotee of power, who in times past had sunk indeed low, even to the enemy of God and man in order from any source to be the vessel of a power beyond man. He could not deny the might that proved itself without effort superior to anything he had ever wielded. This was what attracted him; and, as it is said here, "he continued with Philip" (there was no other bond of connection), "and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done." A believer would have wondered more at the grace of God, and bowed in adoration before Him. Conscience would have been searched by the truth of God; and the heart would have been filled with praise at the grace of God. Neither one nor other ever entered into the thoughts or feelings of Simon.

And "when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John." It was of the greatest importance that unity should be kept up practically, not merely that there should be proclaimed the truth that there is unity, but that there should be the maintenance of it in practice. Accordingly Peter and John, two of the chiefs among the apostles, come down from Jerusalem. But there was another reason too. It was so ordered of God that the Holy Ghost should not at first be conferred

on the disciples at Samaria: I do not mean merely on such as Simon or false brethren, but even on those that were true. Undoubtedly they could not have believed the gospel, had there not been the quickening operation of the Holy Ghost; but we must distinguish between the Holy Ghost giving life and the Holy Ghost Himself given.

Another thing too let me again and again remark: the gift of the Holy Ghost never means those mighty wonders of power which had acted on the greedy and ambitious mind of Simon Magus. The gift of the Spirit is not at all the same thing as the gifts. These gifts, at least such as were of an extraordinary sort, were the outward signs of that gift in early days; and it was of great importance that there should be a decisive palpable testimony to it. The presence of the Holy Ghost was a new and quite unexampled thing even among believers. Hence it is there were mighty powers that wrought by those who were employed by the Holy Ghost; as, for instance, by Philip himself; afterwards also by the disciples, when Peter and John came down and laid their hands upon them with prayer. The Holy Ghost came upon them, not merely, it will be observed, certain spiritual powers, but the Holy Ghost Himself. They had not those powers only, but this divine person given to them. Scripture is clear and unequivocal as to the truth of the case. I can understand difficulties in the minds of believers; and no one would wish to force or hurry the convictions of any; nor would it be of the slightest value to receive even a truth without the faith that is produced, and exercised, and cleared by the word of God. But at the same time to my own mind it seems to be only homage to God’s word to affirm positively that of which I am sure.

I therefore must say that the gift of the Holy Ghost here is, in my judgment, clearly distinct from anything in the way of either a spiritual gift for souls or a miraculous power, as it is called. There followed also such signs, or outward powers; but the Holy Ghost was given Himself, according to the Lord's word — the promise of the Father, a promise which, as all know, was in the first instance assured to those who were already believers, and which was made good to them because they were believers, not to make them so. When redemption was accomplished, it was the seal of the faith and the life which they already had. There can be no doubt that the facts at Samaria were analogous; but this remarkable feature is to be noticed, that the Holy Ghost was here conferred by (not, as at Jerusalem, apart from) the laying on of the hands of the apostles. Of this we heard nothing in the divine history of the day of Pentecost; and I think that scripture is abundantly plain that there could have been nothing of the kind then and there. First of all, the apostles and the disciples themselves received it as they were waiting. The Holy Ghost came down upon them suddenly, with no previous sign whatever, except that which was suitable to the Holy Ghost when sent down from heaven — the mighty rushing wind, and then the tokens of His presence upon each were manifested. Yet there was no such requirement as imposition of hands in order to be the medium of it. But it would seem that special reasons operated at Samaria to make it necessary there. It was of all moment to keep up the links practically between a work which might have looked to many there, as now, not a little irregular. It was wrought not by those that had previously been always the great spiritual witnesses; for we hear of none ministering but the

apostles, and indeed not even of all the apostles speaking, though it may be that they did. But here we have clearly a man who had been chosen for another and an external purpose by the church, but whom the Lord uses elsewhere for a new and higher purpose, for which He had qualified him by the Holy Ghost.

Nevertheless, care was taken to hinder all appearance of independence or indifference to unity. There was the freest action of the Holy Ghost, — sovereignly free, — and it is impossible to maintain this too stringently; and there was the utmost care that all should be left open for the Holy Ghost to act according to His own will, not only within the church, but also by evangelizing outside. For all that God took precaution to bind up together the work at Samaria with that which He had wrought at Jerusalem. Hence though Philip might preach and they receive the gospel, the apostles come down, and with prayer lay their hands upon them, and then they receive the Holy Ghost. To a reflecting believer it will be plain that the reasons for this do not hold at the present time. I merely make this remark lest any should draw from this the inference that there is a necessity for men commissioned from God to lay on hands now in order to confer such a spiritual blessing.

The fact is, that the notion of imposition of hands being a universal medium of conveying the Holy Ghost is certainly a mistake. On the greatest occasions, when the Holy Ghost was given, we have no ground to believe that hands were laid on any. There were two exceptional occasions on which one or more of the apostles so acted, but at times of more general interest and importance nothing of the sort was heard of. Take, as the most solemn moment of all, the day of Pentecost. Who that

honours scripture can pretend that hands were laid on any then? Yet the Holy Ghost was given in especial power on that day. But what is more to the purpose for us Gentiles, when Cornelius and his household were brought in, not only no appearance of it is visible, but positive proof to the contrary. Peter was present, but he certainly laid no hand of his on a single soul that day before the Holy Ghost was given. So far from it, as we shall find by and by in Acts 10, the Holy Ghost was given while he was yet speaking, before they were so much as baptized. On the day of Pentecost they were baptized first, and then they received the gift of the Holy Ghost. At Samaria they had been baptized for some time, as we know. On believing they were baptized, as we are told in Acts 8; but they received the Holy Ghost after an interval, through the action of the apostles.

I refer to this just to show how far scripture is from countenancing the cramped ideas of men, and that the only way of truth is to believe all the word of God, searching out the special principle of God by which He instructs us in the different characters of His action. Surely He is always wise and consistent with Himself. It is we who by confounding matters lose consequently the blessedness and beauty of the truth of God.

Now the reason, as it appears to me, why divine wisdom led to this striking difference at Samaria, was the necessity of hindering that independence to which even Christians are so liable. There was special exposure to this evil which called for so much the greater guard against it at Samaria. How painful must it be to the Spirit of God if the old pride of Samaria were to rise up against Jerusalem! God would cut off the very appearance of this. There was the free action of His

Spirit towards Samaria without the apostles, but the Holy Ghost was given by the laying on of their hands. This solemn act was not merely an ancient sign of divine blessing, but of identification also. Such, I suppose, therefore, was the principle that lay at the bottom of the difference of the divine action on these two occasions.

Then we find Simon struck not so much by an individual's endowment with miraculous power, as by the fact that others received it by the apostles' laying on of hands. At once, with the instinct of flesh, he sees a good 'opportunity for himself, and, judging of others' hearts by his own, presents money as the means of acquiring the coveted power. But this detects the man. How often our words show where we are! How continually too where we least think they do! It is not only in cases of our judgment (for there is nothing that so often judges a man as his own judgment of another); but also where the desire goes out after that which we have not got. How all-important for our souls that we should have Christ before us, and that we should have no desire but for His glory! Not a ray of the light of Christ had entered the heart of Simon, and so Peter at once detects the false heart. With that energy which characterized him he says, "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God." At the same time there is the pity that belongs to one who knew the grace of God, and saw the end of all in His judgment. "Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God if, perhaps, the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee; for I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." God

has no pleasure in the death of a sinner. Simon can only answer, “Pray ye to the Lord for me.” He had no confidence in the Lord for himself — not a particle; for just as those who have confidence in the Lord have not an atom in man, his sole hope of blessing for his soul lay in the influence of another man, not in Christ’s grace. “Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of those things which ye have spoken come upon me.”

The apostles then, after preaching in the various villages of the Samaritans, return to Jerusalem. But not so the word of God. The gospel goes forth elsewhere; it is in no way bound to Jerusalem. On the contrary, the grand bearing of this chapter is that now the tide of blessing is flowing away from Jerusalem. The holy city had rejected the gospel. It was not enough that they had rejected the Messiah, nor even that He was made Lord and Christ on high. They refused utterly the Holy Ghost’s testimony to the Son of man glorified in heaven, and slew or scattered the witnesses, Who then was specially used as the instrument of the free action of the Holy Ghost elsewhere, without plan, without thought of man, and apparently the simple result of circumstances, but in truth God’s hand directing all? Philip is told by the angel of the Lord to arise and go towards the south — towards “Gaza, which is desert.” “And he arose and went.” Strikingly, beautiful it is to see the devoted simplicity with which he answers to the call of his Master. I will not pretend to say that it cost him little, but am sure it would have been a heavy trial to many a man of God to leave that which was so bright, where He had wrought powerfully in using himself for His own glory. But he is truly a bondman, and at once is ready to go at the bidding of the Lord, who had given him to reap in joy

where He had Himself tasted the firstfruits in the days of His own ministry here below. Samaria, which had held out against the truth, was now yielding the harvest that a greater than Philip had sown; and there was joy in that very Samaria where greater works were now done according to His own word.

But this was not enough for God. A man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the queen of the Ethiopians, was returning after having gone up to Jerusalem to worship. He was going, back without the blessing that his earnest heart yearned after. He had gone up to the great city of solemnities, but the blessing was no longer to be found there. Jehovah's house had been left doubly desolate; Jerusalem had this added to her other sins that, when the blessing had come down from heaven, she would not have it. She despised the Holy Ghost as she had despised the Messiah; and no wonder therefore that he who had gone up to Jerusalem to worship was returning with the yearnings of his heart still unsatisfied. And not the angel but the Spirit guides now. The angel had to do with providential circumstances, but the Spirit with that which directly deals with spiritual need and blessing. So says the Spirit to Philip, "Go near and join thyself to this chariot." Philip acts at once, with alacrity hears the eunuch read the prophet Isaiah, and puts the question whether he understood what was read. The answer is, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" Thereon Philip is invited to come up and sit with him, Isaiah 53 being, as we know, the portion in question; and the eunuch asks of whom the prophet spoke these words — "of himself or some other man?" so gross was his darkness even as to the general point of the chapter. "Then Philip opened his

mouth, and began at the very same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." It was enough. That one name, through faith in it, what could it not accomplish? The facts were notorious; but of this we may be sure, that never had they been put together before the mind of the Ethiopian as then, never connected with the living Word and His grace. They were now put in contact with his wants, and all was instantly light in his soul. Oh, what a blessing it is to have and know such a Saviour! What a joy to be warranted to proclaim Him to others without stint, even to a soul as dark as the Ethiopian, who was then and there baptized!

Remember that verse 37 is only an imaginary conversation between him and Philip. The man just now so ignorant is not the channel that God was about to use for bringing out the remarkable confession that is introduced prematurely here. It was reserved for another of whom we shall read in the next chapter. This scene does show the stranger discovering the predicted Messiah in Jesus of Nazareth — the Messiah suffering, no doubt, but accomplishing atonement. Certainly the Ethiopian received the truth; but verse 37 had better be passed by in your minds, at least in this connection. All who are informed in these matters are aware that the best authorities reject the entire verse.

"He went on his way rejoicing." Though the Spirit of the Lord catches away Philip, so full is his heart of the truth that we may be sure all that occurred confirmed it in his eyes. How could anything seem too great and good to him whose heart had just made the acquaintance of Jesus? Did he not feel so much the more settled in Jesus as there was no other object now before his soul? It was the Lord that had brought Philip, and it was His Spirit

that bad taken him away; but it was He too who had given him and left him Jesus for ever. Philip is found at Azotus, and passing through he preaches elsewhere.

At this point we come to the history of the call of another and yet more honoured witness of divine grace and Christ's glory. Saul of Tarsus was yet breathing out his threats and slaughter when the Lord was pursuing His onward gracious work among the Samaritans and strangers. The returning treasurer of Queen Candace was a proselyte, I suppose, from the Gentiles, living among them, not as a Gentile himself, but practically a Jew, whatever the place of his birth and residence. The time for the call of the Gentiles strictly was not yet come, though the way is being prepared. The Samaritans, as you know, were a mongrel race; the stranger may have been possibly a proselyte from among the Gentiles; but the apostle of the Gentiles is now to be called. Such is the unfolding of the ways of God at this point.

Acts 9. Saul in his zeal had desired letters giving him authority to punish the Christian Jews, and was found on his way journeying near the Gentile city that he sought. "Suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord?" All depended upon this. "And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." What a revolution this word caused in that mighty heart! Confidence in man, in self, was overthrown to its foundations — all that his life had been zealously building up. "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." It was the Lord undoubtedly, and the Lord declared He was Jesus, and Jesus was Jehovah. He dared

not doubt longer: to him it was self-evident. If Jesus was Jehovah, what then had his religion been? what had high priest or Sanhedrim done for him? Was it not then God's high priest, God's law? Unquestionably it was. How then could so fatal an error have been committed? It was the fact. Man, Israel, not merely Saul, was altogether blinded: the flesh never knows God. The despised and hated name of Jesus is the only hope for man, Jesus is the only Saviour and Lord. His glory burst on the astonished eyes of Saul, who surrenders immediately. It was not without the deepest searching of heart, though smitten down at once; for how could there be a question as to the divine power? How could its reality be doubted? As little could there be a question as to the grace exercised toward him, though the manner was not after that of man. The light that shone suddenly on him was from heaven. But it was God's way. The voice that said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" was from Jesus. "Who art thou, Lord?" he cried, and hears, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." How could he resist the heavenly vision?

Observe that, although the next words are beyond a question scriptural, and so far the case differs from verse 37 referred to in the last chapter, the last clause of verse 5 and the first of verse 6 belong properly speaking to two other chapters (Acts 22, Acts 26) rather than to this. I do not therefore comment upon these additions here: they will remain for their own real and suitable places. But Saul does arise from the earth. "And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man." But he had heard the voice of His mouth, and His words were spirit and life, eternal life, to his soul. Three days and nights he neither eats

nor drinks. The profound moral work of God proceeded in that converted heart. Nevertheless even he, apostle though he were, must enter by the same lowly gate as another. And so we have the story of Ananias, and the ways of the Lord, — not of some great apostle, nor even of Philip, but a disciple at Damascus named Ananias, to whom the Lord spoke in a vision. And he goes, the Lord communicating another vision to the apostle himself, in which he sees Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him that he might receive his sight.

The Spirit puts us in presence of the freedom of the servant, as he pleads with the Lord, for neither man nor even the child of God ever reaches up to the height of His grace. Ananias, wholly unprepared for the call of such an enemy of the gospel, slow of heart to believe all, expostulates, as it were, with the Saviour. “Lord,” says he, “I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.” But the Lord said unto him, “Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.”

Even here the intimation is sufficiently plain that the Gentiles were in the foreground of the work designed for Saul of Tarsus. But this was not all. It was to be emphatically a witness of grace in suffering for Christ’s name: “For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.” And so it was. Ananias goes, puts his hand on him, addresses him by the sweet title of relationship Christ began, consecrated, and has given, telling him how the Lord, even Jesus, had appeared unto him. How confirmatory it must have been to the apostle’s heart to learn that Ananias was now sent by

the same Lord Jesus, without the slightest intimation from without, whether of Saul himself or any other man! "The Lord hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." And every word was made good. "Saul arose and was baptized, and when he had received meat he was strengthened, and remained with the disciples for some time."

In due time follows the further development of the truth as to Christ in testimony. "He preached in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God." Such was the emphatic and characteristic presentation of His person assigned to the apostle, and this at once. It was not that Peter did not know the same, we are all aware how blessedly he confessed Him to be (not Messiah only, but) the Son of the living God while Jesus was here below. Nor is it that the other disciples had not the same faith. Surely it was true of all who really believed and knew His glory. Nevertheless "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh;" and he who loves to present the Lord in the depth of His personal grace, and the height of His glory, has surely a spiritual fitness for the expression of the heart's joy in that which faith has created within. Thus, although the others no doubt had the same Saviour taught them by the Holy Ghost, still there was not in every case the same measure of entrance or appreciation. Paul had it not more suddenly than with a heavenly splendour which was peculiar to himself; and thus there was a vast work soon wrought. There was a bringing out of that which belonged to Christ, not merely the place which Christ took, but that which He is from all eternity, — consequently that which is most of all intrinsically precious. He preached Him, and this boldly in the synagogue too, "that he is the Son

of God." All that heard were amazed. "But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews that dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ." The doctrine of His Sonship did not in the smallest degree, of course, set aside the Messiahship. This remained; but he preached Him rather in His own personal glory, — not as the Son of David, the servant, which was the great burden of Peter's preaching, made Lord and Christ; — not that He was the Son of man in heaven, as Stephen witnessed; but that this Jesus, the Christ, is the Son of God, — clearly therefore more particularly bound up with the divine nature, or godhead glory of Himself.

After this comes no slight discipline for Saul. As the Jews watched the gates to kill him, the disciples took him by night and let him down the wall in a basket. Thus we find the utmost simplicity and quietness. There is no show of doing great things; nor do we read of daring in any way: what is there of Christ in the one or the other? Contrariwise, we see that which outwardly looks exceedingly weak; but this was the man that was in another day to say that he gloried in his infirmities. He acts on that of which he afterwards wrote. He was led of God.

Then we learn another important lesson. "When Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple." God did not clothe him with such overwhelming influence that doors were thrown open to him though the greatest of the apostles. Oh why should any confessor of Christ — why should any child of God — shrink from rendering godly satisfaction to those that seek it? Why so much haste and impatience? Why

should there be unwillingness to meet and submit to others when it is a question of reception? What earnest desire should there not be to bow to all that which is. due to the church of God? Here we find not even the apostle Paul was above it.

Not on the other hand that there ought to be a spirit of suspicion or distrust in the church or any Christian. I am far from saying that it was comely on their part to indulge in hesitation touching this wondrous display of divine grace. But what I want to press for our profit, beloved brethren, is that at any rate he who is the object of grace can afford to be gracious. Nor is there a more painful want of it than that kind of restiveness which is so ready to take offence at the smallest fear or anxiety on the part of others. Surely to shrink from their enquiries is nothing but self on our part. If Christ were the object of our souls, we should bow as one did called of God with incomparably better tokens of the Lord's favour than any other, — this blessed man, Saul of Tarsus. But if the church were distrustful, the Lord was not unmindful, and knew how to give courage to the heart of His servant. There was among them a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, of whom we have had a happy report before, as we shall hear many (though not altogether unmingled) good tidings to the end. For indeed he was but man. Nevertheless, being a good man and full of the Holy Ghost, he seeks out and takes Saul to the apostles when others stood aloof, and declared unto them "how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus; and he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem." Grace can credit grace easily, understands the ways of the

Lord, and disarms suspicion. it is beautiful to see how the Lord thus, even in the history of that which was unprecedented and might seem to lie outside Christian wants, provides in His blessed word for the every day difficulties we have to prove in such a day of weakness as ours.

After this wonderful working of God the church had rest. I say, “the church;” for there need be no doubt, I think, that such is the true form4 of what is given us in verse 31. The common text and translations have “the churches;” but I believe that this faulty form crept in here, because the sense of the oneness of the church so speedily passed away. Hence people could not understand that it was one and the same church throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria. It was plain enough to see the Christian assembly in a city, even if it were as numerous as in Jerusalem, where it must have met in not a few different localities and chambers. The church, not merely in a city but in a province or country, is intelligible enough to man; but it soon became more difficult to see its unity in various and differing provinces. The change of reading here seems to prove it was too much for the copyists of this book. The reading sanctioned by the best and most ancient authorities is the singular — not the churches, but “the church.” “Then had the church rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria.” Undoubtedly throughout these districts churches existed; but it was all one and the same church too, and not different bodies.

The following extract from the late Dr. Carson’s Letters in reply to Dr. John Brown’s Vindication of Presbyterianism will show how far an able and excellent

man went astray in defending Congregationalism through not knowing that his argument was based, not on God's word, but on man's corruption of it. I quote from the original edition (Edinburgh, 1807): "Acts 11:31. 'Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria,' etc.

Here I would be glad to know how this can be interpreted upon any other principle than that church in the single number was solely appropriated to a single congregation, when applied to an assembly of Christ's disciples. It is not the church of Judea, the church of Galilee, and the church of Samaria, but the churches of Judea, etc. Way, more, had these been Presbyterians, all under the same government, the phraseology would not have been even the church of Judea, and the church of Galilee, and the church of Samaria, but all these would have been in one church, and even then but a small part of a church. This phraseology would have been somewhat like this, 'The church had rest throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria,' — i.e., the part of the church that lies in these countries." (p. 378.) How startled this good man but excessively keen controversialist must have been, had he learnt that, beyond all just question, the only tenable text here is destructive of the notion of independent churches, and in reality gives the appellation to the entire body of the disciples throughout these regions, as standing on one common ground, and enjoying full intercommunion, though in these different districts. But that branch of criticism which consists in a full knowledge of the sources, a nice discrimination of the various readings, and a sound judgment in deciding the preferable text, as it is rarely found, so it certainly was not the forte of Dr.

C. One hundred and fifty years ago, Dr. E. Wells, in his “Help for the more easy and clear understanding of the Scriptures” (Oxford, 1718), not only adopted the singular in his Greek text and his English paraphrase, but pointed out in his Annotations the great weakness of the argument drawn by dissenters from the plural ἐκκλησίαι, as if it favoured their system of separate churches.

The end of the chapter shows us the progress of Peter. He visits round about. It was no longer a question of Jerusalem only even for Peter, but without being called to the same largeness of work practically as the apostle Paul, he nevertheless passes throughout “all quarters” of Palestine, and comes down to the saints at Lydda, and is seen by those of Saron. At Joppa too was wrought a still more striking miracle of the Lord in Tabitha’s case, already dead, than in that of Eneas, who had been paralysed for years. On these I need only remark how grace used them for the spread of the testimony. “All that dwelt in Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.” “It was known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.” But at this point a still more important step was about to be taken; and the Lord enters on it with due solemnity, as we shall see in the following chapter. (Acts 10)

Little did the great apostle of the circumcision anticipate what was before him as he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner. For hence the Lord called him to a new sphere — a task which, to a Jewish mind, was beyond measure strange. It would be a mistake to suppose that God had not wrought on the heart of Gentiles. We see such in the gospels. Cornelius was one of those who, among the Gentiles, had abandoned

idolatry; but more than this was sometimes found. There were Gentiles who truly looked to the Lord, and not to self or man; who had been taught of Him to look for a coming Saviour, though they quite rightly connected that Saviour with Israel; for such was the burden of the promise. As there was a Job in the Old Testament, independent of the law and perhaps before it, so we find a Cornelius before the glad tidings in the New Testament had been formally sent to the nations. All know that there were Jews waiting for the Saviour. It is of interest to see, and should be better known, that among the Gentiles were not wanting such as worshipped no idols but served the true and living God. No doubt their spiritual condition was defective, and their outward position must have seemed anomalous; but Scripture is decisive that such godly Gentiles there were.

It is a fallacy then to suppose that Cornelius had no better than merely natural religion. He was assuredly, before Peter went, a converted man. To regard him as unawakened at that time is to mistake a great deal of the teaching of the chapter. Not that one would deny that a mighty work was then wrought in Cornelius. We must not limit, as ignorant people do, the operation of the Holy Spirit to the new birth. No man in his natural state could pray, nor serve God acceptably, as Cornelius did. One must be born again; but, like many others who had really been quickened in those days (and it may be even now, I presume), a soul might be born again, and yet far from resting in peace on redemption, far indeed from a sense of deliverance from all questions as to his soul. There is this difference, no doubt, between such cases now and that of Cornelius then, — that, before the

mission of Peter, it would have been presumptuous for a Gentile to have pretended to salvation; now it is the fruit of unbelief for a believer to question it. A soul that now looks to Jesus ought to rest without question on redemption; but we must remember that at this time Jesus was not yet publicly preached to the Gentiles — not yet freely and fully proclaimed according to the riches of grace. Therefore, the more godly Cornelius was, the less would he dare to put forth his hand for the blessing before the Lord told him to stretch it out. He did what, I have no doubt, was the right thing. He was truly in earnest before God. As we are told here — and the Spirit delights to give such an account — "he was a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway."

Such was the man to whom God was about to send the gospel by Peter. Thus we must carefully remember that the gospel brings more than conversion to God. It is the message of life, but it is also the means of peace. Before the gospel was preached to every creature, a new nature was communicated to many a soul; but till then there was not and could not be peace. The two things are both brought us in the gospel — life brought to light, and the peace preached that was made by the blood of the cross. At the same time scripture shows there might be and often was an interval after the gospel did go forth. So from experience we know there is many a man that you cannot doubt to be truly looking to the Lord, yet far from resting in the peace of God. Cornelius, I apprehend, was just in this case. He would no more have perished, had it pleased God to have taken him away in this state, than any Old Testament saint, whether Jew or Gentile. No

believer could be so ignorant of God and His ways of old as to imagine there ought to be any doubt about those who nevertheless were full of anxieties and troubles, and through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Even now, although it is the gospel that God sends out, we know well how many, through a misuse of Old Testament teaching, plunge themselves into distress and doubt. God does not suggest a doubt of His own grace to them, or of the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice for them: unbelief does. It was not so with Cornelius. He was not entitled to take the peace of the gospel till God warranted Peter to bring it to him. This was precisely what God was now doing; and the remarkable fact appears, that God did not wait for the apostle of the Gentiles to bring the good news to Cornelius. Is not this interlacing after a divine sort? It was not to be done by mere systematic rule of a human pattern. But just as the great apostle of the Gentiles was the one that wrote the final word of testimony to the Christian Jews in the epistle to the Hebrews, so the great apostle of the Jews was the one sent to fling open the door to the Gentile. It was Peter, not Paul, who was sent to Cornelius. The chapter itself proves that he had to be forced to go. He seems to have lost sight of the words of the Lord Jesus — that he was told by Jesus risen from the dead to preach the gospel to every creature. There was to be a testimony to an the nations. The promise was not merely to them and to their children, but to all "afar off, as many as the Lord their God should call." At any rate, the Lord now graciously interferes, and as he gives Cornelius to see a vision most instructive to him, so next day also there is to Peter another vision from the Lord.

Answering to the vision, messengers bring the apostle to the household of Cornelius, and Peter opens his mouth to the following effect: — “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) that word, I say, ye know.” I call your attention to this. Cornelius was not in ignorance of the gospel going out to the children of Israel, but it was precisely because he was a lowly-minded believer that he did not therefore arrogate the blessing to himself. The very essence of faith is that you do not run before God, but receive what and as He sends to you. God had published it already to the sons of Israel, and the good man rejoiced in it. But for himself and his household, what could he do but pray till the rich blessing came? He valued the ancient people of God; nor is he indeed the only centurion that loved their nation. We are told of another who also built for the Jews their synagogue. Thus Cornelius was aware that God had sent the gospel to the Jews; but there was precisely where he necessarily stopped short. Was that word for him?

“That word ye know,” says Peter, “which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him… whom they slew and hanged on a tree: him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly” (not to all the people, but) “unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the

dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people." Clearly the Jew is meant. "He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever," etc.

Here comes the telling word for him that feared the Lord and bowed to His word, though he was a Gentile. "Whosoever believeth on him shall receive remission of sins." Peter had not long learnt it himself. Had he not read or heard those words in the prophets? No doubt he had read them many a time, but no better than we have read them, and many other words likewise; and how little we understood any of them to profit until the mighty power of God gave it efficacy in our souls! In this case Peter had God's own direct warrant in the vision, not of the church (for this was not the meaning of the sheet let down from heaven), but decidedly of the call of the Gentiles. It was the obliterating of mere fleshly distinction between Jew and Gentile. God was meeting sinners as such, whatever they might be, giving no doubt a heavenly character to what had a heavenly source with a heavenly result. But there is not yet the revealed truth of the body, though involved in the word of the Lord to Saul of Tarsus when he said, "Why persecutest thou me?" Here it is not this, but simply the indiscriminate. grace of God to sinners of the Gentiles as certainly as to the Jews — to those who, in the judgment of the Jews, were nothing but refuse, vile, and unclean.

Peter then, with this new-born conviction in his soul, reads the prophets with entirely fresh light and other eyes. Full of the truth himself, he speaks with the utmost simplicity to Cornelius, who with his household hears

the blessed word. “To him give all the prophets witness.” It was one concurrent evidence. “To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him.” There is no question of a Jew, but “Whosoever believeth in him.” Alas! the Jews did not believe in Him; but whosoever did, let him be Jew or Gentile, “shall receive remission of sins.” This precisely Cornelius had not known, nor could any one have known it till the work of redemption was done. The Old Testament saints were just as safe before the work of Christ as they were afterwards, but this work put them on a ground of conscious salvation before God. It was not a question of being saved in the day of judgment; nor is this the meaning of the term “salvation” in the New Testament. Salvation means that the heart enters into deliverance by grace as a present known public standing in the world. Nobody could have this till the gospel, and even after its publication God Himself sent specifically to the Gentiles; for He has His ways, as well as His times and seasons. God will always be Himself, and cannot be other than Sovereign.

Thus we see God had allowed things apparently to take their course. Israel had the truth presented to them as it was afterwards to all. It was their responsibility now as ever to accept the gracious offer of God. If Israel would have received, the Lord would have given. It was even, and urgently, pressed on them, but they refused with disdain the message, and rejected the messengers to blood. Accordingly the rejection of the very witness of Christ, speaking by the Holy Ghost — the rejection of Him to heaven — becomes the turning-point; and then by the Lord from heaven is now called forth the witness of grace as well as of the glory of Christ. Finally, after

the call of Saul of Tarsus, Peter himself (as well for other reasons as in order to cut off the semblance of discord in the various instruments of His grace) is brought in to show the perfect balance of divine truth and the wonderful harmony of His ways. Thus the church would still retain its substantial character, and the testimony of God still bear the same common likeness, while room was left for whatever speciality of form God might be pleased to give the truth, and the unfolding of the ways in which God might employ one or another. Peter was the one then, not Paul, that announced the gospel to Cornelius, who by the Holy Ghost received it, and was not merely safe but saved. It was no longer simply a cleaving to a God of goodness who could not deceive and would not disappoint the soul that hoped in His mercy, "but the conscious joy of knowing his sins all one, and himself distinctly put on the ground of accomplished redemption as a known present thing for his own soul in this world. Such is salvation.

"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost." Thus on the great Gentile occasion, as before on the Jewish at Pentecost, the medium of man completely disappears. It was as thoroughly according to God that the apostle should not lay his hands on any this day, as it was according to His wisdom that they should lay their hands on the Samaritans. It is granted that man sees difficulty in this: there is what he cannot reconcile; but be assured that the great point is, first, to believe. Settle it invariably that God is wiser than we. Is this too much

to ask? After all, though it seems so simple as to be a truism, though nothing can well be conceived more certain; nevertheless, practically it is not always the plainest and surest truth that carries all before it in our souls. But to believe is the secret of real growth in the revealed wisdom of God.

On this occasion they of the circumcision see that the Gentiles receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; for they hear them speak with tongues and magnify God, and they were astonished. Then Peter says to them, “Can any man forbid water?” It was a public privilege he was warranted to confer on the Gentiles thus baptized of the Spirit. Water baptism is neither slighted nor is it put forward as a command or condition. The previous gift of the Spirit without the intervention of any human hand was the most effectual stopper on the mouths of the brethren of the circumcision who were ever prone to object, and would surely have forbidden water, if God had not undeniably given them the unspeakable gift of the Spirit. But this manifestation and fruit of gracious power silenced even the unruly and hard spirits of the circumcision. “And he commanded them to be baptized.”

It may be observed passingly, that thus plainly baptizing is in no way a necessarily ministerial act. It may be all right and in perfect keeping that one preaching the gospel should baptize; but occasion might well arise where he who preached would avoid it himself. We know that Paul thanked God that so it was with himself at Corinth; and we see that Peter here did not baptize, but simply “commanded them to be baptized.” God is always wise. It is too familiar how soon human superstition perverted this blessed institution of the Lord into a

sacramental means of grace, duly administered by one in the line of succession.

The next chapter (Acts 11) shows us Peter having to give an account of himself before those who had not witnessed the effects of the mighty power of God in the house of Cornelius. When the matter is rehearsed, the great argument is this, — “Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?” This brought the question to a simple issue; but here again, let it be noticed that the gift of the Holy Ghost belongs to those that believe. It is not His operation in enabling souls to believe, but a precious boon given to such as believed. “When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.” The Spirit of God alone quickens a person by faith in Christ. Without the action of the Holy Ghost faith is impossible; but this capacitating power and the gift of the Holy Ghost are two very different things, and the latter consequent on the former. If God had given them the Holy Ghost, as was manifest in sensible results, it was very evident that they must have by God’s grace had repentance unto life. The Spirit given to the believer was a privilege over and above faith, and supposed, therefore, their repentance unto life.

Then follows another grave fact. It appears that the scattered men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who had gone in consequence of the persecution everywhere, and among other places to Antioch, preaching the word to none but the Jews, took courage now and spoke (not to the Grecians - for this had been done long ago, but) unto the Greeks, preaching the Lord Jesus.” Those to whom they

addressed themselves were really Gentiles. The word "Grecians" does not mean "Greeks," but rather Greek-speaking Jews; to whom the gospel had been preached long before, as the cases of Stephen, for instance, and Philip clearly testify. Acts 6 shows us the party in question murmuring. They were in the church already. But the point here is lost in our English version. There is a mistake, not only in our vernacular Bible, but also in the common Greek text which is equally faulty as the authorized version. The true text,5 which has sufficient if not the most ancient authority, tells us that they spoke to Greeks or Gentiles. Thus we see the Lord was working, and, as so constantly happens, it was not only that He called out Paul for the Gentiles; it was not only that He sent Peter to a Gentile; but now these men, who might have been despised as irregular labourers, were in the current of the same work of God, even if they knew nothing of it, save by divine instinct.

The importance of closer attention to the text is well shown by Calvin's remarks on this verse. He was led into no small perplexity by the reading current in his day, and, to the shame of Christendom, still tolerated as the received reading. Yet his masculine good sense held to the truth, though he did not know the solid basis on which it here stands. I cite from the Calvin Tr. Society's edition of his Comm. on the Acts, i. pp. 466, 467. "Luke doth at length declare that certain of them brought this treasure even unto the Gentiles. And Luke calleth these Grecians not Ἕλληνες but Ἑλληνισται [?]. Therefore some say that those came of the Jews, yet did they inhabit Greece [and these would be right if the reading had been really Ἑλληνιστὰς and not Ἕλληνὰς]; which I do not allow. For seeing the Jews, whom he mentioned a

little before, were partly of Cyprus, they must needs be reckoned in that number, because the Jews count Cyprus a part of Greece. But Luke distinguisheth them from those, whom he calleth afterward Ἑλληνιστας [this is precisely where he is mistaken; his reasoning is sound, but his knowledge defective]. Furthermore, forasmuch as he had said that the word was preached at the beginning only by the Jews, and he meant those who, being banished out of their own country, did live in Cyprus and Phenice, correcting this exception, he saith that some of them did teach the Grecians. This contrariety doth cause me to expound it of the Gentiles." Quite right: only the true text delivers from the need of wresting the force of a word, and is as simply as possible Greeks, not Grecians, and means Gentiles without the smallest difficulty or discussion.

But it is still more strange as evidence of the slipshod criticism of the Reformers that Beza, who was more of a scholar than his predecessors, uniformly edits Ἑλληνιστὰς, and writes a blundering note to the effect that it is here used in the sense of Ἑλληνάς. And yet he had in his possession that famous Graeco-Latin Uncial (D) which he presented to the University of Cambridge in 1581, which MS. supports the Alexandrian.

How blessed it is to see the free activity of the Holy Ghost without any kind of communication of man! It is always thus in the ways of God. It is not only that God uses one and another: this He does and we may bless Him that so He does; but the God who employs means is also above them, and He needs now only to draw out by circumstances the souls of some simple Christian men who had faith and love to seek the Gentiles without requiring the same vigorous and extraordinary means,

under His mighty hand, as even the apostle did. Great workman as Peter was, he required the intervention of God in a vision to send him to do a work that these unnamed brethren undertook in their confidence of His grace, without any vision or sign whatsoever. It seems to have been the working of divine grace in their souls, and nothing else. At first they were more timid; they spoke only to Jews. By and by the power of the gospel and the action of the Holy Ghost fill their souls with desires as to the need of others. The Gentiles were sinners: why should they not dare to speak to the Gentiles? “And the hand of the Lord was with them,” as we are told, “and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord.” But what a rebuke is this to those that would make the church to be merely a creature of government, or in any wise to be of man’s will, which is still worse, How blessed to see that it is a real organic whole, not only a living thing, but that He who is the spring of its life is the Holy Ghost Himself — a divine person, who cannot but answer to the grace of the Lord Jesus whom He is come down to glorify.

Next we find Barnabas stirred up to another and a characteristic enterprise. He had before this delivered Saul from the effects of undue anxiety and distrust in the minds of the disciples. He would have Saul to return good for what I may venture to call a measure of evil towards him. As there was need in the church at Antioch, he goes and finds him. He had a conviction that this was the instrument the Lord would use for good. Thus we see that, while we have the angel of the Lord in certain cases, the Spirit of the Lord expressly in others, we have also simply the holy judgment of the gracious heart. This is all quite right. It is not to be treated as

mere human arrangement. It was not only right, but recorded of God that we might see and profit by it. Barnabas was quite justified in seeking Saul. “And it came to pass that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” The place once so famous for its nicknames was now to give a name that will never perish — a name of incalculable sweetness and blessing, connecting Christ as it does with those that are His. It was, no doubt, a Gentile title. There would be no particular force in giving it to Jews, for all Jews professed to be looking for Christ. What a wonderful change for these poor Gentiles to know Christ for themselves, and to be called after Christ! All was ordered of God.

Then we find that if the church at Jerusalem had become impoverished, the Gentiles minister of their carnal things to them. Saul (as he is still called) and Barnabas are made the channels of bringing the contributions to the elders not named before. How these elders were appointed, if indeed they were so formally, does not appear. Among the Gentiles we know that they were installed, as we shall see a little later, by apostolic choice. Whether this was the ease among the Jews scripture does not say; but that there were persons who had this responsible place among them, as among the Gentile churches afterwards, we see clearly.

Finally, and in few words (for I do not intend to say more on Acts 12 tonight), we have the completing of this second part of our narrative in this chapter. We are given a striking prefiguration of the evil king that will be found in the latter day; he that will reign over the Jews under the shadow and support of the Gentiles as Herod

was, and not less but more than his prototype bent on the murder of the innocents, and with his heart full of evil for others who will be rescued by the goodness of the Lord.

James sheds his blood, as Stephen had before; for this Peter was destined by man, but the Lord disappointed him. The disciples gave themselves to prayer, yet they little believed their own prayers. Nevertheless we learn hence that they had prayer-meetings in those days; and so they gave themselves up to this special prayer for the servant of the Lord, who did not fail to appear by an agent of His providential power. All this confirms its having a Jewish aspect, regarded as a type, and was very natural in James and Peter, who had to do specially with the circumcision.

It is needless now to dwell on the scene, more than just to point out that which is familiar, no doubt, to many that are here — the manner in which the Lord judged the apostate; for Herod — owned shortly after by the people whom he had sought to please, disappointed in one place, but exalted in another — was hailed as a god; and at that moment the angel of the Lord deals with his pride, and he is devoured of worms — a sad image of the awful judgment of God that will fall upon one who will sit “in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

In the portion which follows we shall see the manner of the Spirit of God’s working by the great apostle of the Gentiles.

Appendix.

It may be interesting to many readers to read as follows from Mr. Edward A. Litton's work on "The Church of Christ in its Idea, Attributes, and Ministry; with a particular reference to the Controversy between Romanists and Protestants." There are, of course, imperfect expressions, inasmuch as the truth itself is but partially apprehended; but one is glad to see views so decidedly in advance of ordinary evangelicalism, with equal decision against more churchism.

"In the opening chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, the Christian dispensation is seen in actual operation; for that with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost that dispensation properly commences will probably be admitted by all parties. Moreover, in these chapters the Church of Christ is first spoken of as in actual existence. What in our Lord's discourses is a matter of anticipation or prophecy, here appears as a matter of fact. Though not at first fully aware of the great change which had taken place in their religious standing, still less of its ultimate consequences, the first believers at once formed a separate community in the bosom of the Jewish theocracy; a community having, for its distinctive marks, adherence to the twelve Apostles, baptism in the name of Christ, and the celebration of the Lord's Supper.6 Thenceforth the Church becomes a matter of history; and its history is nothing less than that of the vicissitudes, prosperous and adverse, which the kingdom of God upon earth has in the lapse of ages passed through.

"It has already been remarked that, far from intending to establish a mere invisible fellowship of the Spirit, our

Lord contemplated His Church as having a visible existence, His followers as collected into societies [that society called the Church or assembly of God]. With this view He Himself instituted certain external badges of Christian profession, to come into use when they should be needed, and took measures to qualify a small and select company of believers, by attaching them constantly to His person while His earthly ministry lasted, and giving them a formal commission with extraordinary powers, when He left the world, to preside over the affairs and direct the organisation of Christian societies. These essential conditions of the existence of any regular society we find from the very first in being in the Church: the Apostles were the officers, and, collectively, the organ of the community; members were admitted into it by baptism; and they testified their continuance therein by participating in the sacrament of Christ's body and blood. As we advance farther in the inspired history, we find additions made to these simple elements of social fellowship; the organisation of the Christian society becomes more complex and systematic; questions of polity and order occupy no small portion of the apostolic epistles; and we have every reason to believe, if not from Scripture alone, yet from the unanimous voice of authentic history, that towards the close of the apostolic age Christianity had almost everywhere crystallised itself into a certain, definite, and well known form of ecclesiastical polity" (pp. 192, 193).

"St. Paul, in chap 14 of the first epistle to the Corinthians, presents us with a graphic picture of the mode in which Christians in the first age of the Church celebrated public — worship. The Sacrament of the

Lord's Supper constituted the visible symbol of their profession, and the pledge of their union with Christ and with each other; but the governing function in the assembly was the ministry of the Word, whether it assumed the extraordinary forms of 'tongues' or a 'revelation,' or 'prophecy,' or 'the interpretation of tongues,' or consisted of the stated instruction of regular pastors and teachers. Among the various spiritual gifts then common in the Church, the chief place was to be assigned to prophecy; 'for he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.' Of any typical or sacrificial element, St. Paul makes no mention: the whole service, with the exception of the Lord's Supper, was manifestly homiletic or verbal. That the gifts mentioned in the chapter were, for the most part, extraordinary, and in process of time were to cease, makes no difference as regards the argument; for it is the essential character of Christian worship, not the particular vehicle of its expression, that is the point now under consideration" (pp. 256, 257), "The Church of Christ was not properly in existence before the day of Pentecost; much less did she, before that era, go forth on her mission to evangelize7 the world. A body of believers indeed had been by Christ gathered out of the Jewish people to be the first recipients of the Pentecostal effusion; but before that event, this body could not be called distinctively His Church. It is, then, nothing but the fact, that the invisible Church, or rather that which in the Church is invisible, preceded that which is visible. The spiritual power which wrought so wonderful a change in the Apostles must first descend from heaven, and give to the Church its inner form as its spiritual characteristic! afterwards the Apostles preach and

organize. First, there are saints, or men in whom Christ is formed by an invisible operation of His Spirit, whose origin, however, is not unknown; then these saints proceed to execute their appointed mission" (p. 272).

"Were the question put to a person of plain understanding, unacquainted with the controversies which have arisen on the subject, What, according to the Apostolic Epistles, is a Christian Church, or, how is it to be defined? he would probably, without hesitation or difficulty, reply, that a Christian Church — as it appears, for example, in St. Paul's epistles — is a congregation or society of faithful men or believers, whose unseen faith in Christ is visibly manifested by their profession of certain fundamental doctrines, by the administration and reception of the two sacraments, and by the exercise of discipline. He would direct attention to the fact, that the ordinary greeting of St. Paul, at the beginning of each epistle, is to the 'saints and faithful brethren' constituting the Church of such a place, fellow-heirs with himself of eternal life; and that throughout these compositions, the members of the Church are presumed to be in living union with Christ, reasonings and exhortations being addressed to them, the force of which cannot be supposed to be admitted, except by those who are led by the Spirit of God; in short, that the members of the Corinthian or the Ephesian Church are addressed as Christians; and a Christian is one who is in saving union with Christ."

"In proportion to the apparent simplicity of the question, would be his surprise to hear it affirmed that he is mistaken, and that, in addressing a Christian society as a congregation of Christians, St. Paul merely regards it as a society of men professing the same faith, and

participating outwardly in the same sacraments (it being immaterial to the idea whether they possess saving faith or not); a society invested with spiritual privileges, but not necessarily realizing those privileges, and that, consequently, we must lower the import of the terms, ‘saints’ and ‘faithful in Christ Jesus,’ to signify outwardly dedicated to God, and professing with the lips the doctrines of Christianity..... That the mode of interpretation alluded to involves a deviation from the obvious meaning of the New Testament phraseology is not, indeed, sufficient reason for at once rejecting it; but it does warrant us in requiring that the necessity for such deviation shall be clearly made out. And in the present case this requirement is the more reasonable from the circumstance that the Apostles uniformly identify themselves, as regards their Christian standing and hopes, with those to whom they write. ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ;’ ‘that I may be comforted by the mutual faith both of you and me;’ did St. Paul, when he thus wrote, regard himself as but nominally interested in the blessings of redemption? Was his faith nothing more than a profession of Christian doctrine? If he must have meant something more than this; if his own faith and his own sanctity were living and real, the effect of the Holy Spirit’s operation; then, inasmuch as he makes no distinction as regards this point between himself and those whom he addresses, we must suppose that he looked upon them also as real saints and believers. The language of the inspired writers of the New Testament is the expression of that Christian experience, or conscious participation in the blessings vouchsafed through Christ, which the Holy Ghost had shed abroad in their hearts: their idea

therefore of a saint, or a believer, being derived from their own spiritual consciousness, must have been the highest of which the words will admit. But in the sense in which they supposed themselves to be Christians, do they, to all appearance, apply that title to those to whom they write" (pp. 280-283).

To the argument drawn from the use of similar terms under the Mosaic covenant in a merely national and external sense to prove that they mean the same, and nothing more, under the gospel., our author answers, "Here, in fact, is the real source of the error. While the typical character of the Mosaic institution in general is recognised, it has not been sufficiently borne in mind that the Jewish nation itself in its external or political aspect, was a type, and nothing more, of the Christian Israel..... We have only to extend this undoubted principle of interpretation to the Jewish people itself in its national — that is, its legal-character, to perceive that the terms by which, in the Old Testament, its privileges are expressed, assume, when applied to Christians, a different meaning, or rather betoken the spiritual realities of which the former were but the types" (pp. 286, 287).

"To all this, however, it will be replied, that the nature of a visible church, which we know must in all cases be a body of mixed character, as well as the actual state of several of the churches to whom St. Paul addressed his epistles, forbid the supposition that, in terming them communities of saints and believers, he could have used these words in their highest signification. This is the second difficulty which it is conceived lies in the way of our interpreting the apostle's language literally. But a moment's reflection will show that the difficulty is only

imaginary. We must recollect that in the Apostolic Church an effective discipline — the very idea of which seems to be lost amongst us — existed. By means of this discipline, they having been separated from the society whose overt acts were contrary to their Christian profession, the apostle, not being endowed with the divine prerogative of inspecting the heart, was compelled to take the rest at their profession, and to deal with them as real Christians so long as there was no visible, tangible proof to the contrary..... Without pronouncing upon the state of individuals in the sight of God, he assumed the whole body to be what they professed to be — a body of real Christians. For it must be remembered that, however far his profession may be from being a true one, every professor of Christianity professes to be a true, not a mere nominal, Christian. Except on this assumption the apostle could not have proceeded to enforce Christian duties by Christian motives" (pp. 298, 299).

"Nor is there any weight in the objection that many of these primitive Churches were very defective in doctrine or in, practice, or in both; that St. Paul speaks of the Corinthians as being, on account of their divisions, 'carnal,' and not 'spiritual,' as 'babes in Christ,' and sharply reproves them for their laxity of discipline in the case of the incestuous person, and their want of discipline in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. For it is not maintained that the first Christians, any more than those of our own day, were or could be perfect; and all that can be fairly gathered from what St. Paul says of the Corinthians is, that they were imperfect and inconsistent. In the remarks sometimes made upon this subject it seems to be assumed that there is no medium

between our affirming of persons that they are not perfect Christians, and that they are not Christians at all; whereas in fact there is no Christian, however holy, who comes up to the ideal of Christian practice.... To return to the case of the Corinthians: — on what principle, let us ask, did St. Paul reprove them for their inconsistencies? Did he address them as absolutely destitute of the vital principle of grace, or as possessing it, but needing exhortation to walk conformably thereto? The latter is, unquestionably, the ground which he takes" (pp. 302, 303).

"Christianity, as it appears in the New Testament, knows nothing of the atomistic theory of modern independentism. There can be little doubt that, even in the apostolic age, the church of each considerable city — such as Rome or Ephesus — consisted, not of one congregation, but of several, who were collectively styled the church of that place; certain it is that such was the case towards the close of the first century. It could not be otherwise. The expansive power of Christianity called it to break forth on all sides; and speedily the original congregation, or in modern language the mother church, of each city gave birth to other societies of Christians in the surrounding neighbourhood.... No notion is more at variance with the spirit of apostolic Christianity than that of societies of Christians existing in the same neighbourhood, but not in communion with each other, and not under 'common government'" (pp. 449, 450).

It is a perilous mode of reasoning and likely to lead to universal scepticism, to maintain, for the sake of theoretical consistency, that the visible fruits of the Spirit do not possess a sufficiently distinctive character

to enable us to pronounce where they are and where they are not: not to mention that the sin of denying the evident operation of the Holy Spirit is spoken of by our Lord in terms far too awful not to make us tremble at the thought of verging towards it. The fruits of the Spirit, whether they be produced within our own inclosure or beyond it, are always the same, and always to be recognized; otherwise our Lord would never have given us the simple test whereby we are to distinguish false from true prophets — 'by their fruits ye shall know them.' If men profess themselves not to be able to do so, they simply profess that they have neither consciences nor moral sense." [Alas! the power of the Spirit to this end is lost sight of.]…

"One visible manifestation, then, of the sanctity of the Church is the holy walk and conversation of individual Christians; but there is another, and more formal, mode in which she professes herself to be holy, and that is, by the exercise of discipline. The personal holiness of the Christian is a property of the individual, not of the society as such; hence a professing Christian society, however large a proportion of holy men it may contain, does not predicate of itself that it is a part of Christ's holy Church as long as it exercises no formal official act implying that assumption. The exercise of discipline is the true and legitimate expression of the sanctity of a visible Church considered as a society. Hence the great importance of discipline. It is not merely that the absence of it operates injuriously upon the tone and standard of piety within the Church; it affects the claims of the society as such to be a legitimate member of the visible Church Catholic. A Christian society which should openly profess to dispense with discipline, and

tolerate on principle open and notorious evil doers [or still worse heretics, Antichrists, or their abettors] within its pale, would thereby renounce its title to one of the essential attributes of the Church; it would sever all ostensible connection between itself and the true Church [or rather Christ and His sacrifice: see 1 Cor. 5], of which sanctity is an inseparable property; in short, it would unchurch itself. For every particular church is so, called on the supposition of its being a manifestation, more or less true, of the one holy Church — the body of Christ.... How essential to the idea of a Church the exercise of discipline is, may be seen from the embarrassing contrarieties between theory and practice which the virtual suspension of it in the Church of England is constantly occasioning" (pp. 515-517).

Acts 13

We now enter on the missionary journeys, as they are called, of the apostle Paul. The work, under the Spirit, opens to the glory of the Lord. Not merely are Gentiles met in grace and brought into the house of God: He had already wrought in their souls individually — this we have seen before, in Peter's mission to Cornelius and his household; but grace goes out henceforth in quest not of Jews only but of Gentiles, as the special sphere which was assigned to Paul by God, and this also in co-operation with the other apostles; for thus they had agreed.

But there are preliminary circumstances of no little interest and moment, which the Spirit of God has been pleased to give us before the record of these journeys. I have read at the beginning, of chapter 13 the principal scene of this kind. Saul of Tarsus had already been

called, but here we have a formal act of separation. This is the true description of it in scripture. It was in no way what men call “ordination.” This he takes particular pains to deny in explicit terms. It was not only that man was in no sense the source of ministry; for this would be, no doubt, disavowed by the godly everywhere; but he employs the strongest words in showing that it was not by men as the channel. As there are cases where man is the channel of conveying both a gift and authority, we can see how artfulness or ignorance can readily enough embroil the entire subject, and thus prepare the way for the building up of the clerical system. There is no ground for it in scripture. Ministry there is, and as a distinct though connected thing, an official charge: both are beyond question. These two things are clearly recognized by the Holy Ghost. Here we have nothing of official charge. So far as the apostle Paul had both a gift and a charge, and he had both (and the apostleship differs from the gift of a prophet as well as the rest in this, that it is not a gift only but a charge), all had been settled between the Lord and His servant. But now it pleased God at this particular epoch to call forth Barnabas, who was a kind of transition link between the twelve, with Jerusalem for their centre and the circumcision for their sphere, and the free and unfettered service of Paul among the Gentiles. It pleased Him to separate these two chosen vessels of His grace for the work to which He was calling them.

Let us look for a moment at the state of things at Antioch before we pass on. “And there were in the church” (or assembly) “that was at Antioch [certain]8 prophets and teachers.” What is commonly called a stated ministry was there. All should give full weight to

facts which if denied or overlooked would only weaken the testimony which God has given.

It is the continual effort of those who oppose the truth of the church, and who deny the present ruined condition of it, to insinuate against such as have learnt from God to act on His own word, that they set aside ministry, and more particularly what they call “stated ministry.” They do nothing of the kind. They deny an exclusive or one-man ministry. They deny that abuse of ministry which would shut out of its own circle the operation of all gifts but one, which is jealous of every other save by its own will or leave, which has no sufficient confidence in the Lord’s call or in the power of the Holy Ghost given for profit, which consequently makes a duty of both narrowness and self-importance through a total misunderstanding of scripture and the power and grace of God. Not for a moment do I deny that all who are in any definite measure taught of God as to His will in the service of Christ must disavow clericalism in every shape and degree as a principle essentially and irreconcilably opposed to the action of the Holy Ghost in the church.

But it is important to affirm that none understand the action of the Spirit who expose themselves and the truth (which is still more serious) to the deserved stigma of denying the real abiding-place of ministry. This is not in anywise the question. All Christians who have light from God on these matters acknowledge ministry to be a divine and permanent institution. It is therefore of very great importance to have scriptural views of its source, functions, and limits. The truth of scripture, if summed up as to its character, amounts to this — that ministry is the exercise of a spiritual gift. This I believe to be a true

definition of it. The minds of most Christians are encumbered with the notion of a particular local charge. Such a charge is altogether distinct from ministry: it is only confusion to suppose that they are the same thing, or inseparable. Ministry in itself has nothing to do with a local charge. The same person, of course, may have both: this might or might not be.

A man, for instance, as we find in the case of Philip and others might have a local charge at Jerusalem, and there we saw the church choosing, because it was that kind of office which had to do with the distribution of the church's bounty. This is the principle of it. What the church gives the church has a voice in. But the Lord gave Philip a spiritual gift, and there the church bows and accepts, instead of choosing. In point of fact the particular gift that Philip received from the Lord was not one that properly finds its exercise within the assembly, but rather without: he was an evangelist. But this establishes what I have been asserting; that is, that you may have a person without a charge who has a very special gift, and this for public ministry.

The elders or bishops, of whom we shall hear more by-and-by, had a still more important charge. It was the office of oversight, or of a bishop, that was found in every fully-constituted assembly where there could be time for the development of that which was requisite in order to it. But whether there were charges or none, whether the due appointment was or was not, the Lord did not fail to give gifts for the carrying on of His own work. Now those persons who possessed gifts exercised them, as they were bound to do; for here was no question of appointment, and indeed their exercise had nothing, whatever to do with the leave, permission, or

authority of any, but solely flowed from the Lord's own gift. This was properly ministry in the word. But there never was such an idea broached, still less acted on, as the exclusive ministry which in modern times has been set up, as if it were the only right thing in theory or practice. In point of fact it is thoroughly wrong, not only not defensible by the word of God, but flagrantly opposed to it.

Here, for example, we have the picture of an assembly drawn by the Spirit. It is the more instructive, because it cannot be pretended that here, as in the church at Jerusalem, there were elements which savoured of the anterior or Jewish state of things. It was among the Gentiles. It was where Saul himself laboured; but then there were other servants of the Lord beside Saul, — as Barnabas, and Simeon, and Lucius, and Manaen. Nor are these mentioned as if they were the only persons who there exercised the gifts of prophecy and teaching: no doubt they were the more important men. "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul" (for he is still called Saul, which was his Hebrew name) "for the work whereunto I have called them." It was the Lord that called them.

But there is more than this: the Holy Ghost can also set apart among the servants to a peculiar service. This is emphatically brought in when it was a question of Barnabas and Saul. Not, of course, but that the Holy Ghost had to do with the action of a Peter, or a John, or of any others that have come before us in the previous accounts of this book; but it is expressly said here — and not without an admirable reason, and of the deepest interest to us, because God is here preparing the road

and instructing His servants as to His ways, more particularly in the church among the Gentiles. Hence, the Holy Ghost comes into a very decided and defined prominence here: “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.” The Holy Ghost is in the church; He is personally acting, and not merely as giving power, but in distinct and special call. It is, no doubt, subordinate to the glory of the Lord Jesus, but, nevertheless, as a divine person must who does not abnegate His own sovereignty, so it is said “as he will.”

“And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.” This was not to confer authority, which would set one scripture against another. Galatians 1:1 denies such an inference. We shall find, before we have done with the history, what the character of this action was, and wherefore hands were laid upon them: the end of Acts 14 explains it to us. It is said there (verse 26) that they sailed to Antioch (which was the starting-point), from whence “they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.” Such, then, was the object and meaning of the hands laid on Barnabas and Saul. It was not the presumptuous thought that men, who were really inferior to themselves spiritually, could confer upon the apostles what they did not themselves possess to the same extent; it was but a fraternal recommendation to the grace of God, which is always sweet and desirable in the practical service of the Lord. “So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost:” nothing can be more distinct than the place that the Spirit of God has assigned Him, nothing more emphatic than the manner in which the inspired writer draws attention to the fact in these commencing verses. All now depends

upon His power: He is on earth, the directing power of all that is carried on. That power does not belong to the church, which has indeed responsibility in the last resort in the judgment of evil, but otherwise never can meddle with ministry except to the dishonour of the Lord, its own hurt, and the hindrance of ministry. On the the other hand, ministry never can meddle with what properly belongs to the church. They are two distinct spheres. The same person, of course, may be a minister while he has his place as a member in the body of Christ. But as he is not permitted to use his ministry to override the church in any respect, but rather to subserve its right action, helping it on as far as may be in his power by the Holy Ghost, so on the other hand the church can in nowise rightly control that ministry which flows not from the church, but directly from the Lord.

The present state in nowise alters or modifies the principle: on the contrary, it is an immense comfort that as ministry never did flow from the church, so the present broken state of the church cannot overthrow the place and responsibility of those who minister in the word. The fact is they are quite distinct, although co-ordinate, spheres of blessing.

Barnabas and Saul go forth, then, to Cyprus, the native place of Barnabas; and coming there they preach the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. There is great care, and so much the more because Saul was apostle of the Gentiles, to go to the Jews; and it is lovely to see the ways of God in this respect. Above all others Luke, as we know, brings out the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in His grace towards the Gentiles. Nevertheless there is no gospel so eminently Jewish as Luke’s in its commencement, — not even Matthew’s. We have no

such scene in the gospel of Matthew, and still less in Mark's or John's, — no such scene of the temple both of the exterior and interior. We have no such account of the godly Jewish remnant. We have no such care in showing the obedience of Joseph and Mary to the requisitions of the law as in the first two chapters of the gospel of Luke. The fact is, that what is shown first in the gospel, then in the Acts, is "to the Jew first and also to the Gentile." And so we find in the service of these blessed men who now go forth.

They had, by the way, also, we are told, John to their minister. We must not make an ecclesiastical institution out of this. No doubt the expression might to ignorant minds convey some such notion. Nor do I pretend to say what might have been the motives of those who translated it so as to give such a colour to the passage. Manifestly, however, the thing were absurd; because it would be, not a ministry to others, but to Paul and Barnabas. Clearly therefore Mark's service lay here, I suppose, in searching out proper lodgings, and getting people to hear the apostles preach, and that kind of care which a young man would be expected to bestow on those whom he was privileged to accompany and attend in the work of the Lord.

On this occasion they met with the deputy of the island, Sergius Paulus, who was besieged by the efforts of a certain sorcerer that sought to exercise and retain influence over the mind of the great man. But the time was come for falsehood to fall before the truth. When he therefore attempted to turn his old arts against the gospel, and those that were the instruments of bringing it to the island, God asserted His own mighty power. For when Elymas withstood Barnabas and Saul, Saul, "who

also is called Paul" (the Spirit of God taking this opportunity of bringing forward his Gentile name in a mission that was to be pre-eminently among the Gentiles, although beginning with the Jew according to the ways of God), being then filled with the Holy Ghost, sets his eyes on the evil worker, gives him his true character, searches him through and through, and, more than this, pronounced a sentence, a judicial sentence, from the Lord, which was at once accomplished. As we are told, "Immediately there fell upon him a mist and a darkness, and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand." It was the sad sign of his guilty race, the Jews, who, by their opposition to the gospel of the grace of God, and more particularly among the Gentiles, are now doomed to the same blindness after a spiritual sort. "Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord." Beautiful contrast with Simon Magus! What astonished Simon Magus was the power displayed; what astonished the deputy was the truth. The admiration of Power is natural to man, and particularly to fallen man. He, conscious of his weakness, covets the power that he would like to wield, having still the consciousness of the place to which he was called, but from which he has fallen; for God put every creature under him, and although through sin he is fallen from his estate, he has in nowise abandoned his pretensions, and he would fain have the power that would enable him not to hold up only, but to reverse if possible the sad consequences of the fall. Delight in the truth, a heart for that which God reveals, flows only from the Holy Ghost; and this was the happy portion of the deputy. He believed, and believed after a very different sort, with a divinely exercised conscience by the power of the Spirit,. instead of a merely

intellectual credit receiving upon evidence that which approved itself to the judgment of his mind.

Next we read of Paul and his company, for from this moment he takes the chief place, and others are designated because of their companionship with him. Was this place in anywise contrary to the will of the Lord? Was it not thoroughly according to it? We all know that there is sometimes a little jealousy of any such spiritual influence. I cannot but think, however, that the feeling is owing more to the natural independence of the mind, than the simplicity that delights in the working of the Holy Ghost and the sanctioned expression of God's holy word. I say, then, that Paul and his company "loosed from Paphos, and came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John, departing from them (for he was not at all in faith up to the level of the work — at any rate of Paul), returned to Jerusalem," his natural home.

The others proceed on their way to Antioch in Pisidia, and there they are found on the sabbath-day in the synagogue. "And after the reading of the law and the prophets, the ruler of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on." What a painful contrast with that which is found in Christendom! Even among the poor Jews, spite of all the coldness and narrowness of their system, there was then a greater openness of heart, and a simplicity to receive whatever could be communicated than one sees where there ought to be the rivers of living water, — where there should reign the cherished desire among all that belong to the Lord, that the best help at all cost be rendered to every saint of God, as well as to every poor perishing sinner. However, here among these Jews, the rulers

were anxious to get all the help possible from others for the understanding of the word of God, and for its just application. Although they knew nothing whatever of Paul and Barnabas (except, of course, that they were Jews, or looked like them), they called on them forthwith to address all. “And Paul beckoning. with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God.”

There were proselytes as well as children of Jacob. Many Gentiles had renounced idolatry in all the great cities where Jews were found at this time. Undoubtedly, so far, Judaism had prepared the way for the Lord among the nations of the earth, in whose midst Jews were scattered. Disgust had grown up in the Gentile mind. The abominations of Paganism had risen up to a fearful height. At this very time there were not a few who though Gentiles were not idolaters (and you must bear this in mind), and really did fear God.

To all these Paul addresses himself: “The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it.” The history is pursued until he comes to David, as the object, of course, was to bring in the Son of David; for the apostle, led of the Lord, speaks with that considerate skill which love does not fail to use, formed under the Spirit of God. Thus having brought in the Messiah, we are shown how He had been announced by the Baptist. There was no collusion about it. John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. As he fulfilled his course, he acknowledged that he was not the Messiah. Thus God gave an admirable witness of the Messiah that was just at hand. It was no question of a great man, or great

deeds, but of God's accomplishing His purpose. Had a particle of ambition influenced John, he, with an immense following among the people, might readily have set up to be the Messiah himself. The truth was, that he was not the Bridegroom but His friend, and the fear of God shut out these base desires, and he felt it his joy and his duty to do the will of God, and be the witness of Him that was coming.

Thus Paul announces the Messiah himself. "Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent." Next he brings boldly forward the awful position in which the Jews had put themselves. "They that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him." Along with spiritual blindness there was as usual the grossest want of common righteousness. "And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre." God was against them, and as for the man whom they had crucified, He "raised him from the dead: and he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus."

It is not warrantable to say "raised up Jesus again." You may read it either "raised up Jesus," or "raised Jesus again;" but you cannot give both. The word cannot at

the same time include both, though it may in certain cases, according to the context, mean either. The proper rendering here is “raised up Jesus.” This is the meaning required by the facts. It refers to Jesus given to the Jews as the Messiah according to the prophets. It is also the commonest thing possible for the word to apply to resurrection. But then in itself it takes in a much wider range than simply resurrection. The word “raised up” requires “from the dead” to make it definitely mean resurrection. But this is not the case here, till we come to verse 34. I therefore believe that resurrection is not meant in the earlier text at all, but raising up Jesus as the Messiah, as it is also written in the second Psalm: “Thou art my Son: this day have I begotten thee.” This is confirmed, and I think proved by the next verse, where we have the additional statement. “And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead.” Thus we have two distinct steps: — verse 33 affirms that God had fulfilled the promise in raising up the Messiah in the earth for His people; verse 34 adds that, besides this, He raised Him up from the dead. This is important, because it serves as a key to the true application of the second Psalm, which is often, and I believe mistakenly, applied to the resurrection. The reference is to the Messiah, without raising the question of actual bodily resurrection, which is first introduced distinctly in Psalm 16, though implied in Psalm 8. So, in the Apostle’s discourse, the resurrection from the dead is founded not upon the second Psalm, but on a well known passage in the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 55:3), and also in the sixteenth Psalm already referred to.

But here the apostle (instead of pointing out that God had made the rejected Jesus to be Lord and Christ,

which was Peter's doctrine, and, of course, perfectly true) uses it according to his own blessed line of truth, and urges on their souls, that "through this man is preached unto, you the forgiveness of sins; and by him" (not the Jew alone, but) "all that believe are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." Thus early, vigorously, and plainly did the apostle proclaim this great truth — no doubt for all among the Jews who bowed to it, but stated also in terms that should embrace a Gentile believer even as an Israelite. The law of Moses could justify from nothing. "All that believe are justified from all things," The whole is wound up by a solemn warning to such as despise the word of the Lord, and this founded on or rather cited from more than one of their own prophets. (Compare Isaiah 29 and Hab. 1)

"And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God." This stirred up the Jews: it was a new element, and kindled their jealousy at once. We have had the irritation and the murderous opposition of the Jews in Jerusalem. We can understand that they disliked what they considered a new religion, which claimed to come with the highest sanction of the God of Israel, more particularly as it made them feel to the very quick their own sins, their present and past resistance of the Holy Ghost, as well as their recent slaughter of their Messiah. But a new feature comes out

here which the Spirit of God lets us see henceforth in all the journeys and labours of the apostle Paul; that is, the hatred which the unbelieving Jews felt at the preaching of the truth to the Gentiles. “When the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy.” The scene now lay outside among the nations whom they despised, If the gospel were a lie, why feel so acutely? It was not love or respect for Gentiles. But Satan stirred up, not now simply their religious pride but their envy, and, filled with it, they “spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.”

The law had never wrought such a change among men. It might correct the grossness of idolatry and condemn its folly, thereby some here and there might fear God; but it never did win hearts after such a sort. Thus the evil of their own hearts was brought out among the Jews, and the more in proportion as the might of the grace of God proved itself in attracting souls to the Lord. “Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you.” How wondrous and how beautiful the ways of divine love! “But seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life” — how solemn to judge oneself unworthy of everlasting life, as every unbeliever does! — “lo, we turn to the Gentiles.”

This was spiritual wisdom; but was it simply instinct? It was not. There may have been those that turned to the Gentiles from no deeper or more defined reason, as we saw last night. There were those who perceived that the gospel was too great a boon to be confined to the ancient people of God, that it was adapted to the universal need of men, and that it became God’s grace

to let it forth to the Gentiles; and they acted on their conviction, and the Lord was with them, and many believed. But it was not spiritual instinct here: it was a still holier and lowlier thing, yet higher and more blessed. It was intelligent obedience, where it might not be supposed that one could find a sufficiently clear direction. But the eye of love can discern; it is ever on the alert to obey from the heart.

“For so,” says he, “hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles.” What had this to do with Paul and Barnabas? Everything. Beyond controversy Christ is directly in view of the prophet, and perhaps some would be disposed to shut up the words only to Christ; but not so the Holy Spirit, who therefore extends its bearing to Paul and Barnabas. Did not Paul afterwards write “to me to live is Christ”? Christ was all to them. Christian faith appropriates to itself what was said to Him. What a place is this! what a power in His name! No doubt it was heretofore a hidden mystery that man should be so associated with a Christ rejected by (and so separated from) the ancient people of God. But what said He to the man despised and set at naught by them? This was the very time when the Messiah, lost to Israel, becomes, in a new and intimate way, the centre for God to associate fully in grace with Him. Thus what belongs to Him belongs to them, and what God says about Him is direction for them. “I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.”

There was no rashness or presumption, but the soundest wisdom in this. Was it only for the Apostles? Is there no principle in this of all importance for us, my brethren? Does it not prove distinctly that it is not merely where

we get a literal command that we may and ought to discern a call to obedience? The apostles, as men of faith, were bold about it: “For so hath the Lord commanded us.” Yet, I suppose, not two souls besides in the whole earth would have seen a command to them. Unbelief would have asked proof, and have been ill-satisfied; but faith, as evermore, is happy and makes happy. “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the name of the Lord was published throughout all the region.” But the Jews were not to give up their envy. The greater the blessing, the more their hearts were vexed with it. “The Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women.” They were more open, doubtless, to their efforts; and so were “the chief men of the city.” As faith looks to God and the truth, unbelief flies to influence of one kind or another, — of females on the one side, and of great men on the other. Thus they raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. “But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.” As the enemy makes good the occasion of evil, so God turns the wickedness of the adversary to the blessing of His own.

The apostles pass thence into another place; they are, as ever, unwearied in their love. There is, perhaps, no feature more noticeable and instructive than the fact, that nothing turns away the heart of Paul from the poor Jews. He loved them with an unrequited affection; he loved them spite of all their hatred and their envy. Into the synagogue he went again here (as in each new place that he visits), and so spake, “that a great multitude

both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews". (they were generally just the same to Paul in one place as in another) "stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, they were ware of it, and fled." They thus bowed to the storm. Nothing at all of what men call heroism marked the apostles; there was what is very much better — the simplicity of grace: patience is the true wisdom, but God only can give it.

They go accordingly elsewhere, and there preach the gospel. At Lystra, which they visited, the case came before them of a man crippled in his feet, "impotent in his feet," who had never walked. Paul, perceiving that he had faith to be healed, beholds him steadfastly, and bids him stand upright on his feet. The Lord at once answering to the call, the man leaped and walked. "And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men." Accordingly they called Barnabas (who, it is evident, had the more imposing presence) Jupiter; and Paul, because he was the more eloquent of the two, they designated Mercury. "Then the priest of Jupiter", — for the city was famous for its devotedness to the so-called father of gods and men, — "brought oxen and garlands into the gates and would have done sacrifice." "Which when the

apostles,9 Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? we also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein."

What is notable, I think, especially for all those engaged in the work of the Lord, is the variety in the character of the apostolic addresses. There was no such stiffness as we are apt to find in our day in the preaching of the gospel. Oh, what monotony! what sameness of routine, no matter who may be addressed! We find in scripture people dealt with as they were, and there is that kind of appeal to the conscience which was adapted to their peculiar state. The discourse in the synagogue was founded on the Jewish scriptures; here to these men of Lycaonia there is no allusion to the Old Testament whatever, but a plain reference to what all see and know — the heavens above them, and the seasons that God was pleased from of old to assign round about them, and that continual supply of the fruits of His natural bounty of which the most callous can scarce be insensible. Thus we see there was the ministration of suited truth, as far as it went, of what God is, and what is worthy of Him, opening the way for the glad tidings of His grace. How different from the vileness of a Jupiter or of a Mercury, a god devoted to corruption and self-will, and another god devoted to stealing! Was this the best religion and morality of the heathen, making gods just like themselves? Such certainly is not the true God. Who can deny all to be vanity even in the minds of the most civilized and refined of the Gentiles? The true God,

although He had suffered all nations to walk in their own ways in times past, nevertheless did not “leave himself without witness in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” This was no more than an introduction for that which the apostle had to say; it was the truth so far rebuking the folly of idolatry. It was in no way the good news of eternal life and remission of sins in Christ; but it was that which either vindicated God, or at least set aside what was undeniable and before all eyes the debasing depravity of their false gods and pagan religion.

“And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.” “And having stoned Paul” — how like his Master! How sudden the change! About to be worshipped as a god, and the next thing after it to be stoned and left for dead! Alas! here also the Jews instigated the Gentiles. “Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.” Such is the victory that overcomes the world; such the power and perseverance of faith. They go on undaunted, yea, confirming the souls of the disciples in various places, “exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” Impossible for the world to overthrow those who bear the worst it can do, give God thanks, and wait for His kingdom.

But here take note of another part of their service — the confirmation of the souls of those who had already believed. It is not simply bringing souls in, and then

leaving them to other people; the apostles would stablish them in the faith as they were taught. But this was not all. “When they had ordained them.” Let me take the liberty of saying that “ordained” is a very misleading term, which conveys an ecclesiastical idea without any warrant whatever. Not that “ordained” is an interpolation here as in the first chapter of Acts, but certainly the meaning given is fictitious. The true force of the phrase is simply this, “they chose them elders.” In more ways than one it is important; because, as a simple choice takes away “ordination,” and with it that mysterious ritual which the greater bodies like, so on the other hand the apostles’ choosing for them elders takes away all that gives self-importance to the little churches. For it is neither the smaller bodies choosing for themselves, nor an imposing authority vested in their great rivals, but a choice exercised by apostles; that is, they chose for the disciples “elders in every church.”

I am well aware that persons of respectability have not been wanting who have tried to make out that the Greek word means that the apostles chose them by taking the sense of the assembly. But this is mere etymological trifling. There is not the slightest warrant for it in the usage of scripture. It is not requisite for a man to be a scholar in order to reject the thought as false. Thus the word “them” refutes it for any intelligent reader of the English Bible. It is not merely that apostles chose. If it be said that the people must have chosen for them to ordain, the answer is, that the people did not choose at all. This is proved by the simple declaration that the apostles chose for the disciples. Such is the way to fill up the sentence — “They chose them elders.”10 To make out the meaning of what Presbyterians or

Congregationalists have contended for, it should have been said that they chose by them, or some phrase meaning that they chose by the votes of the assembly. Here there is no ground whatever for such a sense, but on the contrary that the apostles chose elders for the rest. “They chose them elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, commending them to the Lord, on whom they believed.”

It is vain to deny or parry the importance of this decision of scripture on the subject of presbyters. Not infrequently there is an attack made on those who really desire to follow the word of God, by men who ask, “Where are your elders? You profess to follow scripture faithfully: how is it that you have not elders?” To such I would answer, “When you provide apostles to choose elders for us, we shall be exceedingly obliged for both.” How can we have elders appointed according to scripture unless we have apostles or their delegates? Where are the men now who stand in the same position before God and the assembly as Paul and Barnabas? You must either have apostles, or at the very least apostolic men such as Timothy and Titus; for it is quite evident that merely to call people elders does not make them such. Nothing would be easier than to bestow the title of elders within a sect, or for the law of the land to sanction it. Any of us could set ourselves up, and do the work in name, no doubt; but whether there would be any value in the assumption, or whether it would not be really great sin, presumption, and folly, I must leave to the consciences of all to judge.

Thus we know with divine certainty that the elders were chosen for the disciples by the apostles in every church. Such is the doctrine of scripture, and the fact as here

described. It is evident therefore, that unless there be duly qualified persons whom the Lord has authorised for the purpose, and in virtue of their most singular relation to the assembly, — unless there be such persons as apostles, or persons representing apostles in this particular, there is no authority for such appointment: it is mere imitation. And in questions of authority it must be evident that imitation is just as foolish as where it is a question of power. You cannot imitate the energy of the Spirit except by sin, neither can you arrogate the authority of the Lord without rebellion against Him. Notwithstanding, I do not doubt that this is often done with comparatively good — let us conceive the best — intentions on the part of many, but with very great rashness and inattention to the word of God. Hence those are really wrong, not to say inexcusable, who assume to do the work that apostles or their delegates alone could do, not such as content themselves with doing their own duty, and refuse a delicate and authoritative task to which they are not called of the Lord.

What, then, is the right thing? All that we can say is, that God has not been pleased, in the present broken state of the church, to provide all that is desirable and requisite for perpetuating everything in due order. Is this ever His way when things are morally ruined? Does He make provision to continue what dishonoured Him? So far from contrariety in this to the analogy of His dealings, it seems to me quite according to them. There was no such state of things in Israel in the days of the returned captives, as in the days of the Exodus, but Nehemiah was just as truly raised up of God for the return from Babylon, as Moses was for the march out of

Egypt. Still the two conditions were quite different, and the mere doing by Nehemiah what Moses did would have been ignorance of his own proper place. Such imitation would have possessed no power, and would have secured no blessing.

It is a precisely similar course that becomes us now. Our wisdom is to use what God has given us, not to pretend to the same authority as Barnabas and Paul had. Let us follow their faith. God has continued everything, not that is needful only, but far over and above it for the blessing, if not for the pristine power and order, of the church of God. There is not the slightest cause but want of faith, and consequent failure in obedience, that hinders the children of God from being blessed overflowingly even in this evil day. At the same time God has so ordered it, that no boast is more vain than that of possessing all the outward apparatus of the church of God. In fact, the louder the vaunt, the less real is the claim to ornaments of which God stripped His guilty people. None can show a display of order and charge so settled and regular, as to bear a comparison with the state of the church as it was founded and governed by the apostles.11 Far from thinking that it is not good and wise, I admire the ways of the Lord even in this deprivation of ground for boasting. I believe that all on His part is thoroughly as it should be, and really best for us as we are. Nor is it that we should not feel the want of the godly order as of old; but I need not say that if we feel the want of elders, the value of apostles was incomparably greater. Apostles were far more important than elders, and very much more the means of blessing to the church of God. But the right appointment of elders necessarily lapses with the departure of the apostles from the earth. It is not so

with gifts, nor therefore with ministry; for all this is essentially independent of the presence of the apostles, and bound up with the living action of Christ the head of the church, who carries out His will by the Holy Ghost here below.

Now we enter upon another and an important chapter in its way, that is to say, the efforts of the Judaisers, who were now beginning (not to hinder the apostle's work merely, but) to spoil the doctrine which he preached. This is the particular point we may see in Acts 15. Accordingly the source of this trouble lay not among unbelieving Jews, but among such as professed the name of the Lord Jesus. "Certain men which came down from Judea, saying, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When, therefore, Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem." Jerusalem, alas! was now the fountain of the evil: it was from the assembly in Jerusalem that this pest emanated. Satan's effort was to pollute the doctrine of the grace of God, who allowed that the authority and the power too of Paul and Barnabas should be entirely ineffectual to stop the evil. This was turned to good account, because it was far more important to stem the tidal in Jerusalem, and to have the sentence of the apostles, elders, and all thoroughly against these evil doers, than simply the censure of Paul and Barnabas. It could not but be that Paul and Barnabas should oppose those that set aside their doctrines; but the question for the Judaisers was, What about the twelve? Thus, the carrying of the question to Jerusalem was a most suitable and wise act. It may not be that Paul and

Barnabas at all designed it as such — I do not suppose they did: no doubt they endeavoured to put it down among the Gentiles, but they could not do so. The consequence was that perforce the question was reserved for Jerusalem, where Paul and Barnabas go up for what Paul knew involved the truth of the gospel. "And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy unto all the brethren." Thus, you see, going upon this painful controversy, their hearts were filled with the grace of God. It was not the question they were full of, but His grace.

"And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things which God had done with them." There again is uttered what filled their hearts with joy, — an important thing. For I am sure that often, where there is any duty of a painful kind, and where the heart of any servant of the Lord, no matter how rightly, gets filled with it, this very earnest pressure becomes really a hindrance. Because such is man, that, if you become thus over-occupied with it, others will infallibly put it down to some wrong object on your part; whereas on the contrary, others do not so oppose where you trust the Lord simply, only dealing with the matter when it is your duty to deal with it and passing on. Meanwhile, your heart goes out to that which is according to His own grace; and there is so much the more power, when you must speak on that which is a matter of pain.

It was thus according to the grace and wisdom given to these beloved servants of the Lord. When the question came before them, "there rose up certain of the sect of

the Pharisees which believed." This is a new feature, it will be observed; that is, it is not merely the envious unbelieving Jews, but the working of legalism in the believing Jews. This is the serious evil that now begins to show itself. They insist "that it was needful to be circumcised, and to command them to keep the law of Moses." In fact they thought that Christians would be all the better for being good Jews. This was their object and their doctrine, if such it can be called. "And the apostles and elders came together to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing," etc.

All this leads us into the interior of those days, and proves that the idea of everything being settled just by a word is only imagination; it never was so, not even when the whole apostolic college were there. We find the liveliest discussions among them. "And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men [and] brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." Peter we hear on this occasion preaching Paul's doctrine, just as we saw that Paul might among the Jews preach somewhat like Peter: — God it put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" — not "they shall be saved," nor "they shall be saved even as we." This is probably what we might have said,

but it is not what Peter said. “We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, — we Jews shall be saved — even as they [the uncircumcised Gentiles].”

How sweet is the grace of God, and what an unexpected blow to the pretensions of the Pharisees that believed! And this too from Peter! If Paul had said it, there would have been less to wonder at. The apostle of the Gentiles (so they were prone to think) would naturally speak up for the Gentiles, but how about Peter? what induced the great apostle of the circumcision so to speak? and this in the presence of the twelve in Jerusalem itself? How was it that without the plan of man, and contrary no doubt to the desires of the wisest, the failure of Paul and Barnabas to settle the matter, conciliatory and gracious as they were, only turned to the glory of the Lord? It was the evident hand of God to the more magnificent vindication of His grace.

“Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying (for he now takes the place of proposing or giving a judgment), “Men [and] brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: so that the residue of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord who doeth these things known from eternity.”

Thus we see that in James's mind what Peter and Paul and Barnabas had pressed was according to the declarations of the prophets, not in conflict but agreement with them. He does not say more than this; he does not mean that such was their fulfilment; nor is any special application set before us. They teach that the Lord's name should be called on the Gentiles, not when they become Jews. That they should be blessed and recognized, therefore, was in accordance with prophecy. There were Gentiles as such owned of God, without becoming practical Jews by being circumcised, — Gentiles upon whom the name of the Lord was called.

This was the argument or proof from Amos; and it was conclusive. "Wherefore my sentence is (or, I judge), that we trouble not them which from among the Gentiles are turning to God: but that we write to them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from the thing strangled, and from blood." This, in the latter part of it, is simply the precepts of Noah, the injunctions that were laid down before the call of Abram, and, again, that which was evidently due to God Himself in regard to the human corruption that accompanies idolatry; so that things were then left in a manner alike simple and wise. There could be no right-minded Gentiles who would not acknowledge the propriety and necessity of that which the. decree insists on.

"Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, having chosen to send men from among them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren."

It will be observed, by the way, that there were leading men among the brethren. Some seem jealous of this; others of hostile mind talk as if it contradicts brotherhood; but according to scripture, as in the nature of things, it is manifestly right. It is only crotchety people who have made a mistake. There must not be any allowance of jealousy where God speaks so plainly. This would be indeed to quarrel with the mercies of God among us. The letter was written, if I may so say, under the seal of the Spirit of God, from "the apostles, and elders, and12 brethren," to the brethren of the Gentiles in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia. On its contents I need not enlarge: they are familiar to all.

"Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren (i.e., at Antioch) with many words, and confirmed (i.e., strengthened) them. And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto those that sent them." (I give more exactly than in the common text.)

It was important to have the presence of men who were themselves competent witnesses of what had been debated and decided at Jerusalem. This was far more than being the mere and cold bearers of a letter. They knew the motives of the adversaries; they were familiar with the spiritual interests at stake, beside knowing the feeling of the apostles, and of the church at large. These men accordingly accompanied Paul and Barnabas. But this led also, in the wisdom of God, to an important point in the journeyings of the great apostle; for Paul and Barnabas, it is said, "continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also." (What largeness and love! How different from the days when an exclusive title protects unfit or haughty

men, and money difficulties hamper both teachers and taught!) “And some days after Paul said to Barnabas” (the younger takes the lead), “Let us go again and visit the brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.”

Paul loved the church; he was not only a great preacher of the gospel, but he was deeply interested in the state of the brethren, and he valued their edification. Barnabas proposed to take with them John, who was also called Mark; Paul, however, would not agree to it. “But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other.” The Spirit of God takes good care to record this; it was needful that it should be noted. It should act as a warning; and, on the other hand, it would also prepare the minds of the children of God for the fact, that even the most blessed men may have their difficulties and differences. We must not be too much cast down if we meet with anything of the kind. I do not make this remark in any wise to make light of such disagreements, but alas! we know that these things do arise.

But there is more for our instruction “Paul chose Silas.” This is a weighty practical consideration. There are persons, I am aware, who think that in the work of the Lord all must be left absolutely without thought of one’s own or concert to the Lord Himself. Now I do not find this in the word of God. I do believe in simple-hearted subjection to the Lord. Assuredly faith in the action of the Holy Ghost is of all importance, both in the church, and also in the service of Christ. Yet there is not liberty alone but a duty of conferring together on the part of

those who labour. There may be spiritual wisdom in what is often called “arrangement.” So far from regarding it as an infringement of scripture, or of what is due to the Holy Ghost, I believe there are cases in which not to do so would be independence, and a total mistake as to the ways of the Lord. It is quite true that Paul would not have an improper person forced on him in the work. He had come to the conclusion that, though Mark might be a servant of the Lord and of course have his own right sphere, he was not exactly the labourer that was suited for the mission to which the Lord was calling himself. Consequently his mind was made up not to take Mark with him. Barnabas, on the contrary, would have Mark with them, and at length so strongly urged this as to make it the necessary condition of his own association with the apostle. The consequence was that the apostle preferred even to forego the presence of his beloved friend and brother and fellow-servant, Barnabas, rather than have an unsuitable person forced upon him.

1 have little doubt that the brethren in general judged, and this spiritually, that Paul was in the right and Barnabas therefore wrong. For the apostle chose Silas and departed, as we are told, “recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God,” without a word about the brethren recommending Barnabas and John. Not that one would in the least doubt that Barnabas continued to be blessed of God. And as for John (Mark), we are expressly informed of his ability in the ministry at a later day. The apostle takes particular pains to show his respect and love for Barnabas after this in an inspired epistle (1 Cor. 9); and what is yet more to the purpose, he makes the most honourable mention of

Mark in more than one of his later epistles. (Col. 4 and 2 Tim. 4) How good of the Lord thus to let us see the triumph of His grace in the end! And what a joy to the loving heart of the apostle to record it!

At the same time the entire history furnishes a most important principle in the practical service of the Lord. We ought not to be in anywise bound by an esprit de corps; where His testimony is concerned, we must be prepared to break with flesh and blood — to say to a father and mother, I have not seen them, neither to acknowledge one's brethren, nor to know one's own children. Nor must we think overmuch about the trial; for beyond a doubt many will be grieved by that measure of faithfulness to the Lord which condemns themselves. This we must bear as a part of the burden of His work. On the other hand, need it be said that nothing is more uncomely than a rudely personal and slashing habit with others in carrying out the will of the Lord? There is in it neither grace, nor righteousness, nor wisdom, but self and self-deception; for it looks like zeal — this fire of Jehu. At the same time there is such a thing as looking to God to have an exercised judgment, as to your associates no less than your work. The Lord alone can give the single eye with self-judgment which enables us in the Spirit to discern aright whom we ought to decline, and whom to choose, if companions offer or should be sought in the work.

In Acts 16 we enter on some fresh points of interest. We have before us the first appearance of Timothy, who was afterwards to figure so much in the history of Paul and the service of the Lord. Here too we find a principle of no small moment for our guidance, and the more so as Paul did that for which, one can conceive, a great many

might judge him. It is wonderful how apt people are, and especially those who do not know much, to judge such as know far better than themselves. There is nothing so easy as to form a judgment, but whether there be adequate grounds and a sound conclusion are other questions. Here the apostle is said to have taken Timothy (whose mother was a Jewess and his father a Greek, himself a disciple of good report among the brethren) to go forth with him. But, singular to say, Paul circumcises him. What consternation this must have made amongst the brethren, especially the Gentiles! It was just after the battle of Gentile independence of circumcision had been fought and won. They surely must have thought that Paul was losing his wits himself to circumcise Timothy! Not even a Jew would have gone so far. Could it be that the apostle of the uncircumcision had at length succumbed to the adversary? or that he was swayed by his early prejudices so as to forget all his own past testimony to the cross and death and resurrection of Christ?

Now I do not hesitate to say, that so far from Paul being under legal prepossession in this act, on the contrary he never did anything in his course that showed him to be more completely above it. To circumcise Timothy was precisely what the law would not have done. It is well known that, if there was a mingled marriage (i. e., between a Jew and a Gentile), the law would have nothing to say to the offspring. Legally the Jewish father could not own his own children born of a Gentile mother, or vice versa. (See Ezra 10) Now Timothy being the fruit of such a marriage, there could be no claim, even if there was license, to circumcise him; and (just because there was no such claim, he being on the one side

sprung of a Greek, though his mother was a Jewess, because it could not be commanded) Paul condescends out of grace to those who were on a lower ground, and stops their mouths most effectually. Grace knows how and when to bend, no less than to be as unflinching as a rock; but this is precisely what even believers in general are least able to understand. Righteousness (that is, consistency with our relationship) is not all. God is gracious, and so may we be by His grace, and thus feel how such as are really on a true and real ground of grace, and in a position according to the word of God, can have the truest sympathy with those who, though of God, are on a totally different ground, doing and saying what must astonish others possessed of little grace. Is not this a thing to be weighed? We may find, there is little doubt, the importance of it before we have got through our little career. It is a question that often comes up in various forms; but I believe there is only one means of solving it. While the heart thoroughly holds fast the truth of God, let us seek at the same time to understand the workings of that truth according to the grace of God.

This was the secret of the apostle's action here, but it did not hinder in the least his use of the decision arrived at in the recent council at Jerusalem. For "as they went through the cities, they delivered to them to keep the decrees that were ordained of the apostles and elders that were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily."

Then we find another important fact. Paul was stopped in his Asiatic journeyings, as we are told here, and "forbidden by the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia." So completely is the Spirit of God regarded as the

directing person in the church. “After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit of Jesus (for such should be the text) suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” In various ways, therefore, divine guidance was never wanting.

Accordingly they come to the first spot in Europe that was blessed with the preaching of the great apostle of the Gentiles. They came to Philippi, “which is the first13 city of that part of Macedonia, a colony: and we were abiding in the city itself certain days.”

Here we read of Lydia’s heart opened, and of her household. The action of the Spirit as to the family seems to have obtained remarkably among Gentiles; among the Jews, as far as I know, we do not hear of it. We have found already districts among the Jews, as also among the Samaritans, which were powerfully impressed (to say the least) by the gospel; but among the Gentiles families seem particularly visited by divine grace as recorded by the Spirit. Take for example Cornelius the jailor, Stephanas: indeed you find it over and over gain. This is exceedingly encouraging — especially to us.

But grace never acts in power without stirring up the enemy, and in ways calculated most to oppose and undermine. His tactics in Europe differed from those in Asia — at least in this the first place where the gospel was preached. The earliest case of any one or thing which the word of God names is, as a rule, remarkably characteristic. Applying this to what is in hand, we find

that Satan's peculiar method in Europe was not so much by overt opposition but rather by affecting patronage. The maiden with the spirit of divination did not take the method of decrying the servants of the Lord but of applauding them. As it is said here, "she followed Paul and us (for Luke was now with the apostle) with the cry, These men are the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation." This she did many days, for at first the apostle avoided action to give no importance by any assaults of an open kind on the evil spirit. But after no notice was taken for some days, he being grieved at her boldness turns and says to the spirit, "I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." This roused the whole city.

The masters were troubled because the source of their gains was gone; and the magistrates disliked anything that produced an uproar. The result was that the multitude rose up together, the praetors rent off their clothes, and the apostle and his companion were beaten and cast into prison, with a charge to the jailor to keep them safely. There the Lord wrought marvellously. At midnight, while others slept, Paul and Silas in praying were singing the praises of God, who soon answered them. "Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened." The consequence of the truth afterwards presented was in God's grace the conversion of the jailor. It is not now the time to dwell on the details, beautiful as the scene is, and attractive to the heart as it may well be. The praetors were soon forced to acknowledge the wrong they had done in beating Romans uncondemned, contrary to the law of which they were the

administrators. Thus the world was rebuked, the brethren comforted, and Paul and his companions departed to other fields of suffering and service.

The next chapter (Acts 17) sketches for us the first entrance of the gospel into Thessalonica. It may be noted how remarkably the kingdom was preached there. But those of Berea earned for themselves a still more honourable character, being distinguished not so much by the prophetic style of teaching addressed to them, as by their own earnest and simple-hearted research into the word of God.

Finally, the apostle is at Athens, and there he makes one of the most characteristic appeals preserved to us in this striking book, but an appeal by no means to the credit of human refinement and intellect. For there is no place where the apostle condescends more to the elementary forms of truth, than in that city of art, poetry, and high mental activity. His text is taken, we may say, from the well-known inscription on the altar, “To the unknown God.” He would let them know what, in the midst of their boasted knowledge, they themselves confessed they knew not. His discourse was pregnant with suited truth, for he points out the one true God, who made the world and all things therein — a truth that philosophy never, acknowledged, and now denies, and would disprove if it were possible.

“God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth” — another truth that unbelief disowns — that God is not only the maker but the Lord, the master and disposer, of all — “He dwelleth not in temples made with hands.” Thus the apostle finds himself at issue with both the Gentiles and

the Jews. “Neither is worshipped (served) with men’s hands, as though he needed anything,” — contrary to all religion of nature, wherever and whatever it may be. “Seeing he giveth” (such is His character) “to all men life and breath and all things; and hath made of one blood:” here again he is at issue with man’s ideas, especially with those of Hellenic polytheism, for the unity of the human race is a truth that goes with that of the true God. It was seen among men that various races had each their own national god, and thus naturally the falsehood of many gods was bound up with and fostered the kindred pretension of many independent races of men. This was a darling idea of the pagan world. They held themselves to have sprung from the earth in some singularly foolish manner, at the same time maintaining that each was independent of the other. On the other hand, the truth which divine revelation discloses is that which man’s mind never did discover, but, when propounded, at once brings conviction along with it. Is it not humbling that the most simple truth about the simplest fact should be entirely beyond the ken of the proudest intellects unaided by the Bible? One would think that man ought to know his own origin. It is just what he does not know. He must know God first, and when he does all else becomes plain. “He hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth.”

Again, “He hath determined the times before-appointed” (everything is under His guidance and government); “and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him, and find him (“God,” it should be here, according to the best authorities: “The Lord” is not in keeping with the

teaching in this place. He shows them that God is the Lord, but this is another matter), “though he be not far from every one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets,” etc. Thus he turns the acknowledgment of their own poets against themselves, or rather against their idolatry. Strange to say that the poets, however fanciful, are wiser than the philosophers. How often they stumble in their dreams on things beyond that which they themselves would have otherwise imagined! Thus some of the poets among them (Cleanthes and Aratus) had said, “For we are also His offspring.” “Forasmuch, then, as. we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead (the Divine) is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device.” How clearly was shown the folly of their boasted reason! What can be simpler or more conclusive? Since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that God can be made by our hands. This is in effect what their practice amounted to. Gods of silver and gold were the offspring of men’s art and imagination.

“And the times of this ignorance” (what a way to treat the boasting men of Athens!) “God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent.” Manifestly there is a thrust at conscience. This is the reason why he insists here on God’s call to repent. It is no use to talk of science, literature, politics, religion. Old or new speculations in philosophy are alike vain. God is now enjoining on all everywhere to repent. Thus he puts the sage down with the savage, because God is brought in as the judge of all. It is evident that divine truth must be aggressive; it cannot but deal with every conscience that hears it throughout the world. The law might thunder its

claims on a particular people; but the truth deals with everybody as he is before God. The ground of the appeal too is most serious: “Because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world.” Solemn prospect! This he urges home on them, and in a manner peculiar but suitable to the moral condition of Athens.

God is about to judge the habitable earth (οἰκουμένην) in righteousness. He does not here speak of judging the dead. It is the sudden intervention of the man who, raised from the dead, is going to deal with this habitable earth. Such is the unquestionable meaning of the text. The “world” here means the scene dwelt in by man. It is in no way a question of the great-white-throne judgment. Certainly all that he put before them was admirably calculated to arouse them from their mythic dreams to the light of truth, without gratifying their love of the speculative. “He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance to all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”

The allusion to the resurrection became at once the signal for unseemly jest. “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them.” There was but little fruit even for the apostle and from this wonderful discourse. Some, however, did cleave to him, and believed: “among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.”

Acts 18. But in the grossly voluptuous state of Corinth the gospel, strange to say, was to take a great and effectual hold on a certain part of the population. Not so

at Athens: few were the souls, and comparatively feeble the work there. But in Corinth, proverbially the most corrupt of Grecian cities, how unexpected yet how good the ways of the Lord! He had much people in that city. It was an immense comfort, both in his labours there and afterwards, when the work seemed spoiled. He could still believe, and spite of all look for the recovery of those that had been turned aside. The Lord is ever kind and true; and so Paul went on with good courage, however tried and humbled on their account.

Here take note of another remarkable fact. The apostle does what is proscribed by all ecclesiastical canons, as far as I know, everywhere: that is to say, he works with his hands at the simple occupation of tent-making "And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come" — he takes this as the occasion for testifying to the Jews fully — being "pressed" (not exactly in the spirit, as it is said in the common text, but) "in regard of the word," he testifies that Jesus was the Christ. "And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment," with the warning, "Your blood be upon your own head; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles."

Accordingly the work goes on among the Gentiles, though the Lord was not without witness among the Jews. And this leads to a vast deal of feeling and clamour: "and all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat." Here the ruler was not only unwilling to entertain the question, but supercilious, and indifferent to the general disorder.

Just at the same time another remarkable feature appears here. In Cenchrea Paul shaves his head according to a vow. It is plain that, whatever might be the strength of divine grace, there was a certain concession to his old religious habits, even in the greatest of apostles, and the most blessed instrument of New Testament inspiration.

However this may be, the end of the chapter gives another remarkable witness of grace. Apollos is brought before us, taught by Aquila and Priscilla, who “took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.” I doubt whether it would have been according to the will of God for a woman to have done so alone; but she, along with her husband, instructed him as they could. Now Priscilla, as I cannot doubt, knew more than her husband; it was therefore desirable that she should contribute her help. Still the Lord’s ways are invariably wise; and it is very evident that it was in conjunction with her husband, not independently of him, that this grave task was carried on.

Another important fact opens Acts 19. Paul found at Ephesus a dozen disciples, who were in a very ambiguous position; for they were not exactly Jews, and they were certainly not in the true sense Christians: they were in a transition state between the two. Does this appear to you at all startling? It is likely that it may disturb those who are in the habit of thinking, or at least saying, that all persons must be in one of the two states — that it is impossible to be in a middle position between them. But this is not the fact. It is always well to face the word of God; and God has written nothing in vain.

I say, then, that these men were recognized at Ephesus as believers, but it is very evident that they were not resting on the work of the Lord Jesus. They had faith, they looked to His person; but they had not intelligently laid hold of His work for the peace of their souls. So when Paul comes there and finds these disciples, he says, “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” Not the slightest doubt is started about their believing, but he does raise a very serious question about another thing: — “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” Why he asked this it is not for us to say for certain. It is likely that he saw something that indicated to his penetrating eye souls not at rest and in the liberty of grace. In spirit they were still under the law. It is the state described in the latter part of Romans 7. Of course I use this description with reference to Romans 7 by anticipation, because that Epistle was not yet written. But people were in that state before it was written as well as since; and the object of the epistle was to deliver them out of it.

Paul then enquired, “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.” It is not that they did not know the existence of the Spirit of God. Such is not at all the meaning of the text. All Jews had heard in the scripture of the Holy Ghost; and more particularly John’s disciples were well instructed in the fact, not only of His existence, but that the Holy Ghost was about to be sent down on believers, or rather that they were going to be baptized with the Holy Ghost. This is what is referred to. Had that baptism taken place? They were not aware of it; they had not yet received the great blessing. Thus it is seen, they were

believers, though they had not received the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Such is the account that scripture gives of their state.

It is well to note this, because we may find persons now in a state somewhat analogous. There are many souls who are not at all in liberty, not having yet received the Spirit of adoption. Yet are they persons that we can truly accept as born of God; they detest sin; they love holiness; they really adore the Lord Jesus, having no doubt at all as to His glory, and that He is the Saviour. For all this they are not able to — what they call — "apply" the truth to their own case and settled relationship. They cannot always appropriate the blessing. They are not at ease and at liberty in their souls. We must not put such people down as unbelievers, on the one hand; neither must we rest, on the other hand, as though they had received everything. Those are two errors to which many are prone. Scripture allows neither, perfectly providing for every case. What the apostle did was this: he was far from questioning the reality of their faith, but he showed that it was not yet exercised on the full object of faith. They had not, yet entered into the just results of redemption. Accordingly he enquires how this came to pass — to what they had been baptized. They say, To John's baptism. This explains all. John's baptism was only transitional. It was of God, but it was simply in prospect of the blessing, not in possession of it. Such too was the state of these men. The apostle then puts before them the truth. "They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them; and they spake with tongues."

This is highly important to be understood, though (I need not say) still more to be believed. We have the apostle in an exceptional way laying his hands on disciples in this condition, just as Peter and John laid their hands on the Samaritan believers who thereby received the Holy Ghost. Thus God takes particular pains to show that the apostle Paul had the same sign and voucher of his apostleship as attached to Peter and John before. We are not, however, to suppose that a man cannot receive the Holy Ghost except by such an act: this would be a false impression and a misuse of scripture. As I have said elsewhere, and sought to explain long ago, the two general cases of the gift of the Holy Ghost are entirely irrespective of any such act; the special cases, where hands were imposed, owed their existence to peculiar circumstances that do not call for detailed remarks at this late hour.

Then we hear of the mighty spread of the work, not only the power with which God clothed the apostle, but also that which rebuked the superstitious use of the name of Jesus by those who without faith pretended to it. The chapter ends with the tumult at Ephesus.

In Acts 20 we learn the definitive usage, which the Spirit sanctions and records for us, of the Lord’s day, or the first day of the week, as the fitting time, for the breaking of bread. So we find it among the Gentiles in Acts 20:7. I am aware that there are those who seem to think there is no liberty to break bread on any other day. I cannot but differ from such a conclusion. There appears to me full liberty to break bread any day provided that some adequate or just reason call for it: Acts 2 is, to my mind, conclusive authority for this. At the same time, while there is liberty to break bread, wherever there arises a

sufficient ground for it in the judgment of the spiritual on any day of the week, it is obligatory, if we may use such a term on such a theme, on all saints walking with the Lord to break bread on the Lord's day, remembering always that the obligation flows from the grace of Christ, and is perfectly consistent with the most thorough sense of liberty before the Lord. In short, then, the regularly sanctioned day for breaking bread among the Gentiles is the first day of the week (not of the month, or quarter, or year); but under special circumstances the early disciples used to break bread every day. This appears to be the true answer to questions raised on this point.

Finally, in the same chapter (without entering into particulars at present), we may note the meeting of the elders14 with Paul, and the important truth that they are not thrown upon any successors to the apostle, nor does he speak of any successors in their own office, but "commends them to God and to the word of his grace." This is the more worthy of attention because he warns them of grievous wolves without, and perverse men from within. Thus there was every reason for speaking of succession, if it really possessed the place which tradition gives it, both to apostles on the one hand, and to elders on the other; but there is a marked absence of any such provision. Not only is it not pointed to, but a wholly different comfort is administered.

I am sorry to add an instructive sample of the blinding influence of ecclesiastical tradition over a pious mind at an early day. It is a citation from Ireneaus' famous work against heresy (III. xiv. 2), or rather the Latin version which alone represents him here: — "In Mileto enim convocatis episcopis et presbyteris, qui erant ab Epheso et a reliquis proximis civitatibus, quoniam ipse

festinaret," etc. Undeniably there is a double misstatement here: (1) the bishops and presbyters must be regarded as at least contrary to fact; (2) they were expressly of the church in Ephesus, not from other neighbouring cities. We cannot wonder that later writers of less integrity and singleness of eye than the martyr bishop of Lyons went farther and without scruple in the effort to justify the growing departure from the normal state of the church, its doctrines, ministry, and discipline, as laid down in God's word. I could not but consider the note of Massuet, the Benedictine editor, a disgrace to a Christian scholar, or even to an honest man, if one did not bear in mind that the eyes of such persons are useless spiritually when they read the Fathers.

Acts 21

The closing chapters from 21 to the end of the book are devoted to an episode full of interest and profit — Paul's course from Jerusalem to Rome. And here we find ourselves in an atmosphere considerably different from what we have had before. It is no longer the mighty power of the Holy Ghost, either inaugurating the great work of God on the earth at Jerusalem, nor His equally wonderful energy in breaking through the old bottles of Judaism, when grace flowed freely, first to Samaria, then to the Gentiles, and in principle, as we know, in due time to the ends of the earth. Neither have we the apostle separated, as it is said, unto the gospel of God. These were the three great divisions and the main contents of the book up to the point we are arrived at. But now the apostle is about to become a prisoner, nor this without warning. The Holy Ghost, as we may see on the surface

of the verses I have read, admonished the apostle time after time; but the apostle shows us the most striking combination of what was truly heavenly in faith and life with the strongest clinging of heart to his brethren after the flesh. This is what makes the difficulty of appreciating his history by no means small. But one may say that what was infirmity must be allowed to be infirmity on the noblest side (if any thing be so, which I do not deny,) of the human heart. Nevertheless we have the immediate effect in the lesson that even this does force us into altogether new circumstances wherein God never fails to magnify Himself. He knows how to turn even that which may have been in itself mistaken to His own glory, and then He in grace forms new channels and suited ways, not without a righteous judgment of the error even if it were in the best, and so much the more remarkably because it was in the best. And this I believe to be the prominent lesson of these later chapters of the Acts.

Let us, however, pursue the course of the divine instruction.

The apostle goes on his way and finds disciples, and tarries among them, as we are told, at Tyre for “seven days.” This seems to have been a common term of stay — we can readily conceive why. One great reason, I do not doubt, was to enjoy the fellowship of the saints together, to spend with the Christians in a new place that day which has the strongest possible claim on the heart that is true to Jesus — the first day of the week. This was expressly shown in Acts 20. The Spirit of God does not repeat the same express statement here. Nevertheless I do not think we are far astray if we connect the seven days of the apostolic visit with that

which was stated plainly in verses 6, 7, of that chapter. At Troas it was said that “we abode seven days; and upon the first day of the week, when the disciples (or rather, we) came together to break bread, Paul preached.” Here there is no such positive affirmation, but still the mention in a similar way of seven days with the disciples may well open a question for spiritual judgment what the motive was for such a term. I do not doubt myself that it was to have the joy of meeting all saints in each locality as opportunity served, and of cheering and strengthening them on their course.

No doubt the spiritual instincts of the children of God would lead them always to desire to be together. For my own part I cannot understand a child of God who on principle could abstain from any occasion that summoned round the name of the Lord the members of the household of faith. It appears to me that, far from being a waste of time or from any other object being of the same moment, it is simply a question whether we value Christ, whether we truly are walking in the Spirit, if we live in the Spirit, whether the objects of the constant active love of God are also in measure the objects of our love in Christ’s name.

I think therefore that it is according to the Lord that the children of God should if practicable be together every day. To this the power of the Spirit would lead: only the circumstances in which we are placed in this world necessarily hinder it. Therefore the true principle according to the word of God is a coming together whenever it is practicable; and we do well to cherish a real exercise of heart and conscience in judging what the practicability is, or rather whether the impracticability be real or imaginary. Very often it will

turn out to be in our will, an excuse for spiritual idleness, a want of affection to the children of God, and a want of sense of our own need. Accordingly obstacles are allowed in own minds, such as the claims of business, or the family, or even the work of the Lord. Now all these have their place. Surely God would have all His children to seek to glorify Him, whatever may be their duty. They have natural duties in this world; and the wonderful power of Christianity is seen in filling with what is divine that which without Christ would be merely of nature; and this should ramify the whole course of a man's life after he belongs to Christ. And so again the claims of children for instance, or parents, or the like, cannot be disputed; but then if they are really taken up for Christ, I do not think it will be found that it is to the loss of either parents or children, or that the little time is missed in the long run that is spent in seeking the strength of the Lord, and in communion according to our measure. We ought to be open for both; and we shall ourselves never have any power to help unless we have the sense of the need of help from others; but both will be found together.

It appears to me that through the blessed apostle the Spirit of God gives us in these passing touches, and in recounting them valuable hints as to the spirit that animated him in his course. We may know in some slight degree what it is to be long on a journey without due rest, food, or shelter; and passing from one country and continent to another was by no means then the easy thing that it is in modern times. We have all the habit of being rapidly enough in motion, and anxious to get to the end. We can understand how the apostle, with so many hindrances in the way, might feel the comfort of

these repeated stays, seven days in one place, seven days in another, as we have seen, expressly showing. the desire of his heart. after communion as well as confirming their souls. Such is what we find in this blessed man's course: in our little measure surely it ought to be so with us.

On this occasion, however, the disciples told Paul through the Spirit that he should not go up to Jerusalem. This was serious. There is no other comment upon it. We know not what the apostle said or did, further than this, that the apostle certainly went up to Jerusalem all the same. "When we had accomplished these days, we departed and went our way." Then we have the beautiful scene of the wives and the children. This has its value. There is a marked absence of allusion to children in the Acts of the Apostles, where much is said among men and saints and servants of God. But we do hear of them in that, which is confessedly suitable. Here they are brought forward, but not as a superstitious church ere long did, among other things, to receive a portion from the table of the Lord: things were soon to change if not to arrive at that pass yet; but we do see them in the expression of the love that filled all, and the desire to reap to the very last moment the blessing of having an apostle in their midst. In short, the children were there no less in token of respectful love to him who was going, but also set in the attitude to receive whatever blessing the Lord might be pleased to bestow upon them. "And they all brought us on our way with wives and children," it is said, "till we were out of the city, and we kneeled down and prayed, and, when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship, and they returned home again."

Another means of letting us into the ways of God among His people is found at Caesarea. “We entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven.” We cannot well have forgotten his labours in earlier days at Samaria, and round about. But we are told here what we had not learnt then, that “the same man had four daughters.” As unmarried, they were remaining in their father’s house; and they prophesied. There is no reason why a woman should not have this or most other gifts as much as a man. I do not say the same kind of gift always. Surely God is wise and gives suited gifts whether to men or women, or, it may be, I was going to say, to children. The Lord is sovereign and knows how, as putting all who now believe in the body of Christ, so also to give them a work suitable to the purposes of His own grace. Certainly He did clothe these four daughters of Philip with a very special spiritual power. They had one of the highest characters of spiritual gift — they prophesied. And if they were invested with this power, certainly it was not to be put under a bushel but to be exercised: the only question is how.

Now scripture, if we be but subject, is quite explicit as to this. In the first place, prophecy stands confessedly in the highest rank of teaching, but it is teaching. Next, the apostle is himself the person who tells us that he does not suffer a woman to teach. This is clearly decisive; if we bow to the apostle as inspired to give us God’s mind, we ought to know that it is not the place of a Christian woman to teach. He is speaking on this topic, not in 1 Cor. 11, but in 1 Cor. 14 He is drawing the line between men and women in 1 Timothy 2. The latter epistle forbids the women as a class to teach. The other and

still closer word in the former epistle, commands them to be silent in the assembly. At Corinth, apparently, there was some difficulty as to godly order and the right relations of men and women, because the Corinthians, being a people of speculative habits, instead of believing, reasoned about things. It was the tendency of the Greek mind to question everything. They could not understand that, if God had given a woman as good a gift as a man, she was not equally to use it. We can all feel their difficulty. Such reasoners are not wanting now. The fault of it all was, and is, that. God is left out. His will was not in the thought of the Corinthians. There was no waiting on the Lord to ascertain what was His mind. Clearly, if He has called the church into being, it cannot but be made for His own glory. He has His own mind and will about the church, and He has therefore spread out in His word how all the gifts of His grace are to be exercised.

Now the passages in 1 Cor. 14 and in 1 Tim. 2 appear to me to be perfectly plain as to the relative place of the woman, whatever may be her gift. This may be said to decide only as to one sphere — the assembly — where the woman, according to scripture, is precluded from the exercise of her gift. I may say further, that in those days it did not occur to them that women. would go forth publicly to preach the word. Bad as the state of things was in early days, they seem to me to have looked for a greater sense of modesty on the part of women. There is not the slightest doubt that many females with the best intentions have thus preached, as they do still. They, or their friends, defend their course by appeals to the blessing of God on the one hand, and on the other to the crying need of perishing sinners everywhere. But

nothing can be more certain than that scripture (and this is the standard) leaves them without the slightest warrant from the Lord for their line of conduct. Public preaching of the gospel on the part of women is never contemplated in scripture. It was bad enough for the Corinthians to think that they might speak among the faithful. It might have seemed that there women had the shelter of godly men; that there they were not offensively putting themselves forward before all sorts of people in the world, as must be the case in evangelising. Among the godly they may have imagined a veil, so, to speak, drawn over them more or less. But in modern times the end is supposed to justify the means. Gross as the Corinthians were, I must confess that to my mind the plans of our own day seem even more grievous, and with less excuse for them.

However this may be, we see here that the daughters of Philip did prophesy. No doubt it was in their father's house, as already intimated: otherwise the word of God would thus be set one part against another.

While they tarried there, a certain prophet came down from Judea, who repeats the warning to the apostle. Binding his own hands and feet with Paul's girdle he declares, "So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." And thus it was accomplished to the letter. Nevertheless, spite of the tears of the saints, spite of the warning of this prophet, as of others before, Paul, with mind made up, answers, "What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

After all the apostle goes accordingly, and in Jerusalem the brethren receive him gladly. “And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.” It is evident from this picture that all ecclesiastically was in due order at Jerusalem. An apostle was there who had an apparently high place of local dignity. Besides there were the ordinary overseers whom the Holy Ghost had set as guides and leaders in the assembly (that is, the local charge of elders). “And when Paul had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.” They owned the way in which the Lord had been glorified. At the same time their word to him is, “Thou seest, brother, how many thousands” (the true meaning is tens of thousands, myriads, which may probably give some a larger thought than is familiar of the vast and rapid spread of the gospel at that time among that nation) “of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law; and they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying, that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.” This was a mistake. Such was not the course of the apostle.

What Paul really taught was the impropriety of putting Gentiles under the law: he did not interfere with the Jews at this time, Later a distinct and peremptory message came from the Holy Ghost; but the process of the Lord with them was gradual — His method with His ancient people I deem of importance for us to learn and imitate. It is perfectly true that it was in the mind of God in due time to bring out fully the deliverance of both Jew and Gentile from the law; but this was not done all at

once, at least as regards the Jew. What the apostle set himself decidedly against was the effort to bring the Gentiles under law; and this was precisely what Pharisaic brethren were zealous for. Whether Judaizing Christians or the Gentiles themselves took up the law, the apostle did most resolutely reject and condemn the fatal error. But as regarded the Jews themselves there was the truest forbearance, flowing from, not characteristic largeness of heart only, but tender consideration for scrupulous consciences. If God had not yet sent out the final word that told them the old covenant was ready to vanish away, how could he who so closely followed His ways be hasty? The early days were really a time of transition, where Christ was ministered first to Jew and then to Gentile. The Gentile, never having been under law, was far more simple than the Jew in appreciating the liberty of the gospel. The Jew was tolerated in his prejudices until the closing message came from God, warning them of the danger of apostasy from the gospel through their adhesion to the law.

Having dwelt on this in sketching the epistle to the Hebrews, there is the less reason to say more about it now. But that epistle was to the Hebrew believers the last trumpet which summoned them to renounce all connection with the old system. Up to that time there had been a gradual transition, the gap widening, the difference more pronounced, but still every tie was not broken till this the final call. Such a way strikes me as worthy of our God — a way which to our precipitate minds might seem somewhat difficult, because we have been mostly trained as Gentiles. Since we have entered into the truth of God more perfectly, we have seen the

enormous mischief of bringing in the law and mixing it up with the gospel.

Let us remember then that, whilst the Holy Ghost always maintained liberty for the Gentile, there was unquestionably a time of waiting on the Jew. Even the apostle Paul was no exception to patience with their prejudices. As to the twelve, they seem to have feebly enough entered into this liberty from the law. Doubtless Paul, as being apostle of the Gentiles, called from heaven by the risen Jesus, and witness of sovereign grace, apprehended it after a different sort and richer measure; but we shall find that even he could warmly sympathise to a great extent with the feelings of a Jew. He is the one to whom, under God, we are indebted for knowing anything about Christianity in its full form and real strength; yet, for all that, it is quite evident that he had, if not Jewish prejudice, certainly the warmest Jewish attachments; and, in point of fact, it was the strength of his affection to the ancient people of God that brought him into the trouble recorded in these concluding chapters of this book, the Acts of the Apostles.

This, we must remember, to a certain extent, may be viewed as an answer to the love found in our blessed Lord Himself; but then there were striking differences. In our Lord, love for Israel was, as all else, perfect: there was not, nor could be, the faintest admixture of a blemish. We know well the bare hint of such a thought would be repulsive to our faith and our love for His person. To the Christian it is impossible to conceive it for an instant. At the same time, we know His love for that people was felt and expressed up to the last. It was His persistent love which brought Him into the

circumstances of utter rejection when God's time was come, and He suffered all the consequence of their hatred (though infinitely more also for sin in atonement, which was His alone). Now the apostle knew what it was to love Israel and suffer for that love. Not only among the Gentiles, but among the saints, the more he loved the less, he was loved. This was true; but, if in general true there, emphatically was it to be verified among the Jews. Thus stands the wonderful fact in the history of the apostle Paul: the very man who brought out the church distinctly, and showed its heavenly character as none other approached; the very man that proved the absolute abolition of the old ties and relations, swallowing. up all in Christ exalted to the right hand of God: — he is the man whose heart retained the strongest attachment of love to the ancient people of God. And I have not the smallest doubt that God gives us in this case a grave but gracious warning of its danger. Were it an apostle, were it the greatest of the apostles, still Paul was not Christ, and what in Christ could be and was absolute perfection, in Paul was not. Yet Paul was a man who puts all that have been since that day into the shade.

If I may express my feelings here, let me say that I felt nothing a greater trial to my own spirit than touching on this very theme. I could not point out any one thing I shrink from more than having the appearance of reflecting on such a servant of Christ. Yet God has written the history of all this, and He has written it surely not for sentiment and silence, but for utterance and common profit. He has written it, no doubt, that we should feel our own great shortcomings, end that we

should beware of our spirit in setting up to condemn such an one as the great apostle of the Gentiles.

Still, I repeat, the Holy Ghost has recorded here His own warnings on the one side, and on the other the refusal of the apostle to act on them, if I may venture so to say, though it were through fulness of tender love, and an ever-burning affection for his brethren after the flesh. Alas! when we think of our faults; when we reflect how little they spring from anything that is lovely; when we recollect how much they are mixed with. worldliness, and impatience, and pride, and vanity, and self; when we observe that he was so deeply chastened, and met with such a distressing stop to the world-wide work which God had given him, in what a light do our faults appear! He had a pressure of trial such as few men ever knew beside himself; and, what might embitter it to him, all this the natural effect of slighting the admonitions of the Spirit of God by yielding to his undying love for a people out of whom, after all, he had been divinely separated to the work the Lord had given him to do. God having given us the account, whatever may be one's own feelings, can it be doubted that we are bound to read, and by grace to seek to understand? Yea, not this only, but may we apply it for the present blessing of our souls, and for our progress in the path of Christ here below, whatever it may be. We may have the smallest possible sphere; but, after all, a saint is a saint, and very dear to God, who magnifies Himself in the least of those that are His.

It is assuredly for our profit and to God's own glory that the Holy Ghost has written this remarkable appendix to the history — the onward history — of the Acts of the Apostles. Here we have a check which brings in new things, the fruit of persisting in going up to Jerusalem

spite of the Spirit's testimony against it. The more blessed the man, the more serious the miss of firm footing. There is one step outside what the Spirit enjoined, whatever may be the mingling of that which is beautiful and lovely; at the same time, it was not the full height, so to speak, of the guidance of the Spirit of God. This exposed the apostle to something more, as it always does; and, indeed, so much the more, because it was such an one as Paul. The same principle is plain in David's life. The lack of energy, which might have been comparatively a little hurt to another, became the gravest snare to David; and, found out of the path of the Lord, he soon slips into the meshes of the devil. Not that I mean anything in the least degree tantamount in the apostle Paul; far from it; for, indeed, in this case the apostle was mercifully preserved from anything that gave the smallest activity to the corruption of nature. It was simply a defect, as it appears to me, of watching against his own love for Israel, and thus setting aside, consequently, the warnings that the Spirit gave. The tears and appeals seem to have rather stimulated and strengthened his desire, and accordingly this exposed him to what was a snare, not immoral but religious, through listening to others below his own measure. He took the advice of James.

"What is it, therefore? The multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this that we say to thee. We have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads" — what a position for the apostle to find himself in! — "and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning. thee, are

nothing.” Without pretending that there was nothing in the previous line of Paul tending to this (compare Acts 18:18), it is evident that the object was to give the appearance that he was a very good Jew indeed. Was this warrantable, or the whole truth? Was he not a somewhat ambiguous Jew? I believe that, as we have seen, there was an undisguised respect for what once had the sanction of God. And here was just the difference in his case from our blessed Lord’s perfect ways. Up to the cross, we all know, the legal economy or first covenant had the sanction of God; after the cross, in principle it was judged. The apostle surely had weighed and appraised it all; he did not require any man to show him the truth. At the same time there was no small mingling of love for the people; and we know well how it may intercept that singleness of eye which is the safeguard of every Christian man.

The apostle then listens to his brethren about a matter in which he was incomparably more competent to form a sound judgment than any of them, Accordingly he suffers the consequence. He is found purifying himself along with the men who had a vow. He enters the temple, “to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them. And when the seven days were almost ended” — which it is well known had to do with the Nazarite vow — “the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help! This is the man that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place; and further brought Greeks also into. the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.” The next verse shows us why. It was a

mistake; nevertheless it was enough to rouse the feelings of all Israel. “All the city was moved, and the people ran together,” and the issue was a frightful tumult, and the apostle was in danger of being killed by their violent hands, when the chief captain comes and rescues him. This paves the way for the remarkable address which the apostle delivers in the Hebrew tongue, given in the next chapter. Acts 22.

The mention of the Hebrew tongue appears to confirm the true key to the difference between this account of the apostle’s conversion and others. It is not precisely in this book as in the gospels, where a different. way of presenting the same fact or discourse of our Lord Jesus obtains, according to the character of the design in hand; yet is it the same principle at bottom. Even in the same book a difference of design may be traced. There may be observed this in the three accounts in which Paul’s conversion is given: first, the historical. account; secondly, Paul’s own statement to the Jews; and, thirdly, Paul’s to the Jews and Gentiles as to the Roman governor and king Agrippa. This is the true reason of the difference there is in the manner in which facts are presented. We need not enter minutely into detail.

On examination you will find what is said to be correct, that here as is evident he adopts a language which was for the very purpose of arresting the attention in appealing to the affections of the Jew; he speaks in their familiar tongue, and accordingly gives an account of his conversion in such a way as he considered conciliatory to the feelings of the Jews. To these there was one thing which was unpardonable; but this was the very glory of his apostleship, the direct object for which God raised him up. Thus, with the most gracious of intentions, and

with the warmest love towards his countrymen after the flesh, the apostle gives an account of his conversion and the miraculous circumstances that attended it, of his meeting with Ananias, a devout man according to the law, which he takes particular pains to state there, and of the trance into which he afterwards fell at Jerusalem in the temple whilst praying. But he tells them out that which he must easily have known (and so much the more because of his accurate understanding of the feelings of the Jews) would rouse them to the uttermost: in short, he lets them know that the Lord called him and sent him to the Gentiles.

It was quite enough. The moment the sound of "Gentiles" reached their ears, all their feelings of Jewish pride took fire, and at once they cried out, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! It is not fit that he should live." As they cried and cast off their clothes to throw dust into the air, the chiliarch commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging. There he put himself in the wrong; for Paul was not only a Jew but a citizen of Rome; and he was so by a better title than the commandant who thus ordered him to be bound. The apostle quietly states the fact. I dare not judge him, though there may be some Christians who would: he was clearly entitled to remind those that were the guardians of the law of their own transgression. He uses no means further, but merely tells them how things stood.

It appears to me that it is a morbid squeamishness rather than true spiritual wisdom that would cavil at such an act on the part of the apostle. Every one knows that it is easy to be a martyr in theory, and that those

who are martyrs in theory are seldom so in practice. Here was one destined to torture, and really one of the most blessed witnesses of the Lord all through. Faith enables one to see things clearly. Should the guardians of law break the law? Faith never teaches one to court danger and difficulty, but to walk the path of Christ in peace and thankfulness. The Lord has not called His servants to desert it. I dare say some of us may have been struck with the fact that the Lord told them when they were persecuted in one city to flee to another. Assuredly this is not courting martyrdom, but the very reverse; and if the Lord Himself gave such a word to His servants in Judea and to His disciples (as is well known), it appears to me that it is at least hazardous without grave spiritual ground to face a danger so decided of condemning the guiltless who are entitled to our reverence. Here we have no sign of anything said by the Holy Ghost in the form of warning; and therefore, observe, it is not in the least degree a setting aside what is clearly laid down elsewhere. We have seen the Holy Ghost admonishing the apostle, when carried far in ardent love, and we can easily see that He had a sovereign title, both to guide and to correct — even if it were an apostle.

Nothing of the kind appears here. It was a fact which the Roman officer had overlooked illegally, and the apostle was entitled to state the fact. It was in no way a going to law. Need it be said that such a recourse to the powers that be would have little become a follower and servant of Jesus? It was in no way using such means as man would have employed; it was the simplest possible statement of a circumstance serious in the eye of the law, and it had its effect. “And as they bound him with

thongs, Paul said to the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chiliarch, saying, Take heed what thou doest; for this man is a Roman." The chiliarch enquires accordingly. You must remember that to say you were a Roman, if you were not, was a capital offence against the government, which of course they never failed to visit with the severest punishment. To claim it untruly was too dangerous to be often attempted, as it exposed a man to the imminent risk of death. The officials of the Roman empire were rarely disposed therefore to question such a claim, especially where it was made by a man who, on the face of it, was such a character as the apostle, little as he might be known to any of them.

So "straightway," it is said, "they departed from him which should have examined him, and the chiliarch also was afraid after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him." However, man strives to preserve his dignity after his own fashion. "On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands," (that is to say, he leaves him still a prisoner which he had no right to do,) "and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them." The apostle seeks no further redress, and was as far as possible from the desire or thought of punishing the man for the mistake he had made. For this evidently would have been a departure from grace: but the occasion helps to give a little insight into this wonderful man of God. For when the high priest Ananias commanded those that stood by to smite him that said

he had lived in all good conscience, Paul turns quickly upon him with the words “God shall smite thee, thou whited wall” (and so He did); “for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God’s high priest? Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.” Acts 23.

This is a fine instance of the most simple, and at the same time admirable, way in which grace recovers, even if there be a momentary slip of haste mingling with it. There can be no doubt at all that the high priest had acted in a way entirely contrary to the law. There was therefore an indisputable right to rebuke him. At the same time I suppose that his decided character, and his keen sense of the glaring injustice, did betray itself in his utterance. Further, it is an instance of what is found often elsewhere in Scripture. God may be with a deed which on one side of it may have haste mingling with it, but on the other real truth and righteousness. What was done here by the high priest was glaringly contrary to the law of which he was the professed administrator. Nor certainly did God permit these solemn words to fall to the ground without bearing fruit. Paul at once, however, corrects himself, and owns that had he known him to be the high priest, he would not have spoken so; that is to say, whatever might be the character of the man, Paul was not one to lower the office. He would leave it to God to judge that which was unworthy of it.

There is another thing that claims our notice. Is there not a certain peculiarity discernible in a measure in the apostle now? First of all there was haste of spirit. Is

there as firm treading as before in the path where the power of the Spirit of God rested on him? Do we not find an adroitness, may I venture to say, though wishing in no way to utter a word too much, as is easily done? But still is there not a cleverness in the way in which the apostle, when he perceived that one part of the council were Sadduccees and the other Pharisees, cried out, “Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees;15 of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question”?

This does not seem according to the simple and full activity of the Spirit of God that we have seen in the apostle when he was away from Jerusalem. He had gone where he had been divinely warned not to go; and it matters not who it is, if it were even the greatest of the apostles, is there not a sensible difference when there is the smallest divergence from the peaceful guidance of the Holy Ghost? And if this is true of him, what shall we say of ourselves? Do not allow your lips to utter strong things about the apostle Paul; but let your own consciences, and let mine, take heed to our own ways, and above all beware of this — that we be not found slighting one word that comes to us from the Holy Ghost. Let us weigh and cherish every expression of God’s mind. In this ease the apostle Paul could not doubt it. It was not doubt; but he strengthened himself now that the time was come to suffer. He had made up his mind for the worst that man might or could do. Was it all that was there? In truth there was more than this; but I think the comparative lack of calm, the exposure to haste, and the other features that appear in this remarkable history, are meant to be signs to our souls of the real truth of the case as it now stood.

The consequence was soon apparent on this occasion. The diversion produced was no doubt what men would call politic; that is, the apostle designed to divide and conquer. He made good use of the one party that had whatever there was of zeal and orthodoxy. There is not the smallest pandering to the Sadducees, which would have been far from the Spirit of God. Now I am very far from saying or implying any unworthy ways; but I do mean that there was a kind of availing himself of the difference that reigned between these that held to the word of God with, at any rate, an outward religious respect, and those that despised it; and this is a danger that no man is free from, particularly in circumstances of danger. The apostle yielded to it then. He stated the fact that the hope and resurrection of the dead were in question; but still the question arises, What was his motive for putting it so? What does the Spirit of God bring out before us here? Was it simply the truth? Was it only Christ? I doubt so.

It seems clear that the discerning eye of the apostle saw the horrible state of the high priest and his party, — that whatever might be the honour of the office, yet, in the defiled and defiling hands that now held it, it was only used for their own worst purposes against the truth and grace of God. Accordingly he availed himself of the strong feeling of the sounder part of the nation, and thus gained what might have seemed unexpected adherents among the Pharisees. It did not give him after all the advantage. To the believer is not this always the result? I doubt very much the weight of such a gain. Have we not learnt that the true gain is Christ? and that to take our side unqualifiedly with the Lord, by God’s grace to shut our eyes to all consequences, and our ears to all

censure, and just go on holding to that which we know is acceptable in His eyes and for His own glory, — is not this the only true path of service, as it certainly is the precursor of victory? In this case it would be a victory unmixedly for the Master. Such an idea as one's own victory ought not to be in a Christian man's mind. Let our desires be simply for the Lord — for His grace and truth, for His own work and glory in the church. His name is ill-served by making use even of the most reputable of His adversaries. Those zealous for the law, one cannot but know, are opposed to the gospel, — the Pharisee no less than the Sadducee. The apostle presents to the multitude "the hope and resurrection of the dead." He does not commit himself to speaking about Jesus; he does not say a word of the gospel. Had he brought in either, all would have come to nothing: the Pharisee would have resented the word just as much as the Sadducee. Leaving out what was adverse to his purpose, he puts forward that which he knew would set one part of his enemies against the other.

Yet here was vouchsafed no small comfort from the Lord to His servant. "And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle. And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." What a proof of what the Lord is, even in (yea, because of) those very circumstances when the apostle's heart might have been exceedingly cast down! He had persisted in going up to Jerusalem, and brought himself

into what certainly looks like a false position, and as a fact exposed him to a number of disasters and painful oppositions. The Lord at this very time, when things looked gloomiest, appeared to His servant, and comforted him. Instead of a word of reproach, on the contrary it is all that could bid him good cheer.

How good the Lord is! How perfect in His ways! He knows how to deal with a mistake whenever there is one, while He righteously deals with it so much the more in one who ought not to have made it, a mistake in his case being a thousand times more serious than in another. Nevertheless, the Lord has nothing but comfort to administer at such a time. “Be of good cheer, for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness of me in Rome.” He was not going to be killed. This was just before the conspiracy appeared. What could man do? Why should he be afraid then? The Lord meant him to go to Rome: his heart’s desire was to go there. That is what his heart was set upon next to Jerusalem; and he had his way in going to Jerusalem; and now the Lord was about to take him to Rome. To Rome he was going, but he was to visit it bearing the marks of having been up to Jerusalem. He was going to Rome a prisoner; bringing the message surely of the grace of God, but not without the experience of what it cost to have yielded to his love for the ancient people of God. He was going to Rome with a deeper sense of what his true calling was. His allotted work lay among the Gentiles — pre-eminently and especially among the uncircumcision. Why did he not cleave simply and solely to his calling?

Nor were the foes of the gospel scrupulous, spite of their boasted attachment to the law of God. A conspiracy

was forming among the unhappy Jews, and the Lord in His providence brings it to light by one that was kinsman of the apostle, to whose heart the ties of flesh and blood appealed with some strength, if there were no higher motive. No doubt he must have been a Jew to have been in the secrets of that portion of the nation which was bent upon the destruction of the apostle. He divulges the secret, first to Paul, subsequently to the chiliarch. Accordingly Lysias (for this was his name) gets ready a detachment of soldiers, and horsemen, and spearmen, during the night, and sends Paul to Felix the governor with a letter. Little did the Roman think that his letter was to be read by you and me; little did he know that there was an eye that looked him through and through as he wrote. That the false and the true should be proclaimed on the housetops he never counted on. "Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix, sendeth greeting. This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them; then came I with the troop and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman." He understood nothing of the sort; he was merely deceiving his superior, seeking in fact to make capital out of that which was error and fault; for, as we have seen, he began with a positive infraction of Roman law. He had bound, and this for the purpose of scourging, one no less a citizen than himself. He was guilty of claiming credit and zeal, where he had been both remiss and hasty. Oh, how little does the world think that the secrets of the most private letter, — the counsels of the cabinet, — the movements of kings, of governors, and ministers of state, of military chiefs and their men, no matter who or what, are all before One who sees all and forgets nothing.

Acts 24. Paul, however, is rescued; and now comes another scene. Ananias, the high priest, descends with the leaders to try their fortune before the governor with the captive. On this occasion they hire an orator to plead for them. If he begins with the grossest flattery and pomposity of speech, the apostle answers with as strikingly admirable and quiet dignity, exactly suited to the circumstances.

Here the apostle, then, when the governor beckoned him to speak, explains how utterly false were all the charges of this hired rhetorician. He loved his nation too well instead of being in anywise their troubler, as he had been represented. “As thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogue, nor in the city.” There was therefore no such case as Tertullus had set forth: “We have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes; who also hath gone about to profane the temple.” He had only been a few days in Jerusalem, and was there worshipping, not seeking to trouble anybody. “Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: and have hope towards God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.” Then he frankly states what had brought him up on this occasion. “I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings.” He really did love

them. “Whereupon,” he says, “certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult; who ought to have been here before thee, and object what wrong they had against me.” But the witnesses were not found. In point of fact, there was nothing tangible to allege against him. It was merely the outburst of priestly hatred and popular fury, followed by a conspiracy formed to murder; and when this failed, the effort was to bring about a judicial condemnation. Who could fail to see the mere will and malice of man? It had no other origin or character.

“When Felix heard these things, he adjourned them, saying, When Lysias the chiliarch shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty.” His wise experienced eye at once saw how things were: there was not the slightest ground for the charges against the apostle. Hence the unusual order not of liberty only, but. that none of his acquaintance were to be forbidden to come or to minister to him. Nay, more than this: “When Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith of Christ.” But there was no compromise: he heard what he did not expect. It was not the resurrection now; it was an appeal to conscience morally, or, as it is said here, “He reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.” All has its season, and this was a word exactly suited to the man and the woman to whom Paul preached. It was well timed. Any one who is at all acquainted with the history of this personage — for he is an historical character — knows that he was peculiarly guilty, and that these

words of the apostle were directly levelled at, and a condemnation therefore of, his moral delinquency.

Felix trembles, accordingly, and talks about hearing him at another time; but that convenient time never came. “He hoped also that money should have been given him.” How truly, therefore, and how seasonably, had Paul “reasoned to him of righteousness!” “He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.” Besides, you see the character of the man in what follows. “After two years Porcius Festus came in Felix’s room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.” There was no justice to be got out of this unjust judge. It was not that he wanted sense, or wisdom, or judgment. He had all these, and so much the worse for him; but he was willing to sacrifice everything for his own ends. He had been foiled in his desire for money; and now to please those Jews whom he heartily despised — willing to do something that would ingratiate himself with them without costing him anything — he leaves Paul bound.

Festus in due time appears to our view in the next chapter (Acts 25) He had the same desire. He was no better than his predecessor. Festus proposes in a singular way that Paul should go up to Jerusalem. This, was an unheard of thing for a Roman governor — the chief representative of the empire — to send one who had been brought before him back to Jerusalem to be judged by the Jews. Paul at once takes his stand on the well-known principle of the Roman empire that ought to have guided Festus. He says, “I stand at Caesar’s judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. But if I

be an offender, and have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die; but if there be none of these things whereof they accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar." This is clearly a matter of spiritual judgment. Paul had now committed himself to this course, as later he actually went before Caesar. It was irrevocable. There was no human possibility of change now. He had uttered the word; before Caesar he must go. Nevertheless, a short time after this we find Agrippa comes down, and the Roman governor, knowing well the active mind of the king, tells him the story of Paul. He felt his own weakness in having to do with such a case, and he knew the interest of Agrippa. Agrippa accordingly tells the governor that he would like to hear the man himself.

On the next day, "when Agrippa therefore was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chiliarchs and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth." And here we find a remarkably fine contrast with all the glitter and pomp of the court. The king himself was a most capable man, but destitute of moral purpose. His wife, however she might be favoured naturally, was alas! a woman of no character whatever. Both of them were under the most painful cloud of suspicion even in the minds of the heathen themselves, not to speak of the Jews. These are the persons who, with the Roman governor, sit in judgment upon the apostle. And then comes forth the prisoner bound with chains. But oh what a chasm separated them from him! What a difference in the eyes of God! What a sight it was to Him to behold these judges dealing with such a man without one shred to cover them of what was of Himself — nay, with that

which was most shameful and debasing. In all the splendour of earth's rank and dignity they sat to hear the poor but rich prisoner of the Lord. And Agrippa (Acts 26) said to him, "Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee." If we find the full peace and blessedness of this honoured man of God, what the Lord wrought, and the mighty power of His grace, we see the most dignified yet lowly courtesy towards those who listened, Agrippa especially. "Because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently."

He expounds therefore all his history, how he had been trained from his youth in the strictest sect among the Jews, and again mentions how he was judged for the hope of the promise made of God to "our" fathers, Thus he reasons on the resurrection: "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you if God raises the dead?" He at once brings in this which every Pharisee acknowledged, and which was the main test of orthodoxy among the Jews. This is applied to the history of Jesus of Nazareth. In fact, all turned on it. If it was true that God had raised Him from the dead, what was the position of the Jews, and what the glory of Jesus? All turned therefore on the resurrection.

Then he points out the facts of his own conversion. It was not favourable circumstances that had thrown him in the way of the gospel; it was the very reverse of attachment to the Christians or of any lukewarmness toward the law. All his prepossessions were for Israel, all his prejudices against the gospel. Nevertheless while he

had carried this to the uttermost, while with the authority of the chief priests he had sought to persecute them to death, the grace of God surmounted all either of religious ties or religious hatred in the heart of Paul. “When I went to Damascus,” he says, “with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun.”

And not more surely was the heavenly light which streamed upon the apostle above all nature’s light, than the grace which God showed that day completely eclipsed all that was of man in his heart and previous history. All disappeared before the all-overcoming strength of the goodness of God in Christ. “And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against goads. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.” The work was done. I say not that there was all the peace and blessedness he was afterwards to enjoy, but there was effected then the entrance of that spiritual light of Christ that dealt with his conscience in all its depths. At once, down to the very roots of his moral being, all was stirred up, and the good seed, the seed of everlasting life, was sown underneath. He is bidden to rise and stand upon his feet. “For I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee.”

The word is not exactly as we have it — “delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles.” It is hard here to see the propriety of that term “delivering” in our

common Bibles. In this connection it was not a question so much of a rescue as of taking him out from the people and from the Gentiles. The Lord was severing him from the Jew no less than the Gentile. It is also more than Peter speaks of in Acts 15 (taking out from the Gentiles a people for His name); which we have seen already, as it was of prime importance to insist on it at the great council of Jerusalem. It was of course still true that God is taking out a people for His name; but in the case of Saul of Tarsus the Lord speaks of taking him out from the Jew no less than the heathen. It is a separation therefore unto the new work of God from both Jew and Gentile. “Unto whom,” speaking of the Gentiles, “now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified through faith that is in me.”

Nor was Paul disobedient to the heavenly vision. He bowed to the Lord. He was right, as became a man taught of God. And he “showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they, should repent and turn to God, and do works worthy of repentance.” For these were the true causes of Jewish hostility.

There was no setting himself up against the law. God forbid that this should ever be an object for a Christian man! He does not call us to a negative testimony, even if legitimate; He calls us to a task far more truly of Himself. It is not against evil so much as for good that God gives us a mission. We must hold this fact always as a fixed principle. I grant you that he who is called out to

a purpose that is worthy of God does judge what is evil; nay, not merely this, but judges especially what looks ever so good. Correcting evil by power is not the present purpose of God for the Christian or the church; and be assured His will is the only true directory and the only safe ground for us in everything.

Let us then always enquire, what according to scripture does God design and desire for His people now? What is His real revealed work now? To what therefore is He calling you and me? To what did He set apart the apostle then? It was certainly not the pulling down of the Jews or their legal economy. Judgment was coming on that nation soon, but as long as God forbore Paul lingered over them in patient love; and was he not quite right? But God was calling out a people from the Gentiles as well as from the Jews, and separating him from all his antecedents, from everything that his heart was so fondly bound up in: for never was mortal man that loved Israel more than the apostle Paul did. But God took him out of all his old Jewish associations as well as the Gentiles, to whom now He sent him.

It is evident that we must be separated from human influences even of the best kind, in order to be a fit vessel for God’s purposes where the need is greatest. If you would effectually help others, you must always be above the motives and ways that sway them. Impossible to deal rightly with a person if you are merely on the same level with him. This is the reason why, if a brother be overtaken in a fault, what is wanted is a truly spiritual soul to seek his restoration. A careless Christian would spoil the case; because, if he who is in fault can put his finger on something like his own shortcoming in the one who deals with him, it gives him

an excuse for his own sin, and a ground for censuring, his censor. Whereas, if there had been the true effect of the grace of God in him who appeals to his soul; if grace has both brought out from all that is evil and sustained in good, so that he can be accused of nothing against the Lord, I need not say how God honours it as His will and special provision for dealing with those who are involved in any fault. Here, in the apostle Paul, is the same principle, though in a far deeper and larger way. Indeed, it is but the assertion of grace — that mighty principle of God's goodness in power, working spite of evil according to all that is in His heart.

Paul, then, was taken clean out of everything, both Jew and Gentile, but sent to the Gentile especially. "And the bare sound of this it was that horrified the Jews; nor could they reconcile how one who had burning love to the Jew could at the same time be the prominent, untiring witness of grace to the Gentiles. In their legal pride they could not forgive it. The most hostile feelings broke out against Paul, coupled with the madness of envy and jealousy against the Gentiles. So he tells them, "For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having, therefore, obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying nothing else than those things which Moses and the prophets did say should come; whether Christ should suffer; whether he should be the first through resurrection of the dead to announce light," etc.

As he thus explains, the Roman governor interrupts him in the exclamation, that much learning had made him mad. Paul replies, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." There is all possible respect, it will be observed; at the same

time, he could not without protest allow the ignorance of a blind heathen to put such a stigma on the truth. He appeals to one beside Festus — certainly an impartial witness as far as Christianity was concerned. “For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.” The alleged facts of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus were not unknown to Herod Agrippa. They were universally talked of by all who concerned themselves with Israel.

Suddenly he turns with a direct question: “King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest them. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” Though I do not agree with some modern efforts as to this clause, I admit that the word “almost” hardly gives the true force. “In a little degree you are persuading me.” In what spirit was this said? It seems to be a sentiment into which he was surprised, and in this sense wrung out from him. He could not deny the truth of what the apostle asserted. He would not disclaim his own prophets. He was, in point of fact, shut up in a corner as far as regarded the facts and the prophecies that spoke of them beforehand. Thus, cool a man of the world as he was, the surprise of the pointed enquiry of the apostle obliged him to acknowledge that in a little degree Paul was persuading him to be a Christian. This does not intimate, of course, that he really believed in the Lord Jesus; but the premisses of the apostle did involve the conclusion that Jewish prophecy pointed to Jesus Christ, so that Agrippa could not but own a certain impression made on his mind.

But Paul answers in a spirit truly admirable, and this not alone with wisdom, nor with loving desire only. There is another element, too, exceedingly sweet, as showing the state of the apostle at this time, and his own soul's deep present enjoyment of the Lord and of His grace. "I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both in a little and in a great degree such as I am, except these bonds." I hardly know such an answer from man's lips. We have wonderful words of others as well as of Paul elsewhere; but to my mind, throughout the compass even of this blessed book, it would be hard to find an expression of grace and truth, with the condition of happiness which the Spirit vouchsafes, more admirably suited to the circumstances of all concerned — more perfectly reflecting what God gives by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul could not wish his bonds for any, however he might glory in them for himself. He boasted to be a prisoner of Jesus Christ; but he could not desire such fare then at least for such as he desired to be brought to the Lord. The time might come, no doubt, when those who proved good soldiers in that warfare might rejoice, even as he rejoiced, in his sufferings for Christ's sake and for his body's sake, as well as for the gospel. But this he could with all his heart wish, — that they might be, not only in some measure (even if it were only a little), but in a great degree such as he was. It is not merely that they might be Christians; still less that they might be converted; but "such as I am."

The wish embraces both the reality or standing and the state of the Christian; yea, such enjoyment as filled Paul's own heart at the very moment when he stood in bonds before this splendid court. Did not Paul know the

dark cloud that hung over Agrippa and Bernice, not to speak of others? Grace surmounts all evil, as it overcomes and forgives the worst enemies. There is not one bitter reflection, nor a denunciatory word. Grace wishes its best even for those who are bent on the pleasures of sin for a season. We know that judgment is sure and just; but grace can rise to a higher kind of justice — not that of earth or of man, but of God, who can be just, and justify him that believes — "the righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ." This was what filled his heart, and it was the full unhindered strength of God's own grace made good and seen in Christ that was now working in his own soul. It was drawn out by his delight and enjoyment of the Christ to whom he had been bearing witness, whose glory made pale all that a Roman governor or a Jewish king could boast. It was not the surprise, but the overflowing heart of one who looked right into eternity — who recalled once more the brightness of the glory of heaven, wherein he had seen Christ Himself brighter than all that glory — the source, power, and fulness of it all, and the giver of it also to those who believe. It was this that filled him then, and strengthened him to utter such an expression of divine love.

The court breaks up, Agrippa acknowledging himself that Paul might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed to Caesar. This is to be noted.

Acts 27. The next chapter details the singularly instructive voyage of the apostle: where, instead of being a prisoner, he looks as if he was really the master of the ship; and, indeed, had his word been duly heeded in time, they would have been preserved in safety. How wonderful a thing faith is! How blessed the faithfulness

that flows from faith; how completely it is the power of God in whatever position a man may be!

Here you find the apostle on his way to the Gentiles. All was clear now. He is away from that which was a charmed circle to him, where his bow did not abide in strength, but now, as before Festus and Agrippa, has returned to his old vigour. All is found in its place: no proofs are wanted where every fact proves it.

Acts 28. The last chapter shows us not only the journey to Rome, but the apostle reaching it. There, too, we find how truly the power of God is with him. He is received and no small kindness shown by the inhabitants in the island of Malta. And Paul illustrates how far any word of the Lord is in vain by accomplishing one of the peculiar promises in the disputed verses at the end of Mark. This strikes the minds of these heathen, so that afterwards we find the father of the great man in the island with Paul, who prays and lays his hands upon him and heals him. “When this was done, others also which had diseases in the island came, and were healed: who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.”

Arrived in Italy, they taste the comfort of brotherly love. “We found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days; and so we went toward Rome. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum, and Tres Tabernae; whom, when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage.” What a joy it is for a humble brother to be the means of inspiring the apostle Paul with fresh cheer along the road of Christ; and how we defraud ourselves as well as our brethren of so much blessing by our little

faith and scanty love in identifying ourselves with the most despised and suffering for the name of the Lord! To what a work are we not called! What a wonderful mission is that which the Lord confers upon the simplest soul that names the name of Jesus! May He wake us up to feel how blessed we are, and what a spring of blessing He is! Out of them, it is said, “shall flow rivers of living water.” Here, observe, it was the apostle himself; and, though it may seem strange to some, even he could find the sweetness and the power of the ministry of love.

To Rome Paul goes, and there he dwells with a soldier that keeps him; and in due time he sees the Jews, and lays before them the gospel at full length. Alas! it was the same tale; for man is everywhere the same, but God is too. “Some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive.”

The sentence, the long-suspended sentence, of judicial hardening was now about to fall in all its withering strength. It had been hanging over the nation ever since the days of Isaiah the prophet; for not without ground was it uttered then. Still the patience of God pursued its way, till Jesus came and was rejected, when the clouds gathered more thickly. Now not only the Holy Ghost was come, but He had testified of the risen glorified man, from Jerusalem to Rome. But if He had testified, the Jews, instead of being, as they ought to have been, the first to receive God’s testimony, were in point of fact the

first to refuse — the most active and obstinate emissaries of unbelief and of Satan's power, — not only not entering in themselves, but forbidding those who would. Accordingly, then and most justly fell that pall of judgment because of unbelief under which they lie to this day. But the gospel goes to the Gentiles; and spite of all that had wrought hitherto, or might work hereafter, they were to hear, and they have heard; and we are ourselves, thanks be to God, the witnesses of it.

1 The true reading, as arrested by, A, B, C, D (corr.), and many ancient versions, is αὐτοῖς (not αὐτῶν, as in D, E, the mass of cursives, etc.). The meaning is, "they gave lots for them." This meets the chief reasoning founded on the common text which Mosheim urges with his usual force against the view in which, he confesses, and the commentators agree (i.e., in representing Matthias as having been chosen an apostle by lot, agreeably to the ancient Jewish practice). It is evidently of no consequence who they were that set forth or appointed (ἔστησαν) the two: some, like Alford, arguing that the whole company thus produced them; others, like Mosheim, contending that it must in all propriety have been the eleven apostles. I think that the vagueness of the phrase, without a defined subject, shows that the stress laid on either side is a mistake. It suffices to say, that two candidates were brought forward, possessed, as far as either apostles or disciples could say, of adequate qualifications. The Lord alone could decide: to Him all looked after the manner so familiar to the people of God. But Mosheim's conclusion destroys the whole point, besides doing violence to the text by confounding κλῆρος "lot" with ψῆφος vote or suffrage. It would bring in man's will and voice where the prayer just offered

was an abandonment of it for the intervention of the heart-searching God. This, no doubt, was natural to one who was swayed by Lutheran prejudice, and strengthened by the practice which undoubtedly prevailed (from the third century at latest), the assembly deciding by suffrage, not by lot, between the candidates proposed by those who took the lead in their affairs. There seems little difficulty in understanding. a Hebraistic extension of the word “gave” (1 Sam. 14:41) for the more common “cast”; and as to the pronoun, it is as intelligible and correct in the dative, as in the genitive it is perplexing in sense, and, I think, inaccurate in form; for the article would be requisite with the substantive if it were the true reading. Compare J. L. Moshemii de rebus Christianorum ante Const. M. Comm. Saec. Pr. § xiv. pp. 78-80.

2 It may be well to guard the English reader from supposing that two classes are intended. The phrase is literally “men-brethren,” and means simply men who were brethren. — Let me add, that the true text in the last clause of verse 30 is simply, “to seat from the fruit of his loins on his throne.”

3 It appears to me that ἀσμένως, “gladly,” was inserted in the commonly received text against the best testimony, as well as internal reasons. For the great uncials (M, A, B, C, D, etc.), supported by the Vulgate and Aethiopic, omit the word, which was probably suggested by Acts 21:17, where it falls in as admirably as here it sounds somewhat out of season. Nearly the same authorities concur in omitting καὶ, “and,” between “the fellowship” and “the breaking of bread.” This serves to strengthen the view that “the fellowship” goes with “the teaching of the apostles,” though put as two

objects instead of being combined by a single article in one idea; and it would throw the breaking of bread and the prayers similarly together.

4 The external authority is very decidedly for the singular against the plural. Thus all the first-rate Uncials, the Sinai, Vatican, Alexandrian, and Palimpsest of Paris, supported by some of the best cursives and all the best ancient versions, oppose the vulgar reading.

5 The copyists of old seem to have confounded in writing, as the Latin and most other ancient translators did in rendering, Ἕλληνας (Greeks) and Ἑλληνιστὰς (Hellenists), here and elsewhere. Thus it might seem incredible, if it were not the notorious fact, that the only two known manuscripts in favour of that which is here most certainly requisite are the Alexandrian and the Cambridge Graeco-Latin of Beza. The Vatican and all others, uncial and cursive (as far as collated and known), support the error. Of the fathers, Eusebius among the Greek, and Cassiodorus among the Latins, are in favour of the true; others are in strange conflict, their text having the wrong reading (perhaps through mistaken scribes), and their comment correcting it. The reading of the Sinai MS. (εὐαγγελιστὰς) is a mere blunder, not uncommon in that most ancient but not very accurate document, arising from confusion through a contiguous word; it would give the sense of “unto the preachers, preaching the Lord Jesus.” But the correction confirms the true reading.

6 Is it not distressing to find, in this thoughtful production of one in much above the traditions of men and the bias of party, the palpable omission of the grandest and most momentous distinction of the church,

namely, the presence of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven? Unbelief here is alas! characteristic of Christendom.

7 It is well to avoid a figure which churchism has ever turned to its own aggrandisement and the Lord's dishonour. The Church neither preaches nor teaches, but Christ sends those who evangelize the world and teach the Church.

8 The best uncials, cursives, and ancient versions, omit τινὲς, "certain."

9 So the Spirit of God calls them both; and it is an important point to observe; it is not restricted to the twelve. Here we find the Holy Ghost acted in this manner. We have apostleship entirely apart from the twelve tribes of Israel. And not merely is Paul apostle, but Barnabas was recognized also.

10 It is scarcely necessary to refute at length the notion of the fathers, and of some moderns like Bishop Bilson (Perpetual Government of Christ's Church, p. 13, Eden's edition, Oxford, 1842), that χειροτονήσαντες here means ordaining by imposition of hands. That the word was so used in later times by ecclesiastical writers is true; that this is its meaning in scripture is palpable error. It is to confound χειροτονία with χειροθεσία (or its equivalent, ἡ ἐπιθεσις τῶν χειρῶν). On the other hand the idea that χειρονονήσαντες means that the apostles conceded to the disciples the power of selecting by vote, whilst they reserved to themselves the right of approval and institution, is still harsher and' in short unexampled in all Greek writings profane or sacred, ancient or medieval. In the earlier Greek authors who write of their public affairs, the word often occurs in the

sense of choosing by suffrage (as opposed to lots); later on it meant appointment irrespective of votes. But it is never used, so far as I know, to express that some appointed on the ground of election by others. And I am glad to say not merely that a candid Presbyterian like Prof. G. Campbell treats Beza's version (per suffragia creassent) with the utmost severity as "a more interpolation for the make of answering a particular purpose," but that the Presbyterian divines of 1645 in the "Jus Divinum" point out the flagrant inconsistency of such an interpretation with the express language of the text. None but Paul and Barnabas chose (whatever the manner); and they chose for the disciples, not by their votes, which would be incompatible with their own choice. Compare Acts 10:41, 2 Cor. 8:19. In the former case God chose beforehand the witnesses, but others gave no votes; in the latter the churches chose brethren to be their confidential messengers, but they never thought of collecting the suffrages of other people. Scriptural usage in every instance is simply choice.

11 "But it is a characteristic of the Church system" (says Mr. Litton in his "Church of Christ," p. 636, speaking of sacramentalists) "to be most peremptory and exclusive in its decisions where Scripture supplies the slenderest foundation for them."

12 There is very grave authority (, A, B, C, D, etc.) for dropping καὶ, "and," and so throwing together οἱ πρ. ἀδ. "the elder brethren" (in the sense, however, of "the elders").

13 Philippi was not the "chief" city of Macedonia, but Thessalonica; and as Wieseler has shown, even if the subdivisions had been known then of Macedonia Prima,

Sec. etc., Amphipolis (not Philippi) was the chief city of that part or district. The literal and correct translation therefore is “first,” geographically speaking. Eckhel (iv. p. 477, ss.) copies the coin, COL. AVG. IVL. PHILIP. It was therefore probably a colony founded by C. J. Caesar, and afterwards increased by Augustus.

14 It may be observed here that those whom the inspired historian calls “the elders of the church” (i.e., in Ephesus) the apostle designates overseers, or bishops (ἐπισκόπους). They are not in scripture two orders of spiritual rulers but one office. It is not merely that the bishops were styled presbyters (the higher dignity including the lower), but the presbyters Paul calls bishops, which could only be because they are both descriptive of the same men and office. This is supposed also in Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 3, Titus 1:5, 7, 1 Peter 5:1, 2. On the other hand presbyters never appointed to that office, though an apostle associated them with himself in laying hands on Timothy when he conferred on him a χάρισμα. But scripture never calls Timothy a presbyter or bishop, but an evangelist, though he was also employed of the Lord in a highly responsible place at Ephesus, and seems to have exercised a quasi-apostolic charge over the presbyters as well as the saints in general there.

15 The plural form is recommended to us by the most ancient uncials, some good cursives, the Vulgate and the Syriac; the singular prevails in the great majority of copies and versions. Being more natural or customary, though far less energetic, we can understand copyists falling into it.

Acts 2

The death of Christ, as the paschal lamb, took place punctually to the day; so did His resurrection as the wave-sheaf; yet no saint knew the significance of either till they were accomplished facts. Nor have we proof, notwithstanding the marked intelligence displayed in the use of scripture since the resurrection (Acts 1, cf. Luke 24:45), that any entered into the meaning of the feast of weeks with its wave loaves, till it was fulfilled. The disciples were together, however, in their true place of dependence and expectation. 'And when the day of Pentecost was in course of fulfilment they were all together3 in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of a mighty blast rushing, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues parting asunder as of fire, and it4 sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with [the] Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them to utter' (vers. 1-4).

This was the baptism of the Spirit, though neither the mighty cause is here unfolded, nor are the effects as yet traced out. But the promise of the Father was now accomplished. The Holy Spirit was sent down from heaven according to the word of the Lord to abide with His own for ever, that other Advocate Who answers on earth to Christ in heaven, the Divine manager of all our affairs according to the will of God. As being a wholly new thing, there were accompanying signs, and these of a twofold character; not only the violent blowing which filled all the house, but the disparted tongues as of fire

which sat upon each. Thus was manifested the presence of the Spirit in a general way for all the house, in a special way as power of testimony for each: a distinction of importance also found in other forms elsewhere.

But testimony is the predominant point here, for if they were all filled with the Spirit, they also began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Hence the aptness of the form in which the Spirit manifested His action: not a dove as with the Lord when sealed on earth emblem of One holy, harmless, and undefiled, but tongues wherewith now to make known the wonderful works of God in the new creation, every way far beyond the wonders of the old. But the tongues were not one, but parting asunder. The Gentile must hear, no less than the once favoured Jew. Now the mission of grace was to go forth indiscriminately as became a dead and risen Saviour, Whom God exalted on high, after man, especially Israel, had rejected Him as their own Messiah on earth. Further, the tongues were as of fire, that set forth divine judgment intolerant of evil, as just now demonstrated in grace to man in the cross of Christ.

But the languages were as real as they were different from their mother tongue or any naturally acquired one. This fact is as clearly stated as the gift itself was eminently significant and seasonable. What could be so clear a testimony that, if God gave His law to Israel, though in itself the expression of man’s moral duty, He was now about to make known His grace in the gospel to every race and tongue? His grace not only forgives all offences, but quickens together with Christ, so as to be a new and everlasting ground for the energy of the Spirit to produce in a new life the fruit of righteousness which

is by Jesus Christ to God's glory and praise. This witness of divine love, efficacious through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, acts in direction toward all, in effect upon all those that believe. It was not the extirpation of difference in language, nor yet the power which will make once more the whole earth of one lip and the same speech, but grace lifting its objects and instruments above the effects of that judgment at Babel, which by diversity of language confounded the pride of the race, when it sought to combine and exalt itself in a union of human will which forgot God altogether. But God remembered guilty and miserable man, and in His wisdom and mercy availed Himself of the chosen people's hatred of Himself and of His Son (John 15:24) to go out in the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; and to mark this in a way most touching to every nation under heaven.

'Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, pious men, from every nation under heaven; and when this report [or sound] was made, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because they each one heard them speaking in his own dialect. And they were all amazed and wondering, saying5 Behold, are not all these that speak Galileans? And how hear we each in our own dialect in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and those that dwell in Mesopotamia, in Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, in Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and the Roman sojourners, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them speaking in our tongues the mighty things of God' (vers. 5-11).

If any words were needed to make the nature of the wonder plain and precise, it might have been supposed that these could not fail. But men of this world's science and learning, though bearing the name of Christian, manifest no less incredulity now than the Jews did of old, who foolishly sought to treat it as mere excitement. Some have tried to find in the account the same sort of senseless jargon, or (as Meyer) an entirely new language as its favourers allege,6 which was revived [more than] a half-century ago among the Irvingites; others (as Bleek, et al.) contend for a highly excited or ecstatic style of speech suitable to the communication of the marvels of grace, or (Olshausen) for so low a thought as a magnetic relation between speakers and hearers, or (Wieseler, et al.) for mere inarticulate ejaculations of praise! The older rationalists, as Paulus, et al., supposed no other than their native tongue; others, from Gregory of Nyssa and Cyprian to Erasmus and men of our own day, had grafted on this the strange idea that the multitude of foreigners was caused by the Spirit to hear each his own tongue! But Gregory of Nazianzus rejects the notion as making the marvel lie with the hearers rather than the speakers, contrary to the clear statement of scripture, as indeed are all these vain hypotheses.

The truth is that all these ideas, though maintained not only by preachers, but by theologians of the highest rank, are swept away at the first touch of the written word, ever the standard of truth and never more needed than in this day of active and daring intellect. The disciples were enabled in the power of the Spirit to speak the various languages of the earth; but it would seem that there were measures in this gift as in others.

The apostle thanks God that he speaks with tongues more than all the Corinthians, so ostentatious of these sign-gifts; but he also insists on the subordination of them all to prophecy, as a gift characteristically for edification, encouragement, and consolation. The great end in the assembly is building up, to which a tongue without interpretation contributed nothing, as their frequency, if not simultaneous also, was an evident offence against order, both of which he corrects as the commandment of the Lord (1 Cor. 14).

Tongues therefore played a very inferior part in the assembly. That they were conferred for the dissemination of the gospel is the supposition of many in ancient and modern times. They were certainly used to arrest the Jews from foreign countries, who flocked to Jerusalem for this feast, or were otherwise staying there. What confounded these strangers from so many lands was, that they each one heard the disciples speaking in their own language, and whatever may have been the prevalency of Aramaic, or of Greek and Latin over the then known world, it is idle to tell one who believes this careful and varied enumeration from the N.E. to the W. and S. (which seems to be the reason why Judea comes between Mesopotamia and Cappadocia), that the inspired writer does not mean to convey more than a few distinct tongues. Not so judged the residents and sojourners in Jerusalem, whose piety gave them weight, yet who least of all were disposed to religious innovation. To them the evidence was irresistible, an impossibility if the variety of languages had not been a plain and sure reality of which they are competent judges. ‘Behold, are not all these that speak Galileans? And how hear we each in our own dialect in which we

were born? Parthians, and Medes and Elamites... we hear them speaking in our tongues the mighty things of God.'

Still those that heard and believed the gospel that day were Jews and proselytes only. But the wondrous form of testimony prepared the way for those who glean the mind of God from the mighty workings of His gracious power, as well as from the words of the Lord in His varied commissions to the disciples, the wide-reaching activity in witnessing His love to which they were called. His hands which had been stretched out in vain to a disobedient and contradictory people were already pointing to all the nations, who also would hear. But the Lord had to use, as we shall see in due time, fresh means to reach the ears and quicken the hesitating feet of His own in the grace that tarrieth not for man and waiteth not for the sons of men.

The tongues were, as the apostle explains elsewhere, a sign to the unbelievers. They were intended to arrest and produce inquiry. The presence of the promised Holy Spirit was an incomparably deeper and more fruitful fact. He was sent down from heaven to form the assembly, the new dwelling place of God, the body of Christ. He was to be the power of testimony, of God's good news for the world. He was to be in the believers and with them for ever, that Paraclete Whom Christ after going on high was to send, not only to bring demonstration to the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, but to guide the saints into all the truth announcing what is coming, and glorifying Christ as He too had the Father. Whatever might be the marvel and the gracious suitability of the tongues, the gift of the Spirit Himself immensely transcends them, but His

presence and the all-important results of it are beyond the ken of the world which neither sees nor knows Him. The signs and wonders occupy men.

‘And they were all amazed and perplexed] saying one to another, What meaneth1 this? But others mocking7 said, They are filled with sweet wine. But Peter,8 standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and spoke forth unto them, Men of Judea and all1 ye that dwell in Jerusalem, be this known to you, and give ear to my words. For these are not drunken as ye suppose, for it is [the] third hour of the day; but this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall be in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your elders shall dream with dreams1; yea and on my bondmen and on my bondwomen in those days will I pour out of My Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will give wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below blood and fire and vapour of smoke. The sun shall be changed into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and manifest9 day of [the] Lord come. And it shall be, whosoever shall call on the name of [the] Lord shall be saved’ (vers. 12-21).

As usual, men arrange themselves in more than one class, some astonished, others hostile and scornful. Peter takes the lead in explaining with gravity and distinctness. He explicitly denies the unworthy thought of intoxication, which the early hour itself should have silenced as against God-fearing souls. It was really what Joel spoke of: not of course the fulfilment as it is to be in the last days, but an effusion of that nature. Indeed, the words of the prophet went in this beyond what that day

saw accomplished; for ‘all flesh’ cannot fairly be limited to Israel, and God, Who was soon about to bring in Gentiles to the name of Christ, will bless the nations in the future kingdom, when all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord, and all the kindred of the nations shall worship before Him. The gospel now makes good the indiscriminate grace of God even more profoundly than will be under His future government, when He will show that the kingdom is Jehovah’s, and that He is the governor among the nations.

In the latter day, when Joel’s words will be fulfilled as a whole, the Spirit will be poured out, and if Israel enjoy the blessing freely, it will flow far beyond their narrow limits. God’s ways will then be known upon earth, His saving health among all nations. Temporal blessing is then to be vouchsafed to Israel (Joel 2:19-27), and their great northern enemy is to be for ever disposed of, for Jehovah will do great things for His people and land, whatever the enemy may have prepared to do. ‘My people’, He says emphatically, ‘shall never be ashamed.’ Then as a distinct intimation the prophet presents two announcements: the first, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (vers. 28, 29); the second, external signs of judgment ushering in the days of Jehovah, the circumstances of which are detailed in Acts 3, till we come down to the closing account of their blessings once more. As the wonders above and below precede that day, so does the repentance of Israel prepare for their deliverance and blessing, and especially for the gift of the Spirit. We see the same principle here also.

For God, in pouring out of His Spirit now, does thereby associate believers with Christ exalted on high. Given in virtue of redemption the Holy Spirit sheds the love of

God in their hearts, seals them for the day of redemption, and is the earnest of their inheritance. He dwells in them now, and will quicken their mortal bodies soon at Christ's coming. Besides, He is the blessed and divine bond, constituting them Christ's body and God's house. And here it may be of interest to not a few if I set before them the judgment formed by the celebrated ecclesiastical historian, Neander, who of course from his Lutheran views had no bias toward the truth of the church. It is not cited as invariably sound or as in any respect authoritative, but as a grave testimony from an able and well-informed Christian in direct opposition to the present state of the church, whether Protestant or Romanist, Oriental or Greek. It is, therefore, as far as it goes, a strong involuntary homage to the revealed truth on this subject.

'What Moses expressed as a wish (Num. 11:29) that the Spirit of God might rest upon all and all might be prophets, seems to me a prediction of that which was to be realized through Christ. By Him was to be instituted a fellowship of Divine life, which, proceeding from the equal and equally immediate relation of all to the One God, as the divine source of life to all, should remove these boundaries, within which, as the Old Testament position, the development of the higher life was still confined, and hence the fellowship thus derived would essentially distinguish itself from the constitution of all previously existing religious societies. There could, in such a society, be no longer a priestly or prophetic office, constituted to serve as a medium for the propagation and development of the kingdom of God, on which office the religious consciousness of the community was to be dependent. Such a guild of priests

as existed in the previous systems of religion, empowered to guide other men, who remained, as it were, in a state of religious pupilage; having the exclusive care of providing for their religious wants, and serving as mediators by whom all other men must first be placed in connection with God and divine things — such a priestly caste could find no place within Christianity. In removing that which separated men from God, in communicating to all the same fellowship with God, Christ also removed the barrier which had hitherto divided men from one another. Christ, the Prophet and High Priest for entire humanity, was the end of the prophetic office and of the priesthood. There was now the same High Priest and Mediator for all, through Whom all men 10 being reconciled and united with God, 1 are themselves made a priestly and spiritual race; one heavenly King, Guide, and Teacher, through Whom all are taught of God; one faith, one hope, one Spirit which should quicken all, one oracle in the hearts of all, the voice of the Spirit proceeding from the Father, all were to be citizens of one heavenly kingdom, with whose heavenly powers, even while strangers in the world, they would be already furnished. When the apostles applied the Old Testament idea of the priesthood to Christianity, this seems to me to have been invariably for the simple purpose of showing that no such visible particular priesthood could find place in the new community; that since free access to God and to heaven had by the one High Priest, even Christ, been opened once for all to believers, they had, by virtue of their union to Him, become themselves a spiritual people, consecrated to God, their calling being none other than to dedicate their entire life to God as a thank-offering for the grace of redemption, to publish abroad the power

and grace of Him Who had called them out of the kingdom of darkness into His marvellous light, to make their life one continual priesthood, one spiritual worship springing from the temper of faith working by love; one continuous testimony for their Saviour. (Compare 1 Peter 2:9; Rom. 12:1; and the spirit and whole train of thought running through the Epistle to the Hebrews.) So too, the advancement of God's kingdom in general and particular, the diffusion of Christianity among the heathens and the good of each particular community, was now to be the duty not of one select class of Christians alone, but the immediate concern of each individual.'11 We need not do more than notice the vague inaccuracy of 'entire humanity' on the one hand and of the 'King' on the other, for we must never expect a Lutheran to know the total ruin of man or the new relations of Christ. That He tasted death for every man is true; but He is King of Israel and of nations, also Head of the church, not of humanity as such. He has authority over all flesh to give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given Him. But this and other passages show that, notwithstanding grave drawbacks, this modern historian understood better than most the peculiar character of that new thing which God had formed for His glory on the day of Pentecost; a character in no wise accidental or temporary, but essentially distinguishing it from first to last, and as distinct from that which God had set up in Israel as from the inventions of Satan among the Gentiles. The new thing was God's habitation in the Spirit.

Such was the preface of the apostle's discourse, a denial of the carnal not to say immoral, excitement imputed, and an affirmation of the power of the Spirit then

manifested in the gift of tongues, and in prophesying according to the prophet Joel.

Now Peter enters on the foundation of their hopes as God's chosen people, and sets forth the facts just accomplished in the light of His word, mainly as we shall see in Psalms 16, 110, and 132.

'Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man shown forth from God to you by mighty works, and wonders, and signs, which God wrought by Him in your midst, as yourselves know — Him, given up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by hand of lawless [men] did crucify and slay; Whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, inasmuch as it was not possible that He should be held fast by it. For David saith as to Him, I kept the Lord in view always before me, because He is on my right hand that I may not be shaken. On this account my heart was cheered and my tongue was exceeding glad; yea more, my flesh also shall dwell in hope [that, or] because Thou wilt not leave my soul to12 Hades nor give thy Holy [or Gracious] One to see corruption. Thou didst make known to me ways of life, Thou wilt make me full of joy with Thy countenance. Brethren, [lit. men brethren] one may speak with freedom unto you about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is amongst us unto this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God swore with an oath to him of the fruit of his loins to seat upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was He left to1 Hades nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus did God raise up, whereof all we are witnesses. Having therefore been exalted by the right hand of God and received of the Father the promise of

the Holy Spirit, He poured forth this which ye see and hear. For David ascended not into the heavens, but saith himself The LORD said to my Lord, Sit on My right hand till I make Thine enemies [the] footstool of Thy feet. Let all [the] house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God made Him both Lord and Christ — this Jesus Whom ye crucified' (vers. 22-36).

The apostle addresses them according to their due national title as the chosen theocracy; and, while he in no way hides his Master's name of humiliation, he claims for Him the indubitably proved character of Messiah. It was God, he affirms, Who had shown Him forth to them by mighty works and wonders and signs; it was God Who by Him thus wrought in their midst. They could deny neither the actual display of divine power in every form of goodness and mercy, nor that Israel had so expected the Anointed of God according to the living oracles. The eyes of the blind were opened, the ears of the deaf were unstopped, the lame leaped as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sang. Had all this come without the person to whom Scripture attaches it all? If not yet with vengeance, surely it was in mercy unequivocally divine? Granted that the parched ground has not become a pool, nor the thirsty lands springs of water, and that the way of holiness is invisible save to faith, granted that the unclean abound and are bold as the lion, and the ravenous beasts are still objects of terror, because the people are apostate from their King when He came, as they once gave up Jehovah for every vain idol of the nations (cf. Ps. 35). But God had failed in no attestation that could commend His Servant Whom He upheld, His elect in Whom His soul delighted; and they themselves knew it, though tempted by Satan to impute

it to the enemy in order to escape the submission of their conscience to the truth. To the enemy! when Christ's every word and every work directly tend to destroy Satan's evil power and wiles. But what will not the deluded mind of man think or at least say to avoid the grace that pities and would save him if he bowed to God and His Christ?

Did any Israelite stumble at the cross as invalidating His claims? Yet on the cross, man — the Jew — being what he is, God had ordered it all marvellously to His own glory. Unbelief and rebellion and blasphemy on the one hand were allowed to work their unimpeded way, when the fit moment arrived; and Jesus was rejected ignominiously by His own people and the Gentiles were urged by them to crucify Him, that on the other hand He might become a propitiation for the sins of His own that believed yea, for the whole world. If that was man's inexcusable iniquity, this was God's sovereign grace. If they were the instruments of their own spite, He gave One Who had been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Thus in the same cross met creature-will of man and of Satan in deadly enmity to God, divine love turning the otherwise hopeless sin to the shedding of that precious blood which cleanseth from all sin, impossible without the glorious person Who is God no less than man, impossible save by His once in atonement suffering for our sins, Just for unjust. 'Him given up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by hand of lawless men did crucify and slay.'

The cross therefore, dreadful as it is as the proof of man's blind guilt and of Satan's power, now that it is seen not only to be necessary that scripture be fulfilled, but also to be the indispensable and only possible door

of deliverance for the sinner in God's grace, is owned as an essential and morally the deepest part of God's ways, as it is the highest moral glory of the Lord Jesus. As Himself said on the eve of it, 'Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God be glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in Himself, and shall straightway glorify Him' (John 13:31, 32).

But the resurrection! — what did God say therein? In vain the lie that the disciples came by night and stole Jesus away, while the soldiers slept. Peter does not even notice such an unworthy subterfuge, but simply asserts the grand truth on which the gospel rests: 'Whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, inasmuch as it was not possible that He should be held fast by it. For David saith as to Him, I kept the Lord in view always before me....' The word of God by David pointed to the resurrection of the Messiah, and God showed Him openly when risen to witnesses chosen of Him beforehand. But indeed it was not possible that He should be held fast by death to which He, the Holy One, had submitted for sin to God's glory. Nor was it possible that the scripture could be broken which said, 'Thou wilt not leave My soul to Hades, nor give [i.e. suffer] Thy Holy One to see corruption.' Even according to the ancient Jewish interpretation these words of Ps. 16 can only apply to the Messiah (Schttgen, 564-8). Here Peter and in Acts 13:33-37 Paul, declare that it was fulfilled in God's raising Jesus from the dead, not in David, still less in any other. Thus was He shown the path of life through death with fulness of joy in the presence of God His Father.

The apostle in his reasoning on the text cites Ps. 132, the great psalm of the kingdom settled for ever in the

son of David. ‘Brethren, one may speak freely [with freedom] unto you about the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried and his tomb is amongst us unto this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God swore with an oath to him of the fruit of his loins to seat upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ that neither was He left to Hades nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus did God raise up, whereof all we are witnesses.’ This, and this alone, explains the peculiarly glorious character of the kingdom even in its earthly relations. Even now the King is risen from the dead. This stamps perpetuity as nothing else could: yet is it the kingdom of a man. Only it is man risen from the dead, for in all things He must have the pre-eminence (Col. 1:18).

But in fact resurrection was the immediate stepping stone, not to the kingdom which still awaits His appearing in glory, but to His going up into the presence of God on high; and this for reasons most nearly affecting God’s glory now as well as those who enjoy His favour, as we shall hear presently. ‘Having therefore been exalted by the right hand of God and received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured forth this which ye see and hear. For David ascended not into the heavens but saith himself, The LORD said to my Lord, Sit on My right hand till I make Thine enemies [the] footstool of Thy feet. Let all [the] house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God made Him both Lord and Christ — this Jesus whom ye crucified.’

Again from that most fruitful treasury of God’s words is a sentence drawn to prove the bearing of Christ’s life, including His resurrection and ascension, where were not only facts of the deepest import, the grounds of

truth needed for every day and for eternity, but parts of God's infinite scheme for manifesting His own glory and giving effect to His goodness toward us. If Ps. 132 secures the risen Son of David for the everlasting King on His throne in Zion, with the abundant and suited privileges peculiar to His kingdom on earth and in Israel, the citation from Ps. 110 testifies to His present exaltation in heaven. Of this there was the most conclusive proof in the now accomplished promise of the Father, the gift of the Holy Spirit, of Whose outpouring there was indubitable evidence to their eyes and ears. That gift Christ had received for the second time. Once a man on earth He was sealed, the holy and acceptable One of God's delight: now a man in heaven a second time did He receive the same Spirit as the One Who, having finished the work of redemption, had gone on high, the guarantee and glorious witness of the acceptance of all who believing in His name, are justified and delivered, that they might be united in one, the body of the ascended Head. And on this rests the perpetuity of that gift, the presence of the Holy Ghost, so essential to the church of God. Not only is the outpoured Spirit the fruit of His accepted work in all its unchanging and everlasting love, but He is therefore given again to Christ, though for us. If Christ received of the Father the promised Spirit and poured forth what was seen and heard at Pentecost, how could the Holy Spirit but abide in honour of Him and of His work? No wonder whatever be the humiliating and deplorable provocations on our part whatever the deep griefs on His part as feeling for Christ's injured name, that He abides in us and with us for ever. He is come to testify to God's exalting Jesus, made both Lord and Christ, Whom men, yea Jews, crucified.

The effect of this solemn appeal to conscience, grounded on testimonies of scripture undeniably direct, was both immediate and permanent. The truth of God searched His people unsparingly: His grace met them in sovereign goodness, and established them in the Christ Whom they had so blindly and wickedly rejected.

‘And when they heard, they were pricked in heart and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, What shall we do, brethren? And Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized each of you in the name of Jesus Christ for remission of sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off as many as [the] Lord our God shall call to [Him]. And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, Be saved from this perverse generation. Those then that accepted his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they persevered [continued steadfastly] in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.13 And all that believed were together, and had all things common, and sold their possessions and substance, and distributed them to all according as anyone had need. And day by day, continuing with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they did take their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord was adding day by day together those that were to be saved’ (vers. 37-47).

It was a real work of God in the conscience. They were not persuaded only, but pricked in heart. There was submission to His person Whom they had just crucified,

and this through faith in God's word. It was not mere remorse, still less a change of mind only, but real judgment of self before God (Whose part they now took against themselves and their unbelieving evil in the past), and a distinct casting themselves on Him Whom they had so bitterly despised to their own ruin. Now they repented, and were baptized each of them in the name of Jesus for remission of sins. Through His name the believer receives remission of sins; in none other is there salvation. He is exalted to give repentance and remission of sins. As they repented, so also were they baptized in His name, according to the charge laid on His servants. They took the place of death with Him: I say not that they then understood its meaning, as they doubtless entered into it more or less afterwards. The Lord directed His servants to baptize; and the new converts simply and without question submitted. It was His way, nor is any other so good, though many a servant of His diverged from His orders, and many a convert seems in effect to think himself, in this as in other things, wiser than his Master. It was a clean final break with sins and sin, with man and religious man, with Judaism. Little or nothing could any one of these confessors be supposed at this solemn epoch of new birth to apprehend with intelligence; but they did feel before God their own nothingness, and the all-sufficiency of His name Who had died on the cross. And they were welcome to the precious privilege conferred on them, as they could in no way have been recognized as disciples of His had they refused baptism in His name. It was the mark of His confession, the sign of salvation; and woe to him that spurns the authority and grace of Him Who instituted it!

But there is another matter of new and immense import that follows. These repentant Jews who submitted to baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for remission of sins are assured of the subsequent gift of the Spirit: ‘And ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’ They were already born of God: without which there could be no repentance nor faith. They were to be baptized with water in the name of Jesus for remission. Not till then was the believing Jew to receive the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; for this is in question here, ‘the gift’ (ἡ δωρεά), not merely the gifts (

τὰ χαρσὶματα) or powers which accompanied and attested His divine presence now on earth. It is the more necessary to insist on the specific character of the truth, because of the widespread confusion in Christendom as to all this. The gift of the Spirit here spoken of, the peculiar and abiding privilege of the Christian and the church, is as distinct from new birth by the Spirit as from the gifts of which we read not a little in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles. But there is to be noticed circumstantial difference in the manner. For while the favoured Jew in Acts ii. had to be baptized before he receives this wondrous gift, the hitherto despised Gentile receives the Holy Ghost before being baptized in the name of the Lord: a difference in my judgment worthy of God, and instructive in His ways for His children.

The inestimable gift was not overlooked in Old Testament scripture: not only the new blessings of redemption in general, but that of the Spirit particularly. And Peter could here say that the promise was to them and to their children, yea, to all that were afar off, as many as the Lord their God should call to Him. Now that

the time was come for displaying, not law nor government, but grace God would call to Himself the most distant, and bless the needy to the full. It is now no question of a mere external sign, but of the power of God in grace according to His promise.

This was not by any means all the apostle urged on that memorable day but from among more and different words it sufficed the Holy Ghost to recall the exhortation, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation’. For now God was about to separate as well as to forgive and deliver, at least, the salvation goes beyond guilt and sin. He would set apart from the perverse generation hurrying on to its speedy ruin, which was rejecting the gospel as it had the Messiah Himself. From the separate people, now proved utterly crooked and rebellious, He would have His own to be saved, for His own glory and after a new way. This the rest of the Book we have entered upon opens out to us; nor can anything of the sort be to us of deeper interest or of more practical value. For we too, though Gentiles naturally, belong to this new family of God and new testimony of Christ.

‘Those then that accepted his word were baptized: and there were added that day about three thousand souls’ (ver. 41). ‘Gladly,’ the reading of the Received Text, is rejected on ample evidence by the critics as not found in the oldest and best authorities. It seems to be a perhaps unconscious importation from, or effect of, Acts 21:17, where it is in perfect keeping. Here it is not. For, precious and comforting as the gospel may be, deep seriousness would characterize those souls so newly repentant, and on grounds suited to sound them thoroughly. A ‘glad’ reception would better harmonize with a revival movement and its generally superficial

results. The Pentecostal work was both profound and extensive: three thousand souls that day were no slight haul, but in every way suited to prove that a Divine person was just come in grace no less than power, both to save and to gather. So it is the Lord's will that we should ever remember and heed His presence from first to last. The Holy Spirit works by the gospel and forms the church here below for heaven.

Further, the Spirit abides evermore, so as to cut off all excuse for not going on with God according to His word and will. So here it is noted that 'they persevered in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers' (ver. 42). Such was the course on which entered the souls just born to God and blessed of Him in Christ. The teaching of the apostles supplied the needed instruction, fitted perfectly as they were not only by the Spirit's recalling to their remembrance all the words of the Lord Jesus, but by His own communication, according to the Saviour's promise, of all that they themselves could not then bear (John 14:26; John 16:12, 13). Never was there such teaching for souls whose very recent introduction into divine relationships made them hunger and thirst for all that would satisfy the new spiritual wants and affections of their souls. And they had it not orally alone, but after a while also in forms written by inspiration, that we too might have 'fellowship' with them, taking in now not the 'twelve' only but the great apostle of the Gentiles yet to be called. For 'teaching', however valuable, is not enough without 'fellowship', and few weigh how much they owe to the presence and living commentary on the truth which sharing it all together in practice furnishes.14 Then 'the breaking of bread' has a most influential

place, both by keeping the Lord continually before the saints in His unspeakable grace and suffering, and in drawing out the deepest feeling of the heart, where the exercise or display of power might be otherwise a danger, as we see at Corinth, where the true character of the Eucharist was lost, and the assembly became a scene of ostentation (1 Cor. 11:20-34). Nor are ‘prayers’, meaning a suppose) the united or common prayers of the saints, left out of this weighty record; for none can neglect ‘the prayers’ without loss otherwise irreparable, and so much the more of moment were they then as the saints rose to the joy of their new and everlasting blessedness. For power and privilege would be of all things the most fatal if the saints slipped out of the sense of needed and constant dependence on God.

On the one hand, the moral impression was great and immediate (ver. 43): ‘fear came upon every soul’, and not the less, but the more, because it was the effect of God’s presence in grace, not in judgments which alarm for a moment but soon yield to a fatal reaction. ‘And many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.’ The manifestations of power were not only marvellous, but significant, so as to reveal Him Who wrought by means of His servants in His own character and ways, alas! among a people manifestly treated as unbelieving and apostate: else His word had sufficed and made them out of place.

On the other hand, how lovely the picture the faithful present for a brief moment! ‘And all that believed were together, and had all things common, and sold their possessions and substance, and distributed them to all according as any one had need. And day by day, continuing with one accord in the temple and breaking

bread at home, they did take their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord was adding day by day together those that were to be saved' (vers. 44-47). Never before was such a sight among men on earth; never such love rising above the selfishness of nature, not merely in that land and race, but in any other, and all through the power of divine grace in the name of the Crucified now seen by faith on high. It was sweet fruit of the Spirit, as far as possible from a claim or a command, however right be the voice of divine authority in its place. But here was the flow, mighty yet unbidden, of divine love that embraced every one begotten of God, without reserve or stint in hearts which answered in their measure to His Who with His Son vouchsafes us all things.

It was, no doubt, a peculiar hour of transitional character, exactly suited to a state which beheld all the faithful within one city; what, in fact, we never do find when grace called and gathered elsewhere, and especially from among the Gentiles. There love surely was not wanting in the power of God; yet it never did take this shape, but one more adapted to the one body, wherever found on earth. So, too, we may observe the continuing in the temple as yet steadfastly, perhaps more so than ever, whilst they celebrated 'at home' (not 'from house to house') the Lord's Supper: deep and solemn joy in the remembrance of the Saviour, but unabated attachment as yet to the temple and its hours of prayer. Even ordinary meals were lit up with the happiness of His presence: how much more where all His self-sacrifice was before their eyes! Thus did they praise God, and all the people regarded them with the

favour with which they viewed Christ Himself in His earlier day (Luke 2:52). In the last verse, ‘to the assembly’ appears to be a gloss. ‘Together’, from Acts 3:1, should come in here: ‘and the Lord was adding day by day together those that were to be saved.’15 It was the church, but described, not yet so designated till Acts 5:11, where the saints there called out together are styled ‘the assembly’ or church.

Thus did God gather to the name of the Lord Jesus, His church began to be built. But He did not therefore forget His ancient people. In word and deed He appealed to their conscience, if haply they might repent, and He bring in the predicted times of blessing.

3 Text. Rec., followed by the Authorized Version ‘with one accord’, has ὁμοθυμαδὸν with one or two uncials and most cursives; but omou, ‘together’, is the reading of ABC, et al.

4 Some read with p.m. Dgr, some ancient versions and fathers ‘they’, but ABCE, the cursives, and other ancient versions support the singular. The plural is probably to suit the tongues’ just before.

5 Text. Rec., with the Authorized Version, adds

πρὸς ἀλλήλοῦσυ, ‘one to another’, with pretty good authority, but not the best.

6 There can be but little doubt that the interpolation of the word unknown in the Authorized Version of 1 Cor. 14:2, 4, 13, 19, 27, gave occasion to, and helped to consecrate, the delusion of the enemy. It is no small proof of the evils of these unwarranted additions, but I find another has anticipated me in remarking what occurred independently to my mind.

7 The critics depart from the Text. Rec. chiefly in forms which affect the sense so little that we need not notice them.

8 See note on previous page.

9 Tischendorf omits

καὶ ἐπιφανῆ (‘and manifest’) on the authority of D.

10 [It should be ‘believers’, not ‘men’; united with ‘Christ’, not with ‘God’.]

11 (Neander’s General History of the Christian Religion and Church i. ,2, pp. 248-250, Bohn’s edition.)

12 [For the Author’s criticism of the text, and his reasons for the rendering here given see his The Preaching to the Spirits in Prison, 1900, p. 133. Editor.]

13 Some ancient authorities add ‘in Jerusalem; and great fear was upon all’: apparently a gloss. Cf. Acts 5:5.

14 Canon W. G. Humphry would, with others, apply

κοινωνία here to ‘the communication of worldly goods’, but this does not suit the immediate connection, and is given in another form subsequently. Besides κοίνωνὶα requires to be modified as in Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4; and Heb. 13:16, to mean other than ‘communion’, as here.

15 It appears to me that

σώθητε, in ver. 40. refutes the prevalent mistake that

τοὺς σωζομένους means ‘those in process of salvation’ though this be grammatically possible and easy. But see Luke 13:23. So Heb. 10:10 shows that robs ἁγιαζομένους in ver. 14 cannot refer to present process. Not time, but character, is in question.

Acts 3

‘Now Peter and John were going up into the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth. And a certain man being lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid every day at the gate of the temple called Beautiful, to ask alms of those that entered into the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to enter into the temple, asked to receive alms. And Peter gazing on him with John said, Look on us. And he gave heed to them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, Silver and gold have I none, but what I have, this I give thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth walk. And grasping him by the right hand he raised [him] up; and immediately his feet and ankle-bones were made strong. And leaping up he stood and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God; and they recognized him that he it was that sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened to him’ (vers. 1-10).

The actual circumstances here recounted agree singularly with the special form the truth assumes. God is showing His long-suffering grace toward Israel though He has commenced an entirely distinct testimony and work in the gospel and in the church. So Peter and John, who were certainly behind none in the new position and testimony, are seen going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth. For the time at any rate they seem the better Jews for being so blessed as Christians. Not even their apostolic dignity, nor the power with which they

were just clothed, detached them. There at the Beautiful gate when about to enter the temple, a man lame from his birth (often seen, being habitually laid there) asked of them alms, and got a better blessing. For Peter, gazing on him with John, arrested his attention who expected to receive some little boon. But if discouraged by ‘Silver and gold have I none,’ he hears of something more indeed: ‘What I have, this I give thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth walk.’ And if the apostle promptly grasped his right hand and raised him up, immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength, so that leaping up he stood, walked, and entered with them into the temple, praising God. It was not done in a corner. All the people saw and heard, recognizing him to be the same that used to sit there begging; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had befallen him.

It was indeed a sign admirably calculated to awaken the Jews, to attest the grace of God towards their utter weakness, to manifest the power of the risen and glorified Messiah, and so much the more as it was not His presence but His answer from on high to the power of His name appealed to by His servant on earth. If such was the instant virtue of the name of Jesus for the lame man, what would not follow faith in that name if Israel believed?

‘And as he held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the portico that is called Solomon’s, greatly wondering. And Peter seeing [it] answered unto the people, Men of Israel, why marvel ye at this [man]? or why gaze ye at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him to walk? The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers,

did glorify His Servant Jesus; Whom ye delivered up and denied before Pilate's face when he decided [lit. judged] to release [Him]' (vers. 11-13). This was no uncertain sound. But all is in keeping. It is the God of our fathers Who glorified the Messiah, His Servant Jesus. 'Son' is not the thought, but Jehovah's 'Servant' as in Isa. 42, 49, 50, 52, 53, Whom the Jews had denied before the Roman judge when disposed, yea determined, to let Him go.

And who is this that so boldly charged the Jews with denying their own Messiah? The very man who not many weeks before had denied Him with oaths. But Peter immediately broke down in a sorrow which wrought repentance according to God, as he judged not only the ripe fruit but the root of his sin. Now restored, his feet washed, he is so completely cleansed from the defilement that he can without a blush or waver tax the men of Israel with the very sin from which he had been so lately freed himself. For redemption by the blood of Jesus had meanwhile come in, and its enjoyment is so much the greater as the believer judges himself before God. 'But ye denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you; but the Author [lit. Chief] of life ye killed, Whom God raised from among [the] dead, of which (or, Whom) we are witnesses, and on the faith of His name did His name make this man strong whom ye behold and know; and the faith that is by Him gave him this entireness before you all' (vers. 14-16). None can preach, any more than worship, dike a soul once cleansed, having no more conscience of sins. How desperate their position! The Holy and Righteous One (Isa. 53:11) they denied; a murderer they desired as a favour: God was distinctly against them in raising up from the dead the Author of

life Whom they slew; and the apostles were witnesses of this; as His name through faith in it made the lame man strong whom they looked on and knew. What and where were they in gainsaying unbelief of Him Who responded to the faith by Him and in Him, that gave such a cripple this entireness in presence of them all?

Then does the apostle explain how so dreadful a deed could be on their part. ‘And now, brethren, I know that ye acted in ignorance, as also your rulers, but God thus fulfilled what He announced before by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer’ (vers. 17, 18). In one way this might aggravate the degraded condition of God’s ancient people; for how came they and their rulers to be so ignorant? They knew neither the scripture nor the power of God. They valued neither grace nor truth. They saw works, they heard words, such as man never experienced before; yet were they more besotted than heathen, duller than their own beasts of burden. But He Who suffered for them on the cross prayed to His Father to forgive them, for they knew not what they did; and now the Holy Spirit through the apostle assures them that so it was, as a plea for divine compassion. That His Christ should suffer was no afterthought of God Who predicted it by all the prophets, and thus fulfilled it. So must the people learn their blind iniquity; so would God manifest His mercy Who gave Christ as a propitiation for their offences.

‘Repent, therefore, and be converted for the blotting out of your sins, so that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and He may send forth Him that hath been foreappointed for you, Jesus Christ, Whom heaven indeed must receive till times of restoring

all things, whereof God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets since time began' (vers. 19-21).

Here we have the condition of blessing to the Jews. Seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord are vainly sought for them as a people, till they repent and turn again for the blotting out of their sins. So the Lord had intimated when He bowed to their rejection of Him, and declared their house left to them desolate: 'Ye shall not see Me henceforth till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord' — of Jehovah. Whensoever their heart shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away. They will be converted for the blotting out of their sins. They will in heart welcome their long-despised Messiah, and Jehovah will send Him. There will be at least a remnant converted and awaiting His advent, and He will appear to their deliverance and the discomfiture of their enemies, as many scriptures bear witness. Of that godly remnant not a few will be put to death, and these, whether earlier or later sufferers, shall be raised in time to join the saints already glorified, so that they all may reign with Christ during the thousand years according to Rev. 20:4. Those who escape and survive will become the first and most honoured nucleus for the kingdom on earth, when heaven no longer has within it the Christ foreappointed for them, Jesus, and times for restoring all things dawn on earth.

For God does mean to bless this long-groaning creation, and He inspired the mouth of His holy prophets to speak of it since time began. They therefore do greatly err who deny the immense and universal blessing in store for Israel, the nations, the earth, yea, even the lower creation. They do not know how God intends to crown men here below with loving-kindness and tender

mercies, when He shall open His hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. Judgment, undoubtedly, must fall previously; and Jehovah shall punish the host of the high ones on high, and the kings of the earth on the earth. Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when Jehovah of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion and Jerusalem, and before His ancients gloriously. For the great distinctive feature is to be, along with the exclusion of Satan and his power, the mighty and beneficent presence and reign of Jehovah-Jesus, Who with righteousness shall judge the poor and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth, after He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall slay the wicked. 'And righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins. The wolf also 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. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice'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. And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse which shall stand for an ensign of the peoples: to it shall the Gentiles seek and His rest shall be glorious' (Isa. 11:5-10).

What a gap in the thoughts and desires of saints who expect none of these great and glorious changes in honour of Jesus! How defective the outlook where the grand purposes of God for the reversal of the world's

ruin and misery since sin entered it are unknown! It will be noticed that here nothing is said of the still more magnificent circle of blessing revealed in Eph. 1:10, when God will place under the headship of Christ all things that are in heaven and all things that are on earth. In our text we have only the earthly things in relation to Messiah and Israel, not the whole universe put under Christ and the heavenly saints.

Meanwhile the Jews refused to repent, and the kingdom, instead of being brought in, is postponed till they are converted for the blotting out of their sins at a future day, so that seasons of refreshing may come from Jehovah's presence, and Messiah be sent from heaven, according to the prophetic word.

'Moses indeed said, A prophet shall [the] Lord our God raise up from among your brethren as [He did] me; Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever He shall speak unto you. And it shall be that every soul which shall not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel, and those in succession, as many as spoke did also announce these days. Ye are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God covenanted with our fathers, saying unto Abraham And in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. To you first, God, having raised up His Servant, sent Him to bless you in turning away each from your iniquities' (vers. 22-26).

During the interval God turns the time of Jewish unbelief to the gospel call of the Gentiles, as well as to the formation of the body, the church one with Christ, wherein is neither Jew nor Greek. Here Peter is still exhorting them to repent, and in case of it pledging the

return of Christ to establish the time of predicted peace and blessing. For Jesus was clearly the Prophet raised up, like Moses, but incomparably greater, as Moses himself bore witness in Deut. 18:15: none could refuse His words with impunity, but to his own destruction. ‘And all the prophets from Samuel, and those in succession, as many as spoke, did also announce these days.’ As the Jews were sons of the prophets and of God’s covenant with their fathers, according to the promised blessing in the seed of Abraham, so was Jesus, His anointed Servant, sent to them first to bless them in turning away each from their iniquities.

It is not yet the heavenly testimony of Paul, nor even what Peter preached to those converted and believing in Christ, as in Acts 2, but his call to the Jew responsible to hear the final appeal to that nation.

Acts 4

The discourse of the apostle was interrupted at this point, but this is lost to many a reader by the division of the chapters.

‘Now as they were speaking unto the people, the priests and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being distressed because of their teaching the people, and announcing in Jesus the resurrection from [the] dead, and they laid hands on them and put them in ward unto the morrow, for it was already evening. But many of those that heard the word believed, and the number of the men became about five thousand’ (vers. 1-4).

Religious authority took umbrage. Who were these men to speak within the precincts of the temple? It is true that a mighty miracle had been wrought publicly and undeniably; but officials are sensitive to any invasion of their rights, and are apt to leave God out of the account, speaking as of the world and knowing none else than the world to hear them. But a class came forward now, which had been comparatively in the background whilst the Lord lived and laboured. Then were the Pharisees His active adversaries, the advocates of defective and spurious righteousness, opposing the Righteous One. Now the enemy had ready another and very different body among the Jews, the Sadducees, roused from their habitual calm by a truth which convicted them of utter infidelity and of consequent antagonism to God and His word. Miracles were bad enough in the eyes of the free-thinkers, they brought the power of God too near, they were a sign to unbelievers that they might hear the

truth. But the resurrection, exemplified in the person of Jesus, was intolerable; and none so intolerant as those who boast of tolerating every shade, when the truth confronts them. The mild Sadducee outdoes the previously fierce Pharisee, none so disturbed by the announcement of Jesus risen from the dead.

And no wonder. The resurrection of Him Whom man had just slain is the plain, conclusive, and irrefragable proof of God's power according to His word, the most complete refutation of those who admit nothing beyond the natural course of things in this world. Laws which govern that course none dispute, nor the knowledge of such laws as men call science. But the resurrection proves One above those laws, which in no way control or limit His power, as He will demonstrate in the day in which He makes all things new. Meanwhile the raising of Jesus from the dead, while the ordinary course goes on, is the sufficient and striking witness to the power which will destroy the world that now is, and create a new one, wholly different, to His own glory.

Hence the sceptical school took fire at the apostles for proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead; for it laid bare their evil unbelief and convicted them of being enemies of the truth. fighting against God Himself. Otherwise they would have inquired into the facts; and, comparing them with the scriptures, they must have rejoiced that He had done so blessed and glorious a thing according to His word. For the resurrection of Christ is the pledge that those who are Christ's shall rise as He rose: He is avowedly the firstfruits of those fallen asleep by Him. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. They are the heads of the two families, the Adam family, and the Christ family, death

having come in by the one head, as now resurrection by the other. Those that are Christ's rise at His coming. It is a resurrection from among the dead, as His was, and they reign with Him for a thousand years. The rest of the dead do not live till the thousand years have been completed. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. No one doubts that in another sense they will reign for ever, to the ages of ages, as will all the godly who are to be born of God during the millennial reign. But this period of special reigning over the earth ought not to be ignored because of the eternal blessedness of the glorified after the kingdom is over and the new heaven and earth are come in the absolute sense, the wicked having been raised, judged, and cast into the lake of fire. Theirs is not a resurrection from the dead, for there are no more dead left in the grave, they themselves being the last remainder after the righteous are raised.

Thus it was not merely the truth of resurrection which roused Sadducean spite, but that of the resurrection from the dead. The resurrection of the unjust, of the mass of mankind, is not 'from among' the dead like the resurrection of the just; it is the effect of the power of Christ, the Son of God, when He summons the wicked from their graves to judgment. The righteous have life In the Son now, and rise to a resurrection of life; as the unjust to a resurrection of judgment a thousand years after, when they must honour Him Whom they now despise. So perfectly does John 5 agree with Rev. 20. There is no discrepancy; but there are two resurrections according to Scripture, not one only. 'The general'

indiscriminate resurrection of the creeds is according to tradition, but is a fable. There will be a resurrection of both just and unjust, of the just to reign with Christ at His coming, of the unjust to be judged by Him before He delivers up the kingdom to Him Who is God and Father, when He shall have abolished all rule and all authority and power. Men, and even believers, whose mind is on the things of men, are offended at the grace which discriminates now, as it will yet more manifestly by the resurrection from the dead. They prefer a 'dim religious light', with its vagueness and uncertainty; they shrink from that blessed hope — at least in any definite shape — which is the fruit of sovereign grace for the believer, involving as it does the solemn and dark background of judgment for all who despise both grace and truth in Christ.

But if the apostles were put in ward that evening till the morrow, the word was not bound, the true light was already shining. Many of those that heard believed. The number of men rose to about five thousand. This would suppose not a few women and children. Compare Matt. 14:21; Luke 9:14; John 6:10. No sufficient reason appears for taking 'men' (ἀνδρῶν) otherwise than with its usual precision.

'And it came to pass on the morrow that their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together at Jerusalem, and Annas, the high priest and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of high-priestly lineage. And having set them in the midst they inquired, By what power, or in what name, did ye this? Then Peter, filled with [the] Holy Spirit, said unto them, Rulers of the people and elders [of Israel], if we this day are examined as to a good deed done to an infirm man, whereby he

hath been cured, be it known to you all and to all the people of Israel that in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Whom ye crucified, Whom God raised from [the] dead, in [or, by] Him [or, in this (name)] he standeth before you whole. He is the Stone that was set at naught by you the builders, that was made head of [the] corner. And in none other is there salvation, for neither is there a different name under heaven that is given among men by which we must be saved' (vers. 5-12).

On the morrow flocked together the religious authorities from the highest, including all grades, and the two apostles were challenged. Peter answered in the power of the Spirit Who filled him, that the good deed was done in His name Whom they had crucified, and God had raised from the dead, Whom His word characterizes as the Stone, set at naught by the builders, yet become the head of the corner, the rejected but exalted Messiah. What a situation for the rulers and people of Israel! And what a light on all that had befallen 'Jesus Christ of Nazareth' was afforded by the testimony of scripture to the Stone, the unquestionable figure used of old about the Messiah!

Consider ever so briefly Gen. 49:22-24; Ps. 118:22 (the very passage referred to), Isa. 28:16, Dan. 2:34, 44, 45, specially with the use made of it by our Lord Himself in Matt. 21:42-44; to which we may add Eph. 2:20, and 1 Peter 2:7, 8. There is first His relation to Israel; then His rejection by the chiefs, but His exaltation notwithstanding; next, Jehovah's commendation of Him to the believer in the face of divine judgment, and, lastly, His establishment of God's kingdom here below, to the destruction of the Gentile powers which had displaced

Israel. The New Testament while it of course confirms, supplements all this by connecting the Stone with the two advents of the Messiah, rendered necessary alike by God's grace and His judgment, and by Israel's unbelief now and future repentance in view of His coming again, crowned by Christ's place as chief cornerstone, Who brings even now those of the Jews who believe in Him into better blessings than the nation will by and by receive at His appearing, that is, to be now a holy and a royal priesthood with all that is suited to each of these blessed relationships.

Into this Peter does not enter here; for he was addressing not the believing remnant of Christian Jews, but the proud and bitter enemies of both Christ and the Christian. But he does set forth, to Christ's honour, and in love even to those who had so guiltily cast Him out, the plain and exclusive assurance of salvation in Christ. 'In none other is there salvation, for neither is there another — a different — name under heaven that is given among men whereby we must be saved.' How blessed that, though God has set Him up at His own right hand in heaven, His name is given under heaven among men on earth, by which we must be saved if saved at all! It is here and now that we must be saved; for it is of grace and by faith. There is no other name — our own least of all; and no other way, for He is the way. Faith exalts the Saviour and the God Who gave Him, and leaves no room for works of righteousness of our doing, even were we capable of them, which in our unbelieving state we certainly were not. All is of grace; but grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. How awful that men should neglect so great a salvation — yea, though, on behalf of

Christ, His servants beseech them to be reconciled to God!

For the servants of Christ the conflict was now beginning. On the one side worldly power and religion, position and numbers; on the other, faith in His name Whom their adversaries had crucified. What could have seemed more unequal? Yes, to those who leave out God, and His Son, and the Spirit sent down from heaven. But in the believer is not this inexcusable unbelief? Why do we not always reckon on divine intervention, till He is judicially giving up people to their own delusions?

'Now beholding the boldness of Peter and John, and aware that they were unlettered and simple men, they wondered, and recognized them that they were with Jesus' (ver. 13). In none does the Spirit's power shine more conspicuously than in such as can boast nothing of this world's advantages. For high and low cry up the learning of the schools: the high, as making the most of what they themselves have enjoyed; the low, in general as excusing their own deficiency and overvaluing what they have not. But in the things of God nothing has power like faith in the God Who is glorifying Christ. And learning, whenever leaned on as an object, so far from being a help, is apt to become a positive hindrance and a real snare. Man as such is capable of attaining it in the highest degree; and pride generally follows, as well as the applause of men. But the ways of God are not as ours, and He was pleased to humble man, not only by Christ crucified, but by choosing the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise. In the front rank of those stand the apostles who, speaking broadly, had not one distinction in the eyes of the world, not one trait of which flesh could vaunt.

Such certainly were Peter and John now in presence of Jewish rulers who, having rejected Jesus, had lost God, and were putting forth nothing but an arm of flesh against His purposes and His servants. The rulers saw their bold bearing on the one hand, and on the other their lack of polite letters or of any public position which could whet their powers or impart experience and presence of mind. If they could not but wonder, they did also recognize their having been with Jesus. This could only aggravate their uneasiness, especially as an unanswerable witness was present.

'And seeing the man that was healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply' (ver. 14). How solemn the position of men who, bearing the name of God's people, are so entangled by the enemy that they cannot deny the truth to which they are at the same time determined not to bow! To own it would be, they think, their ruin. Not so in truth, but their salvation! It would have been the humbling discovery of their sin, and of God's unspeakable grace, of a rejected but exalted Messiah, Whose name by faith in it brings life and remission of sins. But no: they will not come to Him that they may have life. They love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. They value the glory of men and not the glory of God, Who is in none of their thoughts. It is not only the unbelieving who perish, but the fearful, the cowardly, bent on present interests according to their own reckoning, and for their own pleasure, in contempt of evidence to their consciences adequate, yea overwhelming, that they are fighting against God. Did there not stand before all with the apostles a man who notoriously had never before stood?

Their guilty dilemma they did not disguise from themselves, nor one from another when they got rid of the presence of those who morally condemned them. ‘But, having commanded them to go aside out of the council, they were conferring among themselves, saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable sign hath been done through them [is] manifest to all that inhabit Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it be not spread farther among the people, let us threaten them severely [lit. with threat] to speak to no man longer in [lit. on] this name’ [vers. 15-17]. Here the unerring word of God lays bare the workings of hardened feeling without conscience among His enemies; and none are so bitter, none so obdurate, as those who, responsible as His people to do His will have made up their mind to do the* own. They fully knew the remarkable deed just wrought by the apostle; they recognized it as not merely a miracle but ‘a sign’, yet did they strengthen themselves against the Almighty, running on the thick bosses of His buckler. In the face of the evident finger and instructive lesson of God, they deliberately strive together to extinguish its effects. They are well aware that ‘these men’ claim nothing for themselves, assert nothing but the name of Jesus. But this is the very name they themselves most fear and would banish for ever if they could. How vainly! It is the day pre-eminently for bearing witness to Jesus. This is the true and great business of the believer; this his one unfailing joy and duty: in the gospel, in the church, with friend or with foe, with few or with many, habitually in word, often in deed, sometimes in silence, but always, are we called to be His witnesses. Had not He Himself said to these very men with others, as His last charge, ‘Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come

upon you, and ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth'? Could those blind, plotting, self-condemned Jewish rulers stifle that testimony? So they hoped in the infatuation of unbelief which hid their own exceeding iniquity as well as God's will and glory from their eyes. But faith vanquishes the world.

The charge not to speak at all nor teach in reference to (or resting on) the name of Jesus, which the council laid on Peter and John, was therefore as bold as it was wicked, and the more so as emanating from rulers claiming the highest authority in religion (ver. 18). How solemn to think that unwittingly they so treated their own Messiah! And why was it unwitting? Had God given them ineffectual light by the prophets? They own at that moment a manifest sign in the man that was healed. This they could not deny, that they would not believe. And so abiding in darkness they knew not the impiety of their enforcing silence about the Messiah Whose loving-kindness was better than life to His servants.

'But Peter and John answering said unto them, Whether it be right before God to hear you rather than God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard' (vers. 19, 20). This reply put the case with unanswerable plainness and moral power. A ruler, especially a religious one, is bound to uphold what is righteous before God, and their charge simply amounted to heeding themselves in preference to God, for they demanded not a word more in the name of Jesus, though God had openly and just now honoured it unmistakably.

As for the apostles, faith in Christ, love to souls, special call, divine authority, and devotedness to His glory, all

wrought to open their lips in His testimony and praise. The things they had seen and heard were so bound up with what was due to Jehovah and His Anointed, as well as with the believer's blessedness and the unbeliever's misery, that, woe be to them if they held their peace! A necessity was laid on them no less than on Paul at a later day (1 Cor. 9:16). They had received a personal command from Him by Whom kings rule in divine providence; only theirs was on the ground of grace and truth unknown to earthly governors as such, and for ends immeasurably higher and more enduring. Were those who claimed His sanction in a lower sphere authorized to set it aside in a higher? They might attempt it, but as surely would it be to their own irremediable destruction, as it would be in vain for those who heard the voice of One on high mightier than the noise of many waters, let the floods lift up their voice never so loftily.

'And they having further threatened them let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them on account of the people; because all were glorifying God for what had been done. For the man on whom this sign of healing was wrought was more than forty years old' (vers. 21, 22).

Threatening, and further threatening, are tokens of weakness and ill-will, not of power which knows how to forbear till the critical moment come. It is the natural resource of such as have not the truth, and can find no plea of unrighteousness in those they would punish. In this case too, as often, the people were feared, not God. Not that they loved but rather despised the people; but they were necessary as an instrument of influence and the loss of this they dreaded above all. What a contrast

with that Ruler, Who is just, ruling in the fear of God! Their character is as darkness, and the end death: He, as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain.

Government, poor as it may be now, is right and needful; but it is never right when those who should exercise it shrink from fear of the people, instead of acting before God Who authorized them. Alas! it was the religious council that was without God and opposed to Him; and the poor and simple, ignorant as they might be, in this case did all glorify God for that which was done. They were familiar for many years with the sufferer who by divine power was healed; and they had no class interest which was wounded by owning the good hand of God. The Jewish rulers feared not God but the people, and would have punished the holy servants of Christ if they could only have found an excuse plausible before men. They were in the darkness of nature, with the pride of possessing the law of God, and under the direction of Satan. The wisdom of their wise was perishing, and the understanding of their prudent hid. Learned or unlearned were obliged alike to own in the presence of His revealed mind that they could not read it.

Henceforth His word was with the servants and confessors of the Lord Jesus, the Spirit given them was self-evidently not of cowardly fear, but of power and love and a sober mind. The truth of Christ too nearly concerns God and man to be shelved. If truly received, it commands conscience and heart, mind and soul. If the rulers could not deny the sign before their eyes, still less could the apostles refrain from confessing the name of Jesus, the Saviour in heaven for man on earth. For them

to withhold God's glad tidings in Christ would have been treason spiritually. Indifference to Christ or the gospel is cousin-germane to infidelity.

Undeniably there was now a power on earth intrinsically superior to that of man beyond all comparison, but not yet at work so as to preclude shame and suffering, above all for Christ's sake. Nor was it merely with dark heathenism that it clashed, but with the highest authority of the Jewish people, now proving themselves as opposed at least as the heathen to the light and truth and power of God manifested by the presence of the Holy Spirit here below. The wonders and signs done by the apostles, the tongues of the Gentiles spoken in a moment by Jewish Christians who had never learnt them, the mighty works of God in redemption set forth, and unselfish grace raising the believers above what not only their own habits craved, but the nature of man universally, did not, rich as they are, constitute the entire testimony for the name of the Lord Jesus.

A particular sign before the temple, done in His name, had roused not more the amazement of the multitude than the jealous fears of the religious chiefs, sore troubled because they proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. How blinding is the influence of unbelief! They could not deny the reality of the miracle; they would not believe the gospel. They put in ward and further threatened the instruments of divine power. They have not a word to say about their own Scriptures bearing witness to their rejection and God's exaltation of the Messiah; yet they charged the apostles not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus, desirous of punishing them, but finding as yet no means how to do so, because of the people whose favour they

dreaded to lose, without the fear of God. A truly lamentable picture of those who claimed to be exclusively His people on the earth!

Little did they know that God had begun to call a new corps of witnesses from His ancient people, and that He would gather in more from the Gentiles. And so the Spirit is intimating in this very Book as a fact, the ground of which is explained in the Epistles.

‘But being let go they came unto their own [company], and reported all that [or, whatsoever] the chief priests and the elders said unto them. And they on hearing [it] with one accord lifted up [their] voice unto God and said, Master, Thou [art] He that made the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and all that in them [is]; Who16 by [the] Holy Spirit, [by the] mouth of our father David Thy servant, didst say, Why did Gentiles rage and peoples meditate vain things? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Anointed [or, Christ]. For of a truth in this city against Thy holy Servant Jesus Whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with Gentiles and peoples of Israel were gathered to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel foreordained to come to pass. And now, Lord, look upon their threatenings, and give to Thy bondmen with all boldness to speak Thy word, while [lit., in that] Thou stretchest forth Thy hand for healing and that signs and wonders be done by the name of Thy holy Servant Jesus’ (vers. 23-30).

What made these believers ‘their own company’? What drew the two apostles to them instinctively and immediately on their dismissal from the council? It was

the Spirit of God Who had gathered them to the name of the risen Christ. The people of Israel, their leaders at least, were now becoming their enemies as His, a new people was being formed with a High Priest sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, not man. For He has obtained a ministry the more excellent, by how much also He is the Mediator of a better covenant which has been enacted upon better promises [Heb. 8:1, 2, 6]. It is not that they then understood their own privileges as they are here put, nor that the statement here cited covers their best and highest blessings; but they knew the One on high Who was the accomplishment and securer of all, and hence they were more and more attracted to the circle of those who confessed Him and detached in principle, as gradually more in heart, from their old belongings and their old boast.

And ‘their own company’ responded with one accord on hearing their report of all that the religious chiefs of the nation had said. Their utterance is a remarkable outpouring to God, and proves how deeply they err who fancy that there can be no agreement in prayer save through a previously composed and commonly possessed form: a grave interference with, and practical denial of, the power of the Holy Spirit, the only right and adequate spring of all that should characterize the assembly of God. For He it was Who guided in this spontaneous spreading out before God of their then passing circumstances, according to the written word and in striking identification with the Lord Jesus. ‘Master,’ said they, in the sense of Sovereign owner and disposer of all, ‘Thou art He that made the heavens and

the earth, and the sea, and all that in them is.' They acknowledge His glory in creation, but turn at once to His prophetic word through David in the beginning of Psalm 2. This they distinctly apply to that unnatural combination, which Jerusalem had just beheld, between Gentiles and Jews, between Herod and Pontius Pilate, against Jesus the Messiah. He Who at first created all, governed all, and He had revealed His will in His word though not yet was it all fulfilled.

For beyond a doubt it was of the Holy Ghost that David so spoke. To no event since the Psalm was written can the opening words apply save to the one just before them, of that strange union and daring guilt they do speak with precision, where Jew and Gentile set themselves with their rulers in array against Jehovah and His Anointed as never before or since. There are great principles in Scripture, but also exclusively personal prophecies. But though the disciples discern in it a Satan-directed conspiracy, in which evil seemed to have all its way without check even to the crucifying of the Lord of glory, they are clear that the enemy with all his hosts has in reality gained nothing but defeat. The others thought it not at all when they held their council and adjudged Jesus to the death of the cross; but they were gathered by Him Who is higher than the highest, to do whatsoever His hand and His counsel predetermined to be done.

And so it ever is, even in this world lying in the wicked one though it be, but not always so conspicuously as the written word made it in that which was and is so infinitely momentous to God and man. But how solemn to see 'in this city', as everywhere, that men who are the nearest concerned, the perpetrators of these horrors

against God and His Christ, are the last to perceive the import of their own acts, still less God's gracious and worthy purposes by them! In truth, not one sparrow falls on the ground without Him; and the very hairs of our head are all numbered.

Futile and wicked effort! The murderous violence of man but rivets the bands and cords he would burst asunder. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. But this is far from all in the second Psalm. Then shall He speak to them in His wrath and vex them in His sore displeasure. This, however, is not yet, for, instead of judgments to punish their evil and overwhelm their pride, His grace is meanwhile sending out the gospel — repentance and remission of sins preached in the name of Jesus to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. The promise of His Father is sent forth on the disciples, the Holy Ghost as power from on high to associate those who believe with Himself in heaven. When this work of heavenly grace is done, God will take His place for the earth and in Israel especially. He has in no way forgotten or repented of His promise to Abraham or David. 'Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: Jehovah hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession.'

Do any contend that this latter part of the Psalm is now accomplished, 'spiritually' as they call it, under the gospel? It is perfectly demonstrable that such a straining of Scripture is precluded by the context. For it is therein declared that Messiah shall [not save, nor unite to Himself as members of His body but] break

them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. So Rev. 2:27 shows that the faithful who are now being called will share in this with Christ at His coming, instead of its being fulfilled in some allegorical way at the present — a sense unworthy of all just interpretation. Hence the final appeal is to the kings and judges of the earth to pay homage to Jehovah and the Son, lest He be angry, and they perish under ever so little a kindling of His wrath. It is not a call to the poor and heavy-laden to believe the gospel; it is a question of the future and manifest kingdom of God when the Son of man comes in power and glory. Compare Psalm 8: and Daniel 2; Dan. 7. Still, whether it be then or now, blessed are all they that put their trust in Him.

In vain do some, following a few Rabbis, limit or even apply such words to the reign of David or Solomon, for the words go beyond their glory, and still more of their successors. Neither attempted to reign to the ends of the earth, or required the homage of its kings as such; nor was any man called to trust in either; nor was lack of reverence visited with such perdition. That Christ has not yet executed the judgment of verse 9 is no proof that He will not, but is rather the solemn assurance that He will.

In connection with our Scripture it is noticeable that those who so definitely use the Psalm for its accomplishment in the uprising against the Messiah stop short there. Not a thought is expressed by them of His asking for Jehovah's giving the heathen for His inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession (ver. 8). Christ is occupied with His heavenly relations and offices now. He will ask for the earth when He is about to come and execute judgment on the living

and the dead. Then will be His appearing and His kingdom. Now He is hid in God, the source of gifts for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ, till we all come unto the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God (Eph. 4:11-13).

Hence the praying saints do not now ask for such vengeance from God on their adversaries, as we find in the Old Testament, and emphatically in the Psalms which reflect the inmost feeling of the godly concerned, whether in their past preparatory accomplishment or in their complete fulfilment at the end of the age. It is not, as many in ignorant presumption dare to think, that these intercessions against the wicked, as in Psalms 6, 10, 54, 59, 83, and the like, are vindictive; they are solemnly judicial when the time and instruments are there to pour out God's wrath on all who despise Him. But now it is the day of grace and salvation, the accepted time: while Christ sits on the right hand of God; and the Holy Ghost is uniting to Him the one body, the church; and sovereign grace in the gospel flows out, overflowing for the time all difference between Jew and Gentile who are called to heavenly glory. In a spirit suitable to this do they pray, 'And now, Lord, look upon their threatenings, and give to Thy bondmen with all boldness to speak Thy word, while Thou stretchest forth Thy hand for healing, and that signs and wonders be done by the name of Thy Servant Jesus' (vers. 29, 30).

It was enough for their hearts that the Lord should look upon the threats of those that sought their injury: He knew best what to permit and what to restrain; and He could deliver. For themselves they besought grace to speak His word with all boldness or liberty. Is this what

we are doing or seeking? Do we prize it as our chief joy and duty and business on the earth? Is it merely with Christian companions of like mind, spending an hour or two in the morning with people of leisure, and in the evening with those who have closed their earthly toils? This may be all well; but in such circumstances it is apt to be sitting over the word rather than the word over them, admiring the things which they know, and criticizing those who do not know the wondrous counsels and ways of grace. Far different was the heart of these early saints who had so much to learn; but in their faith they supplied, or added, that moral courage and zeal for Christ and divine love which drew them out to speak His word 'wish all boldness'.

The Lord granted their desire, not merely in setting at naught when He saw fit for His glory the threatenings of His and their enemies, but in rendering free and bold witness to Himself. His word ran and was glorified, as we shall see; and believers were the more added to the Lord multitudes of both men and women. They spoke of Him devotedly, and abundantly did He bless them. It never occurred to their simple minds that they should preach for preaching's sake, with the inevitable and deserved result of absolutely no fruit. Speaking His word, they looked to Him that it would issue to His glory in bringing souls to God and filling them with divine joy in His grace.

It is true that their faith, according to the word of the Lord (Mark 16:17, 18), counted on more than spiritual blessing. The healing of the sick or infirm, in His name, they desired, as a precious and significant token to unbelievers. So had the Master wrought when here; so would they His bondmen do in witness of His gracious

power, as He was risen and in heaven Who had vanquished Satan, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that followed. In the confidence of this guarantee on His part they ask Him to grant them with all boldness to speak His word, whilst He stretches forth His hand for healing, and that signs and wonders be done in the name of the holy Servant Jesus.

This power was seasonable where God was inaugurating the infinite fact of the Holy Spirit sent down in person from heaven and now permanently making the assembly to be His habitation, His temple or house on earth What honour too for Him Whom the Jews had crucified by the hand of lawless men, that these signs and wonders were done ‘through the name of His Servant Jesus’! When the name of the Lord was professed throughout Christendom, there would have been no adequate object, or even propriety, in the continuance of such signs, the Scriptures being then accepted in that sphere as the true and full revelation of God. And inasmuch as that profession of acceptance for the most was unreal and superficial and increasingly to the denial by their works of the Lord Whom they professed how morally incongruous would have been the continuance of these external tokens of honour and power!

The more one weighs the matter, the more fitting does it seem that He Who vouchsafed miracles at the beginning should not have bound them as an inalienable heirloom to the church or to His servants. He promised that they would follow ‘those that believe’; and so they did. He never intimated that they were to follow perpetually or absolutely. And they then ceased in His wisdom, as they really could not be now without the danger, yea

certainty, of ill results to His dishonour; for they must tend to gloss over the present ruin-state of the assembly, to blunt the conscience of all, if all had them, or to inflate a few if only exercised by a few.

The testimony, the word of God, was then the prime desire which they spread before Him, for they sought mercy and blessing for their adversaries, not vengeance; and the seals of power they asked at His hand did not consist of consuming fire from above, or of the earth opening to devour the foe, but rather of ‘healing’, and, if ‘signs and wonders’, they besought them ‘through the name of His holy Servant Jesus’, because their hearts were set on the honour of the Son, even as they honoured the Father. The power prayed for was not for apostolic influence or authority, but for His glory Who made Himself a bondman, and to commend the word that reveals Him. It was the Creator, Who, after predicting through His servant David, had now accomplished His work, even by means of His enemies.

It will be noticed that the critical text differs not a little from the Received, not merely in omitting ‘God’ in ver. 24, and giving ‘in this city’ in ver. 27, but yet more in the singular addition ‘by [the] Holy Spirit’ in ver. 25, given by ABE and other authorities. It is difficult to conceive the ordinary text deliberately changed into that ancient form with its unusual apparent harshness; it is easy to understand that later copyists might soften the phrase. It is not often that the older witnesses give us greater copiousness; but here we have distinct instances of it. Further, in vers. 27 and 30, as in Acts 3:13, 26, the true counterpart is ‘Servant’, and not ‘Son’, nor even ‘Child’ here, answering to Isaiah 13:1; Isaiah 52:13; as indeed the Authorized Version rightly translates in ver. 25. Only

in the prayer Jesus is here carefully distinguished from David as His ‘holy’ One.

A distinct and immediate answer to united prayer was now given, faith as ever, receiving more than it asked. ‘And when they prayed, the place wherein they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the17 Holy Spirit, and spoke the word of God with boldness. And the heart and soul of the multitude of those that believed were one; and not one said that aught of his possessions was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power did the apostles render the witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all. For neither was there anyone in want among them; for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold [them] and brought the prices of the things that were being sold, and laid [them] at the feet of the apostles, and distribution was made to each according as anyone had need. And Joseph that by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas (which is, being interpreted, Son of exhortation), a Levite a Cyprian by birth, having a field, sold [it] and brought the money and laid [it] at the feet of the apostles’ (vers. 31-37).

The voice of Jehovah shakes the wilderness. He looks on the earth, and it trembles. So when He comes to reign, the earth will see and tremble. Here it was not in judgment, but in grace that He gave this outward token of His intervention, not conveying as in an earthquake the idea of some universal and unlimited danger, but by its peculiar form, limited to the place wherein they were assembled, giving the conviction that He heard and watched over them for His own glory.

But there was more and better than any external sign. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke (not now, as far as we are told, with other tongues, but) the word of God with boldness. It was the presence of God manifested most suitably in power but grace withal. It was wholly distinct from that operation of the Spirit where a soul is born anew. It was the energy of the Holy Spirit, shown outwardly as well as in believers: the Spirit not only given, but excluding the action of flesh so that, for the time at least, nothing wrought which was not of Himself. It was spiritual power but in the dependence of faith, uttering not merely strong and original ideas but the word of God with boldness, as became His servants, confiding in His perfect grace, and feeling the ruin of man without Christ. Before this, two of the apostles, when forbidden by the high authorities of Israel, pleaded, 'We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard' (Acts 4:20). They were all now animated with like faith and fervour in the Holy Ghost. It was no small thing for any to be thus strengthened; how much more to see an entire company of such confessors!

How are they characterized? 'And the heart and soul of the multitude of those that believed were one.' Never before Pentecost had such a time appeared on earth. What is described is, if possible, more vividly spiritual now that opposition came out distinctly against them. All savours of His presence Who deigned to come down from heaven and make the saints the dwelling-place of God. The Holy Spirit it is Whose energy works all that is acceptable to God, all that is edifying for man. Without Him there had been only so many individuals. The Spirit unites to Christ, He also and thereby gives practical

unity as here. The heart and soul of those that believed, though a multitude, was one. Undoubtedly such unity could not have been without one supreme and absorbing object, even Christ, but there was also needed the power of the Spirit to exclude the activity of each several will. For flesh loves to differ, and seeks its own things. Next, they all sought the things of Jesus Christ, though without intelligence of union with Christ or heavenly relationships. Yet never before nor since has there been in any communion on earth an equal testimony to deliverance through His name from the selfishness of nature and the pride of the world, never more sustained joy in God or more mutual love through our Lord Jesus. It was the accomplishment of the prayer in John 17:20, 21, 'that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me.' Their heart and soul were one. The expression of the inspired historian is more energetic, as the practical unity in grace was realized with singular brightness before the world. No sign of greater weakness in the church than division of way, feeling, or thought; no more evident mark of the Spirit's power than unity of which Christ is the spring and character.

Next follows, as fresh as ever, that unexampled token of superiority to personal interests which Pentecost first beheld. 'And not one said that aught of his possessions was his own; but they had all things common.' Certainty this was in no sense law but grace; but is it not surprising that any believing the scriptures should elude the plain and blessed fact? It was a state of things beautifully suited to the church when it was all in Jerusalem, and in the full early bloom created by the

ungrieved Holy Spirit: when saints were gathered to the Lord elsewhere, we find it no more. Communion of goods, so far as it was carried out in grace, in the nature of things could only be rightly whilst all the members were in one place. When the Lord wrought in other places, the saints were as near in divine relationship as those that dwelt in the same city. That which was peculiar to the assembly in Jerusalem then merged into more ordinary and comprehensive forms of love toward all the saints wherever found, for the church on earth is one, and we are members one of another, even if in the most distant quarter of the globe. We have then instruction and exhortation of the most precious kind about giving, as in Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 16; 2 Cor. 8, 9, Gal. 6; Eph.4; Phil. 4; 1 Tim. 6; Heb. 13, et al., clearly supposing no such state as all things common, but rather rich and poor who were appealed to accordingly. The word of the Lord, though to us always true, was receiving its most marked application: 'Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world (age) to come, eternal life' (Mark. 10:29, 30).

Here too we are told of the prominent place Christ's resurrection held in apostolic teaching. 'And with great power did the apostles render the witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.' Need it be urged that the apostles were right, not the moderns who preach the Lord in His service, or in His death, and there practically stop? For thus do these curtail the true

witness of its blessed fulness; and all their preaching, not to say their faith, suffers. For why sever the resurrection from the death of Christ? If He ‘be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain: ye are yet in your sins’. Without His resurrection there is no proof that our sins are gone, ourselves justified, and God glorified. Where resurrection is not held fast in power, the door is ever open both to ignore man’s total ruin, and the full deliverance God has wrought in Christ and is now giving freely in His grace. Some may reason, others may hope; but the resurrection is the grand fact that He Who suffered for our sins is no longer in the grave where man laid His body, but is raised of God, Whose glad tidings concerning His Son are that He is thus proclaimed victorious over sin and death to the salvation of every believer.

And this witness is of all efficacy for the faithful, for ‘great grace was upon them all’. It is of all moment to arrest and win unbelievers to God; but faith sees in the resurrection of the Lord the pledge of its own justification no less than of the judgment of all who oppose or neglect so great salvation. The God Who raised from the dead Him Who made Himself responsible for our sins, and went down into death under divine judgment for our sakes, is the Saviour God; and His great grace reproduces itself in those who know Him thus. Love is not the fruit of a command or of an effort to love. His grace has creative power of graciousness in such as know themselves loved of Him.

It is painful that any one should, from Acts 2:47, reduce this ‘great grace’ to ‘popular favour’. The next verse (Acts 4:34) does nor give the reason why the people looked favourably upon them (‘because they suffered

none of their number to be in need', as if the church were a good benefit club!). Verse 34 merely exemplifies a special way in which the great grace upon them wrought; especially as it was no longer the simple immediateness of giving which was originally seen in Acts 2:44, 45. Now, when lands or houses were sold, the prices were laid at the feet of the apostles, and distribution was made to each according as anyone had need. What a contrast between the spontaneous unselfishness here manifest and the formal rigour of monastic rule — Mendicant Friars and the like!

Among those distinguished by their self-stripping love for the brotherhood stands specially recorded the afterwards eminent name of Joseph, surnamed Barnabas (vers. 36, 37), Son of exhortation, or perhaps of consolation. Later on (Acts 11:24) he is characterized as 'a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith'. Here, a Cyprian, he is said to have been a Levite, yet possessed of a field, which he sold and laid the money at the feet of the apostles. The express mention of the circumstance here proves how little the practice had become compulsory; for why name Barnabas in particular, if it were a rule absolute and universal? Where men imitate in the world or even in the church, law-work supersedes grace, and the community swamps the individual to the destruction of love on one side and of conscience on the other. The grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ alone puts and keeps both in their true place, whether the individual or the body, because thus only God is God before man believingly. Popery and communism alike strive in vain to realize the unselfish grace of these early days in the church; for they are, neither of them, likenesses but caricatures, and are as

far as possible from having the same source, character, or issue.

Grace is inimitable; only the Holy Spirit can produce it in reality. He it is Who wrought in so rich a measure then; and He abides to work whatsoever is in keeping with Christ at all times, with full consideration of what is due to God’s actual ways, and to man’s state also. But the interests and activity of the Holy Ghost are no longer in the fold of Israel. He is present, in the fullness of grace and power withal, in a new and different sphere outside Israel no less than the nations, He is there bearing witness of the risen Jesus Whom men crucified and slew, and of the boundless blessing conferred on those that confess Him. He is producing new and suited fruit in those that are His, united as one soul, whatever their old habits or once clashing interests: such now is the sweet effect of their oneness in the Father and the Son, that the world might believe that the Father sent the Son.

16 The most ancient reading, here followed, seems difficult or at least confused.

17 The article is required by the best authorities: a plain proof, if needed, that the Holy Spirit personally is in question, not a mere influence. Bishop Middleton is also mistaken about the converse, or absence of the article, which is quite independent of personality, and simply characterizes.

Acts 5

Manifestation of grace provokes the adversary, and the flesh would gladly gain the highest credit to itself at the least possible cost. It was early to forget that God had just made the assembly His dwelling-place; and certainly the witnesses to His presence therein were many and plain. But the enemy knows how to lure the soul by degrees into fatal evil; and spiritual pretension is a direct road and a slippery as well as rapid descent.

Barnabas had been singled out for special mention as he was afterwards to be used and honoured of God in the front rank of His servants. Ananias follows, but his heart was not right with God: that moment of ‘great grace upon all’ was seized for his great deceit, with the aggravation of his wife knowing and taking part in it. How many a Christian woman has been the true helpmeet of her husband in timely warning and instant appeal, condemning any and every evil at the first buddings! How dreadful when the man and the woman aid one another to forget God and His gracious but holy presence! when they agree to dishonour the name of the Lord by lying pretensions to self-sacrificing devotedness!

‘But a certain man, Ananias by name, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession and reserved [part] of the price, his wife also being privy: and brought and laid a certain part at the feet of the apostles. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to reserve for thee of the price of the land? When it remained, did it not remain to thee; and when sold, was it not in thy power? How [is it] that thou conceivedst this thing in thy heart? Thou didst lie not to men but to God.

And Ananias hearing these words fell down and expired, and great fear came upon all the hearers, and the younger [men] arose, swathed him, and carrying [him] out buried [him]' (vers. 1-6).

Sin is aggravated by the position of the guilty, as is carefully shown in Lev. iv. The ruler is distinguished from one of the people, and the anointed priest involved far more serious consequences than both.

But there is another and yet more solemn criterion, the presence of God, and this according to His nature now fully revealed. In Israel it was Jehovah dwelling in the thick darkness, Who governed His people, around Him yet unable to draw near, the Holy Ghost thus signifying that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest. Now it is, by virtue of the blood of Christ, Who has therefore entered once for all into the holies, having found eternal redemption. Therefore also is the Holy Ghost come down to constitute us God's dwelling-place, His holy temple. If sin became exceeding sinful through the commandment, how abominable in the light of the cross! But therein God condemned sin, not only in its fruits but in its root, and this in Him Who became an offering for sin. Such was God's work in sending His own Son, the Holy One yet made sin that we might become God's righteousness in Him. The sins of the believer are blotted out and forgiven the evil nature which could not he forgiven is already condemned in His cross Who died for it; and He is risen, and we are in Him, freed from all condemnation, and living of His life Who is alive again for evermore. The Holy Ghost also is not only witness to us but power in us, and personally here to make good God's presence.

Then, again, the dwelling of God is the true and full ground of the call to holiness. Even in Israel it was so: 'Holiness becometh Thine house, O Jehovah, for ever' (Ps. 93:5). So shall they hereafter sing in truth of heart when the kingdom comes and Jehovah reigns. And thus, looking back not forward only, it had been when Israel had no more than a temporal redemption by divine power from Egypt, a type of the incomparably more blessed and permanent, yea eternal, redemption, which the Lord Jesus acquired by His blood. Even then, when the redemption was but the shadow of better things to come, the God of Israel manifested His presence on behalf, and in the midst, of His people. Now all is real; because Christ Who is the truth, came to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. The full result does not yet appear for the universe till He comes to reign in righteousness, after which shall be the new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. But meanwhile the mighty work of propitiation is not only accomplished but accepted, and the Spirit of truth is come down in person to effectuate the presence and dwelling of God here below in the assembly of the saints as His house.

Hence if the Book of Exodus, above all Books of the Bible, is in its first half the figure of redemption, its last half shows us the consequent dwelling, the tabernacle, of God in the midst of His people; and the ways of the people are regulated accordingly. 'There I will meet with the children of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by My glory. And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar. I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons to minister to Me in the priest's office. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and

will be their God; and they shall know that I am Jehovah their God That brought them forth out of the land of Egypt that I may dwell among them: I am Jehovah their God' (Ex. 29:43-46).

So it is in the church now. Holiness is imperative individually, for the Spirit of God dwells in each of us as saints purged by the blood of Jesus, alive from the dead, freed from sin and become bondmen to God, that we may have fruit unto holiness, and the end eternal life. 'What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost that is in you, Whom ye have of God? and ye are not your own, for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore with your body' (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). But He dwells in the assembly also (1 Cor. 3:16, 17), and makes us collectively the living God's temple, responsible as come out from unbelievers to be separate, and to touch not what is unclean. There God dwells; to such He is a Father. 'Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every pollution of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God' (2 Cor. 6:16-18; 2 Cor. 7:1). Thus in every way, individual and corporate, holiness is grounded, not on law, but on what grace has wrought and given us through our Lord Jesus; and the Holy Spirit is present abidingly to make it good, or, if there be evil, to raise up a suited testimony against that which the cross has proved to be absolutely intolerable. In His children, in the church least of all, will God make allowance for iniquity. God is there in the power of the Holy Spirit to avenge the wrong done to His grace as being there and to His nature of which the Christian is made a partaker.

Ananias, then, comes forward seeking credit for a display of faith working by love, which the flesh, set on by Satan, sought to emulate without trust in God, nay, seeking to deceive Him too, as if He had no house on earth in which to dwell and manifest His power as well as grace. Part of the proceeds of his sold possessions he kept for himself, part he laid as the whole at the feet of the apostles. The Lord by His servant resents the sin and insult. 'Ananias,' said Peter, 'why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie to (deceive) the Holy Spirit and to reserve for thee of the price of the land?... Thou didst lie not to men but to God.' What can more simply and withal more powerfully let us know their sense of God's presence? Sin then blinded the eyes of the guilty disciple; in days not so far off unbelief stole the truth away from the church, which thereon set up its own bulwarks, rules, and functionaries, works of its own hands, its calves of gold, in forgetfulness both of Him Who is coming back from on high and of Him Who meanwhile is here to glorify the Son as the Father. There is no ground to suppose that the motive of Ananias was the hoped-for possession of spiritual gifts like Barnabas, or the coveted power to impart them as in Simon's case (8:19). It is an error to infer that thus his sin was indeed against the Holy Ghost. The truth of God is deeper than any mere product of human reasoning. It is the same verb (ψεύδομαι) in verses 3 and 4, but with a different construction: with an accusative (3) in the sense of imposing on any by falsehood, with a dative (4) as addressing a lie to a person, here to God Himself in the person of the Spirit sent down from heaven.

God was in His holy temple (the old temple being now by the rejection of the Messiah no more than 'their house',

the house of unbelieving Jews) and there one bearing the name of the Lord dared to lie to His face. It was no mistake of haste, but deceit with a selfish and hypocritical aim purposed in the heart, and it was so much the more heinous in presence of fresh and boundless grace on God's part, and of its fruit in the unexampled self-abandonment of many saints before all. God of old sternly judged an Achan who coveted the accursed thing, and a Gehazi who enriched himself by a shameless prostitution of the prophet's name. 'Is it a time,' said the indignant man of God, 'to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants?' (2 Kings 5:26). So, though it be the day of grace, it is on this account all the more solemn in God's eyes that one professedly a believer in Christ should expect his iniquity to pass muster in the house of His holiness.

On hearing the apostolic words Ananias fell down and expired; so that all that heard were overawed. The younger men that swathed and carried out his body to burial had not returned when, about three hours after, his wife entered, not knowing what was done, and Peter, drawing out from her the distinct evidence that she was privy to the imposture, said, 'How [is it] that ye agreed together to tempt the Spirit of [the] Lord?' (ver. 9).

This is just what Satan desires and prompts, that those who are, or at least profess to be, the Lord's should not believe that He is among them. To tempt Him is to doubt this in word or deed — to say in heart, Is He among us or not? How unworthy of those who ought best to know His presence, secured at infinite cost as the Christian at least should also know! How awful to think of the

prevalence of this sin now, little felt or judged even by true children of God! So completely, in fact, have the saints in general lost sight of the presence and action of the Spirit in the assembly that they notoriously and periodically pray that He may be poured out afresh. They, of course, mean thereby little if anything more than an accession of comfort for believers, and a great increase in the conversion of sinners. But all the while they ignore His actual presence on earth, and seem quite unconscious of the deep slight put upon Him by shutting out His revealed and sovereign working for the glory of Christ in the midst of the gathered saints. They may be waking up to allow more of His free action in gospel work outside for man's salvation; but as for His energy in the church for God's glory and in subjection to His word, they will not hear of it, whatever it may have been, it is out of date and disorderly now! Alas I this is to make the church of man and not of God, though what is of His purpose of grace will last for ever.

But Peter added, to the convicted widow, 'Behold, the feet of those that buried thy husband [are] at the door and shall carry thee out. Then she fell immediately at his feet and expired, and the young men coming in found her dead, and carrying [her] forth buried [her] by her husband' (vers. 9, 10). An infliction from its repetition so unmistakably divine could not but make an immediate and still deeper impression; and we read that 'great fear fell [came] upon all the assembly, and upon as many as heard these things' (ver. 11). It was meant for warning to all within as well as without This is me first distinct mention of the church or assembly. It is spoken of, not as if just inaugurated, but as a known and already existing body. The church began as a fact on the day of

Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit (the promise of the Father, Whom Christ sent from the Father as the Father sent Him in the Son's name) baptized all the saints into one body. There had been saints from Abel; now they in the Holy Spirit became one. In Acts 2:47 it is well-nigh certain that the true words run that 'the Lord was day by day adding together those that should be saved', without calling them as yet the church, though of course such they were. The thing was there, not yet so named. Now, according to the words of the Lord in Matt. 16:18; Matt. 18:17, they are thus entitled, when God was establishing in the gravest way the reality of His presence by the action of the Spirit Who dwells there, and had all power and promptness to avenge deliberate wrong to His nature and majesty done within; unless He would be a party consenting to His own dishonour.

The Lord seized the critical moment when Ananias and Sapphira thus sinned unto death, and a death so awe-inspiring, to put fresh and gracious honour on the Twelve. One of their number had just stood prominently before all as the vessel of divine power in judging deliberate and hypocritical iniquity, in which the offending pair had been consenting partners. Now it was according to His wisdom to manifest the normal flow of His goodness and compassion in honour of the Lord Jesus, and in a world ruined through sin and wretched under its dismal effects.

'And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; and they were all of one accord in the porch of Solomon. And of the rest durst no man join them, but the people magnified them; and believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women; insomuch as even to

carry out the sick into the streets and put [them] on beds and couches, that, as Peter came, at least his shadow might overshadow some one of them. And there also came together the multitude from the cities round about [?unto] Jerusalem bringing sick [persons] and [persons] troubled by unclean spirits; and they were healed every one' (vers. 12-16).

This witness to the supremacy of the rejected Messiah now exalted to the right hand of God we are apt to forget, being so long accustomed to its absence, and, it may be, thinking too exclusively of His grace to us and too little of His glory. What mercy it is that keeps up that which is yet more precious, and even more profoundly wonderful, the unchanged efficacy of His blood, the new creation, union with Him, and the ever-abiding presence of the Holy Ghost in and with us on earth! But we ought not to be insensible to the blessed, even if partial, display of the testimony to His power over all the groaning creation, and those evil spirits who seduced man to his ruin into their own rebelliousness against God, nor should we ignore the humbling fact that such a display so soon faded away, as doubtless it was meet that it should. The God of all grace (and so now pre-eminently is God revealing Himself) would not stay such an answer on earth to Christ's exaltation to the seat of divine power, were there not the wisest and most adequate reasons, not only on the side of His own moral glory, but because the continuance of signs and wonders would be an anomaly in His ways, and an injury rather than a blessing to the saints when the assembly fell more and more from the grace and truth which came by our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is evident that here as on other occasions the apostles were those above all distinguished by doing many signs and wonders. But plainly from Acts 6:8; Acts 8:6, 7, 13, the power was in no way confined to those whom God set first in the church, for the martyr Stephen and the evangelist Philip were both remarkable in that way. Nor can there be an intelligent doubt, for the believer who reads 1 Cor. 12, that such sign-gifts might be distributed widely and apart from all public office; even as our Lord intimated in Mark 16:17, 18, 20, for 'those that believed', not merely for certain prominent functionaries. Here, however, the mighty works were done by those in the front rank, nor were they done in a corner, but in all publicity, for they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch, of the rest no man daring to join them. And the moral effect was immense. On the one hand, the people magnified them; on the other, believers were more than ever added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women. 'Women' had been emphatically mentioned in Acts 1:14, when the disciples, however closely found together, were only so many individuals cleaving to the Lord in faith, and giving themselves up with one accord to continual prayer, before the uniting power of the one Spirit sent down from heaven baptized all into one body. The prophecy of Joel applied to the Pentecostal gift supposes the common share women were to have in the promise of the Father, and its mighty consequence (Acts 2:17, 18); and now we hear 'women' again named explicitly among the multitudes of believers added to the Lord.

Among the signs and wonders a very special feature is pointed out in ver. 15; their bringing out the sick into the streets and putting them on beds and couches that

the mere shadow of Peter as he came along might overshadow some one of them. So did the abundant goodness of God by man in honour of Jesus fill men's hearts with confident expectation. Nor do we hear of disappointment. On the contrary we are told that the multitude also of the cities round about Jerusalem flocked thither, bringing sick people and those troubled by unclean spirits; and healing was vouchsafed to them all. How wondrous the virtue of that Name which thus unfailingly invested His servants with power superior to every demand over evil seen or unseen!

Again come forward the Sadducean party. For liberalism is no more friendly to the truth than traditionalism. And who can wonder? Their citadel had been stormed by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. They felt themselves assailed and pursued in the open field by the proclamation of the gospel, and by the miraculous powers which magnified the Name of the crucified but now risen Messiah.

'And the high priest rising up, and all those that were with him, which is [the] sect of the Sadducees, were filled with wrath, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in public ward. But an angel of [the] Lord by night opened the doors of the prison, and leading them out, said, Go and stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this Life' (vers. 17-20).

During the ministry of the Lord Jesus here below the Pharisees had been His chief adversaries: their self-righteousness, unrighteousness, zealously held fast tradition; and, veiled by religious forms, waged constant warfare against the Righteous One; and the more, as He was ever the expression of God's grace and truth to

those who owned their true condition of guilt and ruin before God. When He presented Himself as Messiah for the last time to the unbelieving people, and was going, as He well knew, to death, not in rejection only but for atonement, all came out in unambiguous opposition, whatever the pretence, chief priests and elders, Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, coming to judge Him, but in result to be themselves judged by the word. Now after He rose from the dead those who said there is no resurrection nor angel nor spirit were naturally the most embittered, notwithstanding their usual self-complacency and wish to pose as the mildest of the people.

But man never knows himself apart from Christ, any more than he thinks or feels rightly about God. The revealed truth detects and lays him bare in his departure from God; and this is so much the more intolerable as he has a religious position to maintain. Hence the excessive anger of the Sadducean high priest and his party at this time. Their boasted liberty of conscience is only for the different forms of error. The truth of God is ever unwelcome, and those who preach it are mere troublers to be punished without hesitation. They ‘laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in public ward.’

But the God Who had acted in the assembly with a stroke which slew the guilty husband and wife was not wanting now, and a providential messenger of His power was sent to deliver His faithful servants. ‘An angel of [the] Lord by night opened the doors of the prison, and leading them out, said, Go and stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this Life.’

The intervention then was as sensible as it was striking. God is marking in this chapter the reality and the varied forms of His action for His assembly and those members of it in particular who are charged with His word and who rouse most the animosity of the foe. Angelic care has in no wise disappeared for His servants, though there is no such display of power as of old, any more than the presence and energy of the Spirit within the assembly. It is our fleshly activity, and our lack of spirituality, which hinder. We grieve the Spirit by our self-confidence and worldly wisdom, and we fail to discern the wonderful ways in which God delivers. Were our eyes more truly opened of the Lord we should see that, when beset with seemingly countless and overwhelming adversaries, they that be with us, if really with and for Christ, are more than they that be with them. Are they not all ministering spirits sent out for service on account of those that shall inherit salvation?

Here no doubt there could be no mistake about the matter; for it was no question of men escaping by strength and skill or any earthly means, but of an angel opening the doors of the prison by night, leading them out, and commanding them to speak in the temple to the people all the words of this Life. The source of the deliverance was as plain as the commission to speak. The religious chiefs were in flat opposition to the God of all grace Who would have men that believed through grace to be His chosen vessels in proclaiming all the words of this Life in Christ the Lord. For there is no other Name of salvation given among men, nor any other way than the Son to the Father. Life in Him, remission of sins through His blood, the gift of the Holy Spirit, such are the first blessings which the gospel

announces to every soul that believes in Jesus. And God will have it go forth freely and fully, let men say or do as they may. But who shall measure the guilt of thus rejecting every testimony from God, not only despising the message of grace, but forbidding and imprisoning the messengers, that the mercy and truth of God in so speaking to man may never reach his ears? Who can wonder that their judgment slumbereth not? The higher the estate, the deeper the fall.

But God, Who knows best that His words are the seed of everlasting life, will not have the proud and evil will of man to intercept His message of good. He therefore, as in a day of wonders, interfered by an angel to do extraordinarily that which He could have accomplished by more ordinary means, if so it had pleased Him. But the occasion itself then was beyond all that is usual; and it was according to His wisdom that, as His power had been shown judicially within the assembly, and in healing grace by the special envoys of the Lord Jesus, so also with marked superiority over the hostile will of man and authority of the world by the angelic deliverance from the prison. The words of this Life must be spoken at His command that souls might hear and live. One can understand how the courage of faith would be confirmed and increased in His servants by an act so signal; and what a testimony it ought to have been to the consciences of all, especially to the sect of the Sadducees! But unbelief is as hard and as blind towards God, as it is credulous of its own vagaries, and bent on its own will, even with the knell of perdition sounding in its ears.

The apostles, thus miraculously brought out of prison, acted forthwith on the message to the confusion of the enemy.

‘And when they heard, they entered about dawn into the temple and were teaching. And when the high priest arrived and those with him, they called together the council and all the senate of the sons of Israel, and sent unto the jail to have them brought. But the officers that arrived did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported, saying, We found the jail shut in all security and the keepers standing at the doors, but on opening we found no one within. And when both [the priest and]18 the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were utterly perplexed about them whereto this would come. And there arrived one and reported to them, Behold, the men whom ye put in the prison are in the temple standing and teaching the people. Then the captain went away with the officers, and brought them, not with violence, for they feared the people, lest they should be stoned. And having brought they set them in the council, and the high priest asked them saying, We strictly charged you not to teach on [in] this name; and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and purpose to bring upon us the blood of this man. And in answer Peter and the apostles said, Obedience must be to God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus Whom ye slew by hanging on a tree: Him God exalted with His right hand as Leader and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins. And we are [His]19 witnesses of these things [lit. words], and the Holy Spirit Whom God gave to those that obey Him’ (vers. 21-32).

In the temple there was no hindrance to instruction in the word of God, the Old Testament scriptures; and as yet none others were written. The apostles therefore used their liberty to teach, as their Master had done before (Matt. 21:23 - 28; Mark 11:27 - 12; Luke 20; Luke 21:37, 38; John 7:14, 28, 37; John 8:2-59; John 10:23-39). So it was too in the synagogues; and the apostles were in no way disposed to forego the opportunity of expounding the scriptures to the people, as we see in the history of Paul especially. There they were teaching at break of day; they were obedient, and their hearts in the work.

But the adversaries were not slack on their side. ‘And when the high priest arrived and those with him, they called together the council and all the senate of the sons of Israel, and sent unto the jail to have them brought But the officers that arrived did not find them in the prison; and they returned and reported, saying, We found the jail shut in all security, and the keepers standing at the doors, but on opening we found no one within.’ Thus the Sanhedrim met in due form, and in all the confidence of the highest religious authority. But the prisoners were no longer in custody; and, what was the most surprising news of all, without violence from within or from without. The building was found by the officials in all security, the keepers on guard at the doors, but not a prisoner was there.

‘And when both the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were utterly perplexed about them whereto this would come.’ Conscience could not but whisper, the more inexplicable to them it might seem. Strange things had Jerusalem seen and heard: not only when the Christ was here, but more widely and

wonderfully since He died, and, as the disciples affirmed, rose and went to heaven. That God had somehow brought out of prison the apostles, whom Jewish authority had put in, was rather in keeping with all that had been of late transpiring in their midst in Solomon's porch and elsewhere. But unbelief is the rebellion of the heart and may work most proudly in the face of the fullest testimony, without one solid ground of objection or a reasonable excuse. And as it is the heart that is in question, neither age nor sex, neither knowledge nor ignorance, exempts a single person from its poisonous activity. Indeed an active or subtle mind, however much furnished and exercised only gives the larger means and scope for its evil opposition to God. 'Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life.' 'For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.' 'He that hath received His testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.' Men dread consequences. Faith is subject to God's word, and seeks to please Him. The Jewish rulers were afraid of the issues now. They had no thought of God in the unseen light of eternity.

'And there arrived one and reported, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are in the temple standing and teaching the people.' God took care to give publicity to the defeat of the guilty people in the hour of their seeming power over His servants. Had the council before charged and threatened them strictly not to speak at all nor teach on (in) the name of Jesus? Had they now, filled with envy, put them in the public prison? God had by an angel brought them out from doors ever so secured and guards vigilant as they might be; and there they were in the temple standing and teaching the

people. ‘Then the captain went away with the officers and brought them, not with violence, for they feared the people lest they should be stoned.’ How comforting to faith the witness of the weak strong, and of the strong weak! Hardened as the captain and the officers might be, they were overawed, so that they abstained from violence even to the escaped prisoners; and not these but those feared lest they should be stoned. But it was man they dreaded, not God. The apostles had God before their eyes, the only true deliverance from the fear of man.

‘And having brought they set them in the council; and the high priest asked them, saying, We strictly charged you not to teach on [in] this name, and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and purpose to bring upon us the blood of this man.’ They assuredly had no wish for or thought of accentuating their own powerlessness in presence of a few poor and weak and ignorant Galileans. Yet they could not conceal from themselves any more than from others that their stern commands were impotent, and that the teaching of the apostles was everywhere prevalent in the city, with the blood of Him Whom they dreaded to name weighing heavily and increasingly on their consciences. But a little while ago Pilate had vainly washed his hands before the multitude, as if he could thus rid himself of his dark blot in delivering Jesus to their will; and then answered all the people, His blood be on us and on our children; and the priests, yea the chief priests, pleaded against the Holy Sufferer, instead of interceding for the Guiltless. Now are they the first to deprecate and feel the guilt of that blood on their own heads, and to shrink from its intolerable burden, and (save to faith) its

irrevocable curse. There was, however, no uprightness of conscience: had there been, they would have found a sure and immediate and everlasting resource in the purging efficacy of that blood.

What had the boldest of the apostles proved? Were they ignorant of his denying his Master? Yet was he soon after restored in soul so completely as to be able calmly and earnestly without a blush to tax the people with denying the Holy One and the Just and desiring a murderer to be granted to them! Such is the virtue of Him Who came by water and blood: life is in Him only. So testifies the Holy Spirit, and He is the truth. But what did the Sanhedrim care for the truth, especially from the lips of unlearned and ignorant men in reproof of all the erudition and dignified office in Israel?

Peter and John had before this asked, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken to you rather than to God, judge ye (Acts 4:19, 20). Now they all join Peter in his still firmer reply, 'Obedience must be to God rather than men.' This is the great practical principle of faith, as it was the uniform characteristic of Christ in all perfection here below. 'Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God': not miracles, not doing good, not teaching, not zeal, so much as unqualified and unfailing obedience rendered to God. Yet was Jesus a man approved of God unto them by powers and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in their midst beyond past example no less than present doubt. Yet was He anointed with the Holy Spirit and went about doing good, and healing all oppressed with the devil. The people too were astonished at His teaching, and all bare Him witness and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth, and the very officers sent to apprehend Him declared with

truth, Never man spake like this man. And for burning jealousy for the Father's glory His disciples could not but be reminded that it was written, 'The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up.' But all these instances had their fit seasons. Obedience was always there, as unfaltering as constant, as lowly as perfect.

Nor is there any principle so essential for the Christian. He is sanctified of the Spirit unto Christ's obedience as well as to the sprinkling of His blood (as the gospel is for faith-obedience, in contrast with enforcement of law), and his soul is purified by obeying the truth to unfeigned brotherly love, for God chose him to salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and faith of the truth. Hence, though he may have sometimes to wait on God for light, obedience is the invariable place and duty of the believer. It is never a question of his rights; he is called to obey. He is to be subject to every human institution for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to rulers as sent by him, free though not having his freedom for a cloak of malice but as God's bondman.

Hence, if collision come between God's word and the ruler's requirement, the believer's path is clear: God must be obeyed, but in suffering perhaps, not resistance to authority. He is always to obey, though in some cases it may be God rather than men. Nothing is so humble, nothing so firm. Naturally the believer might be feeble and timid; obedience by grace gives strength and courage. He might be self-confident and unyielding; obedience gives distrust in self and meekness in doing God's will. 'He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever'; even as sin is self-will or lawlessness, and its end judgment and perdition. Therefore is obedience not only an inalienable duty, but the true pathway of power, and

the sure means of extrication from every snare of the enemy. So the blessed Lord defeated Satan, and so the apostles now lay bare the tremendous fact that the Jewish heads and people were as wholly beguiled by Satan, as they themselves were wholly in simple-hearted subjection to God. Once the elect nation had God in the world, as they had the Messiah in hope. Now that they had rejected their Messiah, they were not only without God like the Gentiles but the proved adversaries of God. They were only 'men' like others, and 'obedience must be to God rather than men.'

This Peter proceeds to demonstrate in a few plain, pointed, irrefragable words. 'The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, Whom ye slew by hanging on a tree: Him God exalted with His right hand as Leader and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins. And we are [His] witnesses of these things, and the Holy Ghost Whom God gave to those that obey Him.' Here the proof is short and unanswerable, the antagonism to the God of Israel in chiefs and people beyond question. The God of their fathers (how unlike them the children!) raised up Jesus Whom ye slew (and with the deepest ignominy too) by hanging on a tree. Here, it is no longer the ambiguous word ἀνέστησεν, but the more determinate ἤγειρεν, not merely raising Him up as a living Messiah on earth, as in Acts 3:22, 26; Acts 7: (18), 37; Acts 13:33, but waking Him up after death. Nor was resurrection all: for God exalted Him (not 'to' as in Webster and Wilkinson, but) by His right hand (as Peter had preached, Acts 2:33, in fulfilment of the undeniably Messianic Psalm 110.). For in what relation to them did He take His place in heaven? As Leader and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of

sins. The door of grace was still open. God was waiting to be gracious to His people though guilty of the great transgression; and He could afford by that blood to free them even from their guilt in shedding it. Surely Christ will appear in judgment one day. Meanwhile He is announced as Leader and Saviour to give Israel just what they wanted — repentance and remission of sins.

There was testimony more than adequate — abundant: ‘And we are [His] witnesses of these things [or, words], and the Holy Spirit Whom God gave to those that obey Him.’ Compare the Lord’s own words in John 15:26, 27. ‘But when the Comforter is come Whom I will send unto you from the Father, the Spirit of truth Which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me, and ye also bear witness, because ye are with Me from the beginning.’

The Holy Spirit is not only their power of duly remembering the past, but is Himself the Witness of the glory of Christ in heaven. And this blessed Spirit, Who wrought mightily in the apostles and others set high in the assembly, is given of God to those who submit to the authority of the heavenly Leader. Such is the full force of the peculiar word ‘obey’ (peiqarcevw) employed in verse 32. The distinct personality of the divine Spirit is as carefully guarded here as in ver. 3, though in a different way.

One can hardly conceive an answer more direct than this of the apostles. Israelitish authority was for them a judged system, for were the chiefs not convicted of deadly opposition to the God of their fathers? They might again and again command the apostles to be silent about Him Whom they had hanged, though God

had sent Him as Leader and Saviour; nor was it their testimony only, but that of the Holy Spirit also, Whom the Jews could not pretend to have. How awful and terrible their position!

‘And when they heard, they were cut to the heart [lit., sawn asunder] and took counsel20 to slay them’ (ver. 33). It is always dangerous to oppose the truth, and the more so in proportion to the importance of that in question. Here it was the foundation of all, and so estimated by those whom the Lord called to proclaim it, and as the adversaries were resolved to reject the testimony, they all naturally betook themselves to designs of blood. Convicted yet rebellious, and abhorring the witnesses whom they could not gainsay, they were chagrined to the utmost, and consulted to slay those before them. No compunction, still less self-judgment, as in Acts 2, but they were torn with rage.

Then the God, Who by His angel had just brought His exposed servants out of prison, was pleased to shield them from these more and more guilty murderers, and wrought after another sort of providential interference not now angelic but human. The hearts of all are in His keeping.

‘But there stood up one in the council, a Pharisee, by name Gamaliel, a law-teacher, in honour with all the people, and commanded to put the men [or, apostles] out a little while, and said unto them, Ye men of Israel [or, Israelites], take heed to yourselves as to these men what ye are about to do. For before these days rose up Theudas, saying that he himself was somebody, with whom a number of men, about four hundred, took sides; who was slain, and all as many as obeyed him were

dispersed and came to nothing. After him (this one) rose up Judas the Galilean, in the days of the census, and drew into revolt people after him, and he perished and all as many as obeyed him were scattered abroad. And now I say to you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or if this work be of men, it will be overthrown, but if it is of God, ye will not be [or are not] able to overthrow them21 lest ye be found [even] fighting against God' (vers. 34-39).

From such a quarter these words of sobriety, as opposed to Sadducean violence, were irresistible. There seems no just reason to doubt that Gamaliel is the same celebrated man, son of Rabbi Simeon, grandson of the once famous Hillel; he presided over the Sanhedrim during the reigns of Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius; his son succeeded to the same chief place, and perished during the siege of Jerusalem. Under Gamaliel, we are told in Acts 22:3, Paul studied the law, of which he was styled 'the glory', as he was the first to bear the title of Rabban. That he was a Christian publicly, or even secretly, is only the assertion of unscrupulous legendmongers. Scripture gives us not only a perfectly reliable but a most graphic account of the man and of his character, as well as of the way in which he was providentially used at this critical moment.

For his intervention entirely fits in with the entire context, where God is tracing for our instruction how He watches over His own on earth for His glory. There was the manifestation of the Spirit's presence where they were all assembled and all filled with Him (Acts 4:31), lights in the world, holding forth the word of life, living to the forgetfulness of all selfish interests, whilst the apostles with great power testified of the Lord's

resurrection (Acts 4:32-37). Then follows the display of the energy of the Holy Ghost in judgment of hypocritical deception and covetousness within (Acts 5:1-11), but along with it the renewed activity of miraculous power through the apostles in grace (vers. 12-16). Next, the Jews growingly oppose themselves to the testimony of Christ, but their measures are manifestly frustrated by divine power through the angel which set free the prisoners on their mission of grace and truth (vers. 17-25). Lastly, when the exasperated will of men would proceed to deeds of blood, God interferes in the ordinary way of His providence to protect His faithful servants by a grave and wise man even in the enemy's camp. The voice of moderation and wisdom, though only natural, prevailed over the rash impulses of pride and passion intermingled with fear. God would still provide a further space for truth to awaken consciences and win hearts among His ancient people, guilty though they were. It was the day of grace, when He would save to the praise of the Lord Jesus. 'Ye Israelites take heed to yourselves as to these men what things ye are about to do' (ver. 35)

Of Theudas, who is in the first instance named by Gamaliel, we know no more than Luke records. 'For before these days rose up Theudas, saying that he himself was somebody, with whom a number of men, about four hundred took sides, who was slain, and all as many as obeyed him were scattered and brought to nothing' (ver. 36). What less likely than that the Theudas, who, according to Josephus, appeared at least a dozen years after Gamaliel's speech in the fourth year of Claudius (A.D. 44), can have been so seriously misplaced even by an historian abounding in inaccuracies, as all competent men acknowledge? If

Luke had been only an ordinary godly Christian, is it conceivable that he would put into the mouth of a prominent and respected Jew like Gamaliel a falsehood so egregious as antedating the story of Theudas? If he be an inspired writer, it is needless to assert his immaculate exactness. God Who knows all and cannot lie is the true source of inspiration, whoever may be the instrument. The fact is that, on the one hand, the historical accuracy, as tested by the minutest shades of knowledge in the varying conditions and circumstances of which Luke writes freely in his Gospel, and even more amply in this Book of the Acts, is too well known generally by the most competent to need proof here; and, on the other, the name of Theudas22 was too common (cf. Cicero Ad Fam. vi. 10, ed. Orell. iii. 41; Galeni Opp. xiii. 925, ed. Khn) to provoke the least well-grounded surprise that more than one so called could rise up among the many insurgent chiefs who agitated the Jews either before or since the death of Herod the Great. Josephus himself alludes to many, of whom he names but three, the Theudas, whose defeat by Fadus he places a dozen years later, seems to have had a far larger following than the 400 men of whom our evangelist writes.

To the believer it is certain that the revolt of Judas the Galilean was subsequent to that of the Theudas of whom Gamaliel spoke. Josephus entirely agrees with the Acts that it was in the time of the census under Quirinus, A.D. 6 (Antt. xviii. sub. init.). And it is remarkable that the Jewish historian, though describing him there as a Gaulonite of the city of Gamala, subsequently (6) speaks of him, just as Gamaliel does in our chapter, as ‘the Galilean Judas’. Had this later mention been withheld,

the impugners of revelation would have become loud in decrying Luke as they are absurd in their disposition to treat Josephus as infallible. But short as is the inspired report of Gamaliel's speech, we have strikingly accurate information of Judas perishing, as to which the historian is silent, and of the mere but thorough scattering of his most numerous supporters, who did not come to naught like Theudas, but again and again reappeared till the last and for a time successful effort terminated in the death of his younger son, Menahem, A.D. 66. 'After him rose up Judas the Galilean in the days of the census, and drew into revolt people after him, and he perished, and all as many as obeyed him were scattered abroad' (ver. 37). Whether Origen (Homil. in Luc. xxv.) had authority to say that this Judas really pretended to be Messiah may be doubtful; but he drew his vast crowds with the cry, 'We have God as our only Leader and Lord.' The uprising was fanatical as well as revolutionary. But how did it end? pleaded Gamaliel: a question unanswerable.

Then follows his advice of patient waiting for results. 'And now I say to you, Refrain from those men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or if this work be of men, it will be overthrown, but if it is of God, ye will not be able to overthrow them, lest ye be found also For, even] fighting against God' (vers. 38, 39). It was the form of toleration which a grave Jew might feel, impressed with recent facts, the character of the accused, and the state of public opinion. But there is far more reference to the issue under God than in the modern doctrine of toleration, which is in general a mere homage to the rights of man, ignoring God and the truth. He may have felt that persecution is a sorry means of subverting error or maintaining truth. Whatever the value or the motives

of his judgment, it commended itself to the council, and saved the apostles from a death that seemed imminent.

Perhaps it may not be amiss here to give a specimen of the famous John Calvin's skill in handling the word of God. In his comment on the passage he first of all shows little favour to the sober speech with which Gamaliel swayed the council and extinguished the fiery zeal of those inclined to extremities. 'But if any one weigh all duly, his opinion is unworthy of a prudent man. I know indeed that by many it is held as an oracle; but that they judge badly appears with sufficient clearness even from this, because in such a way one must abstain from all punishments, neither were any wickedness to be corrected longer: yea, one must refuse all helps of life, which not even for one moment is it in our disposal to prolong. Both things indeed are said truly: what is of God cannot be destroyed by any efforts of men; what is of men is too weak to stand. But it is a bad inference that meanwhile we must do nothing. Rather should we see what God enjoins: and His will is that wickedness be restrained by us' (I. Calvani Opp. vi. in loc. Amstel. 1667).

Here breaks out the inflexible rigour which insisted on the burning of the unhappy Servetus, and the excessive punishment of others. Their evil doctrines are not questioned; but what have servants of Christ to do with measures of the kind? We have not so learned Him. The church has no doubt its own responsibility in the spiritual domain; as the world in what pertains to this life. Calvin has confounded all this in the opinion which censures Gamaliel, who meant nothing less than to deny the duty of the powers that be, but rightly urged that men should await the manifestation of that which was

doubtful, instead of yielding to the hasty measures of passion and prejudice. To dissuade from extreme violence where the work might prove to be of God was certainly wiser than punishing to the utmost where they knew of no adequate reason. Calvin's logic seems as precarious as his confusion is evident of things spiritual and worldly. But this is not so extraordinary as his judgment that when Luke says, 'After him [Theudas] rose up Judas', he does not mark the order of time, as if Judas were the latter, that Gamaliel brought in his two examples promiscuously 'in disregard to time', and that 'after' means no more than 'besides' or 'moreover'!23 He had said before, 'If we credit Josephus, Gamaliel here inverts the true series of history.' Not so; unless we assume there could be only one insurrectionary Theudas. Now Josephus tells us of four men named Judas in ten years, who broke out in rebellion, and of three named Simon in forty years, and he in no way professes to name all, but on the contrary implies many more as unnamed. The assumption of Calvin is anything but rational and certainly fails in reverence.

As usual, one wrong step leads to many. For Calvin is led thereby into the truly absurd consequence that, if we reckon the time, we shall find that it was at least twelve years since the death of Christ before the apostles were beaten! This blundering computation is founded entirely on confounding the Theudas of Gamaliel's speech with him who, as Josephus tells us, was dealt with by Cuspius Fadus in the reign of Claudius. 'Therefore that space of time of which I spoke is complete, and so the more excellent the constancy of the apostles, who, though ill-requited for the long pains they endured, are in no way discouraged, nor cease to hold the even tenor of their

way.’ Calvin was a great and good man, I doubt not; but the more striking and instructive is the lesson of boldness and folly when a man, no matter who, abandons the sure meaning of the written word for his own reasoning, which in such a case will ever betray its weak and worthless, not to say presumptuous, character. For what is man when he lifts up his voice against God? We need not dwell on other remarks of the commentator, which let out singular unfairness towards Gamaliel, as there is no desire to defend the latter nor expose the former beyond that measure which seems to be profitable for the reader. But I give his actual words: — ‘Ergo conficitur illud quod dixi temporis spatium. Quo praestantior fuit Apostolorum constantia, qui quum post diuturnos labores obitos tam indignam mercedem reportent, non tamen franguntur, neque desinunt cursum suum persequi.’

‘And to him they yielded, and, having called the apostles, they beat and charged [them] not to speak in [lit. on] the name of Jesus, and let them go. They therefore went their way from [the] presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to be dishonoured for the Name.24 And every day in the temple and at home they ceased not to teach and preach that the Christ [is] Jesus’25 (vers. 40 42).

Thus, though plucked from death, the apostles suffered the indignity of stripes at the hands of Jews, as Paul was afterwards to experience at least five times. ‘The unjust man knoweth no shame.’ If the Roman judge scourged the Lord of glory, the disciples were not above their Master, and must bear from Jew or Gentile to be treated as wicked men worthy to be beaten, Deut. 25:2. Doubtless it was for their alleged disobedience; and they

are dismissed with a fresh command not to speak in the name of Jesus. How senseless is the will of unbelief! Impossible for one who knew His glory and His grace to be silent! God is concerned in such testimony supremely, and not man only or chiefly because he is otherwise lost for ever. And what is due to Him Who so humbled Himself, and suffered for our sins, and glorified God as nothing else could? ‘They therefore went their way from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to be dishonoured for the Name.’ Who can doubt the deep and divinely-sprung joy of hearts that answered in their little measure to Him Whose delight is in His Son above all? What an impulse, not discouragement, to their testimony ‘in the temple’ to all comers (for of course, no proper assemblies would have been permitted there), ‘and at home’ where the saints broke bread, prayed, edified one another, and the like! But everywhere and every day there was but one theme: teaching or evangelizing, it was Jesus as the Christ.

If the chosen people were blind to the Messiah, if they despised Jehovah the Saviour when here, and crucified Him according to the prophets and His own word, it was the more incumbent on those who believed the report of divine grace to bear witness persistently, in love to their unbelieving persecutors, and in care for such of the lost sheep of Israel as were now saved by faith. And this the apostles did with a zeal not to be put down by prison, scourge, or death itself, as we shall see in due time. And God would in honour of His Son awaken others to imitate them as they imitated Christ.

18 The more ancient MSS. and versions reject ‘the priest and’ as in the Received Text. But while one can readily understand the omission from ignorance of the phrase, it

is hard to see how some good copies, as well as a great many, accepted it unless genuine. ‘Proclivi lectioni praestat ardua’ is an acknowledged maxim in such matters. The fact is however, that in the Old Testament the use of ‘the priest’ for ‘the high priest’ is common. See Ex. 29:30; Ex. 35:19, Ex. 38:21 Lev. 4:5, 6, 7, 10, 16; Lev. 6:22; Lev. 13:2; Lev. 16:32; Lev. 21:21, Num. 3:6, 32; Num. 4:16, 28, 33; Num. 7:8, Num. 16:37, 39, Num. 18:28; Num. 25:7, 11; Num. 26:1, 3, 63; Num. 27:2, 19, 21, 22, Num. 31:6, 12, 13, 21, 26, 29, 31, 41, 51, 54; Num. 32:2, 28; Num. 33:38; Num. 34:17. Nor is it only in the books of Moses that we find the use of ‘priest thus frequently for ‘high priest’, for so it is in Joshua 14, 17, 19, 21, 22; so in 1 & 2 Sam.; 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chr. So the Lord is predicted in Ps. 110.; Zech. 6. We are not driven, as Krebs would seem to have supposed, to the Apocrypha (1 Macc. 15:1, 2), though the usage is there, and in Josephus (A. vi. 12, 1), to whom he refers. In the New Testament itself compare Heb. 5:6, and (not to speak of Heb. 7:5) Heb. 7:3, 11, 15, 17, 21; Heb. 8:4; Heb. 10:21.

19 The greater copies exclude ‘His’; but the strange reading of B rather strengthens EHP and the mass in holding to it.

20 ἐβουλεύοντο DHP and the bulk of cursives, the Vulgate, Syriac Versions, et al., Lachmann, Tregelles, et al., prefer ἐβούλοντο (‘were minded’) with ABC, et al. (the addition or omission of a syllable in the middle, easily made, is all the difference between the readings).

21 αὐτούς ABCcorr. DE, at least a dozen cursives, the later Syriac et al., as against αὐτό (‘it’) C p.m. HP, most cursives, versions, et al.

22 Abp. Ussher (Works x. 484) identifies the Theudas of Acts 5:36 with one of those called Judas in the days of Archelaus. ‘Cum vero Hebraeorum Yehudah fuerit Syrorum Thudah. indeque Judas et Thaddaeus, multoque magis Theudas idem plane nomen extiterit: non alius videtur fuisse Judas hic quam Theudas ille de quo Gamaliel dixit...’

23 It is true that Calvin might have pleaded the example of Eusebius (H.E. i. 5; ii. 11) for the same bad preference of a worldly to an inspired historian: so early, so inveterate, is the working of the evil heart of unbelief, and this in men of reputation. Even Th. de Bze seems to be ashamed of all this, and certainly scouts the view of his predecessor as unfounded, though he speaks of Eusebius rather than of Calvin.

24 E and many other copies add ‘of the Lord Jesus’, as others simply ‘of Jesus’, or ‘of Christ’, or ‘of Him’, which last is in the Received Text.

25 The Received Text has ‘Jesus the Christ’,

Ἰησοῦν τὸν Χριστυόν, HP, et al., not

τόν Χριόστον Ἰησοῦν as in AB and very many more.

Acts 6

Persecution of the Christian for Christ's sake is an honour from God (Phil. 1:29), as grace makes it a blessing to the church and a testimony to the world. The real danger is from within, and this yet more when the confidence of love yields at all largely to an evil eye and a discontented tongue. And so it was now. After God had so signally judged the deception of Ananias and Sapphira, fleshly and selfish complaint broke out among the Hellenistic or Greek-speaking Jews apparently against those of Jerusalem and Judea. It was not the Jews of pure descent jealous of those from elsewhere who profited by the self-sacrificing love which sold houses and lands that none might want. Still less was it the germ of those Judaizing divisions which were to be a source of not only deep, wide, and long-lasting disquiet, but of the utmost danger in denying the grace and corrupting the truth of which the church and the Christian are the responsible depositories.

'Now in those days when the disciples were multiplying, there arose a murmuring of the Hellenists against the Hebrews that [or, because] their widows were overlooked in the daily ministration' (ver. 1).

The murmuring came from those who had more or less of foreign admixture: whereas ill-feeling usually and naturally characterized those who boasted of associations wholly Israelitish. It was the Greek-speaking Jews who murmured against the Hebrews. That the mistake and indeed wrong was with the complainers seems clear, if from nothing else, from the grace evinced by all those who were the object of their

murmuring, as the sequel shows. It is habitually the wrong-doer who denounces men better than himself. ‘Their widows’, they alleged, were being overlooked in the daily supply of wants. We are not told that so it really was, but so they complained. The poor ‘widows’ are ever remembered of God. The mouth of murmurers should be stopped, if the allegation were false.

‘And the twelve, having called the multitude of the disciples unto [them] said, It is not seemly that we, leaving the word of God, should serve tables. Look out then, brethren, from among you seven men of good report, full of [the] Spirit and wisdom, whom we will appoint over this business; but we for our part will give ourselves closely to prayer and the ministry of the word’ (vers. 2-4).

Up to this time the administration was in the hands of the apostles, as we see in Acts 4:35, though probably they may have employed many brethren in the actual distribution to each needy individual. But that there were already officers whose province it was, is not only without, but against the evidence of Scripture. I am aware that Mosheim tries to prove such a class of functionaries from ‘the young men’ (οἱ νεώτεροι) in Acts 5:6 which he will have rather fancifully to be the counterpart of the ‘elder’ (οἱ πρεσβύτεροι) who do not appear till the end of Acts 11, Khnl and Olshausen accepting his thought. But the usage of Scripture nowhere countenances any such official ‘younger men’, as it does often in the use of ‘elders’. On the contrary in the same context, on their return from burying Ananias, they are called ‘the young men’, (οἱ νεανίσκοι) which cannot be conceived to have such a force and therefore ought to refute it for the previous and corresponding

term. They were simply the younger brethren, on whom would naturally devolve any prompt call for a laborious and sorrowful duty of a physical nature. Compare 1 Tim. 5:1, 2, Titus 2:6; and 1 Peter 5:5. That not the Hellenists but the Hebrews had deacons already is the unfounded idea of the same writer, whose history would have small value as to later times if not far better than his use of the inspired source. It would be hard to say where Mosheim is right in his review of the apostolic church.

The fit moment was come for the apostles to be relieved from outer [temporal] work and thus free for what was spiritual. They direct therefore the establishment of responsible men for the daily ministrations in Jerusalem. This service was diaconal, yet peculiar (as Chrysostom long ago remarked) because of the actual circumstances there. Hence it may be that the term ‘deacons’ is not here or elsewhere given to ‘the seven’, but this number of theirs even more than ‘the twelve’ becomes a sort of distinctive badge. As the money came from the disciples in general, on them do the apostles call to look out from among them brethren in whom they could happily confide; yet the apostles, acting for the Lord in order, established them over the business. It was not seemly or proper (for ἀρεστὸν admits of a wider sense than the very narrow one of ‘pleasing’, or ‘our pleasure’) that they should forsake the word of God, and serve tables. To this their continuance in that work would otherwise have come. Loving wisdom thus turns ungrateful complaints for good. That it is in this a principle of moment is rendered evident. Where the Lord gives, He chooses, as for all ministry in the word; where the assembly gives, they choose, as in this case.

We see the same thing in 2 Cor. 8:18, 19, where a brother was chosen by the assemblies as fellow-traveller with Paul and Titus, thus providing for things honest not only before the Lord but also before men. This is the meaning of the phrase ‘messengers of churches’. They were selected by the assemblies which sent help to the poor saints elsewhere, as the apostle would not take charge of the collection otherwise. Compare also 1 Cor 16:3, 4. In the case of ‘elders’ we find the apostles choosing, and not the disciples (Acts 14:23), and so Titus is told to do (Titus 1:5).

The three principles are quite distinct: (1) the Lord choosing and sending those whom He gives as gifts to the church, (2) the apostle, or an apostolic man by express commission, choosing or establishing elders; and (3) the assembly choosing the administrators of its funds, whom the apostles set solemnly over this business.

That ‘the seven’ were deacons (in the traditional sense of a brief noviciate or apprenticeship to the priesthood) is as unscriptural as that they had previously been of the ‘seventy’ whom the Lord sent out ‘two and two’ with a final message through Judea. Their work was not to preach and baptize but the dispensing of help to the temporal need of every day. Philip no doubt did preach, but he, we are expressly told, was ‘an evangelist’. It was therefore in virtue of this gift, not of that appointment to care for the poor in Jerusalem, that we find him, in the dispersion of the assembly, preaching in Samaria and beyond (Acts 8). Just as evidently had Stephen the gift of a teacher if not of a prophet, which he exercised in a most solemn testimony before the council. But neither the multitude chose, nor yet did the apostles appoint, a

single man to preach or teach. Evangelists and teachers were given by Christ the Head; and so they are still. The church is neither the source nor the channel of ministry: which is the exercise of a gift flowing from Christ at the right hand of God. So it was at the beginning, and so it remains de jure till He comes again.

Here it was but a local charge, however important and honourable, to which, as the multitude chose, the apostles appointed. The distinction is as plain as it is complete, but men are apt to view matters of the kind through the medium of habit and prejudice. Their duty was to carry out the distribution of the means for relieving the wants of the Christian community; which would leave the apostles free for the service of the word of God. Their number was doubtless suitable to the requirements of their work. Their qualifications were that they should have a good report, and be full of the Spirit and wisdom. To make their establishment more or other is as common as it is baseless. It would be unaccountable, if men had not objects foreign to Christ, and so to God's word.

'But we,' say the apostles emphatically, 'will give ourselves closely to prayer and to the ministry of the word.' This is much to be weighed. For that service of the word prayer should take the first place. So it was with the apostles, but not so with the Corinthian saints, who forgot not only that power is to be subordinated to order (1 Cor. 14) but that life according to Christ has to be exercised now in holy and constant self-denial, as the prime duty of him who names the Lord (1 Cor. 9). Prayer is the outgoing and expression of dependence, and is so much the more requisite, that the ministry of the word be not in the will or resources of man, but in weakness

and in fear and in much trembling, yet in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that the faith of the saints stand not in men's wisdom but in God's power. In the order of the soul's blessing from God the word takes precedence, as we may see in comparing the end of Luke 10 with the beginning of Luke 11, where we have the moral sequence of these two means of grace. Receiving from God goes before drawing near to our Father. But for the due ministry of the word prayer is the great pre-requisite that flesh may afford no occasion to the enemy, and the individual may be a vessel to honour, sanctified, meet for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work.

'And the saying pleased [lit. before] all the multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of [the] Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and having prayed they laid their hands on them' (vers. 5, 6).

The grace shown by the apostles had a remarkable answer to it in the multitude, for that all the names are Greek indicates a Hellenistic connection. Persons seem to have been chosen without exception from the ranks of the Greek-speaking believers, the very class which had murmured against the Hebrews. Was not this grace enough to make the suspicious ashamed? There was no human provision of a balance or of a fair representation, as habits of business or the spirit of a law-court would suggest. God was looked to in faith, and the most marked conciliation prevailed. The supposition that there had been already Hebrew caretakers, and that Hellenists were now added to look after Hellenistic interests, is;to miss and mar this beautiful account of

divine love in full activity, by supposing the infusion of a mere worldly prudence.

It is also to be observed that ‘the seven’ when chosen were presented to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them in token of fellowship with their appointment. Imposition of hands was an ancient sign of blessing, Gen. 48:14, especially of official recognition, Num. 27:23, or of commendation to God’s grace, Acts 13:3, Acts 14:26 (Acts 15:40). The impartation of the Spirit by that act in Acts 8:17; Acts 19:6, or again in 1 Tim. 4:14, 2 Tim. 1:6, is distinct, as will be shown in their places. Probably in the establishment of elders there may have been a similar laying on of hands, as some have gathered from 1 Tim. 5:22. But as Scripture is silent as to the fact, it would seem in order to guard believers from that fatal routine of superstitious form which has overlaid Christendom to the dishonour of the Lord and the hurt of rule. Even if apostolic hands were laid on presbyters, we are not told it; but where the duty was of an outward character, and godly men were chosen by the multitude, the apostles (we are expressly told) did lay hands on them. Not the multitude, but, as we have seen, the apostles chose elders for the disciples (Acts 14:23), and Scripture does not tell us of their laying hands on them, even if the fact were so. How infirm is the ground-work of ecclesiastical pride! How perfect is the word of God both in what it says and in its reticence!

The measure taken by the apostles in appointing servants for the exterior duties of the assembly, leaving themselves free for prayer and the ministry of the word, was owned by the signal blessing of God. Administration of money is a delicate and difficult task, especially if it

be undertaken by such as serve in the word. In a low condition it gives influence of the basest kind to those who otherwise could have little or none. But here we are in presence of the Holy Ghost working in energy, holiness, and love, and in raising souls above the fleshly feelings that threatened danger to the church. None would be more struck by the unselfish wisdom of the apostles than the sacerdotal class, ordinarily apt to be greedy of power and influence, if not of worse still.

'And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied exceedingly; and a great crowd of the priests26 were obedient to the faith' (ver. 7).

It looked most promising surely, when the word of God grew as an object of faith and a distinct power among men, when the disciples so greatly multiplied in the city of solemnities itself, when the very priests were now flocking in, unwonted sight as this was, what could most think but that the scattered and peeled nation were at length learning divine wisdom? Would they not soon repent and be converted for the blotting out of their sins, so that seasons of refreshing might come from the presence of the Lord and He might send the Christ Who had been fore-appointed for them, Jesus? Appearances gave a colour, if not currency, to this thought such as never after that could be claimed for it. The truth was that God was but severing unto the name of Jesus from His ancient people such as should be saved, before He sent His armies, destroyed the murderers of His servants (yea, we can add, of His Son), and burned up their city according to the word of the Lord.

And so, if I err not, God is now doing in the active work of salvation which He is carrying on throughout the earth, in Christendom especially. It is the sure sign, not of the world's surrender to Christ and the cross, but that the Lord is separating His own from the world which is hastening to inevitable, unsparing, and condign judgment. Never till then can there be universal or stable blessing for the earth as a whole, such as we are entitled to expect according to Psalms. 65 - 68; 72; 92 - 107; and to the Prophets generally. The heavens must receive Jesus till the times of the restoring (not the destruction) of all things of which God has spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets since time began. It is the corrupt harlot, not the true bride, that wants to reign in the absence of the Bridegroom. If grace convert ever so many or ever so extraordinarily, as with the priests, they were but saving themselves from that crooked generation. Judgment personally inflicted by the Lord must precede His introduction of God's kingdom in power and glory; but this does not hinder the action of sovereign grace in changing His own and translating them to be with Himself on high before the day of His judgment dawns on the earth. For when His day comes they are already with Him, and hence they follow Him out of heaven, and appear with Him for the execution of that judgment.

Another element of moment is now introduced — the free action of God's Spirit even in Jerusalem, where all the twelve apostles were.

The ordination, if we call it ordination, of 'the seven' was for a temporal service, expressly not for spiritual ministry by the word, but on the contrary, by handing over to them the exterior duty, to let the apostles be

undistracted in their blessed work. Assuredly, if it be a ridiculous perversion in one part of Christendom to devise a modern answer in the charge of the paten and chalice, it is only a shade better to make it a sort of probationership to the office of a presbyter. Scripture is overlaid and ignored by human tradition. 'The seven' were stewards for the poor, and not a formal noviciate for a full-blown minister. It was reserved for dissent to find a still lower deep, through money to constitute (what one of their own best men called) 'the lords deacons', with power to conciliate or coerce, to pamper or starve out, the minister. How unlike are all these to the holy ways of God and His word!

Yet one of 'the seven' is brought before us as used and honoured of God in a way quite outside the work for which they were appointed. 'And Stephen, full of grace27 and power, wrought great wonders and signs among the people. And there arose certain of those that were of the synagogue called28 [that] of the freedmen [Libertines], and of Cyrenians, and of Alexandrians, and of those of Cilicia and Asia,29 disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. Then they suborned men, saying, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God. And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes; and coming upon (him) they seized and brought him into the council, and set false witnesses, saying, This man ceaseth not speaking words against the30 holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and change the customs which Moses handed down to us. And all that sat in the council, gazing fixedly

on him, saw his face as it were an angel's face' (vers. 8-15).

Beyond a doubt the levelling spirit of democracy, the unwillingness to recognize those who are over us in the Lord, is very far from the word of God. But even in those days when the church shone in order and beauty as never since, when the highest authorities that ever God set in the church were all there, we behold His sovereign grace acting in a man with no other title than what grace gave him. He was not even a bishop or presbyter; he had been set apart with others to a grave but lowly service. Yet we find him soon after described as full of 'grace' (not 'faith' merely) and power, working great marvels and signs among the people. There was no jealousy in that day of grace and power: for all who could and did glorify the Lord there was room and welcome. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of liberty. Even law, as well as the world and the flesh, gender bondage, and pride, and sin, man being what he is.

The fact is that Scripture knows nothing of ordaining a man to preach or to teach, still less if possible for the administration, so-called, of baptism and the Lord's supper. Superstition has entered, and the power of religious habits of thought founded on everyday routine; so that even pious men fail to see in the Bible what contradicts their theory and practice, and they attach to scriptural acts or words in defence of their own thoughts a meaning which is quite foreign to the truth.

According to Scripture, if a man has a spiritual gift from the Lord, he is not only free as regards others but bound before the Lord to use it. Otherwise let him beware of the condemnation in the parable of the unprofitable

servant, who counted his lord hard and was afraid and went away and hid his talent in the earth. It is no question of a Christian's rights but of the grace of Christ, as well as of the obligation on him who has received the gift to use it according to His will to Whom the church belongs and for His glory. So says the apostle Peter, and it were well that men who misuse should hear and weigh his words: — 'According as each hath received a gift, ministering it among yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God: if any man speak, as oracles of God, if any man minister, as of strength which God supplieth, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, Whose is the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen' (1 Peter 4:10, 11).

I purposely press this scripture which is in perfect keeping with all others that treat on the same subject. It seems the more apposite as Peter was there with the eleven when God put forward Stephen to act on it. The free energy of the Holy Spirit in gift is therefore in no way a Pauline peculiarity as some affect to believe. In the Epistles of the great apostle of the Gentiles, no doubt, we have the truth on this head, as on so many others dependent on Christ's headship of the church, developed more profoundly and comprehensively than the Lord was pleased to do by any others. But the principle is the same in a]l. Thus we find James warning the brethren not to be many teachers, knowing that we shall receive greater judgment, not because they were not ordained. And as the Second Epistle of John thunders against receiving a man (ordained or not), who did not bring the doctrine of Christ, so does the Third encourage Gaius (however Diotrephes might oppose) in all loving reception of such as went about preaching the

truth. John had authority, if anyone on earth then had, to act for Christ; but he takes no other ground than the character of the doctrine they preached, for rejecting or receiving them. It was a question for him (is it for us?) simply of Christ, of the truth. This we must have if we are to love in truth. Love is of God, and God is love, but we must have the truth in order to love the truth. Otherwise it is the most illusive and fatal of snares.

Nor can one hesitate to say, that whatever might be the great marvels and signs that Stephen was doing (ver. 8) to the glory of the rejected but exalted Christ, the Second Man in heaven, the wisdom and the Spirit by which he was enabled to speak (ver. 10) were a reality yet deeper and more blessed. The one might arrest anyone, but no adversary could withstand the other. And there were many adversaries, here of course all of the circumcision.

Who were the Libertines? It would seem, according to the oldest interpretation on record, Jewish freedmen banished in A.D. 19 from Rome, whither Pompey had carried many prisoners taken in war, but afterwards emancipated by their masters and allowed to adhere to their religion. It is natural, as another has suggested, that men such as these should show strong feeling if they conceive that the religion for which they had suffered abroad was insulted or endangered at home. They are at any rate put into the foremost rank of Stephen’s adversaries by the inspired historian. If it be so, it is a Grecized Latin word. This too would account for the expression ‘called’ as due to the connected ‘Libertines’. Some have tried to make out a city Libertum in Africa, and it is known that there was a bishop of Libertum at the synod of Carthage in A.D. 411.

But if such a town existed in the days of Stephen, and it was not too small to be noticed, it could never take precedence of Cyrene and Alexandria.

Doubt has been felt whether two synagogues were meant, or five. It appears to me that Winer is not justified in the former supposition, that the τῶν first used would have sufficed to have united the five classes, and that the second is not to indicate only two parties, each possessing a common synagogue, but the difference of such as came out of cities like Cyrene and Alexandria with the freedmen first named from those of provinces like Cilicia and Asia. When we are told that there were then some 480 synagogues in Jerusalem, it seems very unlikely that there should not be a separate place for each, as the Jews were notoriously numerous in most if not in all.

It is of solemn interest to observe how unbelieving men can find a show of reason to fasten the most odious charges on the truth which they hate and on those who proclaim it. Yet why suborn men to inform, if they honestly felt indignation at alleged wickedness? One can understand that to claim for Jesus the title of the Christ, the Anointed, was to imply His superiority to Moses; also to hint at the transitory nature of the temple, which the Lord had said was to have not a stone left on another, might be regarded as blaspheming the God Whose house it was.

However this may have been, they thereby roused the people and the elders and the scribes. Here the Pharisees would be as furious as the Sadducees or more so. It was a general outburst of proper Jewish resentment; and so Stephen was seized and brought into

the council. If the words had been said, the witnesses were none the less false. Nothing could be more wickedly untrue than that he said anything disrespectful to God or Moses, to the law or the temple. But wicked men hear with a wicked feeling, and the Spirit pronounces them false witnesses, though Stephen's words might sound as they reported. 'For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and change the customs which Moses handed down to us.'

I know not why commentators should question the singular mark of divine favour vouchsafed to Stephen's person, unless they abjure faith and deny the yet more wondrous privilege at the close of his discourse. It is striking that he who was accused of reviling Moses and God should receive from God a sign like that which His servant Moses enjoyed. The Jews at any rate ought to have felt it to be a solemn appeal to them above all mankind. The occasion was worthy of divine intervention whether in the case of him who received the commandments of Jehovah for Israel, or in his case who bore witness to the rejected but glorified Son of man, and that 'better thing' to which His atoning death was to give birth according to the law and the prophets. The supernatural attestation singularly suited both. But there is no evidence possible which wilful unbelief cannot evade, not even if one rose from the dead, as our Lord warned (Luke 16:31).

26 It is painful to note how prone men of learning are to parry and pare down the marvels of God's grace. Thus Beza, Casaubon, and Valckenaer would change the text — Elsner, Heinsius, Khnol, and Wolf, the only legitimate use of the last clause — to get rid of this great work

among the priests. Is aught too hard for the Lord? Were priests alone a hopeless class? The Peschito (not the Philoxenian) Syriac had already yielded to similar unbelief, and the Arabic also, both omitting all notice of the priests.

27 Such is the reading of ABD, of more than twenty cursives, and of the best ancient versions.

28 If we might safely adopt the reading of Tischendorf's last edition (τῶν λεγομένων with A, eight cursives, Sah. Memph. et al), the construction would be easier, 'of those called L'. But the mass of uncials, cursives, versions, et al, is adverse.

29 Lachmann was bold enough to omit 'and of Asia', because of its absence in 30 The best authorities omit 'blasphemous', which the Received Text adds with 'this' against the mass.

Acts 7

The remarkable testimony of Stephen now comes before us. It was fitting that the devoted Hellenist, rather than any of the twelve, should break fresh ground and pave the way for the wider outgoing of the truth, just after the mention of so striking a witness to its attractive power from the bosom of Judaism in the faith of a crowd of priests (Acts 6:7).

Stephen was accused of disparaging what was most sacred in Hebrew eyes — the sanctuary and the law. He was charged with attributing to the Nazarene a purpose of destroying ‘that place’, and of changing the customs delivered to them by Moses. What can be of deeper interest and instruction than his way of meeting so malignant a perversion of his meaning? Grace is never the enemy of law, though incomparably higher, it rather establishes law. The prophetic word did not conceal that of the stately buildings of the temple not one stone should be left on another; but was Jesus a destroyer, because He was a prophet and far more than a prophet? Under His reign the law shall go forth out of Zion, and even in humiliation He came not to destroy but to fulfil it. But unbelief is deaf and blind, and is apt to impute its own evils to those who love the truth. Certainly Stephen said nothing but what the prophets and Moses had declared should come.

‘And the high priest said, Are these things so? And he said, Brethren [lit. Men brethren] and fathers, hear. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said

unto him, Go out of thy land and out of thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee' (vers. 1-3).

'The God of glory' is no mere Hebraism for 'glorious God', but directs the heart from the beginning to One altogether above the world not only in Himself but in His purposes, whatever His ways meanwhile on the earth. 'Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood [river] in old time, even Terah the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods' (Joshua 24:2). It was in sovereign grace that God thus appeared. Even the line of Shem, the father and kindred of Abraham, were idolaters. Grace gives, not finds, what is good. Not only did the God of glory appear: it was to Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia and thus when he was at the farthest point of his distance from 'the land', as well as in idolatrous associations. How little the Jews understood the God of glory or His servant Moses! Stephen, full of grace and power, did. Nothing was more foreign to him than 'speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God.'

Even Abraham, blessed as he was, moved slowly in the path of faith at first. He did not quit Mesopotamia to dwell in Canaan all at once. Before this he dwelt in Haran. He got out of his land, but not so quickly 'out of his kindred', so that there was a remarkable delay in coming into the land which God was to show him. 'Then came he out of [the] land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Haran; and thence, after his father died, He removed him into this land in which ye now dwell' (ver. 4).

It is rather a daring comment to say (Alford, Greek Testament in loco) that 'the Jewish chronology which Stephen follows was at fault here, owing to the

circumstance of Terah's death being mentioned, Gen. 11:32, before the command to Abram to leave Haran, it not having been observed that the mention is anticipatory. And this is confirmed by Philo having fallen into the same mistake…' The truth is that the favourite Jewish hypothesis (Aben Ezra, Rashi) is that Terah did not die till sixty years after Abraham had left Haran. And in all probability the Samaritan Pentateuch has changed 205 into 145 (Gen. 11:32), in order to meet the supposed difficulty. The source of the error among ancients or moderns is the assumption that Abraham was Terah's eldest son, for which there is no more ground in the order of the names than in the case of Noah's sons, where we know that not Shem but Japheth was the eldest. But, for an adequate divine reason, not the elder but the younger is repeatedly named first. To Terah at 70 years Haran was born, Abraham at 130, who therefore could be married to Haran's daughter, Sarai or Iscah, ten years younger than himself. See Ussher's Works, viii. 21-23; Clinton's Fasti Hellen. i. 289 et seqq.

One may not agree with Bengel's suggestion which Alford quotes, but an upright help towards understanding the word which is held fast as perfect is to be respected: 'truly lamentable' is the pandering to the enemy on the plea of the spirit, not the letter, of God's word. That Terah who had Haran at 70 might have begotten Abraham at 130 is simple enough, dying at 205; that Abraham should at 99 regard it as beyond nature to have by Sarah a son is no less simple. Hagar had borne him a son at 86; and the natural interpretation of Gen. 25:1-6 is that after Sarah's death Abraham had by Keturah, his wife or concubine, six sons sent away from Isaac while he lived, that Isaac only

should be his heir without dispute. There is no handling of the word of God so deceitful as the unbelief which treats it as if it were not His, or as if He could lie.

Terah, as long as he lived, was a dead weight on Abraham's obedience. As we are told, 'Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan' (Gen. 11:31). But the land, in these circumstances, they never reached. God told Abraham to quit his kindred as well as his country, and till this was done, he failed to reach Canaan.31 It would have scarcely been proper for Abram as the son to take Terah his father. So 'Terah took Abram...' This, however, was not at all according to the call of God to Abram. Hence, we read, 'they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.' But when Terah died, 'Abram departed as the Lord had spoken unto him' (Gen. xii. 4). Then the language is pointedly different: — 'And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran, and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came' (Gen. 12:5). There was no failure now that his faith was not hampered by the encumbrance of nature which almost necessarily took the upper hand; therefore the movement had lacked the power of God to give it effect. That gone, the blessing immediately followed.

There is a question in verse 4 whether the subject be Abram or God understood. If verse 43 points to the latter, the construction of 1 Chr. 8:6 (in the LXX.) favours the former: so that some may and do abide with the Authorized Version, instead of following the

Revisers, and the Vulgate, Syrr., Ar., Cop., if not Aeth. The connection with verse 5 would lead one to prefer God: 'And He gave him none inheritance in it, not so much as a foot's tread, and promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when he had no child.'

It is wholly incorrect to say that God did afterwards give him a possession in Canaan, namely, the piece of land which he purchased of Ephron as a burial-place, Gen. 23:17; for the gift of God is absolute and future, and that it is so is confirmed, not weakened or trenched on, by the purchase of a burial-place from the Hittite. For who that possessed this land or any other would think of buying his own possession? There he lays his dead in land so evidently not his own that he has to buy it for the purpose, the pledge to faith that he will have it another day. So far from occasion to wrest our text here or anywhere in order to produce accordance with the history, the language is as plain and perfect as possible. The fact is stated to show how truly the patriarch was a pilgrim in the very land whose present possession had, to say the least, such exaggerated moment in the eyes of his seed, because they walked not in the faith of their father. God will surely give 'this land' to Abram's seed. They will buy it of no stranger in that day. No intermediate confusion can touch His promise. 'By faith he (Abraham) sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise' (Heb. 11:9).

Abram and his seed will have the promise in the day when glory is to dwell in that land (Ps. 85.), a truth which Gentile theology makes even believers forget.

Indeed all the earth shall then be filled with the glory of Jehovah, but pre-eminently is the glory to rest on Zion, a defence on all, when God shall have accomplished the cleansing of Jerusalem: not by the gospel simply as now, but by the spirit of judgment and of burning. Then shall the children of Abraham, not by nature only but by grace also, enter on the promised inheritance, he himself being in resurrection-glory, when Jesus is revealed from heaven and there come the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since time began.

There is no ground for regarding ‘not’, as ‘not yet’ nor ‘gave’ and ‘promised’ as pluperfect in sense, nor ‘and’ as ‘yet’, with learned men who did not understand nor believe the scripture before them.

Further, Stephen draws attention to the fact that ‘God thus spoke, that his seed [Abraham’s] should be a sojourner in a land not theirs, and that they should enslave and ill-treat them, four hundred years. And the nation, to whom they shall be in slavery, will I judge, said God; and after these things shall they come out and serve Me in this place’ (vers. 6, 7). It is a free citation of Gen. 15:13, 14, with a few words, more or less from Ex 3:12, instead of the closing phrase. The God of glory thought of His people in Egypt and in the wilderness, before the holy place or even the law, and will never give Israel up till He has made good His promise, guaranteed when Abraham had no child. God called Abraham alone, and blessed and increased him. How wrong then they all were in making so much of themselves, and of their privileges, to the slight of His grace and of Himself, the God of glory, Who appeared to Abraham alone when there was absolutely nothing to boast, nothing but sin

and shame in man, and Israel as yet unborn! For as with the father, so with his seed. As he went about a stranger in Palestine, so they were first seen in bondage in an alien land; and this for no brief moment — for in round numbers 400 (strictly 405) years intervened from the birth of the child of promise till God judged the nation that had them in slavery.32 When his descendants did come out, it was not even into the land, but into the desert, where they wandered forty years. He had indeed delivered them to His own glory, but His dealings were not according to their thoughts and prejudices. Were they the people to claim indefeasible and even exclusive rights? To do so, they must disbelieve their own history, yea, God's word.

At first sight it may appear to some singular that Stephen should introduce circumcision. But he, in fact, simply follows the divine record, so that there is not only instruction conveyed, but it is increased by paying heed to the order impressed on the facts, and so on the history, by the wisdom of God.

'And he gave him a covenant of circumcision, and thus he begat Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac, Jacob; and Jacob, the twelve patriarchs' (ver. 8).

Thus does Stephen draw marked attention to the covenant of circumcision given of God to Abraham, instead of slighting the institution incorporated in the law. It was thus Isaac was begotten, and those who followed; all submitting to a rite which indicated the corruption of the flesh, and put death on it as the only deliverance from it. But the promise was already long before the law; and the father of the faithful had enjoyed

the election and call of God anterior even to circumcision. The truth is a whole, and only suffers from the misuse of one part to enfeeble or destroy another. The Spirit, using the word in view of Christ's glory, puts all in its place, as He alone can. Hence the speaker, being a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, saw and presented things according to God, whereas the unbelieving Jews understood in no wise the true bearing of their own institutions, misusing them for self-righteousness and pride, and hence blindly rejecting the Light of God to Whom all pointed.

Alas! it is an old story. Their fathers were not really better than they; and God has not told us of their doings in vain, if we have but an ear to hear. For how does Stephen sum up the history of that early twelve? 'And the patriarchs through jealousy sold Joseph into Egypt: and God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house' (vers. 9, 10). A beloved son, or a God-fearing slave, a guiltless prisoner or a wise vicegerent, Joseph had God with him everywhere and in all circumstances. Yet who of the twelve was so tried of his brethren? who so plotted against as he? Who seemed to fare worse in spite — yea because — of his unsullied purity? Nevertheless, even in prison, 'Jehovah was with him, and that which he did Jehovah made it to prosper.'

Was there no voice, from Joseph and his brethren, to the Jews who surrounded Stephen? 'Joseph brought unto their father their evil report.... And when his brethren saw that his father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.... And his brethren said, Shalt thou indeed reign

over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams and for his words.... And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him.... And they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver; and they brought Joseph into Egypt' (Gen. 37:2-28). If so the fathers dealt with the type, who that believes could wonder that they should deal worse with the great Antitype? For it was what was of Christ in Joseph, what the Spirit wrought in and by him, which irritated the fathers of the nation against him. Was it so wonderful, then, that 'this generation' had rejected a greater than Joseph; Who being come convicted them of enmity against God, drawn out by hatred of divine goodness in His own person, ways, and words? Let them not forget that the rejected of his brethren was exalted to the right hand of power for the blessing of others, and even (specially at the end) of his brethren, to whom he was only thus made known after his long separation from them. Thus did he prefigure Christ in His sufferings, as well as in the glories that should follow them.

'Now there came a famine over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction; and our fathers found no sustenance. But Jacob, having heard that there was corn in Egypt, sent forth our fathers first and at the second [time] Joseph was made known to his brethren, and his [or, Joseph's] race became manifest unto Pharaoh. And Joseph sent and called to him Jacob his father, and all his kindred, seventy-five souls' (vers. 11-14).

It was a pathway of righteous suffering which led to glory; and when exalted, Joseph administers in the

wisdom of God what the same wisdom exalted him to provide in days of plenty for those of dearth. Under the mighty hand of God, the dearth pressed not only over all Egypt but over Canaan, where the heads of Israel tasted of that cruel affliction, for they found no sustenance, and in divine providence sought corn in Egypt. This, ‘at the second time’, gave occasion for their great discovery, not without self-judgment when Joseph was made known to his brethren, and the line of promise became no longer a secret to Pharaoh. And the fathers, with Israel their father, went down into Egypt, where they in lengthened and retributive sorrow were to pay the penalty for their heartless wrong to their brother, who was exalted of God where Jew and Gentile had both put him to shame, which he repaid in nothing but grace to all, but especially to Israel.

The bearing of all this on Christ is unmistakable; but Stephen does not apply — he only states — facts, so much the more striking because they were familiar, and now set in a light which shone on Messiah as well as the Jews, that the people might thereby know God and themselves. How little they knew anything as they ought was plain from this, that they had hitherto never thought of seeing in Joseph the Christ, nor in the guilty fathers themselves, the still guiltier murderers of the Lord of glory. Their ignorant boast was their shame. And He that was sold no less than Joseph, and lifted up on high from a worse pit and a deeper dungeon, was waiting to bless them, as they themselves were to taste the bitter fruits of their sin in a dispersion worse than a captivity, whatever the mercy that awaits them in the latter end, when they bow repentant before Him in glory.

It will be noticed that Stephen speaks of seventy-five souls, where the Hebrew has seventy; he cites here, as elsewhere, the Septuagint. Calvin (in loco) considers that this discrepancy came not from the Greek translators themselves, but crept in through the fault of copyists, and that Stephen did not say so; but that seventy-five was foisted in here to make the speech agree with the Greek version of Gen. 46:27. But this appears to be an unreasonable way of accounting for what is simple enough, and that the apostle's caution against endless genealogies (1 Tim. 1:4) has nothing to do with the matter. The fact is, that both the original and the Greek version might both be true, the latter reckoning in five sons of Manasseh and Ephraim born in Egypt (1 Chr. 7:14-27), according to a latitude of various forms, by no means uncommon in such lists.

There is more difficulty in explaining the next verse but one. 'And Jacob went down into Egypt and died, he and our fathers; and they were carried over unto Shechem and laid in the tomb which Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in [son, or father of33] Shechem' (vers. 15, 16).

The late Dean of Canterbury had no hesitation in pronouncing him who spoke, full of the Holy Ghost, as guilty of 'at least two demonstrable historical inaccuracies', which, he is pleased to assure his readers, do not affect the inspiration or the veracity of the writer! On the other hand Bengel, following Fl. Illyricus, et al., seeks to clear the passage up by the supposition that a double purchase and a double burial were intended with intentional omissions on either side. He therefore maintains the integrity of the reading 'Abraham', and declares the conjectural 'Jacob' unnecessary,

compendious brevity, when the particulars were all known, accounting for a method which to us seems surprising. The facts are that Abraham bought a burial-place of Ephron the Hittite at Machpelah or Hebron, where the three patriarchs were buried as well as Sarah, and that Jacob bought a field of the sons of Hamor in Shechem, where Joseph was buried. Where the rest of Jacob's sons were laid does not appear in the Old Testament: Josephus says in Hebron; the Rabbis, in Shechem, as Jerome also reports. Moderns argue for some here and some there; and one at least maintains a transfer from Shechem to Hebron.

I prefer to leave the passage; but in the circumstances the least worthy hypothesis is that this blessed and mighty witness of Christ fell into a confusion of Hebron with Shechem, and of Abraham with Jacob, beneath an ordinary Sunday-scholar. Is it not a safer conclusion that we may be ignorant of facts which, better known, would dispel this mist, or of some peculiarity in the mode of reference, as in Matt. 27:9, Mark 1:2, to which Westerns are not used, but which is understood without cavil among Jews? One is disposed (when surveying from first to last a speech of surpassing scope, and power of insight into principles of Jewish history) to doubt that the speaker was ignorant of circumstances lying on the surface of the earliest book of Scripture, and familiarly known to every Jew; or that the inspired writer of the Book did not see the discrepancy which must strike the most careless reader. And one may question whether it would not be better, these things being so, to amend our manners instead of assuming to amend the text.

'But as the time of the promise was drawing nigh which God vouchsafed34 to Abraham, the people increased

and multiplied in Egypt till there arose another king over Egypt who knew not Joseph. He dealt craftily with our race and evil-entreated our fathers that they should expose their babes to the end they might not be preserved alive' (vers. 17-19).

It is always thus. There is ever war between God and the enemy, and nowhere does it rage so hotly as where His people are concerned, and when a distinct manifestation of divine mercy is imminent. God's approaching favour to Israel drew out the enmity of Satan, who stirred up a suited instrument for his malice in the prince of the world of that day, 'another king who knew not Joseph'. The verses are a pithy summary of Ex. 1:7-20, which gives the details of Pharaoh's wily, aggressive, and unscrupulously cruel efforts to depress, yet just as signally to be defeated of God, for, say or do what he might, 'the people multiplied and waxed very mighty'. The edict to destroy the males failed, not only through human pity, but through the fear of God, Who honoured those who honoured Him, and brought to naught His adversaries.

But now Moses is dwelt on at great length by Stephen as before Joseph more briefly. Thus he brought before their minds another and most salient personal type of the Messiah, besides the general testimony to the truth for their consciences.

'At which season Moses was born, and was exceedingly [lit. to God] fair, who was nourished three months in his father's house; and when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was instructed in all [the] wisdom of [the] Egyptians; and he was mighty in his words and

works. But when he was about forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the sons of Israel; and seeing one wronged, he defended [him], and avenged him that was oppressed, smiting the Egyptian. For he thought that his brethren understood that God by his hand was giving them deliverance; but they understood not. And on the day following he appeared to them as they were striving, and compelled them to peace, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren: why do ye wrong one to another? But he that was wronging his neighbour thrust him away, saying, Who established thee ruler and judge over us? Dost thou wish to kill me as thou killedst the Egyptian yesterday? And Moses fled at this saying, and became a sojourner in the land of Midian where he begat two sons' (vers. 20-29).

The enemy had raised up a suited instrument, another king over Egypt which knew not Joseph. Suffering became the portion of Israel and a deadly stroke was aimed at the promise in the person of their babes. For the commandment of the king was to expose them that they might not be preserved alive. At that critical moment Moses was born, fair unto God, with a glorious career before him, however dark its beginnings. He, too, came under the sentence of death, and, after being nourished three months in his father's house, was cast out like the rest. But we have the highest authority for affirming that it was 'by faith', whatever the natural affection of his parents, that he was hid by them these three months (Heb. 11:23). 'They were not afraid of the king's commandment.' God interfered for him providentially; and' the least likely of all in Egypt, Pharaoh's daughter, took him up and nourished him for her own son. It was manifestly an intervention of God.

But divine providence is no guide for faith, nothing but the word. Providence brought him in, whence faith led him out. ‘By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter choosing rather to be evil-entreated with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked unto the recompense of reward’ (Heb. 11:24-26).

None can deny that Moses was capable of justly estimating the situation. He was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and works. He looked, however, not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. His eye was on the kingdom of God, he awaited the Messiah, he knew that the purposes of God, as they centre in Christ, had Israel as their inner circle on earth. His affections therefore, were not with the court of Egypt, nor upon the most brilliant vista it could open for a man of his energy. Poor degraded Israel he loved, and loved, not so much because they were his people, but as the people of God, yet reserved for Christ, Whose reproach meanwhile their degradation was.

So when Moses was about forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. Alas! they were fallen, not in their circumstances only, but in their souls. Faith wrought in but few of them to expect a deliverer or to appreciate such as had faith in God. In such circumstances the worst moral condition is apt to be found. An unfaithful Israelite sinks below an Egyptian; and Moses must learn this, as Joseph had learned it before; as One infinitely greater than Joseph or Moses proved it even before the death of the cross.

‘And seeing one suffer wrong, he defended him and avenged him that was oppressed, smiting the Egyptian; and he supposed that his brethren understood how that God by his hand was giving them salvation, but they understood not.’ They were dark and dead God-ward. The hardness of man they felt. The hope God had given to Israel had almost vanished from their souls. There was certainly no expectation of a deliverance at hand; yet surely they ought to have looked for it. The fourth generation was proceeding, in which, according to the word of Jehovah, they, so long afflicted, were to quit a judged Egypt, and to come into the promised land again (Gen. 15:13-16).

But God was not in their thoughts, and Moses was misunderstood. Nay, worse than this; ‘And the day following he appeared unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren, why do ye wrong one to another? But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wouldest thou kill me as thou killedst the Egyptian yesterday?’ The keenest wound, as the basest blow, comes from God’s people: when man rules therein and not God, Satan works underneath it all and at his worst.

Yet was it all profitable discipline for Moses, who ‘fled at this saying and became a sojourner in the land of Midian, where he begat two sons.’ He must learn of God alone in the wilderness. The wisdom of Egypt must be, as it were, unlearned: God deigns not to honour it for His deliverances. The wisdom that He uses must come down from above. We shall see how God wrought when the due moment arrives. Meanwhile Moses is the rejected of Israel, as Joseph before of his brethren. Only

as Joseph shows us exaltation over the Gentiles when separated from his brethren, so Moses gives us, in another direction, the complication from the offended power and anger of the Gentiles.

But it is during this compulsory exile from Israel that Moses has a family given to him. So the virgin's Son, Emmanuel, speaks in Isaiah 8:5-18. There too Israel are unbelieving; there too is a hostile confederacy of the nations; but, 'Behold, I and the children whom Jehovah has given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel, from Jehovah of hosts which dwelleth in mount Zion.' Faith waits upon Jehovah that hides His face from the house of Jacob, and it looks for Him. At the worst of times He is for a sanctuary, at the right moment He works out unmistakable deliverance. How solemnly all this bore on the actual circumstances of the Jew! They did not understand that Jesus was their Deliverer. They gradually grew to hate His words, because His words judged them in the secret of their souls, and His parables portended sure destruction for their pride and unbelief. Hence they cast Him out even unto death, but God raised Him up and was now manifesting the children He had given Him, as yet from Israel only, but soon to be from Gentiles also. The hour of Messiah's rejection is but the occasion for a higher glory and a more intimate relationship with those who meanwhile believe, just as the stranger in the land of Midian becomes the father of two sons which he had not when in Egypt with the sons of Israel around him.

Had Stephen invented these remarkable facts and yet more remarkable foreshadowings? No Jew, however prejudiced, could deny them to be the brief, true, and bright reflection of God's word in their own hands. The

undeniable truth inspired by the Holy Ghost shone solemnly on that which they had done to One attested by God to them by works of power and wonders and signs which God wrought by Him in their midst, as they themselves too well knew. Such is man on the one hand, and such God on the other: so surprising as to provoke the unbelief and ill-will of all who do not bow to His revelation as well as to the bitter conviction of their own evil. To the believer it is the old but ever new lesson of learning the first man and the Second: where this is learnt, the heart seeks and owns it could not be otherwise, man being what he is, as also God what He is for He cannot deny Himself, though man in his blindness constantly denies both himself and God.

But the correction comes when Christ is brought home to the soul by the Holy Ghost in the gospel: one repents, and believes. Such an one reads his own evil in what man did and is: anything of iniquity in a Jew or a Gentile is not overmuch marvellous, he can find a match for Pharaoh or for Israel in his own breast if not in his own life, or in both. But greater grace assuredly than was ever shown by a Joseph or a Moses, he knows in the Son of God Who came down from heaven not to do His own will, but His Who sent Him — in the Son of man Who came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. So does faith turn all things past or future to present account; as a man’s unbelief loses all blessing from every quarter, and will rather destroy his own soul than give honour really to God and His Son.

Thus was Moses an outcast for many long years, not more from the incensed king of Egypt than from his own unworthy brethren, who loved him the less, the more abundantly he loved them, and who were as unmindful

of the promised deliverance as unappreciative of him who forfeited all on their account. Israel denied him who was in that day the type of the Holy and the Righteous One. It was no new thing.

‘And when forty years were fulfilled, an angel [of the Lord]35 appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire of [in] a bush. And Moses, on seeing, wondered at the sight; and as he went up to observe, there came a voice of [the] Lord [unto him]36: I [am] the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and37 Isaac, and38 Jacob. And Moses trembled, and durst not observe. And the Lord said to him, Loose the sandal of thy feet, for the place whereon39 thou standest is holy ground. I have surely [lit. seeing I have] seen the ill-treatment of My people which is in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and am come down to take them out for Myself. And now come, I send [or, will send] thee into Egypt. This Moses whom they denied, saying, Who established thee ruler and judge? him hath40 God sent [both] ruler and deliverer, with an angel’s hand that appeared to him in the bush. This [man] led them out, having wrought wonders and signs in the land of41 Egypt and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years. This is the Moses that said to the sons of Israel, A prophet will God42 raise up to you out of your brethren, like me’ (vers. 30-37).

God ordered the trials for Moses as none else would. For him, at the vigorous age of forty years, spent with every natural advantage possible in that day, who would have planned an equal period in the comparative solitude of Midian, without a project or even a known communication with his race, in patient waiting on God?

Yet what wiser, if God were acting in wisdom and power by Moses to His own glory?

Then came a most singular but suited manifestation: an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire of a bush. It was no less significant than that vouchsafed to Joshua at a later day (Joshua 5:13-15). When conquest of Canaan was in question, what more encouraging than a man seen with his sword drawn, captain of Jehovah's host? When the work was to bring the people through a waste howling wilderness, what more appropriate sign than a bush blazing yet unconsumed, and yet more, 'the good-will of Him that dwelt in the bush'? Moses himself, 'separated from his brethren', could well appreciate its significance, when wonder and fear had yielded to reflection in the light of the divine communications he had received.

'And as he went up to observe, there came a voice of [the] Lord, I [am] the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And Moses trembled, and durst not observe.' Before redemption, even a saint trembled when brought into God's presence. Be it that His voice declares Him the God of promise, of the fathers Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, 'Moses trembled, and durst not observe.' Till redemption peace is impossible. 'And the Lord said to him, Loose the sandal of thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.' Before the exodus of Israel from Egypt there was a manifestation of divine righteousness in delivering them and judging their oppressors. And holiness is proclaimed inviolable from the outset, not less is it so when Israel are called under Joshua to uncompromising conflict with the Canaanite dwelling in the land. 'Holiness', it was sung at a latter day for an epoch not

yet fulfilled, ‘becometh Thine house, O Jehovah, for ever’ (Ps. 93:5). The same prefatory admonition precedes alike the types of redemption accomplished for His people, and of warring in their midst with Satan that they may enjoy their proper privileges. God will be sanctified, whatever His grace in redeeming His own from the house of bondage, or in leading them to victory over the powers which usurp their heritage. Let us not forget it. How often irreverence has crept in, both in learning divine righteousness and in conflict with the enemy! ‘These things ought not so to be.’

But redemption was in His heart; and of this He forthwith speaks to Moses, now weaned from self-confidence as much as from worldly association. ‘I have surely seen the ill-treatment of My people which is in Egypt and have heard their groaning, and am come down to take them out for Myself.’ Who but God would have thus undisguisedly spoken of a poor set of slaves as ‘My people’? Others would have delivered and bedecked them first. It is the same God Who as a father falls on the neck of the returning prodigal in his rags and kisses him, before the honours afterwards lavished upon him. But let it be the foreshadowing or the antitypical reality, it is of the utmost moment to apprehend that redemption is the work of God present in some sort, and delivering, not merely from the enemy, but for Himself. His people’s ill-treatment must be avenged, their groaning be heard and answered with His consolation”; but, better still, He comes down to take them out for Himself.

‘To deliver’ was of course verified also but the literal rendering is much more expressive, and gives not mere relief from the usurper’s hand, but the positive object,

and what can surpass it? If it be often overlooked, both in doctrine and in practice, it is of the more consequence to insist on it. Elsewhere may be put forward liberation, of which it is, of course, right in its place to point out the nature and effects; but here it is God taking Israel out for Himself, as said also of Joseph in verse 10, and not infrequently elsewhere in Scripture, though the emphatic force only comes out fully in redemption. For Christ suffered once for sins, Just for unjust, that He might bring us to God. It will be manifest when we ate in glory; it is no less true now to faith while we are here on earth. Nor can any truth bound up with redemption be of deeper moment for the soul. True spiritual experience rests on and springs out of it.

‘And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.’ But how different now the feelings of Moses! When in Egypt, he had gone forward in his own energy, and now, when sent of God, he makes objections and difficulties. How instructive the twofold lesson for us! So it is ever. The man who was not called readily proffered to follow the Lord wheresoever He might go; as ignorant of himself and of the world and of the enemy, as of Christ. The disciple who was called begs leave first to go away and bury his father, but learns from the Lord that there must be no object before Himself. ‘Follow Me’ (Luke 9:57-62).

‘This Moses whom they denied, saying, Who established thee ruler and judge? him hath God sent both ruler and deliverer [or, redeemer! with an angel’s hand that appeared to him in the bush.’ The language is framed so as to maintain the parallel between Moses, as before of Joseph, with Jesus the despised and denied Messiah, Whom God is to send from the heavens, not only to bring in generally the predicted times of refreshing from the

presence of the Lord, but to redeem Israel from the hand of the enemy, and to gather them out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. This is found in not only the New Testament but the Old, as the Lord expounded to the sorrowing disciples on the day of His resurrection, both which teach the sufferings of Christ and the glories which should follow them (Luke 24). ‘Ought not Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?’ Indeed, He had taught the same before His death. There will be the bright and judicial manifestation in its due season, for as the lightning, when it lighteneth out of the one part under the heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven, even so shall the Son of man be in His day. But first must He suffer many things and be rejected of this generation. Then indeed will He bless Israel, in turning every one of them away from his iniquities.

Of Him Moses was but a shadow, however honoured of God as both ruler and deliverer, with an angel’s hand that appeared to him in the bush. Jesus the Son of man will Himself appear on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory; and He shall send forth His angels with a great sound of trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds from one end of the heavens to the other. A greater than Moses shall be displayed in that day; but in this day a far greater humiliation was His than that of Moses. Still in both respects the analogy was close, evident, and intentional, for the Holy Spirit in the word was providing for the help of man in warning or in blessing, and the clear intimations of scripture left the Jew especially without excuse, as Stephen demonstrates.

‘This [man] led them out, having wrought wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.’ None denies that Moses stands in the front rank of great as well as good men; but it is God Who made His presence signally known and respected in what He did by him chiefly, though sometimes without him, in that long succession of wilderness patience, and of power, fruitful in wonders, abundant in instruction. Stephen’s aim is, however, to give scope to an undercurrent of analogy to Christ, and hence the man Moses comes into prominence, the better to furnish it as his solemn appeal to a people who never forgot their oldest folly and never truly learnt from God when again putting them to the test. What could Moses have done in the desert without God for one day, not to speak of forty years? What wonders and signs could he otherwise have wrought in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea, before Meribah on the day of Massah in the wilderness, when the Jewish fathers tried Jehovah, proved Him, and saw His work?

There was intrinsic power in the person of the Son, Who from everlasting to everlasting is God. Only, subsisting in the form of God, He counted it not a thing to be grasped to be on an equality with God (in blessed contrast with the first man, who sought to be what he was not, to God’s dishonour and in disobedience), but emptied Himself, taking a bondman’s form, coming in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea, death of the cross. All between His birth and death was alike moral perfection; a Man Who never did, never sought, His own will, nothing but the will of God, till all closed in the yet deeper doing it by suffering for

sin in death of atonement, that God might be glorified even as to sin, and we righteously delivered. But in His service, of Him pre-eminently it could be said that God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, Who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil: for God was with Him. And if that generation denied Him, saying, Who established thee ruler and judge? none the less did God raise Him to be a more blessed Redeemer, a more glorious Ruler of the kings of the earth, as He is ordained of God to be Judge of living and dead, whilst He will also fulfil every hope of Israel according to the prophets.

No wonder therefore it is added by Stephen, 'This is the Moses that said to the sons of Israel, A prophet will God raise up to you out of your brethren, like me.' The difficulties and differences of the most celebrated Rabbis prove what a stone of stumbling is the true Christ, the Lord Jesus, to unbelieving Israel. How otherwise could we account for such a man as Abarbanel perverting the words of Deut. 18:18 here cited, to Jeremiah? If there be among the prophets, yea, in all the people, a marked contrast with the honoured deliverer from Egypt and the law-giver in the wilderness, it is the mourning man of Anathoth, whose testimony and life show a continuous struggle of grief and shame between his burning sense of God's ignored rights and his love for the people of God who most of all ignored them, as well as himself. Utterly untenable is the theory of Aben Ezra and others, that Joshua is meant, who but supplemented, and in little more than one direction, Moses' work, but in no adequate way stands out as the prophet raised up from his brethren like Moses. Hence the effort of some most distinguished among the Jewish

teachers to interpret as a succession this singular prophet! which is as contrary to usage in the language as to the fact in their history. Compare Num. 12:6-8 and Deut. 34:10-12. The position of mediator, whose words must be heard on pain of death, points to Moses' peculiarity, only in the highest degree true of none but Messiah. And if the Jews did not then realize the consequence of refusing to hearken to Him, soon did the threat begin to fall on their guilty heads. 'The wrath', says the apostle Paul, 'is come upon them to the uttermost' (1 Thess. 2:16). And not yet have they paid the last farthing. The unequalled tribulation is still before them, though a believing remnant will be delivered out of it, hearkening to Him Whom the nation opposed to their own ruin.

The parallel is yet further pursued in what follows. 'This is he that was in the assembly in the wilderness with the angel that spoke to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers; who received living oracles to give us: to whom our fathers would not be subject, but thrust [him] away and turned in their hearts into Egypt, saying to Aaron, Make us gods who shall go before us, for this Moses, who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him' (vers. 38-40).

Moses is presented in his mediatorial position, between the angel of Jehovah on the one hand, and 'our fathers' on the other. In the 'church' is suggestive of thoughts and associations altogether misleading. The children of Israel are meant in their collective capacity. It has not the smallest bearing on what in the New Testament is called the church of God, the body of Christ, indeed this is only noticed here in order to guard souls from an error so grave. The church is part of that 'great mystery'

or secret which the apostle was given to reveal, the mystery hidden from ages and generations but now made manifest to the saints. What God was then doing by Moses was part of His ordinary dealings, when Israel so readily overlooked the promises to the fathers and took their stand, to their speedy sorrow and inevitable ruin, on their own obedience as the tenure of their blessings.

Immense indeed was the privilege vouchsafed, not only then in works, but in words of God henceforth given to man in permanence. It was not merely that the angel spake to Moses, but he ‘received living oracles to give us’ — an unspeakable boon, yet more characteristic of the greater than Moses, Whose coming was followed by a fresh, complete, and final revelation of divine grace and truth. Indeed the citation of Moses’ own prophecy in ver. 37 prepared the way for new communications with a yet higher sanction. In vain then would Jewish unbelief idolize the servant in sight of his Master.

But on the one hand ‘lively’ is too slight here, as also in 1 Peter 1:3 and 2:5, on the other ‘life-giving’ goes too far, and at any rate is not the epithet intended; for this is to characterize the oracles themselves, not their effect on others. I know not why Mr. Humphry should have endorsed the error which Khnol adopted from Grotius. And why ‘saving’? This is but to change, not to translate or to expound, any more than the opposite lowering of the sense by J. Piscator and J. Alberti as if received viva voce! ‘Living’ alone is right and sufficient. And how did the children of Israel treat one thus signally honoured in that day? ‘They would not be subject’ to him. If the fathers so treated Moses, was it surprising that their children did not receive the Messiah of Whom he

prophesied, and was besides so striking a type? Thus the simple recall of scripture history vividly presents the actual guilt of the Jews where any had ears to hear. If their fathers of old thrust Moses from them, what of that incomparably more honoured Prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, so recently delivered up to be condemned and crucified? That their hearts were gone from God and turned to Egypt was plain enough then from their appeal to Aaron and from his shameless compliance. But was it less true now when a robber was preferred to 'the Anointed of the Lord'? 'Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber' (John 18:40). 'Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you.' The difference between the fathers and the children was not in favour of those then alive, ever dull to estimate the present race, and self above all, which it most concerns men to judge aright. Yet is it exactly what the Spirit of God effects in every soul that comes to God: if there is living faith, there is true repentance.

But unbelief craves a present and visible guide. 'Make us gods who shall go before us. For this Moses, who brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him.' Israel was rebellious, when Moses was on high; and so is the Jew now that Christ is gone to heaven. But is it only the Jew? Does the Gentile stand in the truth? Only by his faith can it be, as the apostle declares. Is not Christendom high-minded, instead of humbly and heartily hearing? Is it not lifted up with pride, instead of abiding in goodness? And what must be its end? 'Thou also shalt be cut off.' Christendom, little thinking it, is doomed. If God spared

not the natural branches, the Jews. He will certainly not spare the presumptuous wild-olive graft; and Israel as such shall be saved (Rom. 11).

Alas! the baptized soon forsook their own mercies and denied the special testimony for which they were responsible to God's glory before the world. They got weary of dependence on an exalted but absent Lord; they ceased to wait for His return from heaven; they practically superseded the presence and free action of the Holy Spirit in the assembly, they gave up their bridal separateness for worldly influence and favour, and they swamped grace under a system of law and ordinances: so that the word of God became of little or no effect through tradition, as departure from the truth became more and more the state of those who professed the name of the Lord. Insubjection to Him speedily bred alienation, and the heart soon turned toward that world out of which grace calls and severs to God. Men are even more naturally idolatrous than sceptical, unbelief being the mother of both these enemies to God and His truth. Men love to have gods to go before them. The true Deliverer being irksome passes readily out of mind: 'we know not what is become of him.' Is not the wilderness history prophetic? Did not these things happen as types of us that we should not be lusting after evil things, as they also lusted, nor be idolaters, as some of them? Indeed all the things recorded happened to them as types, and were written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the ages are come.

'And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice to the idol and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. But God turned and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in [the] book of the prophets,

Did ye offer Me victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of your [or, the] god Remphan, the forms which ye made to worship them; and I will transport you beyond Babylon' (vers. 41 43). So prone is man, incredulous man, to abandon the living God, in spite of daily standing witness of His power and grace, as well as of His solemn occasional judgments before all eyes; so readily does he take up that idolatry which he had but lately known to dominate the high and mighty the refined and learned — the world, in short, where he himself had been enslaved. So powerful an adversary is 'public opinion' to the will and glory of God, even in the face of the grandest exhibitions of His favour to His people, and of stern unmistakable punishment on their enemies, and, not least, of shame on their gods who could neither help their votaries nor screen themselves. Nor did the 'calf', the abomination of Egypt, satisfy Israel; they craved after objects higher than the works of their own hands whatever the charm of this to man's vain heart. Once yielding to the snare Israel must outdo Egypt. So 'God turned and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven.' Grovelling idolatry aspires to higher things and inflates itself with its heavenly imaginations. Not Stephen is the authority for so withering a charge, but Amos (Amos 5:25-27). In the prophets' Book it is written: would an Israelite gainsay them too? or tax scripture itself with saying blasphemous things against Israel? The forms of Moloch, 'horrid king', and of Remphan, they made to worship, and they did worship them.

And not the least repulsive feature of this early corruption among the chosen people was that they

offered all the while victims and sacrifices in the wilderness to Jehovah. To be lavish in honour of false gods the poorest can afford, who complain of what is due to the true God, as if He were a rigid exactor and not the Giver of every good and every perfect gift.

But divine judgment is sure if it seem to slumber, and the prophet Amos at a far later day pronounces the sentence for the sin perpetrated in the desert. Whatever may have been the aggravation afterwards, it is the firs. sin which decides. Evil never gets better, never works itself out, though it may easily, and always does, wax worse. The evil heart of unbelief departs more and more from the living God. Patience may go on for ages in ways admirable to the eye of faith; but judgment, however deferred is certain, and in due time is revealed though it may be long before it is executed.

Neither Damascus, the head of Syria (Amos 5:27), nor Babylon, the golden city, is the limit of Israel's deportation from the land they had defiled. 'I will transport you beyond' — saith the Lord. To say that 'Babylon', true in fact was an error in quotation is a statement Mr. Humphry should have left to sceptics.

'Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He that spake to Moses commanded to make it according to the model which he had seen, which also our fathers having in succession received brought [it] in with Joshua. in their taking possession of the Gentiles whom God drove out from [the] face of our fathers, until the days of David; who found favour before God and asked to find a habitation for the God43 of Jacob, but Solomon built Him a house' (vers. 44-47).

Yet all this while of idolatrous iniquity ‘our fathers of Israel’ had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, made as they were assured according to the model Moses had seen and God commanded. That the heathen who know not God could serve idols is not surprising, however sad their sin and inexcusable; seeing that their fathers once knew God, but glorifying Him not as God, nor thankful, they became vain in their imaginations and with darkened heart in their folly changed His glory into an image of the creature which they worshipped and served rather than the Creator Who is blessed for ever. Amen. And for this cause God delivered them up to vile affections and the most unnatural evil, as well as to a mind void of judgment, so that knowing the judgment of God against all who do such things worthy of death, they not only practise the same but have pleasure in those that do them (Rom. 1:20-32).

How much more guilty were those who knew far better, who stood in national relationship with God as His own peculiar and favoured people, and had the very tent of the testimony for Him and against their ways! They bore it not only in the wilderness from father to son, but into the goodly land whence God by Joshua drove out the old heathen inhabitants that Israel might be in the possession of it, adding thus gross hypocrisy to their greedy idolatry. There is no corruption so grievous as that of God’s people; and therefore His proportionate chastenings ‘You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities’ (Amos 3:2).

In the days of David (2 Sam. 7:1-17), the favour which God showed him wrought in the heart of the king, who

asked to build a house for Jehovah, but had as his answer that Jehovah would make him a house, and that his son Solomon should build a house for His name, as Stephen here recounts.

Here then, thought the Jew, must Jehovah restrict Himself to that ‘magnifical’ palace of His holiness. For unbelieving man must have an idol somewhere. ‘But the Highest dwelleth not in [places]1 made with hands; even as the prophet saith, The heaven [is] My throne, and the earth a footstool of My feet: what sort of house will ye build Me, saith [the] Lord, or what [is] My place of rest? Did not My hand make all these things?’ (vers. 48-50). Superstitious exaltation of the temple detracts from His glory Who gives it all its distinctive grandeur. Jehovah did deign to hallow and glorify it, so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; for the glory of Jehovah had filled the house of God. But Solomon himself at that august consecration had owned that heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, much less the house he had just built! And so afterward spoke the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 66:1), long before Babylon was allowed to burn and destroy the object of Israel’s pride. It was no afterthought to console the Jew in his subjection to Gentile masters: so had Israel’s king spoken to God; and so had God spoken to Israel long before the Chaldeans had become an adversary commissioned to chastise their idolatry.

It was right and pious to own the condescending grace of Jehovah, it was presumptuous to limit His glory to the temple He was pleased to make His dwelling. The Creator had created all and was immeasurably above the universe. From such a point of view what was Jerusalem or the temple? Who was now in accord with

the testimony of Solomon and of Isaiah? The accusers, or Stephen? The answer is beyond controversy, and their enmity without excuse.

In these verses we have the conclusion of the address, a most grave and pointed appeal to the consciences of the Jews who, under the form of a most instructive and wonderfully compressed summary of their national sins from first to last, heard of God's unparalleled dealings with Israel. The facts were beyond question, the language (even when most unsparing) that of their own confessedly inspired writers, the accusation therefore as unutterably solemn as it was impossible either to rebut or to evade.

1 The best authorities ABCDE, some cursives, and all the ancient versions save the Armenian, et al., have no such addition as 'temples' in the Received Text and most junior MSS., et al.

'Stiff-necked and uncircumcised in hearts44 and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers, so ye. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they slew those that announced beforehand of the coming of the Righteous One, of Whom now ye became45 betrayers and murderers, ye which received the law as ordinances of angels and kept [it] not' (vers. 51-53).

'I have seen this people' said Jehovah to Moses at the Mount Sinai 'and, behold, it is a stiff-necked people' (Ex. 32:9), again (Ex. 33:3), 'I will not go up in the midst of thee: for thou art a stiff-necked people, lest I consume thee in the way.' 'For Jehovah had said unto Moses, Say unto the children of Israel Ye are a stiff-necked people' (ver. 5). But this very fact is turned into a pica by

the skilful advocacy of the mediator: ‘If now I have found grace in Thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray Thee, go among us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Thine inheritance’ (Ex. 34:9). If Stephen repeated the word at the end of their history, it was fully borne out from the beginning. ‘How much more after my death?’ said Moses (Deut. 31:27). ‘For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days’ (ver. 29). The predicted evil was about to be, as it had been already, fulfilled to the letter, and as the latter days are not yet run out, so neither is this evil exhausted: ‘this generation’ still repeats the same sad tale of unbelief and departure from the living God.

It is Moses again (Lev. 26) who lets Israel know how Jehovah will avenge the breach of His covenant. And yet if thus their ‘uncircumcised hearts’ be humbled, and they truly accept the punishment of their iniquity, then will He remember His covenant with Jacob and with Isaac and with Abraham, and will remember the land.

But there was another, and the main, fatal charge made by Stephen: ‘Ye do always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers, ye also.’ Before the deluge He strove with man, though Jehovah said it should not be so always, and thus set a term to His patient testimony of a hundred and twenty years (Gen. 6:3). After that judgment of the whole race, Israel was the theatre of His operations, according to the word that Jehovah covenanted with them when they came out of Egypt. But they rebelled, and vexed His Holy Spirit: therefore He was turned to be their enemy, He fought against them (Isa. 63:10). Here again Stephen had the surest warrant for

vindicating Jehovah and His Anointed, and for convicting the proud stubborn Jews of their old iniquity and opposition to every dealing of His grace. Alas! they were, as Moses told them at the outset, a very forward generation, children in whom is no faith; and without faith there is no life, nor is it possible to please God. Faith working by love seeks His glory and is subject to His word, the expression of His mind and will. Israel without faith was the sad and constant witness of a people outwardly and in profession near to God, their heart ever far from Him and pertinacious in antagonism to Him. Their rejection of the Messiah, their indifference to, or malignant contempt of, the Pentecostal Spirit, were only of a piece with their history throughout. Far yet from being the light of the blind heathen, the instructor of the benighted nations, they are the ringleader of the world's rebellion against God, uniform only in this from father to son throughout their generations.

'Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute?' The prophets dealt with the people's sin, exposing it fearlessly in the light of truth righteousness, and God's judgment, while looking onward to the kingdom of God which should set aside all evil, and the suffering Messiah should be exalted and extolled and very high. It was this confronting the wicked will of man with the light of God that condemned it, which drew out the enmity of Israel, and made the prophet an object of dishonour and hostility nowhere so much as in his own country. God was brought near; and guilty man will not have God at any price. Had Stephen gone outside the record, or misinterpreted its spirit? Jeremiah (who was not a whit behind the rest in the bitter contempt and positive

persecution he had to bear from priests, prophets, and princes) bears a plain testimony to God's sending on the one hand, and to Israel's rebellion on the other. So in 2 Chr. 36:15, 16, we read, 'Jehovah God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes and sending; because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of Jehovah arose against His people, till there was no remedy.' Was not Stephen then right in asking, 'Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute?'

But did not the Jews delight in the promised Messiah? Did they not eagerly anticipate His kingdom, when they will be delivered out of the hand of their enemies, and all that hate them be covered with shame and dismay, and glory dwell in their land, and blessing chase away the gross darkness of the earth? Whatever their thoughts afterwards, their bitterest rancour broke out against those that announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One. If there was any difference, such 'they slew'. It was a kingdom they wanted with ease and honour for themselves; not a King to reign in righteousness, and princes to rule in judgment. No care had they for the inalienable principles of His kingdom; no love, but heart-hatred, for every quality of the divine nature, and for God's rights, which, if in abeyance, can never be abdicated. He was in none of their thoughts, nor His Anointed; and those who held Him before them were most obnoxious to the nation, so that the occasion failed not to work their violent death. And if their children built the tombs of the prophets, and flattered themselves that they were of wholly different temper

and condition, the farthest removed from participation in the guilt of the prophets' blood, they only proved thereby that they were blinded by the enemy, and they witnessed to themselves that they were sons of those that slew them.

For faith does not act in garnishing sepulchres, or in monumental tablets to the holy sufferers of days gone by; faith walks and suffers reproach, if not worse persecution, in the days that are, looking for heaven and glory only when Christ appears. Unbelief, on the contrary, seeks present satisfaction and credit in the honouring of those who render no more a living testimony to their consciences, and it falls under the cheat of the enemy who builds up the higher that hypocritical temple of worldly religion where those once despised and slain as martyrs now fill a niche as idols.

And the Lord tested, as He always does, delusion and falsehood. He sends fresh testimony, and will do so till judgment. He sent His servants when on earth; He sent them from on high, as He continues to send. And the world hates the true and faithful, as it loves its own. But He Himself is ever the most searching of all tests, and how did He fare at their hands? 'Of Whom now ye became betrayers and murderers.'

It was possible to complain of others. No saint, no prophet. was immaculate or infallible. 'In many things we all stumble' — I say not must, but do (James 3:2). And if it be so now, since redemption and the gift of the Holy Spirit, it was assuredly so in the less privileged times that preceded. The unfriendly eye of man could descry even in the most blessed of God's servants words and ways which were sadly short of Christ and which

might be perverted into an excuse for slighting their testimony. But what could they say or think of the Righteous One Who appeals to them, 'Which of you convinceth Me of sin?' 'If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil, but if well, why smitest thou Me?' He was indeed the Holy One of God, Who did no sin, neither was guilt found in His mouth, yet was He treated with altogether unprecedented and most aggravated scorn; and though lawless men had their hand in the cross, the heart and the will of the Jews were engaged in an incomparably deeper way (John 19:11). They were betrayers and murderers of their Messiah, God's Messiah; and Stephen only applies to the living Jews around him what the prophets had declared fully of old, what David had written in the Spirit long before Isaiah and Micah, and Zechariah afterwards, to speak only of the plainest.

By one more characteristic does this most resolute witness of the Lord further explain to the Jews their position and their guilt, 'Which received the law as ordinances of angels and kept it not.' That law in which they boasted was their shame, certainly from no fault in itself, for all the evil was in them. But so it is with man, and most of all with man professing to have a religion from God. His boast is his most manifest condemnation. It matters little what he boasts in; it is at best worthless. There is indeed a resource given in God's infinite grace, where he may and ought to boast; but it is in the Lord, not truly in the law which he fondly flattered himself he was keeping, when in fact he had utterly and miserably failed, and in all its parts, Godward and manward, in himself and toward others. The Lord he had definitively disdained; nor in truth does any soul receive Him till

sense of sin before God breaks him down overwhelmingly, whilst notwithstanding he casts himself on God's mercy, till he sees the rich and perfect provision made for such as he is in the offering of the body of Christ once for all. Then he does truly boast in the Lord, as it is meet he should.

The apostle's language in Gal. 3:19 by its similarity materially helps to clear up the words of Stephen here, though it is painful to observe how few seem to have profited thereby. Each word of the phrase (εἰς διαταγὰς ἀγγέλων) has been the occasion of strange perplexity and dispute among the learned to the depravation of the sense. Winer (N. T. Gr. xxxii. 4, 6) refers to Matt. 12:41 as illustrative of the force here too of the preposition, but the difference of the phrases seems to render the desired sameness impossible. 'Repenting at' the preaching of Jonah is very intelligible and clearly meant; not so 'receiving' at ordinances of angels.

Hence Alford, who follows this later suggestion of the German grammarian, understands it as 'at the injunction' of angels. But this departs from the sense we had got for διαταγὰς from Gal. 3:19, which signifies, beyond just doubt, 'ordained' or administered through angels, not 'enjoined' by them, a very different idea, as also is 'promulgated'.

Now what is the meaning of receiving the law as ordinances of angels? Those who take εἰς here as 'at' are obliged therefore, in order to make sense, to interpret διαταγὰς as 'injunctions', swerving in this from the true force of the participle in Gal. 3:19. It appears to me accordingly, that, if it be 'ordinances' here in keeping with 'ordained' there, we must understand eij"

in the very common Hellenistic sense of ‘as’ rather than ‘at’, the accusative of the predicate, to which Winer had inclined in earlier editions, and, as I believe, more rightly. Israel received the law, not as a code drawn up by human wisdom, but as administered by angels, and so through their intervention, from God. Hence the solemnity of their failure to keep what was divine. The allusion seems to be to Deut. 33:2. Jehovah came from Sinai, rose up from Seir unto them, He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came from the myriads of holiness (or, holy myriads) — from His right hand a law of fire (or, fiery law) for them. Compare Psalm 68:17. It is needless to cite Josephus, Philo, or the Rabbis What is of more moment, Heb. 2:2 quite falls in with the Galatians and with our text. In the Septuagint we find singular confusion; for, first instead of ‘holiness’ they seem to have understood ‘Kadesh’; and yet, secondly, they bring ‘His angels’ into the last clause, instead of ‘a law of fire’; so that their version errs greatly from the text.

The discourse is thus brought to a due conclusion; and this terse and pointed application does not sustain the notion of an abrupt stop which shut out words needful to complete Stephen’s answer to the accusation. The facts adduced throughout, and now condensed in the final and most cutting appeal, which laid bare their pride not more than their persistent rebellion and extreme rum, appear to my mind singularly effective and complete. He begins with their habitual antagonism, fathers and sons alike, to the Holy Spirit, so that their prime religious badge had lost all meaning — their circumcision was become uncircumcision. They had persecuted the prophets, they had slain those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One, they had now actually betrayed

and murdered Himself; and of course the law (received so solemnly through angels)46 they kept not, notwithstanding all their self-righteous pretensions, as if to have the law were to do it.

It was man, not left to himself like the nations who were suffered to walk in their own ways, but governed as Israel was by God's law, enlightened by prophets, blessed with the coming of the Messiah, and according to the word that Jehovah covenanted when they came out of Egypt, so His Spirit stood among them: no people till then so privileged, none so guilty, and, we may add, none so convicted; for they had broken the law, persecuted the prophets, slain the Messiah, and had always resisted the Holy Ghost (cp. Haggai 2:5).

The closing scene of Stephen, and a very momentous turning-point in God's ways, are both brought before us vividly in the verses that follow.

'Now hearing these things they were deeply cut to their hearts and were gnashing their teeth at him. But being full of the Holy Spirit, looking fixedly into heaven, he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, Lo, I behold the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God. But they crying with a loud voice held their ears and rushed upon him with one accord, and cast out of the city and stoned [him]. And the witnesses laid aside their clothes at the feet of a young man called Saul, and stoned Stephen, invoking and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And kneeling down he cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And having said this he fell asleep. And Saul was consenting to the making him away' (Acts 7:54-60; Acts 8:1).

It is for the truth told in love that those who are Christ's should suffer, for this only; and so it was now. For Stephen's love and faithfulness there was hatred, as with the Master.

But a more blessed picture nowhere appears of the Christian. The Jews resisted — he was full of — the Holy Spirit; his gaze was fixed on heaven, as ours should be, and he was given to see actually, as we only by faith can see, the glory of God and Jesus at His right hand.

It is true, there is a difference. It was as yet a transitional time and Jesus he saw 'standing' there: He had not taken definitely His seat, but was still giving the Jews a final opportunity. Would they reject the testimony to Him gone on high indeed, but as a sign waiting if peradventure they might repent and He might be sent to bring in the times of refreshing here below? Stephen in these last words accentuated the call, as he said, 'Lo, I behold the heavens opened, and the Son of man' (for so He is attested, the rejected Messiah exalted in heaven for a far larger glory) 'standing at the right hand of God'. Thus not only does he look up, as the characteristic outlook of the Christian, but the heavens he sees to be opened (another fact full of blessing to us), and Jesus is beheld as Son of man in the glory of God. He Who came down Son of God in supreme love to die for us is gone up in righteousness, raised from the dead and glorified in heaven, and the believer filled with the Spirit and suffering for His sake sees Him there. Once the heavens opened on Him here as He received the Holy Spirit and 'was acknowledged Son of God. By and by from the opened heaven He will come forth King of kings and Lord of lords to execute judgment on the quick. The place and privilege of the Christian is

between these two, and Stephen here sets it forth in its fullest light.

‘But they crying with a loud voice held their ears and rushed upon him with one accord, and cast out of the city and stoned [him]: and the witnesses laid aside their clothes at the feet of a young man called Saul, and stoned Stephen invoking and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit’ (vers. 57-59). Such was religious man, not secular nor heavenly, but now filled with murderous wrath, because he stands convicted of opposition to the present and full truth of God, utterly blind alike to His grace and His glory. And in that guilty scene was one not less dark and infuriated than the rest, Saul of Tarsus, afterward to be the witness of the very Jesus Whom he was then persecuting in Stephen’s person, for he not only beheld, but took the part here assigned to him with those that stoned Stephen invoking and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’

There is no ground for the addition in the Authorized Version of ‘God’, and a questionable need for that in the Revised Version of ‘the Lord’. It was on the Lord that His dying servant called, as the blessed Lord dying commended His spirit to His Father’s hands.

Each is exquisitely in place, which here is somewhat rudely disturbed by the common version. No one doubts that the usual address is to God to the Father; but as little should it be forgotten that there are special circumstances where we not only may but ought to call on ‘the Lord’, as we see in Acts 1:24, and also in 2 Cor. 12:8. But in no case is it sweeter than when the servant dies for his Master as here, though he rightly puts it as a prayer to the Lord to receive his spirit; not as the Lord

Jesus so appropriately, and according to scripture, commended His spirit into His Father's hands.

But this is far from all, blessed as it is. For 'kneeling down he cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.' — There was nothing of consequence in calling with a loud voice on the Lord; for well he knew that He would hear and answer a whispered petition — that He would receive his spirit — as readily as in the loudest tones. His importunate earnestness was for others, divine love for his enemies then murdering him. It was also the reproduction of the spirit of Christ, the practical anticipation of what Peter exhorted later the saints to do: If ye do well suffer for it, and take it patiently, this is acceptable [this is grace] with God (1 Peter 2:20). It is more than taking patiently, as it was then simple suffering for well-doing and Christ. But it is set before us as the pattern for a believer now; practical grace rising above all injury and malice; present and perfect rest in the Saviour, as became a heavenly man full of the Holy Spirit.

'And having said this, he fell asleep.' Well he might: his work was done and well done; and his cup of suffering filled to the brim, but only so as to bring out his last and fervent cry, the intercession of love to the Lord on behalf of those who were slaying His servant.

'And Saul', it is added quietly, 'was consenting to the making him away' (Acts 8:1). He was not there accidentally, nor without full participation in the bloody business of that never-to-be-forgotten day. It is not so that man would have chosen him who was to be the most self-denying, laborious, and effective workman the Lord ever raised up in the gospel; the most

comprehensive, profound, and elevated of apostles in leading the church into the hitherto unrevealed mystery of its union with Christ the Head over all things. A darker page, we know, has yet to be traced, and never more than the day which dawned on his conversion. But how often it is so in the ways of sovereign grace! 'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts' (Isaiah. 55:8, 9). It is ordered thus that no flesh should glory before God; but he that glorieth let him glory in the Lord. So it is written (1 Cor. 1 29, 31).

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31 Philo (Ed. Richter, iv. 20) is all wrong in denying that God appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia, confining the vision to Gen. 12:7 just like the Jews who assailed Stephen. Dean Alford's remarks are worse than 'inaccurate'.

32 It was as exactly as possible 400 years from the dismissal of the Egyptian bondwoman and her child Ishmael, the beginning of that 'persecution of the line of promise which culminated in Egypt and closed in the Exodus of Israel when divine judgments had broken the power and pride of their oppressors.

33 The chief various reading in this verse is a question between ἐν and τοῦ: the former supported by p.m. BC, several cursives and ancient versions (and with τοῦ before ἐν corr. AE and three cursives, et al.), the latter (which is the commonly received text) by inferior authorities. The whole phrase is omitted by the Pesh. Syr. and Erp. Arabic.

34 There can be scarce a question that

ὠμόλογησεν is the right reading, as in ABC, et al., with most of the old versions; and not the vulgar reading w]mosen ‘swore’, as in HP, most cursives, the Pesh. Syr., Cop., et al.

35 DEHP, almost all cursives and many ancient versions.

36 Most authorities but not the best.

37 ‘The God of’ in the Authorized Version and Received Text on ample, but not the highest, authority.

38 Ibid.

39 ‘Wherein’ is the more common reading.

40 The perfect has best, not most, support.

41 Probably Lachmann’s choice of

ἐν τῃ Αἰγύπτω is right (BC et al.), which may next easily have lapsed into ἐν γῃ Αἰγύπτου or ᾧ both being well supported but not the oldest.

42 The Received Text adds, ‘The Lord your’, as in the Authorized Version, and ‘him shall ye hear’, but not so the oldest.

43 p.m. BDH join against all other witnesses in reading τῳ ὀίκω ‘the house’, instead of τῳ θεῳ ‘the God’, and Tischendorf actually accepts it! — ‘a habitation for the house of Jacob’!

44 There is a question of reading between

καρδίαις (with, or without,

ταῖς), and

τῃ καρδία. A few of the oldest, ACD, with some cursives, support the plural but EHP with the mass of cursives,

ancient versions, et al., give the singular. The reading of the Vatican is a clerical error of καρδίας, for καρδίαις probably. Some, as the Sinaitic, add ὑμῶν.

45 The chief uncials (ABCDE), well supported by cursives, present ἐγένεσθε ‘became’; the majority of cursives, with HP, have γεγένησθε ‘ye have been’ which seems to have slipped, or been put, in to add force to the simple fact.

46 There is not the least ground to take angels here as human messengers: the corresponding scriptures refute the idea; and the meaning which would thus result is as unworthy of the context as it is illegitimate. Again, ‘by troops of angels’ is not more opposed to grammar than to philology; as also ‘by’ (A.V.) the disposition of angels is clearly untenable.

Acts 8

Outwardly also the death of Stephen was the epoch when the murderous spirit, provoked by his solemn and fearless testimony, burst out against all who bore the name of the Lord.

‘And there arose on that day a great persecution against the assembly that was in Jerusalem, and47 they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles. And devout men buried Stephen and made great wailing over him. But Saul was ravaging2 the assembly, entering throughout the houses, and dragging men and women was delivering [them] to prison. They therefore that were scattered abroad went about evangelizing the word’48 (vers. 1-4).

Blinded by religious pride and jealousy the Jews were but sealing their guilt irrecoverably. Those who despised the Messiah in humiliation on earth were now rebelling against Him glorified in heaven, rejecting withal the Holy Spirit Whom He had sent down to render a divine testimony to His glory. Man in his best estate is not only vanity but enmity against the God of love. The spirit of the departed martyr they had sent, as one said, to Jesus on high with the message, We will not have this Man to reign over us. So had the Lord once figured the hatred of ‘the citizens’ in the parable of the pounds (or, minas) (Luke 19:11-27); and thus were His words punctually verified. That generation has not passed away; nor will it, as He has apprised us, till all things He predicted shall have taken place, and the most tremendous of these woes await the end of the age which He terminates by His appearing in glory.

But the rage then in Jerusalem was so intense and widespread against the assembly there that they were all scattered abroad except the apostles. It was in accordance with the word of the Lord that the testimony of the gospel of grace should begin ‘at Jerusalem’, and so it did. It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to the Jews, and so it was. ‘This salvation of God’ must be sent unto the Gentiles, and they will also hear: but it must go fully to the Jews first, and this was now being done; and the Jews rejected it with a persecuting obstinacy as yet beyond all example on earth. It was reserved for Popery to outdo that day in unrelenting opposition to the word of God and in sanguinary hatred of His saints. ‘They were all scattered abroad’ throughout the neighbouring regions ‘except the apostles’: a persecution as remarkable for its success in dispersing the objects of its fury, as for the exception specified; for those who stayed would naturally be the most obnoxious of all.

This is the more striking because the charge in Matt. 10:23 (‘when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next’) was primarily to the twelve so strange it seems that Canon Humphry should take our chapter as a fulfilment of the command of our Lord, though the closing words point rather to a future testimony in the land before the end of the age. Nor is Calvin more happy who will have it that the apostles remained behind as good pastors for the safety of the flock; for it is evident that the sheep were all gone. Still less tolerable is Bp. Pearson’s idea (Lect. in Acta App. iv. x. p. 62, Opera Posth. 4to. Lond. 1698) that the tradition of the second century, mentioned by Clemens Alex. and Eusebius (H.E.), accounts for it; namely, that our Lord forbade the

apostles leaving Jerusalem for twelve years! This very chapter later on disproves it. He bade them go and disciple all the nations, yea, go into the world and preach the gospel to all the creation. Remission of sins was to be preached in His name to all the nations, beginning with Jerusalem. They were to tarry in the city but it was expressly till they were clothed with power from on high, without a thought of twelve years.

But for the present, in the face of that great persecution, the apostles abide. Divine wisdom ordered all aright. They remain there together unmoved by the storm which dispersed all others, for important purposes which afterwards appear; and the spread of the glad tidings falls under the good hand of the Lord to His scattered saints. No man beforehand could have foreseen such a result of such an ebullition. God was rejected not alone in His unity as of old, but also in His Son, and now in His Spirit. His truth was counted a lie, His saints as sheep for the slaughter. But if the apostles abode, the dispersed brethren went in all directions announcing the glad tidings of the word. It is just the action of the Holy Spirit in the gospel which we see as God's answer to the people's full and final rejection of His grace; and this was secured in the best and most unmistakable way by the apostles remaining, while all the rest were scattered, with no other external impulse than the last degree of human hatred from rebellious Israel in the city of solemnities itself. The love of Christ constrained: they believed and therefore spoke.

Meanwhile 'pious men buried Stephen, and made great wailing over him' (ver. 2). There is nothing in the epithet to necessitate our regarding these as disciples. They were rather God-fearing Jews whose conscience revolted

against the lawless end of a trial that began with the form of Jewish law and was carried on with the corruption of suborned testimony which then characterized the chosen nation. Calvin has missed the point of the account by the assumption that it is for us a lesson of the faithful even in the heat of persecution, not discouraged but zealous in the discharge of those duties which pertain to godliness. Still further did he err in making Luke also commend their profession of godliness and faith in their lamentation, as if they identified themselves with Stephen's life and death, and testified withal what great loss the church of God had suffered by his decease. The force of this history lies in the raising up decent burial and exceeding lamentation on the part of Jews who were not of the assembly, when those on whom it would have devolved were not there to pay the last offices of love. There is no need with Meyer to render the particle which introduces the account as an adversative. The writer was inspired to give it as an additional feature of the scene, not without interest and profit to the believer who sees and values the gracious care of God even in such circumstances. A Gamaliel stands up for righteous wisdom at the right moment, and pious men bury the martyr with great wailing where it could be least expected.

The true opposition is in what is next told us of his fanatical and bitter zeal who was afterwards to be the most devoted servant of the Lord, who had also to experience what it is in the church to be less loved the more abundantly he loved, spending and spent out most gladly for the souls of men. 'But Saul was ravaging the assembly, entering the houses throughout, and dragging both men and women delivered [them] to prison' (ver.

3). Religious rage is of all the most unrelenting; and fresh victims do not satiate but whet its cruel appetite, sex and age being alike disregarded.

It may be well here to remark that

εὐαγγελίζεσθαι ‘to announce the glad tidings’ is ministry of the gospel no less than κηρύσσειν to ‘proclaim, or preach’, in ver. 5. After Dr. Hammond, Mr. Brewster in his Lectures on this book gives no valid reason for laying stress on the difference, in order to support what he calls ‘regular commission’. First, the former word (εὐαγγελίζεσθαι) is used of our Lord Himself (Matt. 11:5; Luke 4:18, 43; Luke 7:22; Luke 8:1; Luke 20:1), so it is of the apostles (Luke 9:6, Acts 5:42; Acts 13:32, Acts 14:7 15, 21; Acts 15:35; Acts 16:10; Acts 17:18; Rom. 1:15; Rom. 10:15; 1 Cor. 1:17, 1 Cor. 9:16, 18, 1 Cor. 15:1, 2; 2 Cor. 10:16; 2 Cor. 11:7; Gal. 1:8, 11, 16, 23; Gal. 4:13; Eph. 3:8); surely far more than enough to refute the mean or vague use to which he would confine it. Secondly, the latter word (κηρύσσειν) is so little restricted to an official class, that it is applied to the healed leper and demoniac in their proclaiming what the Lord had done for each of them (Mark 1:45, Mark 5:20), and so to those who published the cure of the deaf and dumb (Mark 7:36). Again, it (κηρύσσειν) stands side by side with the former word in Luke 4:18, 19, 44; Luke 8:1; Luke 9:2; Rom. 10:15; 1 Cor. 1:23; 1 Cor. 9:27; 1 Cor. 15:11, 12; 2 Cor. 11:4. Further, the latter word (κηρύσσειν), not the former, is used of those at Rome, who during the apostle’s imprisonment preached Christ, some even of envy and strife, thinking to raise up affliction for him in his bonds (Phil. 1:15, 16). Were there an atom of truth in the alleged distinction, there would be just the occasion to employ this

supposed expression for mere speaking or irregular work. But it is not so; the apostle describes the preaching of the heartless as well as the true workmen by the term (κηρύσσω) which Mr. B. will have to be distinctive of the duly commissioned official.

The notion is therefore wholly unscriptural. Difference of course no one denies, for the one means to announce glad tidings, the other to proclaim or publish, but this is wholly independent of the desired confinement of preaching to those ordained for the purpose, an idea purely imaginary and opposed to all the evidence of scripture. Those who had the gift were not free but bound to exercise it in responsibility to Christ the Lord. Elders were chosen by apostles or apostolic envoys, and deacons by the multitude but for other objects, nor did they ever preach in virtue of their proper office. They might be evangelists like Philip. Otherwise they were no more authorized than the rest of the saints, like the dispersed before us. Rules and order even in earthly things are of moment, but quite distinct from preaching or teaching for which ordination is unknown to God's word.

But Dr. Guyse represents another class which limits 'all' scattered abroad to 'preachers'! This he does by misinterpreting verse 2 of 'Stephen's religious friends', and those ravaged by Saul in verse 3, so as to deny the general preaching by the turning it into the 'remainder of the 120 that was called the apostles' own company' (Acts 4:23), and perhaps including several other later converts that had received the gift of the Holy Ghost and went about as evangelists to preach the gospel!49 How sad these evasions of the truth on the part of godly men! Power makes itself felt; and gifted

men should be the last to silence any Christian who can evangelize. For it is a question of divine qualification, not of human sanction, which last is really a restraint on the Holy Spirit, a slight of Christ's grace, and a hindrance, so far as man can be a hindrance, to sinners' salvation. How blessed the grace of God, Who, without design on the apostles' part or even a hint from any, turned the world's dispersion of the assembly into scattering far and wide the seeds of gospel truth!

Among the great host of those that were scattered publishing the word of the Lord one is singled out by the Spirit of God, who achieved a signal victory for grace where law had utterly failed as always. Samaria was won by the gospel to the name of Jesus; and the good soldier who fought was Philip. He was one of the seven chosen by the saints and appointed by the apostles to do diaconal work in Jerusalem. But the ascended Lord had given him as an evangelist, as we may learn expressly from Acts 21:8; and here we find him in Samaria engaged in this work for which he had the gift, not in that office to which he had been ordained now that the dispersion of the saints from Jerusalem no longer admitted of its functions. But as gift is in the unity of Christ's body (Eph. 4:11-13), so its exercise is above passing circumstances and has ample scope, where a local charge were out of place, as our chapter abundantly testifies. It is the free action of the Holy Spirit exemplified in the details of an individual, as we have already seen it generally in the dispersed.

'And Philip went down to a city of Samaria and preached to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord gave heed to the things spoken by Philip, when they heard, and saw the signs which he did. For [as to]

many50 that had unclean spirits, they went out crying with a loud voice and many palsied and lame were healed. And there was great51 joy in that city' (vers. 5-8)

The worthlessness of tradition is made manifest, though unintentionally, by Eusebius (H.E. iii. 31; ed. Heinichen, i. 261-263), who cites a letter of Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus, to Victor, bishop of Rome, before the end of the second century, speaking of Philip as 'one of the twelve apostles', 'and his daughters'. But what could be expected of a man who could in the same letter interlard the scriptural description of John with 'who became priest bearing as he did the mitre' or high-priest's plate? See also Eusebius H.E. v. 24. So rapid was the loss of Christ's truth, so inexcusable in presence of plain scriptural facts before all readers. They may ridicule Papias; but what of one bishop who reports the fable, and of another (among the most learned in his day) who uses it more than once in his History of the Church? Such are very early Christian fathers, ignorant of scripture to the last degree, yet idolized by superstitious men who profess to receive the Scriptures as inspired of God.

It is interesting to note that the city in question was the same where the Son of God had made Himself known to not a few Samaritans who confessed Him to be the Saviour of the world (John 4:39-42).

Now the Christ is preached there by one of whom it could be said in all truth — that after serving well as a deacon, he was gaining to himself a good standing, or step in advance, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 3:13). It was meet that both

should be rather in Sychar (afterwards Neapolis and Nablous), ancient Shechem and Sichem at the foot of Gerizim, the mountain that vainly sought to rival Jerusalem, rather than in the city of Samaria, lately rebuilt or enlarged by Herod the Great, and named Sebaste in honour of Augustus.52 There the Lord deigned to abide two days, deepening the impression produced by the sinful woman saved from death, and giving them to hear Him themselves and to know the truth in Himself.

The enemy seemed now in possession like a flood; but the Spirit of the Lord lifts up a standard against him in the preaching of Philip, confirmed by the signs which he wrought before their eyes. No miracle was needed there when the Lord visited the place and wrought as the great and acknowledged Prophet, though in truth the central object and glorious sum of all prophecy. It was the Father seeking true worshippers through the Son, Who declared Him in a fullness of grace and truth which surmounted the trammels of Judaism; and the word went home in power though not without the Holy Ghost which the Son gives as a divine spring of unfailing enjoyment. But now Satan had sought to efface the truth and set up a rival in sorcery, ever apt to seduce, interest, and alarm those who know not the true God. And the time was also come for God to bear witness in men, the servants of Christ on earth, to His victory over Satan and His glorification on high, as we have seen in previous chapters of this Book. Hence the energy of the Spirit was at work in Samaria in a free herald of the gospel, after the testimony had been refused with an enmity up to death in Jerusalem. On the one hand, the crowds gave heed with one accord to the things spoken

by Philip; on the other, from many that were possessed unclean spirits came out with loud outcries, and many palsied and lame were healed. Can we wonder that ‘there was much joy in the city’? But with Luke 8:13 before me I could not affirm so absolutely as J. Calvin (Opera vi. 71) that the joy must be the fruit of faith. At least the ‘faith’ may not be of God, as we see in the flagrant case which the Holy Spirit brings here before us. Indeed not a few remarks in Calvin’s Commentary seem rash.

Yea, such was the power at work that even the main instrument of Satan fell under the general influence of the multitudes he had so long seduced to his lies. ‘But a certain man, Simon by name, was before in the city practising magic and amazing the nation of Samaria, saying that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed from small to great, saying, He is the power of God that is called53 Great. And they gave heed to him, because a long time he had amazed them with his magic arts. But when they believed Philip evangelizing54 about the kingdom of God and the name of 55 Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women. And Simon also himself believed; and being baptized he continued with Philip and, beholding signs56 and great works of power as they were done, was amazed’ (vers. 9-13).

This is the only reliable account of one who prominently figures in the early ecclesiastical writers as a heresiarch most hostile to the truth, but with so much fable surrounding him as to prove how little we can trust their statements. Some object to his being classed with the leaders of heresy, on the ground that he was not a Christian. He certainly was ‘baptized’, as he is said to

have ‘believed’, and thus had a better title (as far as profession goes) than his Samaritan master Dositheus, who is said to have been a disciple of John the Baptist, but eclipsed in his leadership subsequently by Simon. Even Justin Martyr who had the double advantage of being a native of Flavia Neapolis which arose out of the ruins of Sychar, and of being born not a century after, seems to have fallen into the blunder of confounding the Sabine deity, Semo Sancus (who had a statue erected to his honour), with Simon Magus. Dr. E. Burton in a note to his Bampton Lectures (Oxford, 1829) endeavours to show the impossibility of such a mistake on the part of Justin, and has put together from various learned men what can be said in favour of Simon’s deification at Rome. If it were so, it is of small consequence. The alleged contests between him and the apostle Peter whether at Caesarea or at Rome, are too absurd to notice, being evidently legends grafted on the inspired history by the unhallowed hands of men whose mind and conscience were alike defiled. Destitute of the truth they betook themselves to marvels of the imagination, which after all rather detract from the solemn effect of sacred history, and add nothing to the dignity of the apostle’s exposure, or to the blind self-condemnatory turpitude of the unhappy man himself.

Whatever the mischievous result of Simon’s sorcery and falsehoods leading to his own blasphemous pretensions — and we are here told of his misleading all around small and great (for what avail rank or education to guard from error?) — all vanished like smoke before the light of the gospel. ‘The kingdom of God’ and ‘the name of Jesus’ annihilated the vain jugglery and impious frauds of the Samaritan.

But it is instructive to notice that there is a difference in the language of verse 12 as compared with 13, and a difference in favour of the men and women in the former as against the latter. They are said simply to have believed the testimony and to have been baptized; the same is said of Simon with the important addition that he attended closely to Philip, and while beholding the signs and great works of power as they were done, was amazed. This was what transported him, not the love of God, not the truth of Christ, nor the grace of the gospel even to such a guilty deceitful wretch as himself, but the wondrous power which wrought before his eyes. Its overwhelming reality struck none so deeply as Simon. Others had their eyes drawn to the kingdom and its holy glories; others in spirit fell down and clasped the feet of their unseen Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ, lost in wonder, love, and praise. Simon was in ecstasies, beholding the signs and great deeds of power, the character of which was discerned by none more clearly than himself. He yielded to evidence and believed what approved itself to his mind irrefragably. Not a word implies self-judgment before God, not a word of any gracious action on his heart. Conscience was not ploughed up; nor did the affections flow under the sense of God's immeasurable grace in Christ to save trim from his sins. On the other hand, it is not said of the men and women in the verses before that they were 'amazed', as Simon was in his close attendance on Philip, not to hear the truth more fully and grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, but 'beholding the signs and great deeds of power as they came to pass.'

The Spirit of God thus lays bare to us in this description, it seems to me, the merely natural source of Simon's

faith as distinguished from others. And such is all faith that is founded on ‘evidences’, which the mind judges and accepts accordingly. It may not be in the least insincere, and those who so believe may be the readiest to do battle, if it seem necessary, for their creed. But there is no life, as there is no repentance, no link with Christ formed by the Holy Spirit through the reception of the word, because it is God’s word, discovering God to the guilty conscience and delivering withal through Christ dead and risen.

Still Simon may have fully credited himself with honest conviction of the truth; and, in the warmth and haste of so mighty a work in so short a time, not even Philip saw reason to question his confession. In fact, where it is the mind without conscience, progress is much more rapid, and all outwardly looks promising for a little where a soul thus easily passes into the ranks of Christ. We have not long to wait for the circumstances which betrayed unmistakably the unrenewed condition of Simon’s soul, delivered the saints from what had else been a constant incubus, and gave himself the most solemn warning that his heart was not right with God.

The tidings of God’s gracious work in Samaria could not but make a powerful impression on all saints; and of these none would estimate its importance so deeply as the personal companions and most honoured servants of the Lord in Jerusalem. His will and glory, as well as love to the objects of His grace that they might be blessed more abundantly, drew their hearts to the spot where God had wrought so manifestly. Indeed the Lord risen (Acts 1:8) had specially named Samaria as a scene of future testimony for the disciples. What a contrast with Jews having no intercourse with Samaritans!

‘Now when the apostles that were in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John, the which on coming down, prayed for them that they might receive [the] Holy Spirit; for as yet He had fallen upon none of them: only they had got baptized unto the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Spirit’ (vers. 14-17).

Some important principles of truth, too often overlooked, are illustrated here.

The independency of congregationalism is shown to be as far as possible from the will of God. There was no holding aloof on the part of the chiefs in Jerusalem, though we hear of no request for their intervention on the part of the Samaritans. The apostles felt as members of the one body of Christ for the fresh objects of divine grace; and yet the chosen future exponent of that great mystery was still in his sins and unbelief.

Nor was there the smallest jealousy in Philip, because other servants of Christ came whose place in the assembly was so much higher than his own. Love, the ‘way of surpassing excellence’, as yet prevailed; and as the members generally had the same care one for another, in none did this appear so conspicuously as in those whom God set in the church first: for Christ’s sake and according to His word they were in the midst of them serving as bondmen. Nothing was farther from the heart of the chiefs who ruled, than on the one hand to be called Rabbi, Father, and Master, or on the other to affect the lordly style of either patronizing or despising the Gentiles. It was on all sides the power of the life of Christ.

Again, it will be noticed that the apostles sent two of their number, not James (son of Alphaeus) and Thaddaeus, nor Simon Zelotes and Matthias but their unquestionably choicest pair, Peter and John. Can any believer be so dull as to conceive that this had no far-reaching purpose in the mind of Him Who dwells in the assembly and knows the end from the beginning and would give the sure light of His word to such as look to Him for guidance? Not even Satan, I am bold to think, yet indulged in the dream of an exclusive57 chair for Peter's direction of the church as a whole; still less of a present throne in command of the 'powers that be' with a triple crown of pretensions over heaven, earth and hell. On the contrary, without a thought of these vanities of ecclesiastical ambition and most profane assumption, the apostles in love and wisdom send, to those that had received the word of God in Samaria, Peter and John. Who better qualified, were it needed, to judge and report truly? Who could be the bearer of better blessings from on high? or who in fine be more jealous for the glory of the 'one Shepherd', in dealing with these 'other sheep', which were not of the Jewish 'fold'?

And what could more become servants of Christ when they did come down? They 'prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit'. God had hitherto withheld this, the great and characteristic privilege of the Christian. But the apostles in Jerusalem were in the current of His will and ways. And Peter and John on the spot perceived the lack and spread it out before God, not out of doubtful mind, but reckoning on His faithfulness to make good the promise of the Spirit. Even at Pentecost Peter was led to look beyond the Jews and their children to all that were afar off, as many as the

Lord their God might call to Him (Acts. 2:39). ‘For as yet He was fallen upon none of them; only they had got baptized unto the name of the Lord Jesus.’

So plainly then is the situation laid before us that doubt is inexcusable. On the one hand these Samaritans believed the word, as they were also thereon baptized; on the other hand not one of them had as yet been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which the Jewish saints had at once received on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. Yet from the days of the so-called Fathers down to the Reformers, and hence till our own day, not merely the superstitious but men beyond most for godliness, ability, and learning, as to this seem at sea, as if they had no chart. It is indeed one of those deep blanks in traditional theology (Catholic or Protestant, Arminian or Calvinist, being here almost equally at fault), which involves incalculable loss practically as well as in spiritual intelligence, and is nowhere more felt than in the worship of God. The soul’s entrance into the truth has commensurate blessing in its train, as those know who have made the transition from ignorance of this truth into the enjoyment of it.

Thus Chrysostom (Cramer’s Cat. Pat., iii. 136) and OEcumenius speak of the Samaritan converts receiving the Spirit for remission, but not for signs: a manifest departure from scripture which never designates the first gospel work of the Spirit in the soul as ‘the gift of the Spirit’, nor consequently as a question of ‘reception’ (comp. Acts 2:38; Acts 19:2).

But leaving the Fathers, one must content the reader with J. Calvin’s remarks as well as Dr. J. Lightfoot’s as a sufficient sample. The former are purposely cited from

Beveridge's edition of the early English version given in the series of the Calvin Translation Society (Acts i. 338-339) 'But here ariseth a question, for he saith that they were only baptized into the name of Christ, and that therefore they had not as yet received the Holy Ghost; but baptism must either be in vain and without grace, or else it must have all the force which it hath from the Holy Ghost. In baptism we are washed from our sins; Paul teacheth that our washing is the work of the Holy Ghost (Titus 3:5). The water used in baptism is a sign of the blood of Christ; but Peter saith that it is the Spirit by Whom we are washed with the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:2). Our old man is crucified in baptism that we may be raised up in newness of life (Rom. 6:6); and whence cometh all this save only from the sanctification of the Spirit' And finally what shall remain in baptism if it be separate from the Spirit (Gal. 3:27)? Therefore we must not deny but that the Samaritans, who had put on Christ indeed in baptism, had also His Spirit given them (!) And surely Luke speaketh not in this place of the common grace of the Spirit whereby God doth regenerate us that we may be His children, but of these singular gifts wherewith God would have certain endued at the beginning of the gospel to beautify Christ's kingdom. Thus must the words of John be understood, that the disciples had not the Spirit given them as yet, forasmuch as Christ was yet conversant in the world; not that they were altogether destitute of the Spirit, seeing that they had from the same both faith and a godly desire to follow Christ; but because they were not furnished with these excellent gifts wherein appeared afterwards greater glory of Christ's kingdom. To conclude, forasmuch as the Samaritans were already endued with the Spirit of adoption, the excellent graces

of the Spirit are heaped upon them, in which God showed to His church, for a time as it were, the visible presence of His Spirit, that He might establish for ever the authority of His gospel, and also testify that His Spirit shall be always the governor and director of the faithful.'

This is enough to show where pious and enlightened men are in general as to the truth of the Spirit and indeed of redemption also. They are not aware that the gift (δωρέα) of the Spirit, whilst over and above that communication of life which is common to all saints in Old and New Testament days, is at the same time quite distinct from the gifts (χαρίσματα) and more especially from powers and tongues, the sign-gifts which the Spirit distributed in honour of the risen Lord Jesus when inaugurating that new thing, the church, the body of Christ, here below. Nor is Christian baptism a sign of life, but rather of sins washed away and of death to sin with Christ. That is, it is a sign of salvation, the demand before God of a good conscience by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the present clearance of a Christian, and not merely what the heir had in his nonage under law. Then was a perfectly sure promise, now there is full accomplishment for the soul (1 Peter 1:9) which baptism expresses as a figure. But this is quite distinct from the Spirit, given to the believer as the seal of redemption and earnest of the inheritance; and this distinction in particular the great French Reformer ignored, as people do to this day. Hence in his great anxiety to guard against sacramentalism (though even here his language is unsafe and has been used for evil by the men of that school), he lowers the reception of the Spirit to transient displays of energy and thus

involves himself in hopeless antagonism to scripture. The words of John 14-16 go far beyond miracles, healings, or kinds of tongues. They are to be understood of the far different presence of the Paraclete Himself, Who was to dwell with the disciples and be in them; and this is not for ‘a time as it were’, but to abide for ever.

The Samaritan believers were saints then, and children of God, but not yet endued with the Spirit, any more than the Old Testament saints who, though born of the Spirit, never received that great gift, which was not and could not be till redemption, when God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into hearts already renewed, crying, Abba, Father. No doubt sensible gifts then and for a while accompanied the Spirit’s presence thus vouchsafed, but we err greatly if we either confound the gift with the gifts, or deny the new and abiding privilege with what all saints had before redemp A brief extract from what our learned Dr. Lightfoot says (Works viii. 125-128, Pitman’s edition) will suffice. ‘The Holy Ghost thus given meaneth not His ordinary work of sanctification, and confirming grace; but His extraordinary gift of tongues, prophesying, and the like. And this is evident, by the meaning of that phrase, “the Holy Ghost”, in the scriptures when it denoteth not exactly the person of the Holy Ghost or the third person in the Trinity.’ Here again we have the same confusion of God’s new and distinctive endowment of the church, the ever-abiding gift of the Holy Ghost, with the gifts, some of which took a visible form and others not It is admitted that what is called ‘sanctification of the Spirit’ (1 Peter 1:2) is different and previous; as it is that vital work of separating a soul to God which takes place in conversion or quickening, and therefore has always been and

always must be, as long as God in His grace calls sinners to Himself from among men. This typically is what answered to the washing of the unclean in the Levitical figure; then followed the application of the blood of sacrifice; and lastly the anointing oil, which only is what the New Testament designates the reception of the Spirit, wholly distinct from the new birth (which answers to the water), the blood intermediately being the token of being brought under redemption. The gifts, however important in their place, were quite subordinate, and might be some of them but temporary, though all, of course, were in full force when the Spirit was given at Pentecost.

Are Christians then grown wiser in our day? Let Dean Alford bear witness (The Greek Test., fifth edit. ii. 88, 89), who, like the rest, takes advantage of the accompanying gifts, which might be seen, to ignore the incomparably more momentous unseen gift of the Holy Ghost. Further, he cites the very remarks of Calvin, as ‘too important to be omitted’, which we have seen to be a heap of confusion that might with justice be exposed more trenchantly still were this the task in hand. They all agree in the great error of reducing the gift of the Holy Spirit to the outward ‘miraculous gifts’, instead of seeing along with these the unprecedented and transcendent privilege of Himself given to be the portion of the saints for ever. It is the more inconsistent (and error is apt to be inconsistent) in Dean Alford, inasmuch as he owns in his note on John 16: 7, ‘that the gift of the Spirit at and since Pentecost was and is something TOTALLY DISTINCT from anything before that time: a new and loftier dispensation’. His own emphasis is given as he puts it.

One of these objections is that the imposition of hands preceded that gift here as well as in Acts 19, where the apostle Paul laid his hands for a like purpose and with a like result on the twelve disciples at Ephesus. But why should this offend them? They may not like the ritualistic effort to base confirmation on a scripture which gives no real countenance to that ceremony; they may feel grieved at or ashamed of a mere form without power, they may justly censure R. Nelson (or any citing him) for untruly referring to Calvin as if he thought confirmation was instituted by the apostles. For in fact in the Institutes (iv. ch. 19:76) he disproves the very thought attributed to him. But to deny that it was the Holy Spirit Himself that was communicated at Samaria and Ephesus by imposition of apostolic hands is to fly in the face of God's word; to construe it into the gifts, and not the gift, of the Spirit, is to prepare the way for the most withering unbelief and the loss of the spring of all true power. For what is the church without the personal presence of the Holy Ghost? and what is the Christian without His indwelling? That which baptizes into unity does not exist otherwise, there is no power adequate to constitute the believer a member of Christ; for both depend on the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Let it be observed that the two main occasions of that gift were to the Jewish believers (Acts 2:4) and to the Gentiles (Acts 10:44), on neither of which is there a word expressed or implied about Laying on of hands. Indeed one has only to weigh both accounts (Pentecost being, of course, the fullest and chief) to gather that there could be nothing of the sort on either day. The peculiar cases of Samaria and Ephesus, which some would unintelligently erect into a rule to supersede

those more general, were but ancillary as events, though the blessing conferred was of course, as far as it went the same For on each of these where the laying on of hands occurred, the principle was, it would seem, to guard against rivalry, to bind the work of God together, and to put the most solemn sign of divine honour, first on the Jewish apostles, and next on the apostle to the uncircumcision. This was of moment to mark, but we do not find it repeated, save for special reasons and with other features, on Timothy personally (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). But God had taken care at an early day to anticipate and cut off possible misuse by employing a disciple, not the apostle, in the very conspicuous instance of the great apostle himself (Acts 9:17), as if to break beyond dispute all thought of a successional chain.

It may be well also to say that the effort to make the anarthrous form mean no more than a special gift or particular operation of the Holy Spirit is not borne out by scriptural usage. For we find πνεῦμα ἅγιον employed with and without the article, so as to demonstrate that this expression in no way excludes His blessed personality, but only falls under the usual principles of the language. Where it is intended to present Him as a distinct object before the mind, the article appears, where it only characterizes, the phrase is, as ever, anarthrous. Here, to go no farther, we have πνεῦμα ἅγιον in verses 15, 17; but in 18 to; pneu’ma. Were it merely previous mention, we should have had the article in 17 as well as 18. The true solution, however, is not here contextual, but the intention is not to present objectively. Where this is not so, the accusative of a transitive verb is regularly without the article, as being

only the complement of the notion expressed by the verb, where it is sought to present the governed word as an object before the mind, the article is added. The usage therefore is thoroughly exact. So in Acts 19:2 we have twice πνευμα ἅγιον without the article, but in verse 6 the article in its emphatic duplication; where in seems vain to contend that the Holy Spirit is not meant in all these cases. Is there then not a difference? Unquestionably; but the difference lies, not in the contrast of a special gift with His general influence, as men say, or even with His person, but in the questioned character of what was received in the one case with the definite object before the mind in the other, most suitably accompanying such a phrase as ‘came’ upon the men described.

This is the true key to Acts 1:2, 5, not the mere circumstance of the preposition (strangely supposed by some to be exceptional) which serves to define, as the phrase in verse 8 brings the Spirit into an objective point of view. But it is the self-same Spirit in each case; and could a mistake be greater than to allow that Christ only gave injunctions by a particular gift, and that the disciples enjoyed Him in all His fullness? Compare also Acts 10:38 with 44. So, on the eventful day when the promise of the Father was fulfilled, we find in Acts 2:4 the Spirit both without and with the article, and there according to the principle enunciated: when used to characterize what filled all, it is designedly anarthrous, when the phrase presents a distinctively objective cast of thought, the article is as correctly inserted. The presence or the absence of the article leaves the Holy Spirit untouched and only affects the aspect meant — person or power. Compare verses 17, 18, 33, 38, Acts

4:8, 31 (a very remarkable expression in the text of the oldest codices); Acts 5:3; Acts 6:5; Acts 7:55; Acts 8:29, 39; Acts 9:17, 31; Acts 10:38, 44, 45, 47; Acts 11:15, 16, 24, 28; Acts 13:2, 4, 9, 52; Acts 15:28; Acts 16:6, 7. The Epistles would only add and confirm by further instances.

Thus were the Samaritans sealed of the Holy Spirit and made members of Christ in full possession of the church's privileges, no less than the saints at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

The sight of the blessing brought out the true condition of Simon. He was amazed, before the two apostles entered the scene, as he beheld the signs and great deeds of power wrought by Philip. Now that others from among the Samaritans received like power, Satan prompted his unrenewed mind to evil.

'Now Simon, when he saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, offered them money, saying, Give me also this power that, on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive [the] Holy Ghost. But Peter said to him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou thoughtest to obtain the gift of God through money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and beseech the Lord if so be the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee, for I see that thou art in gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. And Simon said in answer, Beseech ye for me with the Lord that none of the things which ye have spoken come upon me' (vers. 18-24).

Undoubtedly there was somewhat to be 'seen' but this does not hinder the truth that the Spirit was being given

inwardly, and not merely ‘gifts’, still less only what men call the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. They, however, point to the fact that this was through the imposition of the hands of the apostles. But why should not God give the Spirit thus if He pleased? It is for Him to judge His own best methods; and God, Who gave the Spirit at Pentecost without the laying on of hands, was pleased now to honour the apostles as the channel. It is a question of His wisdom as well as sovereignty. For mere bishops to imitate the form without the power is without any basis of truth, and is real presumption. Simon saw, in fact, a means of self-exaltation, perhaps also of gain. Certainly he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me also this power that, on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit.’ What an insult to God! What is bought with money may naturally be sold for money. But this divine gift, was it to be a matter of traffic among men?

It is a mistake to suppose that Simon wanted the gift for himself. He wished to buy the power of conferring the Holy Spirit upon others. It is very possible, however, that he may not have received the outward gift even for himself, assuredly he was not sealed of the Holy Ghost, which, as we have seen, implies the new birth previously. And Simon manifests not a thought or feeling in communion with God. He was just a natural man, and a man even debased by all his former ways and character, especially those which profanely abused the name of God. The truth he had heard could never have judged his conscience or reached his heart. It was rather stupefaction in presence of transcendent power, and the keen desire to appropriate this power to his own selfish purposes. He judged, as man habitually does,

from himself; not, as the believer does, from God. As money is the great means among men, he supposed it must be so with the apostles. Christ was nothing in his eyes; the power that eclipsed his own was desirable to obtain at any price. This was all that he conceived of the Holy Spirit; and it proved in the most conclusive manner where his own soul was.

Simon's offer filled Peter with indignation, who said to him, 'Thy money perish with thee, because thou thoughtest to obtain the gift of God with money.' Christ alone is the procuring cause, and those alone who rest on His blood by faith receive it. The word of Simon betrayed his ruin. He was, as yet, a lost man. There was no real faith, and consequently no salvation in his case. Baptism is an admirable sign where there is life and faith, without these, it is a most solemn aggravation of man's natural guilt and ruin. It is to perish with a Saviour in sight, with sin and God's judgment slighted as well as the Saviour. Simon had no share nor lot in this matter, for his heart was not right before God. This does not mean, in my judgment, a lack of share or lot in the sign-gifts but in the Saviour: the gospel was nothing to him. Had the word of truth reached him, his heart would have been purified by faith, for the grace of God is adequate to save the vilest. But no heart visited by grace could have thought of offering money in order to obtain the power of giving the Holy Spirit. Simon was self-convicted of total strangership to God and His grace. The heart of man, though a baptized man, was as perverse as ever, and had broken out into a more daring sin than was possible before. Outward nearness to grace is of all things the most fatal to him who is not subject to the truth of God.

Yet, as he had taken the place of professing the name of the Lord, Peter calls on him to ‘repent’. Repentance is the clear duty and imperative call of God for a sinful man. It was always an obligation since the fall; but the gospel, as it sheds a brighter light upon man’s need, so furnishes the mightiest motives to act upon the heart. ‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.’ The highest of duties, then, is to own and honour the Son of God, confessing one’s own sins, which brought Him, in divine love, to the cross. On the other hand, he that believes in the Son has everlasting life; whilst he that disobeys the Son, not subject to Him now fully revealed, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

Hence the apostle adds, ‘Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and beseech the Lord if so be the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee, for I see that thou art in gall of bitterness and in bond of iniquity.’ That there is grace in God and efficacy in the blood of Christ to meet any wickedness of man is certain. Peter would have never thus exhorted him had pardon been an impossibility. But the answer of Simon clearly shows that, though alarmed for the moment, there was no sense in his soul of his shameless sin against God and especially against the Holy Spirit; no real reckoning upon grace in God, according to the revelation of Himself in the death of His Son. Peter did not say, ‘Beseech’ God, but ‘the Lord’, for in Him and by Him only can God deliver a guilty soul; and now that He has sent His Son, the only sure and adequate way of honouring the Father is in honouring the Son. ‘He that confesseth the Son hath the Father also.’ Confessing the

Father only, not the Son, neither saves the sinner nor glorifies God. So here Peter calls on him to beseech the Lord, Who is ‘the way and the truth, and the life’. But there was no faith any more than repentance in Simon, who said in answer, ‘Beseech ye (it is emphatic) for me with the Lord, that none of the things which ye have spoken come upon me.’

There was confidence, if we can so say, in the channels of power. He who had no faith in Christ confesses his faith in Peter; as millions since have done in saints, angels, or the virgin Mary. This, however, is not really faith but credulity and superstition; for it has no ground, either in the nature of the persons, or in the word of God. Faith in the Lord Jesus has alone a divine resting-place, for God sent Him, His only-begotten Son, into the world that we might live through Him — through none other but Him. ‘Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as propitiation for our sins.’ To all this truly divine and infinite salvation Simon was insensible. But he saw in Peter an instrument of power, without faith in the word he and Philip had preached; and so he entreats the apostles to pray to the Lord for him so that none of the things spoken might befall him. It was future consequences he dreaded, not his present state of ruin and guilt that he felt. Thenceforward, according to scripture, he disappears from our sight; and none could wonder if the worst evil came on the impenitent man. But the reticence of Luke did not suit the ecclesiastical historians who to their own shame detail for their readers accounts which bear the stamp of fable in honour of Peter. And where is the Lord in all this? Wounded, we may say, as so often, in the house of His friends.

But we have a brief word added as to the two apostles. ‘They therefore, when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, returned1 to Jerusalem and evangelized58 many villages of the Samaritans’ (ver. 25). It was not a mere transient act, as the common text has it, but a continuous work. Their hearts were toward the Lord, Who had created in them a right and fervent spirit, and needed no entreaty to spread amongst small and great the glad tidings of His redemption. The villages of the Samaritans, and many of them, were not beneath the detailed and repeated labours of the apostles.

We have next the history of Philip’s evangelistic service resumed, and full of interest and instruction it is.

‘But an angel of [the] Lord spake to Philip, saying, Arise, go southward unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza; this is desert. And he arose and went. And behold a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch in power under Candace, queen of [the] Ethiopians, who was over all her treasure,1 had come to worship at Jerusalem; and he was returning and, as he sat in his chariot,1 was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, Approach and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip running up heard him reading the prophet Isaiah,59 and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I unless some one shall guide60 me? And he besought Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the scripture which he was reading was this —

As a sheep He was led to slaughter;

And as a lamb dumb before his shearer,

So He openeth not His mouth.

In His61 humiliation His judgment was taken away.

His62 generation who shall declare?

For His life was taken away from the earth.

‘And the eunuch answering Philip said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself or of some other (ἑτέρου)? And Philip opened his mouth, and, beginning from this scripture, preached to him Jesus. And as they went on the way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch said, Behold water: what hindereth me to be baptized?63 And he commanded the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. But when they came up out of the water, [the] Spirit of [the] Lord caught away Philip, and the eunuch saw him no more, for he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus, and passing through he evangelized all the cities till he came unto Caesarea’ (vers. 26-40).

A fresh step is taken by Philip. Jehovah’s angel directs him; for there were two roads, and an evangelist would not have chosen the one that was a desert.64 But the object of God’s grace was travelling by this one; and an angel is employed as ever in God’s providence, here objectively that we might not forget the truth or take account only of thoughts and feelings. ‘Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth for service on account of those that inherit salvation?’ The ready servant of God’s will, Philip leaves the rejoicing multitude to whom he had been blessed in Samaria, and goes promptly, though he only knows the seemingly strange direction of his journey, not as yet its aim. It was a proselyte returning from Jerusalem, unsatisfied but wistful and groping his way in the prophetic word. The blessing is not now in

the city of solemnities, the Blesser had been driven away. Samaria is rejoicing in the Saviour of the world. The Ethiopian is soon to stretch out his hands to God, not in prayer only but in praise and conscious blessedness, though Ethiopia must wait till He comes Who is already ascended on high and has led captivity captive. But here it is not an angel but ‘the Spirit’ that said to Philip, Approach and join thyself to this chariot. Angels have to do with circumstances, the Spirit leads as to souls. So we saw in Acts 5; and so we may see yet more clearly in comparing Acts 12 with Acts 13. The reality is as true now as ever, though it was then manifested and is written in God’s word that we be not faithless but believing.

With alacrity the evangelist answers to the Spirit’s call, and runs to Candace’s treasurer as he sat in the chariot reading Isaiah, and puts the searching question, Understandest thou what thou readest? Alas! it was then as now in Christendom. The vision of Him Who came to make God known, otherwise unknowable, is handed about from learned to unlearned, as if the divine solution of all riddles were itself the one insoluble riddle. The learned man, when asked to read, says, I cannot; for it is sealed, and on the same appeal the unlearned excuses himself, I am not learned. Faith alone can understand: so it is, and so it ought to be. So it was now that grace took up the returning stranger; for the passage was Isa. 53:7, 8; and when the answer betrayed his sheer ignorance of the gospel, Philip let him hear the glad tidings of Jesus.

It was not without God that the then passage of Isaiah set out the holy suffering Messiah. Other parts of this very strain, both before and after bear witness to His

exaltation; but here it is sufferings simply — the main difficulty to a Jew, who thought exclusively of His glorious kingdom. Hence the propriety of the name of ‘Jesus’ in Philip’s application of the prophecy (ver. 35): the more striking because the inspiring Spirit had said (ver. 5) that Philip proclaimed ‘the Christ’ or Messiah to the Samaritans. Ignorance, learned or unlearned, slights these distinctions, censures those who point them out as refining on scripture, and thus really loses the force of the truth. For God hath not written one word in vain; and spiritual intelligence gleans its sweetest fruit in that too neglected field. The Samaritans needed to hear that the Christ was come: the Ethiopian, to know that the despised and suffering Jesus was beyond doubt the Messiah, whom the prophet introduced with a trumpet note as lofty in Isa. 52:13, as that which closed the passage in Isa. 53:12. Everywhere are bound together His sufferings and His glories after these, but nowhere more than here do we find His meek submission to the wanton cruelty of His guilty people. Now ‘Jesus’ was the right word for this, for on the one hand it expresses what He became in manhood so as to be the object of contempt to rebellious creatures, and on the other it tells out His intrinsic glory Who for us stooped so low. He was Jehovah the Saviour.

The difference in the language from the Old Testament in our hands is due to the Septuagint, or Greek Version then in common use, and especially among the Egyptians and others. The sense remains substantially the same. But we are not to infer that Philip confined himself to this scripture: that he ‘began’ from it more justly implies and warrants that he did not end there but expounded others also. But this was of extreme

importance to one in the state of soul which the whole preceding account gives us to see in the treasurer, and it was blessed to the letting in of a flood of divine light into his heart.

Yet the scripture which detected the darkness of the Ethiopian's mind before Philip sounded the glad tidings of Jesus in his ears that he by faith might ever after be a child of light in the Lord, has fared ill, not merely at the hands of the Fathers of old, but hardly less with Calvin and the like in Reformation times and since. For the great French commentator (to dwell on no others) will have these verses to teach that our Lord was so broken that He appears like a man dejected beyond hope, as is evident, but also that He comes out of the depth of death as a conqueror, and out of hell itself as the author of eternal life.

But to draw this last sense from the words cited in verse 33 (or from the original in Isa. 53:8) is quite unfounded. The prophet is as far as possible from here saying that Christ should be lifted up from His great straits by the hand of the Father. This is in no way taught by His judgment being taken away. The new beginning of unlooked-for glory is found elsewhere, but not here. Nor does the exclamation of the prophet in the following clause ('His generation who shall declare?') import that His victory shall go beyond all number of years, instead of lasting only a little. Sundry old interpreters were not justified in proving hereby the eternal generation of the Word, any more than others who understood it of His miraculous Incarnation. But no perversion seems worse than the deduction from such words as these that Christ's life shall endure for ever, for the entire passage refers exclusively to His humiliation.

The first clause of v. 33 appears to express the mockery of all righteousness in His judgment, the second, the unspeakable wickedness of that generation, the third, the violent end of His life on earth to which He bowed, which is its proof. Were it a question of Phil. 2:6-11, or of the whole section (52:13 - 53), and not of these two verses only, Calvin would have been right as now he is demonstrably wrong. And this is confirmed by the Hebrew, which here no more admits of a thought of exaltation than does the Greek. The suffering Messiah is seen only in Jesus, at all cost to Himself the Saviour of the sinful man who believes in Him, let His own people gainsay as they may the blessed report of the faithful Baptism follows the hearing of faith. And thus, when they come upon a certain water, the stranger asks what hinders his being baptized, and has the privilege conferred on the spot. So Peter asked, in Cornelius' house, if any one could forbid it, when the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit, even as the believing Jews before them. For the outer mark, worse than worthless without the heart's subjection to the Lord and His grace, has its importance in ways neither few nor small; as the loss of the truth represented is as manifest in those that despise, as in those that idolize it. They fail to see that life is never attributed to baptism, but salvation is set forth in it, the washing away of sins, and death to sin, the blessed portion to which the gospel bears witness in Christ dead and risen for the believer.

Life the Old Testament saints had, when there was no such thing as Christian baptism. Abel and Abram had it, no less than the Christian; but the Christian by virtue of Christ's accomplished work has soul-salvation, as he waits for his body to be saved and changed at Christ's

coming. Of this salvation meanwhile, which no Old Testament saint could have, baptism is the sign, to which therefore the believer now submits, as a confession not only that Jesus is Lord, but of deliverance through His death and resurrection. Those who make all subjective, like the Friends, or who make all objective like the Catholics, suffer the consequence of their errors. Neither one nor other owns dogmatically the true present privilege of the Christian as in Christ delivered from all condemnation, freed from the law of sin and death, perfected for ever by the one offering of Christ. This truth to the Quaker and the Papist is dangerous doctrine, both holding, though on different grounds, that whoever is justified is sanctified, and that, as far as he is sanctified, he is so far justified, and no further. Both therefore slight the word of God, and preaching, and faith; as both are wholly ignorant of the gift of the Spirit sealing the believer to the day of redemption, the one crying up ordinances and priesthood to the glorification of the church, the other resting for all on what he calls the inward light, which he contends is given to every man, Jew or heathen, Mahommedan or Christian, whose destiny for ever turns on the use he makes of it. Neither allows eternal life in Christ to faith; neither sees founded on Christ's work, that quittance of our old state as children of Adam, and entrance into the new state of the Second Man, of which baptism is not the channel but the emblem. Hence they ignore, if they do not falsify even in quotation, such scriptures as Col. 1:12, 13. They are striving to be made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; they are hoping to be translated into the kingdom of the Son of His love. Had they read baptism aright, they would be rejoicing in the sense of a present and

everlasting deliverance to the praise of Him in Whom they believe.

If true, they are certainly feeble, believers. With the Ethiopian all was simple and assured. For they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him (ver. 38). There was no thought of going before the assembly in Samaria. Baptism is individual, no matter how many souls might be baptized. The church has nothing to do with it. The Lord directed His servants (not the church as such) to baptize; and for this they are responsible to Him, as they are for the preaching of the word. The church does not baptize, any more than preach and teach; the evangelist does, though he may ask another to do it for him, as Peter when he directed Cornelius and the rest to be baptized in the name of the Lord on a later day.

'And when they came up out of the water, [the] Spirit of [the] Lord caught away Philip, and the eunuch saw him no more, for he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus, and passing through he evangelized all the cities till he came to Caesarea' (vers. 39, 40). The miracle only established the new convert's faith, as doubtless it was wrought of God to do; for there is not a hint that Philip wished it, still less sought it in prayer. It was God for the honour of His Son in virtue of that Spirit's power which was working on earth; but surely not without a wise and gracious intent for the witness of it (and he was not alone) returning to his native land with the gospel of salvation. Abyssinia was thus to have the glad tidings of God concerning His Son; as Philip transported to Azotus (or Ashdod) abides the same simple-hearted indefatigable preacher of divine grace (ver. 40). For passing through he was evangelizing

all the cities till he came to Caesarea. It is there the inspired history shows him to have lived, and his four daughters, long afterwards (Acts 21:8).

47 The first hand of the Sinaitic leaves out the copula, with two cursives, which Tischendorf singularly adopts. It is just as necessary as in ver. 2.

48 Laud's MS., E, gives the aorist here, and adds 'of God' at the end of ver. 4, in both faultily, in the latter with several Versions.

49 Much truer to the word is Doddridge's note — 'There is no room to inquire where these poor refugees had their orders. They were endowed with miraculous gift; if they had not been so, the extraordinary call they had to spread the knowledge of Christ wherever they came, among those who were ignorant of Him would abundantly justify them in what they did,' (Fam. Expos. iii. 105, 106 Tenth Ed.)

50 The true text here is a good instance of the tendency in later copyists to soften down a rugged or peculiar construction and so get rid of the difficulty. The older MSS., ABCE, some cursives, and among the ancient versions the Vulg., Sah., Syrr., et al., support πολλοὶ, which gives grammatically an anacoluthon or irregularity of construction by no means uncommon: so 7:40. We can easily understand the change to πολλῶν in order to make all smooth, supported by but two later uncials (HP) with the mass of cursives et al.

51 The critical reading

πολλὴ χαρὰ (not

μεγάλη) seems to refer to the extent rather than the quality of the joy.

52 In no part of this chapter or of the New Testament is the city meant, but the country, containing cities and many villages. Sychar was the religious centre ebaste the capital politically.

53 ABCDE, many cursives, and ancient Vv., etc. supply

καλουμένη ‘called’, omitted in the Received Text on inferior authority, and probably because the copyists, not perceiving its importance, imagined it was a mere gloss. It is expressive of the egregious assumption of the impostor.

54 On the other hand

τὰ ‘the things’ is an insertion contrary to the oldest witnesses, which enfeebles the sense here, and in Acts 28:23, though in general a favourite expression of Luke if not peculiarly his.

55 The article, read by a few cursives but adopted in the Text. Rec., has no place here in the best authorities.

56 The best copies and Versions have the order of words here followed as in the margin of the Authorized Version. R. Stephens, Elz., Beza even from his first edition (Tiguri, 1559) are right; not so Erasmus and Colinaeus who read δυνάμεις καὶ σημεῖα, nor the Complut. Edd. who have δ. κ. σ. μεγάλα. It may be added that the MSS. CD from the primary hand join at the end of the verse in the great blunder of ‘they were’ amazed.

57 The bare structure of the phrase in the Text. Rec. of the Greek, one article for Peter and John, joins both in a common position here. But the great uncials do not favour its insertion.

58 The most ancient and best copies present here the imperfect, not the mere historical tense or aorist, as in the Text. Rec. following the inferior authorities.

59 Ap.m. Cp.m. Dp.m. followed by the Vulg. and the Sah. omit ὅς (27) though almost all others seem to insert it. It is one of those readings which affect the sense infinitesimally, yet as to which much might be argued on either side. So with other variations in vers. 28, 30, 31, 33, where the numeral is put.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

63 The great authorities ABCHLP, with more than eighty cursives, the most ancient Latin copies, Pesh-Syr. Sah. Memph., excepting Laud's MS. 35, do not read ver. 37, which seems from internal evidence also to be spurious. For 'the Son of God' would have been a wonderful step in advance, as we see really in Saul, Acts 9:20, but here as decidedly out of keeping with the Ethiopian's ignorance, as with the development of the history. It was an early interpolation; and we need not wonder that those capable of the deed failed in spiritual apprehension of the truth, and overshot the mark.

64 All can see that the reference may be to Gaza, rather than to one of two roads which is designated 'desert'. And Strabo is cited in confirmation of the former thought, which seems to have been the opinion of the A.V. if not of the Revisers though both might be understood of the way as easily as of the town. Not so Mr. T. S. Green, who renders the clause, 'This road is a lone one'.

Acts 9

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus follows in beautiful development of the ways of God. For on the one hand his murderous unflagging zeal against the Lord Jesus and His saints made him (arrested by sovereign grace and heavenly glory, in the person of Christ shining into his heart from on high) to be so much the more conspicuous witness of the gospel; on the other hand his call immediately thereon to go as His apostle to the Gentiles was a new and distinct departure of ministry to the praise of divine mercy. For the blood of Stephen, far from quenching the raging enthusiasm of the young zealot ‘consenting to his death’ had only stimulated him to dare unsparing violence against all men and women who called on the Lord’s name; and now his unsatisfied zeal against ‘the way’ induced him to chase the fleeing scattered saints outside the land.

‘But Saul, still breathing threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked of him letters unto Damascus to the synagogues; so that, if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring [them] bound unto Jerusalem. And as he was journeying, it came to pass that he drew near to Damascus, and suddenly there shone round him a light out of heaven, and faring upon the earth he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? And he said, Who art Thou, Lord? And He65 [said], I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest1, but arise and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men that journeyed with him were standing speechless, hearing the sound but

seeing no one. And Saul arose from the earth, and when his eyes were opened, he saw nothing66; but leading by the hand they brought him into Damascus; and he was three days without seeing, and did neither eat nor drink;' (vers. 1-9).

Thus wonderfully was the chief persecutor called, not as saint only but as apostle also. The conversion of the dying robber was a signal display of suited though sovereign grace; that of the living pursuer of the saints to prison or death was higher far. And if Peter followed the rejected Christ from Galilee to His ascension and heavenly glory, Saul began with His call out of heaven till, himself ever afterwards a partaker of His sufferings, he finished his course in becoming conformed to His death. He was apostle, not through the living Messiah on earth, but through Him glorified after God the Father raised Him from the dead. He began his witness where Peter ended it on his part.

Saul's was an unprecedented starting-point, which gave another and heavenly character to his service. There was a complete breach with Israel after the flesh, no longer a question of the earth or earthly hopes. Man risen from among the dead and gone on high has no connection with one nation more than another. The cross broke off all possible claims of those who had the law; but therein also was laid the righteous ground for the forgiveness of all trespasses, for taking out of the way the hostile bond written in ordinances. Heavenly associations with Christ glorified were now revealed as a present fact for faith to apprehend, enjoy, and make manifest practically on earth; and of this, both individually and corporately, Saul was chosen to be a

witness as none other had ever been before; and therein none followed, for the case admitted of no succession.

This was the man who, brimful of deadly hatred, desired the highest religious sanction for war unto death against all men or women that called on the Lord Jesus. Armed with the high priest's letter he approached Damascus, when suddenly light out of heaven flashed round him, and fallen to the earth he heard a voice charging him with persecuting Him Whom he could not own to be the Lord; and the astonished Saul learns to his utter confusion before God that it was Jesus, Jesus persecuted in His own, who were one with Him. Overwhelming discoveries for any soul! For the light, 'the glory of that light,' the power, the voice even to him were unmistakable altogether; and the more so, for one like Saul confidently and conscientiously embittered against His name, thinking he was doing good service if he captured or even killed His disciples: so stout certainly his will, so ardent his zeal, so unsuspecting his malice, through blinding religious prejudice.

Never was a conversion so stamped with heavenly glory (2 Cor. 4:4) and this from the person of Christ speaking thence (Heb. 12:25). It was emphatically the saving 'grace of God' that appeared to him, in total and manifest overthrow of the highest earthly tradition, though it was also the 'glad tidings (or gospel) of Christ's glory', as not another even of the apostles could say like himself. Hence he speaks of 'my' gospel, and when joining others of his companions, 'our' gospel. It was not as if there was any object or any saving means before the soul but the one Saviour and Lord; but so it was from heavenly character, as well as the fullness and sovereignty of grace, therein manifested beyond all.

Besides, in Christ's words, from that first revelation, lay the germ of the doctrine of the assembly as one with Himself, His body, which the apostle was called to expound and enforce by his Epistles, as by his ministerial work and life, in a way and measure that surpassed 'the twelve', however honoured in their place. And this peculiar manner, as well as heavenly development of the truth, of which the Lord makes him the pre-eminent witness, brought on him unparalleled trial and suffering, from not only without but even from within, as his own writings and others abundantly prove.

Saul was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Judaism and the world were to his soul judged and abandoned for ever by the certainty of saving grace and heavenly glory in Christ on high Who now manifestly exercised divine power and authority, and at one glance pointed out the new and only true path of patient suffering for the witness, in word and deed, of grace and truth, according to His own matchless way on earth, till He come and take us to Himself where He is. On the one hand, not only the Gentiles (Romans, Greeks, and all others) were fighting against God, but yet more keenly the chosen nation, the Jews; on the other hand, the simplest disciple now is one with Christ on the throne of God, and to persecute them is to persecute Him.

This and far more such a mind as Saul's read in the revelation outside Damascus — a revelation to go forth in due time over all the earth, and have its power only in faith and love forming a Christlike life to Christ's glory, but not without notable effects even where it was ever so hollowly professed. It may be drowned in blood or obscured with clouds of creature error and presumption, Jewish or Gentile, or worse than either when both

combine to deny the Father and the Son; but none the less in its objects it will rise in heaven with ever durable and unfading glory around Christ, ere He shall be revealed from heaven with angels of His might in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those that know not God and those that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in that day, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints and wondered at in all that believed, as well as to be alike the Blesser and the Blessing to all the families of the earth according to promise (2 Thess. 1:7-10).

It will be noticed that the first effect on his believing and repentant soul was the spirit of obedience. Life was there through faith, and this as ever instantly shows its true character by obedience, which the Lord saw. It is assumed in the latter half of the Text. Rec. which forms the whole of verse 6, ‘But rise up and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.’ He lets us know in his own account to the Jews (Acts 22:10) that he had said, What shall I do, Lord? This the inspired historian does not cite here, though he gives it later where it was of importance. But in any case the Lord counts on obedience, even before Saul could be supposed to appreciate dogmatically, and to rest in peace on, the sprinkling of His blood. The new nature lives in obedience, such as Christ’s, in the consciousness and affections of sonship, and that blood cleanses from every sin of which the old man was guilty. Even before the new-born soul knows clearance from all guilt, the heart is made up to obey, not through fear of penalty like a Jew with death before his eyes, but attracted by sovereign goodness and submission to God’s word. Obedience is the only right place and attitude of the

renewed mind, in contrast with the independence of God natural to man shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin. Power comes in the gift of the Holy Ghost, when the believer rests on redemption and knows all his evilness before God. But even an apostle must be told, not himself discover, what he must do.

‘The men that journeyed with Saul were standing speechless, hearing the sound but beholding no one’ (ver. 7). The word often means ‘voice’, as it is rightly translated in verse 4, where Saul clearly heard what the Lord said to him. Here his companions did not hear one word articulately, as we are distinctly told in Acts 22:9. Yet they did hear that something was being uttered. Hence ‘sound’ appears to be a more accurate representation of the fact intended by the expression. And this is confirmed by a nice difference in the form of the Greek phrase; for the genitive (expressive of partition) is used where the physical effect was incomplete, the accusative where the words were sent home in power. In spiritual reception the genitive is always used; for who among men could be said to have heard in full what the voice of the Son of God imports?

On rising up Saul proved to be without power to see, blinded, we may well say, with excessive light. So they led him by the hand into Damascus (ver. 8), and for three days without seeing he did neither eat nor drink (ver. 9). A deep work thus went on in a soul capable of feeling grace and truth as profoundly as he could judge himself according to the light of God, which had exposed the vain wickedness of formalism in its best shape, and brought down the zealous missionary, armed with inquisitorial power, where Job of old was brought — to abhor self in dust and ashes.

Thus was brought to pass a conversion of the highest character and the deepest interest, pregnant with widespread results never to pass away. The miracle found its justification, not only in the moral principles of the case or in the dispensational display at that point in God's ways, but especially in the all-importance of such a heavenly revelation of His Son. Nevertheless Saul, when converted, though designated to a ministry which transcends that of every other man, enters the sphere of Christian confession by the same lowly portal as any other.

'Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I [am here], Lord. And the Lord [said] unto him, Rise up, and go to the lane that is called Straight, and seek in Judas' house one of Tarsus named Saul; for behold, he prayeth and hath seen in a vision67 a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands1 on him, so that he might receive his sight. And Ananias answered, Lord, I heard68 from many of this man, how much evil he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem, and here he hath authority from the high priests to bind all that call on Thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go, for he is a vessel of election to Me, to bear My name before both69 Gentiles and kings and sons of Israel; for I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake. And Ananias went and entered into the house; and laying his hands upon him he said, Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus that appeared to thee in the way which thou camest hath sent me, so that thou mightest receive sight and be filled with [the] Holy Spirit. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it were scales, and he

received sight,' and rising up he was baptized; and he took food and was strengthened' (vers. 10-19).

There is much to learn from the connection of Ananias with the new convert, total strangers to each other as they had been, save that the former well knew by public rumour of the latter's fierce enmity to all who called on the name of the Lord. He was himself a devout man according to the law, of unimpeachably good report among the Israelites of Damascus (Acts 22:12). Such was the man who had a vision of the Lord about Saul, as Saul had about Ananias: both corroborative, in the most simple and important way, of the miracle put forth on the occasion of Saul's conversion. If we see sometimes an economy of divine power, here the dullest cannot but own a striking affluence; as indeed the end in view was most worthy. For in the testimony of the fresh witness were developed the displays of grace and truth, of the gospel and of the church, of individual Christianity and of corporate blessedness, of the deepest truth for man's soul, of the fullest vindication of divine righteousness, of past wisdom in God's ways manifested, of future counsels of glory for heaven and earth and eternity to the praise of God and His Son: the grounds of all this and more were first laid out, as they had never been before and never need to be again. Who, acquainted with God's ways in His word, can wonder at the special pains taken to furnish outward vouchers of unusual fullness and of unquestionable force, so as to preclude all reasonable imputation of delusion on the one hand or of collusion on the other? The Lord has here seen to this remarkably: let us not overlook it.

Ananias had communications from the Lord (vers. 10-12), which even in vision drew out the expression of

his extreme surprise. Nor can there be conceived a more exquisite unfolding of the free intercourse which grace has now opened between the heart of the Master in heaven and that of the servant on earth. Ananias on one side ventures respectfully even to the verge of remonstrance (vers. 13, 14), after being told to seek Saul at Judas' house and recover his sight; as the Lord on the other overrules a]70 reluctance by the assurance not only of His own abounding grace, but of Saul's genuine repentance fitting him for the wonderful work to which he was henceforth called (vers. 15, 16). How entirely then may we not pour out our exercises of heart into His bosom, how implicitly count on His loving interest, Who has all things at His disposal, and interests Himself in our history from first to last! For His eye of love is on the praying at such a house in such a street, no less than on the vast sweep of Christian life and service from Arabia to Damascus, from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum, yea to Rome if not Spain, where His own name would be borne before both nations and kings and sons of Israel, when the many doings of Saul over the world of that day would be less than his many sufferings for Christ's name. Truly he was a vessel of election to the Lord, in labours of love most abundant, in sufferings for Christ yet more unparalleled.

Ananias promptly obeys, goes to the house where Saul lodged, and, laying his hands on him, told out the errand on which he was sent, not only to restore Saul's sight but that he should be filled with the Spirit. The force of the message lay in this that the Lord Jesus, Who appeared to Saul in the way, now sent Ananias supernaturally to convey His blessing. How evident that God was at work, and that the Lord Jesus was the

revealer of His mind and the medium of His mercy, as He is the effulgence of His glory and the expression of His subsistence; not more surely man than God, and now the Man glorified at His right hand Who searches the reins and hearts, and controlled Ananias no less than Saul! If the vanity of man in his best estate was manifest to Saul's conscience (and no man had such reason as he to know this experimentally), the grace of God in the Lord Jesus was equally evident. 'And immediately there fell from his eyes as it were scales, and he received sight, and rising up he was baptized, and he took food and was strengthened.' Saul submitted to baptism like any other. He was baptized by a simple disciple; and he himself subsequently taught others to lay no stress on his own baptizing anyone (1 Cor. 1:14-17).

'I thank God I baptized none of you but Crispus and Gaius (he wrote to the vain Corinthians), 'lest any should say that I had baptized in my own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas; besides I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.' The proclamation of the truth is far beyond the administration of its sign. So we shall see that Peter preached at Caesarea, but consigned to others the baptizing of Cornelius with his kinsmen and his near friends. Indeed the same thing appears here; for nothing would have been easier than to have employed an official, at least a 'deacon', if this had been desirable in God's sight, Who surely has no pleasure in breaking down His own order. A 'disciple' baptizes the great apostle of the Gentiles.

But the most striking fact in all the transaction is the gift of the Spirit through Ananias, so decidedly did the wisdom of God in Saul's case break through the ordinary

method of conferring the Spirit through the hands of an apostle, if, for special reasons, hands were employed at all. Here the utmost care was taken to mark God laying all human pretensions in the dust. The employment of a disciple like Ananias lays the axe to the root of official pride; and this where the Lord was calling out the most honoured servant He ever deigned to use.

There is another remark to note of still more general importance, which the history of Saul's conversion brings into evidence. We must not confound, as popular preachers and teachers do, the reception of life and salvation. Life is always given immediately; not so salvation. Saul was quickened the moment he believed in the Lord Jesus. But this is quite distinct from what scripture calls 'salvation'; and hence we see, in the state of Saul, during the intermediate three days, a plain testimony to this important difference.

What searchings of heart!71 What deep questions were discussed in his soul during those days and nights, when he neither ate nor drank! Yet divine life was there all the while as truly as afterwards, faith too in the word of God, and in His glory Who had smitten him down and revealed Himself to him and in him. But was this peace with God? Was it rest? Was he delivered consciously from all condemnation? Salvation is found in believing the gospel which presents the work of Christ in all its fullness as God's answer to every difficulty of the conscience and heart. It is not therefore, a mere confiding in the Lord for ultimate safety, but present deliverance enjoyed by the soul. Into this Saul was now brought. It is a great mistake therefore to talk of 'salvation in a moment', 'deliverance on the spot', or any other of the stock phrases of superficial revivalism,

which ignore the word of God and spring from the confusion of life with salvation. After truly looking to the person of Christ with its soul-subduing power, a deep process habitually goes on in renewed souls, who are not satisfied with ‘life for a look’, but face the overwhelming discovery of not only all they have done, but all they are in its evil and enmity against God and His Son. Self is thus judged in the light, and humiliation is produced, without which there can be no solid and settled peace. In the style of preaching referred to this is slurred over to the danger and injury of souls, quite as much as to the slighting of the full truth so due to Christ’s glory.

And therein also is seen the practical importance of distinguishing the new birth of the Spirit from the gift of the Spirit, as we have repeatedly pointed out in expounding this Book. The one goes with our believing on the Lord, when first arrested by God’s word in the midst of open sins or of proud self-righteousness; the other is, when the soul (ploughed up by the word and learning its hopeless evil before God, humbled as well as troubled, yet not without hope, for Christ is believed in) finds in His all-efficacious work Who for him died and rose, that his evil is all gone, root and branch and fruit, and that he is in Christ, a child of God and joint-heir with Christ, yea, dead and risen with Him, and so freed from all that can be against him that he might live unto God.

Of this, burial with Christ is the instituted symbol to which every Christian submits; salvation is the expression of its standing privilege. Hence in his First Epistle (1 Peter 3:21) Peter brings in the comparison with Noah’s ark, and the passing through the waters of

death as the way of salvation; so Christ died personally and efficaciously for our sins, as we in spirit when baptized. The apostle carefully distinguishes between the mere outward effect of the water, and points to the true power in Christ's death and resurrection, of which baptism is the figure. Expressly, however, it is a figure, not of life, but of salvation, present salvation of souls; as we await the coming of the Lord for the salvation of our bodies when we shall be like Him even outwardly, seeing Him as He is.

Calvin will have it that Ananias laid hands on Saul, partly to consecrate him to God [from the context one gathers, ministerially], partly to obtain for him the gifts of the Spirit. It would not be worth noticing in general, for both are absolutely wrong, but the errors of great and good men are proportionately dangerous. The blessed man says of himself, 'Paul, apostle not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father Who raised Him up from among the dead' (Gal. 1:1). Nor can we too vigilantly reject the error that confounds the gift (δωρεὰ) of the Spirit, or, we may add, the being filled with the Holy Spirit, with 'the gifts' (χαρίσματα). Nor does it appear afterwards by the narrative that Ananias was also commanded to teach him, any more than this was implied in his subsequently baptizing him. How ready even the excellent of the earth to let slip, or add to, and so spoil, the holy deposit of the truth! It would rather appear that Ananias laid hands on Saul to cure his blindness, before he was baptized; after which he was filled with the Holy Spirit, without a hint of any such act subsequent to baptism.

Thus simply is brought before us the call and conversion of the great apostle, containing within the account itself

the germ of that which was to be unfolded in his Epistles and called out by the demands of the work which mostly gave occasion to the Epistles.

It may be noticed that to bear Christ's name before Gentiles has the first place, the sons of Israel being put last, with 'kings' placed between them. He was to be 'apostle of Gentiles' (Rom. 11:13). For this, the call of the Lord from heaven was most appropriate. On earth He had sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. When He sends from heaven, Israel ceases to have any such place. All mankind, before this, had joined and been lost in one common guilt. The Jews had even led the Gentiles to crucify Him. Israel's superiority after the flesh was therefore clean gone. Sovereign grace alone governs henceforth; and therefore, if any are to be prominently named, it is rather those who are most needy. Of such Saul was characteristically apostle.

'And he72 was certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And immediately in the synagogues he preached Jesus,73 that He is the Son of God. And all that heard [him] were amazed and said, Is not this he that in Jerusalem made havoc of those that called on this name, and had74 come hither for this thing, that he might bring them bound before the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in power and confounded the3 Jews that dwelt in Damascus, proving that this is the Christ' (vers. 19-22).

Hence we have a new departure of at least equal importance. From the very first Saul proclaimed Jesus to be the Son of God. This gave a new and higher character to the preaching.

The other apostles knew it but are not said to have preached it. Peter had long ago confessed the great truth with singular strength, and the Lord had pronounced him thereon blessed; for flesh and blood had not revealed it to him but His Father, that is in heaven (Matt. 16:16, 17). Yet do we never find Peter preaching or proclaiming the Lord thus at Pentecost and afterwards. He sets forth the crucified Jesus as having been made both Lord and Christ. He dwells on His death, resurrection, and ascension. He represents Him as from heaven pouring forth the Holy Ghost, having received of the Father that promised gift. The greatest prominence is given to Jesus as the now glorified Servant of the God of Israel, exalted by God's right hand as Leader and Saviour to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins. Peter preached Him thus fully, but only as the Messiah, Whom His people had rejected, Whom God had raised from the dead and would send from heaven in due time, to bring down all promised blessing. Beyond this he does not preach Christ, so far as the Book of Acts teaches.

Stephen went beyond this at any rate in his last discourse. 'Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.' Anyone familiar with the Psalms and the Prophets ought to have discovered, at least by the light of the New Testament, the import of this new title. It opens out assuredly a far larger glory for the Lord than the realm of Israel. The Son of man is set over, not all mankind only, but all creation, He only being excepted (which shows its immense range) Who set all things under Him. In Psalm 8:5 it is intimated that His humiliation unto death was the ground and way whereby the Lord passed into this

glorious supremacy, and that we Christians see Him already crowned with glory and honour in consequence, though not yet do we see all things subjected to Him. Daniel 7:13, 14 shows Him coming with the clouds of heaven in this same glory to the Ancient of days, and receiving dominion, glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages, should serve Him — an everlasting dominion withal, which shall not pass away neither shall His kingdom be destroyed, as that of all others had been. In this glory, however, before He comes to judge the quick and the dead, Stephen beholds Him through the opened heavens at the right hand of God. No doubt this was a sight miraculously vouchsafed to the proto-martyr, but what he then witnessed on high is revealed for us also to know and profit by even now in the Spirit.

Saul of Tarsus brings us an immense step beyond, for He proclaims Jesus in His proper and divine glory as the Son of God; whilst it was reserved for John, the apostle, to give his most admirable record of the Lord in this self-same way and to show how the intrinsic glory of His person superseded every object hitherto precious in the eyes of Israel, a divine glory, which could not be hid though veiled in flesh, and which manifested itself on departing by sending down from heaven the other Paraclete, though (not less than Himself) a divine person, the Spirit of truth, not only to glorify Him, but that we might have fellowship with those who most of all enjoyed His presence here below; ‘and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.’

It is well to notice that Saul thus preached Jesus ‘immediately’ and ‘in the synagogues’. Hence we may

see how powerfully, and the more so because indirectly, the account of Luke confirms his own explicit statement to the Galatians (Gal. 1:12) that he did not receive the gospel he preached from man, nor was he taught it but by revelation of Jesus Christ. How strikingly too all this, so different from what learned and pious men say or think about it, falls in with the character of his preaching so distinct from all before him: the same Jesus, but His glory viewed neither as connected with Israel, nor as conferred because of His sufferings, but higher up and divinely personal!

That he was formed in his peculiar line by Ananias is more worthy of a Corinthian than of a Reformer, though natural in those who lay exaggerated and unscriptural stress on human elements for the training of Christ's servants. God is sovereign in this as elsewhere. The Lord had His own aims in calling Saul and Luke, as in calling the differing cases of Peter and James. He can call from learning and science whether to pour contempt on human pride in such fields or to use them as He pleases; He can call from the land or sea those who have never known the schools to prove Himself superior to that which the vain world inordinately values. But Saul preached 'immediately', and 'in the synagogues'. What a testimony to conscience that he should preach Jesus, and preach Him as the Son of God!

The reader will observe that for 'Christ' in the Authorized Version after the Text. Rec. of verse 20 is here substituted 'Jesus', as it stands in the best authorities, followed by the Revised Version and by others founded on carefully collated authorities. It is not improbable that the later copies which introduced the error may have been swayed by ignorant considerations

of a quasi-Christian sort, unless it were a mere slip of memory which crept in and got perpetuated among those who understood not the difficulties and wants of such Jews as were addressed. To preach to them ‘the Christ’ or Messiah as the Son of God would have served no adequate purpose and have met with little, if any, opposition. They would have all allowed it in terms, even if none really entered into its full import. But the momentous truth Saul affirmed was as to Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth: and that He is the Son of God. What could be graver to a Jew? To accept it as of God was to condemn the people, and especially the religious, and to find himself in the dust before the Crucified (now risen and on high) for Whom this divine title was claimed in the highest and most exclusive sense. It became the turning-point not for time only but for eternity.

The signal change in the preacher also told powerfully. ‘All that heard were astonished and said, Is not this he that in Jerusalem made havoc of those that called on this name, and had come hither for this thing, that he might bring them bound before the chief priests?’ Such a conversion, coupled with his actual zeal for the truth, could not but be most impressive as grace which had wrought intended it to be. ‘But Saul kept growing more in power and confounding the Jews that dwelt in Damascus, proving that this is the Christ.’ Here ‘Jesus’ would be quite out of place, and the Messiah is the truth meant; for advance in truth received and learnt from God does not cast a slight on a lower level which is equally of God.

But breadth of mind in taking into consideration an immense sweep of varied truth and harmonizing all in the Lord Jesus to God’s glory is one of the marked traits

of His most remarkable servant. The Messiahship of Jesus must ever be a capital matter in dealing with Jews. Higher glories there are, as we have seen, of surpassing interest and importance, and none ever rose higher, in principle at least, than Saul did from his first testimony as we are told. But the lowest point of view had for its urgent and indefatigable advocate the same devoted man who was the earliest to proclaim the highest. None of Christ's servants has ever shown equal largeness of heart. We may perhaps say of him, in a deeper as well as more heavenly sphere, what God says of king Solomon to whom He gave wisdom and understanding exceeding much, so that God distinguishes him by 'largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore' (1 Kings 4:29). The question of a Christian woman's wearing her hair long, or her head duly covered, was to him connected with and answered by the vast scope of creation, the theatre of God's purpose in Christ, which put the man and woman in their true relative place, and brought in the very angels as spectators meant to act on the spirit of such as walk by faith, not by sight (1 Cor. 11:3-16). But who, save Saul of Tarsus, to settle a detail in conduct apparently so small, would ever have thought of such a scope in application of God's order and ways to maintain His moral glory?

The waxing powerful of Saul does not mean that he overcame his adversaries in disputation, but that the Spirit so strengthened him by the deepening of his soul in the divine word, which no doubt did bear down more and more the puny arms of such as opposed themselves. Whatever might have been his vast natural ability, whatever his providential training under Gamaliel, it was in practical dealing with souls in the synagogues or

individually that the new nature in the Spirit's power found its true field of unremitting exercise.

So sudden, surprising, and profound, a conversion as that of Saul (by nature, character, attainments, and position, the most zealous of Jewish adversaries), could not but make the deepest impression on all observers especially those of the circumcision. How confirmatory to the disciples at Damascus! How impressive in the synagogues to hear him proclaim Jesus as the Son of God! How suited to confound those who denied Jesus to be the Christ! God's grace displayed in it was such as to amaze all that heard. The very opposition of the restless enemy was for the moment paralysed.

'And when many days were fulfilled, the Jews consulted together to kill him; but their plot became known to Saul. And they were watching the gates also75 day and night that they might kill him; but the76 disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a basket.

'And when he arrived at Jerusalem, he essayed to join himself to the disciples, and all were afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took and brought him unto the apostles, and declared to them how he saw the Lord in the way and that He spoke to him, and how in Damascus he preached boldly in the name of Jesus' (vers. 23-27).

The Spirit of God appears to comprehend in the first verses the space of three years which the apostle spent in Arabia, a fact of great significance as following on his conversion and used powerfully in the Epistle to the Galatians (Gal. 1:17) to prove how little man, even the twelve, had to do with it. His call was in no way from

men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father that raised Him from among the dead; even as the gospel he preached was not according to man, nor yet did he receive it from man, nor was he taught it but by revelation of Jesus Christ. It was expressly meant of God to be independent of Jerusalem and the twelve but derived (call, apostolate, and gospel he preached) immediately from the prime source of grace, truth, and authority, the risen Head and God Himself. Thus was secured what was all-important, not only for the Gentile saints then and indeed thenceforward for the due intelligence of Christianity, but for our special profit now so menaced at the end of the age with the revival of the early Judaizing which opposed the full gospel at the beginning, as well as the heavenly independent character of Paul's office and testimony.

Otherwise it seemed even more extraordinary for Saul than for Moses to go to Arabia. But as there was of old divine wisdom in the long shelter there given to the future leader of Israel, so the break with the flesh was complete in the briefer sojourn of the apostle of the Gentiles, where none on earth could imagine he was winning for himself a good degree either in the humanities or in divinity. Such was God's ordering manifestly and wholly distinct from man's ways. He took no counsel with flesh and blood. He went not up to Jerusalem to those that were apostles before him, as all else would have thought most proper if not absolutely requisite. It was designedly on God's part death to the Jewish system in its best shape and to all successional order that Saul should go to Arabia, and again return to Damascus, and then after three years should go up to Jerusalem, not to receive office at apostolic hands, but to

make acquaintance with Peter there remaining but fifteen days, and seeing none other of the apostles save James the brother of the Lord. For his ministry was to be the true and fullest pattern of that which according to the will of God was to follow when the temporary Jerusalem order should pass away, and the Holy Spirit would bring out all the blessed and governing principles of a heavenly Christ for the church His one body on earth, as well as for His servants individually; a ministry of holy liberty, the expression of God's grace in the full communication of His truth, centring in the divine and glorified person of Christ, to the utter denial of man's will and of the world's pride.

But the world, as the Lord had previously warned His disciples, hates those identified with Christ as it had hated Himself, and according to His word would persecute them as it had Him. And so Saul now proves at the hand of his old co-religionists, ever the most bitter. The Jews were plotting to make away with him. 'Yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do because they have not known the Father nor Me' (John 16:2, 3). How evidently and deeply true! Nor did any more strikingly and continually verify their truth than Saul of Tarsus. The sword of the Spirit was too incisive in his hands, no matter how great his love and lowliness, not to rouse the unquenchable resentment and deadly enmity of Satan. And when the Jews went so far as even to watch the gates of Damascus both night and day that they might dispatch him, the disciples, much as they appreciated his ardent love of Christ and zeal for man's blessing, took him by night and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a basket.

Miracle there was none, but an escape ordinary enough, if not ignominious for those who would surround the great apostle with a perpetual halo. How little they know of the cross, of God, and of His ways!

This escape from murderous hands at Damascus he relates in the wonder-sketch of his devoted labours and sufferings which he recounts to the ease-loving Corinthians when set against the blessed apostle by the deceitful workers there fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ (2 Cor. 11:23-28). How admirably suited only to shame those who took care to work and suffer the least possible, but to kindle into burning love the feeblest spark in the true servants of Christ from that day to this! At the close of the list of trials which he gives us as ‘foolishness’ in his confidence of glorying, if others gloried after the flesh, before he says a word of the man in Christ he knows — himself of course, but purposely so put — caught up even to the third heaven, he winds all up with this very incident, in a singularly isolated way, so as to bring into juxtaposition his being let down through a window in a basket by the wall with his being caught up into paradise for exceedingly great revelations (2 Cor. 11:32 - 12:4). Strange conjunction, but how instructive withal, the same man lowered from a window in a city wall, and caught up to heaven to hear unspeakable words! Who but Paul had even thought of thus glorying in the things that concerned his weakness? For, if he did mention his most singular honour as a living man, he took care to tell us how, to counteract all self-exaltation, there was given him thenceforth a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him.

It may be well to note that in 2 Cor. 11:32, 33, there is the additional information that the hostility be

encountered was not confined to the synagogue but shared by the ethnarch of the then king, no doubt to do the Jews a favour, as others in somewhat the like position did afterwards: ‘In Damascus, the governor under Aretas the king was guarding the city of Damascus, wishing to take me, and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.’ This is cited, not to confirm the truth of Luke’s account as if the divinely inspired word could be inaccurate or as if it needed support for a believer, but to give a fresh instance of the moral purpose which reigns in all scripture, the true key to that peculiar method of God, which is as perfect for His own glory and the growth of His children, as it furnishes occasion to the unbelief of man who judges all in the self-confidence of his own intellectual powers, at the utmost very limited, great as they may be. Information, important as it is in its place, is one of the least objects in the word of God which lets the faithful into the communion of His mind and love.

But a new and very different lesson now opens in the city of solemnities where not long since great grace was upon all, and the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied exceedingly, and a great crowd of even the priests were obedient to the faith. For Saul, having arrived at Jerusalem, essayed to join himself to the disciples, and all were afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. How painful on the one hand for that vessel full of divine affections, that channel even then overflowing with a testimony of Christ beyond these doubting brethren whose grace was really so small as to question the largest measure that had ever crossed their eyes! But how helpful on the

other hand for us and all saints who have to learn that no one is to be received on his own responsibility, but on adequate testimony from others! A man unknown, or only known by circumstances somewhat dubious, must ordinarily have a wonderful opinion of himself, or be surprisingly blind to the duties of others, if he expect to be welcomed within the holy bounds of Christ on the good account he gives of himself. And God's children must be exceedingly rash or be indifferent to His glory who hold the door open without a commendatory letter, or (if this through circumstances failed) its equivalent in some satisfactory degree. He who cannot present something of the kind ought rather to praise the care for the Lord's glory in His own, even if it call for a little patience or delay on his part, and never was there a time when such vigilance was more due in the interests of Christ and the church than in its present state. Let the saints only bear in mind that here too as everywhere it is a question not of letter but of spirit. Proof of reality Christward is and ought to be all that is wanted, while indifference to Him, and yielding all to the mere profession of His name, when nothing is so cheap, is the most offensive and guilty looseness. Legality is not well, where all should be grace, but it is at least far less indecent than laxity. A letter of commendation too could be, as we should not forget, most readily forged by an unscrupulous person.

Even if saints be ignorant or prejudiced the Lord never fails and soon raises up an instrument to remove the difficulty. For Barnabas 'took him and brought him to the apostles,' (no more, we have seen, than Peter and James) 'and declared to them how he saw the Lord in the way, and that He spoke to him, and how at

Damascus he preached boldly in the name of Jesus' (ver. 27).

That this course on the part of Barnabas was owing to previous acquaintance with Saul! that they two had studied together at Tarsus! where both knew nothing of the Lord Jesus, and that either, even if true, could be a ground to satisfy the disciples, is just a sample of human guesswork — not to say of false principle — which disgraces those who cultivate such a style in the interpretation of scripture. But Christendom's hunger after all that tends to exalt the first Adam, as it demands such pabulum, is sure to find the supply where truth is neither trusted nor valued as displayed in Christ to God's glory. Is not the real key furnished by the sacred historian in a subsequent glimpse at Barnabas in Acts 11:23, 24? When he saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted accordingly; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith. Nor was it in Antioch only or first that grace wrought mightily in him; for in far earlier days than either he had been singled out for what God had produced in him, in contrast with Ananias and Sapphira who had agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord (Acts 4:36, 37, Acts 5:1, 2).

How much one gracious heart can effect, and how little it matters what the circumstances may be through which it seeks to please the Lord and help those that are tried! Yet how often, when such a character is formed and proved, a crisis arises too strong for all but the present guidance of the Lord above all that is of man, and grace in all its fullness must control graciousness quite breaking down! And so Barnabas proved at a later day. How little any then could have anticipated that Saul would be the one to reprove Peter as well as Barnabas

(Gal. 2:13) for the allowance of flesh or law to the jeopardy of the truth of the gospel! Yet so we know it was, and scripture has set it out in glowing and imperishable words to preserve us in our weakness from like error. How thankful should we be for the condescending mercy of our God Who would thus turn to our account the mistakes even of the most honoured, instead of hiding any or palliating all in the genuine spirit of party to the dishonour of the Lord and the irreparable injury of our own souls.

It may be well to note that this visit to Jerusalem (ver. 26 et seq.) is not to be regarded as immediately consequent, being named here in order to complete the history of Saul thus far by the account of his first introduction to the saints there.

Adequate testimony then to the call of divine grace is the true ground of reception: and the peculiar antecedents of Saul brought it out in high relief. There are very different circumstances now where the world in these lands calls itself Christian. But the principle abides, though profession in an easy-going estate where corruptions (moral, ecclesiastical, and doctrinal) abound is as far as possible from calling on the name of the Lord in the face of opposed nature and persecution private or public. It is of the deepest moment that all for each soul should turn on His name, the only passport which ought to be demanded as thus directly magnifying Him, the best of all safeguards against the world, the flesh, and the devil; for His name is the death-knell of all evil, whatever its varying form. To that Name the highest of earth must bow and be indebted for recognition when every tongue confesses Him Lord to the glory of God the Father but the same Name introduces the most down-

trodden slave into the fullness of grace now with living hope of heavenly and everlasting glory. And though His name solemnly summons every one that names it to stand aloof from unrighteousness, against none here and at once does it threaten such scathing judgment as when men (no matter what their fame, credit, or pretensions) bring not the doctrine of Christ.

But the assembly, profoundly engaged to care for the common interests of that Name, looks for trustworthy testimony as to each soul that names it. This gives the fullest scope to faith and love in the saints already within who, seeking the glory of the Lord in those that confess Him, are, according to their measure, reliable witnesses, whether for receiving a Saul of Tarsus, or for rejecting a Simon Magus. For if all have communion as saints in what is done, and are free, yea bound, to satisfy themselves, the evidence on which they judge practically rests with such as, enjoying the confidence of all, have love enough to ascertain the truth. The church acts on witnesses it believes. So it is shown in the striking instance before us that we might be guided aright in our own duty, even where the outward features are as unlike as possible. But, the church being a divine institution and not a mere voluntary society even of saints, there is a holy and wise principle which governs (or at least it ought, and will if done rightly), bringing out the Lord's glory, as in Saul's case. Active love, animated by a single eye to Christ, will see clearly and judge aright.

'And he was with them going in and going out at77 Jerusalem,78 preaching boldly in the name of the Lord79, and he was speaking and discussing with the Hellenists80, but they had in hand to kill him. And when

the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him off unto Tarsus' (vers. 28-30).

Liberty was thus enjoyed whether for fellowship or for testimony. It is indeed essential to Christianity and in contrast with the law which genders bondage. 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty'; or, as He Himself testified, 'I am the door, by Me if any one enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and go out, and shall find pasture.' Salvation, liberty, and food are assured by His grace: and so Saul was proving at this time even in Jerusalem. What could be sweeter than to taste it for his soul, where tradition had so lately blinded his eyes, and zeal for the law led him to persecute the way of divine grace unto death, binding and delivering into prison both men and women?

But there was more than this — bold utterance in the name of the Lord, which well becomes the object of grace. If 'this day is a day of good tidings', and assuredly it is, beyond all that ever dawned, how hold our peace? Not so did the four leprous men, when famine pressed the city of Samaria, and they found the deserted camp of the Syrians full of every good thing for those that were otherwise perishing with hunger (2 Kings 7:9). And who in Jerusalem more than Saul, its late emissary of bonds or death for all that called on the name of the Lord, could with godly assurance proclaim His name by faith in it to strengthen the weak and release the captives, to give life to the dead and liberty to the oppressed, or (as he said in a later day) to open their eyes, that they might turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, receiving remission of sins and inheritance among those that are sanctified by faith in Christ? For free and bold testimony in His name is the fruit of His

grace, no less than liberty for one's own soul; and in this order too. We need to be set free from every hindrance and weight and doubt and question, we need the liberty wherewith Christ sets free, before the mouth can open boldly to make known His grace and glory to others. It is not to angels that God subjected the habitable earth to come but to Christ Who will give His saints to reign with Him. It is not to angels that He gives the gospel commission but to His servants who were once children of wrath even as others. How soon even Christians forgot His ways and returned to the yoke of bondage and to fleshly successional order, to the rudiments of the world which played their fatal part in crucifying the Lord, now to find themselves, if God be believed, set aside and condemned to death in His cross!

But Saul, as he lets us know, when called by grace to have God's Son revealed in him that he might preach Him among the Gentiles, immediately conferred not with flesh and blood, but went into Arabia and returned again to Damascus. Even when he did go up to Jerusalem, it was 'to see (or visit) Peter', not to take holy orders, any more than to go through a theological curriculum, for 'he abode with him fifteen days' seeing none other of the apostles save James the Lord's brother (Gal. 1:15-19). And on this he speaks with impressive urgency, as a matter of the deepest moment for God's glory that the truth of his independent mission should be established for ever and beyond question, bound up as it is with the gospel revealed by him in a fullness and height beyond all others. In Jerusalem too we see his full liberty and his bold testimony to the Lord's name.

All was ordered that the truth of the gospel might continue with the Gentiles; but with the Jews also he

maintains the same principle and conduct. Alas! it was ill appreciated. For on the one hand, the Gentiles have not continued in God's goodness but throughout Christendom have turned back, like a dog to its own vomit; judaizing so egregiously as to give people the impression that the gospel is a sort of half-improved, half-mitigated, law, instead of being the perfect expression of God's grace in justifying ungodly sinners by the faith of Christ in virtue of His death and resurrection. On the other hand, when Saul turned in the name of the Lord to the Hellenists, or Greek-speaking Jews, with the loving zeal of a hater of party, to impart the truth which had set himself free, seeking not theirs but them, they betrayed how little those are subject to God's law who despise and refuse His gospel, for they went about to kill him. They were but Abraham's seed, not his children (John 8:33 44): if they had been his children, they would have done the works of Abraham. They had really the devil for their father, a murderer and a liar from the beginning; and his works they did.

It is needless to dwell on the error whether of old MS. or of ancient version, which makes the apostle speak and dispute at this early day with the 'Greeks' in Jerusalem. In fact it was with the same class which furnished 'the seven' who had been set over the daily ministration; of whom Stephen and Philip had been so highly honoured also in the word (Acts 6:1-5). Saul was drawn out the more toward them, as no longer a bigot, but one who sought out the Hellenists the more as he had been the prime energetic leader in the persecution that followed Stephen's death. Now he himself is exposed to their deadly hatred; 'and when the brethren knew, they

brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him off to Tarsus.' It seems clear that this was not Caesarea Philippi, but rather the seat of the Roman governor, whence he readily went by sea. Nor is Gal. 1:21 any real difficulty; for it only informs us that he then came to the regions of Syria and Cilicia, which was easy by ship; and the following verse intimates that he was still unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ.

'The assembly81 then, throughout the whole of Judea and Galilee and Samaria, had1 peace, being edified82; and walking83 in the fear of the84 Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, was multiplied' (ver. 31).

There seems no good ground to make this verse the concluding sentence of the paragraph, as the state of the church throughout these districts is not meant to be connected with Saul one way or another. It is rather, while attending to their past trial, an introduction to the account of Peter's visit which immediately succeeds, and it can thereon well stand by itself.

Having given us the peaceful and prosperous condition of the church throughout Palestine, the Spirit of God now turns to speak of Peter. He that wrought effectually in him, the great apostle of the circumcision, had just shown us the mighty vessel of His grace called to do work among the Gentiles. But Saul of Tarsus is dropped for the present, and we have the familiar figure of Peter brought before us, not in Jerusalem, nor yet in Samaria as once with John, but alone on a visitation of Judea. If there was peace for the church, there was no less power than at the first in him who was behind none since Pentecost.

‘Now it came to pass that Peter going through all [parts] came down also to the saints inhabiting Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Æneas, for eight years lying on a couch, who was paralysed. And Peter said to him, Æneas, Jesus [the]85 Christ heareth thee: rise up and make thy couch. And immediately he rose up. And all that inhabited Lydda and the86 Sharon saw him, who also turned to the Lord’ (vers. 32-35).

Grace thus used the apostle, not merely for the edification of the saints but for winning fresh souls to God. Lydda or Lod was at this time a considerable town — as Josephus informs us, not behind a city in size. And there God wrought a miracle, to arrest unbelievers, in the person of Æneas. It does not appear that he was a believer, being described as ‘a certain man’. Indeed, as the rule, believers were not objects of miraculous power, however often they may have been its instruments. Timothy is exhorted by the apostle to use ordinary means: ‘Be no longer a water-drinker, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities.’ Epaphroditus drew out in his sickness deep exercises in Paul’s heart; and Trophimus, the apostle left at Miletus, sick, instead of healing him. The Lord has His special dealings with such: not even an apostle would interfere. But as tongues were for a sign to unbelievers, so, on such, power was free to act to God’s glory, and the cure of the long-palsied Æneas became a striking testimony to all the dwellers around.

The manner of Peter’s action and his words are remarkable: ‘Æneas, Jesus [the] Christ heareth thee: rise up and make thy couch.’ And so it was straightway: power to help himself as well as to rise up. The power of God was exercised in this serious case of one palsied for

eight years through the true but rejected Christ. Jehovah-Jesus was the healer of disease. It was but a testimony now. What He did on a small scale during this present evil age is only a sample of the world or age to come. Then He will prove Himself the Forgiver of all Israel's iniquities and the Healer of all their diseases, according to Psalm 103:3, when His kingdom rules over all.

Meanwhile the word of God acts; the gospel is blessed, for 'all who inhabited Lydda and the Sharon saw him, who also turned to the Lord.' Their souls were impressed, so that they gave heed to the truth and turned to the Lord. It was a real work of the Spirit of God, and not simple astonishment at a miracle. But it had also the peculiarity of being very extensive and all-embracing. Whole communities were brought in. Nor was it only that they professed, or were baptised: of this the Holy Spirit says nothing. All in those parts saw the paralyzed man who was on the spot healed in the name of Jesus; and they turned to the Lord. Some who seem disposed to doubt the work of grace in 'households', and anxious to reduce it to a merely intellectual recognition of the Lord, if even so much as this, might profitably consider the great work done at Lydda, consequent on the healing of Æneas. The language here is wholly inconsistent with a sponsorial profession, it was a wide but real action of divine grace, the external sign, which no doubt followed as a conferred privilege, being not even named.

It may be added that Khnl has as utterly failed in the grammar as in the exegesis, when he would have this last passage to mean merely that all the Christians (i.e., all those who had turned to the Lord) saw Æneas

restored to health. For though the aorist may occasionally bear or require a pluperfect force in English, in the sentence before us such a rendering is not only uncalled for but destroys the power and dignity of the narrative; whereas the ordinary meaning in the simplest way maintains all that could be desired, crowning the miracle wrought, with a worthy and blessed spiritual result, instead of a close so frigid and feeble as to sink below not scripture only but any writing whatever. Grammatically too the indefinite relative is just the word proper to introduce the statement of a moral nature or character.

But it may interest some to know that Lydda in the New Testament is no other than the Lod of 1 Chr. 8:12; Ezra 2:33; Neh. 7:37, Neh. 11:35, called Ludd or Lidi to this day, scarcely so ‘miserable a village’ as Messrs. Webster and Wilkinson think, if we are to credit the popular report of Dr. Thomson, who represents it as a flourishing community of some two thousand persons, evidently thriving and industrious, ‘embosomed in noble orchards of olive, fig, pomegranate, mulberry, sycamore and other trees, and surrounded every way by a very fertile neighbourhood.’ Ono, Hadid, and Neballat, of old associated with Lod, have still their representatives distinctly enough under their modern disguise.

Further, though Calvin lays it down confidently that the Sharon (or Assaron,87 as he calls it) was a city hard by, and slights Jerome’s thought that thereby is meant the plain lying between Caesarea and Joppa, there is no good reason to doubt that the early translator is right, not the reformer. And the minute accuracy of the Greek text affords a striking evidence to the reader in the article prefixed to ‘Sharon’, not to Lydda. So invariably

is it in the Hebrew, where the same district is referred to (1 Chr. 27:29; Cant. 2:1, Isa. 33:9, Isa. 35:2, Isa. 65:10), whereas the article is dropped where the same name is applied to a different locality on the other side of Jordan and not improbably a town of the Gadites. 'The Sharon' lay north of another district, 'the Sephelah', which in our Version has fared worse than 'the Sharon' in having been quite stripped of its character as a proper name and reduced to 'the vale' and other vague terms.

Here then it was that the energy of the Spirit was pleased to win glory to the Lord Jesus and to bless souls by Peter at the very time when sovereign grace was preparing another and yet more favoured servant of Christ, not only to proclaim the gospel in the whole creation, but to complete the word of God, the mystery that had been hid from ages and from generations. Yet another and greater exertion of divine power was soon to follow, and a more distinct testimony of grace to the Gentiles through Peter himself, as we shall see in the immediate sequel, and according to a wisdom that never failed. But one may not anticipate more at this time. Grace would ere long work more profoundly as well as indiscriminately; the heavenly side of the gospel must shine out more distinctly and suitably to Him Who sits the glorified Man, at the right hand of God. But it was from no lack of zealous testimony on Peter's part; nor was it that power from above failed in his ministry to put honour on the name of Jesus, or to shed blessing on the souls that believed. But all the divine counsels must be duly revealed as well as accomplished in their season; and God has His fitting ways no less than His counsels. And we do well to take heed to His word which reveals

all this and more, that we may be completely furnished to every good work.

Another circumstance of like kind at a different place gave occasion for the power of God to display itself by Peter still more wonderfully.

‘Now, in Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which, being interpreted is called Dorcas (Gazelle). She was full of good works and alms-deeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days that she fell sick and died: and, having washed, they laid her in an upper88 room. And as Lydda was near to Joppa, the disciples hearing that Peter was there sent two men unto him, beseeching, Delay89 not to come on to us. And Peter rose up and went with them, whom, on his arrival, they brought up into the upper room; and all the widows stood by him weeping and showing the coats and cloaks which Dorcas used to make while she was with them. But Peter, putting them all forth and kneeling down, prayed, and, turning unto the body, he said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. And, giving her a hand, he raised her up, and calling the saints and the widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout the whole of Joppa, and many believed on the Lord; and it came to pass that he remained many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner’ (vers. 36-43).

Will it be believed that a professed and not unlearned translator of the New Testament dared thus to render the opening verse: ‘Moreover, there was among the disciples at Joppa a woman named Tabitha, who was always doing good works and giving alms’? I cite from Gilbert Wakefield’s second edition ii. 27, though I cannot

say (not having its predecessor) whether this is one of its alleged ‘improvements’ or a mere reproduction of the first. It is the note (on page 375) which is so offensive: — ‘I have left out the impertinent explanation in this verse, because, even if no interpolation it must be either ridiculous or unintelligible in a translation.’ It is the more shameless from one who allows himself no such audacity in his rendering (as among many like passages) of John 1:38, 41, 42, with all three of which he deals fairly. Now what is the fact in our case? It is the true Aramaic form of that time and country; so Gamaliel’s maid was called; and Josephus (B.J. iv. iii. 5) gives as Luke does the same corresponding Greek name to the mother of a certain truculent John, as the English reader can see in Dr. Traill’s Tr. ii. 64. The Hebrew word that answers to it means ‘beauty’; but it is commonly used of a ‘gazelle’, ‘hart’, or ‘roe’, as in Deut.; 2 Sam.; Song of Solomon. So in our own tongue men and women are called Buck, Doe, Roe, Stag, and the like. In Lucret. iv. 1154 it occurs as a term of endearment. Where is the ‘impertinence’ of such an explanation? Only in the empty, presumptuous, and profane mind of Mr. Wakefield. I take the trouble of refuting it, as a caution to the misinformed not to be imposed on by the unconscious impiety of such as believe not the inspired character of Holy Writ. Whenever they assail that word, it would be easy to expose their self-sufficient folly.

Tabitha, or Dorcas, then, is described as a disciple at Joppa, who was a doer of the word and not a hearer only; for her pure and undefiled service before her God and Father was to remember the widows in their affliction, keeping herself unspotted from the world. $he was as full of good works and alms-deeds as of faith. In

those days then she sickened and died. Now if washed in the usual way, she was laid in an upper room, a suitable place to await the arrival of the apostle. For it seems not obscurely implied that the disciples looked for more than consolation in sending messengers for the apostle just at that moment and admitting of no delay;90 as he on his part promptly met their entreaty. As usual the scene is livingly before us, though it is with Peter for the central figure, not Paul of whom Luke was the cherished companion. But what mattered this or that if the Spirit inspired him to give us the truth to Christ's praise? He certainly had it all before Him as it was, though Luke was not there: and no jealousy for his leader tarnished one word of Luke's narrative. There they were in the upper chamber, and all the widows stood by Peter, not in tears only but displaying the work of Dorcas' loving hands, the clothes inner and outer which she used to make while she was with them.

But Peter had not come for condolence only or chiefly, but for the glory of God that Jesus the Son of God might be glorified in her who was gone. So, putting them all out and kneeling down, he prayed. He sought not to display the great work about to be done; he sought the Lord only, and with that grave reverence which became one who walked in presence of the Unseen Who alone could avail. Here again how vividly graphic is the recital! yet no eye of man was on Peter and the body of the disciple. He Who wrought in power through one servant has told us it through another. Some of old in east and west and south have ventured to add 'In the name of [our Lord] Jesus Christ'.91 If they meant honour, they were guilty of a heinous wrong. 'Add thou not unto His words.' The inspiring Spirit has given us

the truth perfectly. Enough to know that Peter knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, said, Tabitha, arise. Spoil not the word of God, O man, unworthy of the name of a believer, unworthy of the task of a translator, or of an expositor, by thy unhallowed glosses. His prayer proved to Whom He looked and on Whom He leaned; but we may not take from His words in Acts 3:6, nor add to them in Acts 9:40, nor assimilate either one or other to Acts 9:34. Let us be assured that each is as God wrote it, and therefore as each should be: our place is to receive humbly, believe confidingly, and enjoy to the uttermost.

The power of the Lord was there, according to His servant's prayer, not to heal as before, but to raise the dead. 'And she opened her eyes; and seeing Peter, sat up. And, giving her a hand, he raised her up; and calling the saints [who had the deepest and least interested feeling] and the widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout the whole of Joppa.'

Yet it is to be remarked that the moral or spiritual effect is not to be measured by the comparative character or measure of the power displayed. When the paralysed Æneas was healed, all who inhabited Lydda turned to the Lord, when the far greater wonder was wrought of raising up the deceased Dorcas in Joppa, no such wide or large effect followed, but 'many believed on the Lord'; a blessed result for these souls, and to His glory assuredly, but, as far as we may gather from scripture, by no means so comprehensive now as then. After all it is the word which is the true and right means of conversion to Him, whatever may be the means used to draw attention to His word. For His grace is sovereign, and refuses the plausible reasoning of men.

There is another word which the Spirit adds at the close, and not without its importance: ‘And it came to pass that he remained many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.’ The veil drops over the recollections of Dorcas if she had any about her recent experience, as in the case of Lazarus and all others raised from the dead. But of the great apostle of the circumcision, through whom pseudo-apostles claimed succession over the uncircumcision! as well as a monarch’s patrimony, we are told that he stayed a good many days in Joppa at the house of a certain tanner who bore his own name of Simon. Has this no voice to those who easily believe that they too stand ‘first’ in the church of God in our day? No true apostle according to scripture ever possessed, ever sought, wealth or rank in virtue of his office. Alas! it is not only power that is departed, but, what is far more serious, the spirit of obedience and the simplicity of faith, which last invests the least thing on earth, that Christ gives or sanctions, with the halo of heaven.

But there is also consistency with Christ to be maintained; and Christ was crucified on earth no less than glorified in heaven. Is the portion we seek, cherish, and defend, in real harmony? It is here and now we are put to the test. Are we allowing the corruption of Christendom to sully our faith or degrade our practice? Do we value, look for, or accept present earthly honour as the fruit of gospel service, and of position in the church? If it be so, let us learn from God’s word that this is not fellowship with Christ’s sufferings, nor are we in this respect at least in the communion of His apostles. Are we doing well in God’s sight if we take conformity to the world so quietly? Christ deserves a better return at our hands. How sad that fidelity to Christ and the cross

in our walk of every day should be counted a ‘peculiar view’! ‘Already are ye filled, already ye became rich, ye reigned without us: yea, and I would that ye did reign, that we also might reign with you. For, I think, God set forth us the apostles last, as men doomed to death: for we are made a spectacle to the world and angels and men. We are fools for Christ but ye wise in Christ; we weak but ye strong, ye glorious but we without honour’ (1 Cor. 4:8-10).

65 The Text. Rec. on inferior authority adds first ‘Lord said’, then an interpolation from Acts 26 ‘[it is] hard for thee to kick against goads’, and an exaggerated form in the first half of ver. 6 of the first clause of Acts 22:10.

66 Or, ‘no one’, which is the reading of most authorities, some of them ancient and good, though Ap.m. B Vulg. Syrr. Sah., et al., give the broader sense of the neuter. It may help some to notice the objective or historical fact in this expression, as compared with the subjective state in the last clause of ver. 7 and the first of verse 9: objective again in the in latter part of 9.

67 ἐν ὁράματι ‘in a vision’, though given by most MSS. and Vv. finds no support in A61 Vulg. Sah. Memph. Aeth. There are also several changes of order in the words in these verses, and the oldest MSS. incline to the plural form of ‘hands’ where the Text. Rec. after most has the singular.

68 The perfect has most MSS., but the more ancient give the aorist.

69 τε ‘both’ ABCE, eight cursives, et al., but

τῶν is wrongly added by B Cp.m.

70 ‘Forthwith’ is here added in Text. Rec., but very high authority excludes the word, which is needless.

71 Calvin apparently sees only terror, and makes the abstinence part of the miracle. Can one conceive a stranger absence of spiritual perception?

72 The Text. Rec. on inferior authority adds ‘Saul’.

73 It is ‘Jesus’ in ABCE, sixteen cursives, Vulg. Syrr. Memph, et al. One of the Aeth, has ‘Jesus’ only, the other ‘Jesus Christ’.

74 Most copies but not the best have the perfect in ver. 21. Only p.m. B omit the article in ver. 22. Other minute differences may be left.

75 The Text. Rec. has

παρετήρουν τε, but the best witnesses give

παρετηροῦντο δὲ καί, and so the chief modern editors.

76 The oldest copies, with ancient Latin copies, have the strange reading ‘his’ disciples, which appears to be as easy a slip as out of keeping with the account.

77 εἰς ABCELP, et al.,

ἐν H., Syrr. Pst. & Hcl., Arm. Æthiop.

78 ABC Fuld, Arm., et al., omit the copulative: EHLP Vulg. Syrr. Cop., et al, insert.

79 T.R. with p.m. HLP, et al., add

Ἰησοῦ, but p.m ABE and Versions omit;

Ἰησοῦ only, is read by C, Syr. Pst.

80 A is alone of the uncials in reading

Ἕλληνας, all others giving

῾Ελληνιστάς.

81 The singular is read by ABC Vulg. Syr. Pst., Sah. Cop. Arm. Æthiop, Erp Arab., et al., as against the plural of the Text. Rec. HLP Syr. Hcl (and E, ἐκκλησίαι πᾶσαι).

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid.

84 The article is omitted by A, though read by all others.

85 Bp.m. C with half a dozen cursives, et al. omit the article which is supported by the great mass of copies.

86 I presume the Revisers meant to distinguish between the town and the district by ‘at Lydda and in Sharon’.

87 So HLP and many cursives, manuscripts which probably point to the Hebrew article. Cf. Joshua 12:18 (Lasharon). The Sinaitic indeed erroneously omits the article before the word, but it is added as a correction.

88 Lachmann, following ACE (and many cursives), reads ‘the’, but the best and most ancient copies confirm the common reading with all other editors.

89 The ancient copies give the entreaty more graphically than the Text. Rec.

90 The marginal reading (ver. 38) of the Authorized Version (‘be grieved’) is in no way suitable as a rendering here, though habitually used in classical authors for the hesitation of shame, pity, or alarm. They were led to retain it in the margin through their respect for Tyndale, followed by Cranmer. The Geneva V. discarded it rightly. The Rhemites give ‘Be not loth’, though Wiclif had translated correctly, as they adhered servilely to the Vulgate. Num. 22:16; Judges. 18:9 are

unquestionable precedents in the LXX., and so Josephus, Ant. ii. 7.

91 So in the Thebaic, Armenian, Philox. Syriac; Cyprian, et al.

Acts 10

The sovereign grace of God toward an men was about to have another and yet more conclusive formal seal. It was not enough that the scattered Hellenists were preaching the gospel in the free action of the Holy Spirit or that Philip in particular had evangelized Samaria. It was not enough that Saul of Tarsus had been called from his persecutions to bear Christ's name before the Gentiles no less but more than before the sons of Israel. The apostle of the circumcision must now openly act on the grand principle of Christianity which knows no distinction between Jew and Greek. As the cross proves them alike sinful and lost (Rom. 3:22, 23), the gospel meets them alike where they are (Rom. 10:12), and proclaims the same One to be Lord of all and rich unto all that call upon Him. This was now to be publicly demonstrated by Peter's preaching to the Gentiles, and their entrance into the privileges of the gospel on precisely the same terms of gratuitous, unconditional, and everlasting salvation by the faith of Christ as to the Jews at and since Pentecost. Henceforth there is no distinction for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved The circumstances of a change so momentous bore the unequivocal marks of divine authority; though, long before, the Lord Himself had announced it (Luke 24:47) to the unwilling and therefore unintelligent ears of his disciples, and Peter had in terms affirmed it (Acts 2:39), however little he seems to have as yet apprehended the force of what he then uttered. Indeed we are here and now carefully shown how reluctantly he set his hand to the work of indiscriminate grace till God left excuses no longer

possible. But He would have the activity of His grace tarry no longer for the dull sons of men: His message of love to the lost must run forth in power; and the great apostle of the circumcision must be the one formally to open the gates of the kingdom not to Jews only but to Gentiles also. The moment was come; the man with whom to begin appears.

‘Now a certain man in Caesarea, Cornelius by name, a centurion of a cohort that was called Italian, pious and fearing God with all his house 92giving much alms to the people, and entreating God continually, saw in a vision manifestly about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in unto him and saying to him, Cornelius. But he, gazing on him and being affrighted, said, What is it, Lord? And he said to him, Thy prayers and thine alms have gone up for a memorial before God. And now send men unto Joppa, and fetch [one]93 Simon, who is surnamed Peter: he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea. And when the angel that spoke to him had departed, he called two of his domestics and a pious soldier of those in close attendance, and, having recounted all to them sent them to Joppa’ (vers. 1-8).

The Spirit of God is thus careful to make known the godly life of Cornelius. He was already a converted man, though a Gentile. But he did not know salvation proclaimed in the gospel. Therefore was Peter to be sent for, as Peter himself afterwards explained (Acts 11:13, 14): else he could only have hoped for his soul in the mercy of God. But now the gospel is to teach sinful man, without distinction; and it seemed good to the all-wise God to bless thereby such a one as this devout Roman, as He had already in the same grace paid honour to the

crucified Saviour by converting as well as filling with peace the penitent robber who hung by His side. They were as different tributes to the grace which came by Him as could well be conceived; but each was seasonable, each to the glory of Jesus, each a display of what God can afford to do through redemption. The pious centurion was only entitled to know his sins remitted on God's message of grace through the blood of Jesus.

The evangelical school, ignorant of the new and peculiar privileges of the gospel, were wont to regard Cornelius as a self-righteous philanthropist, because they did not distinguish between conversion and the known forgiveness of sins or salvation. But this was their ignorance. Even Bede knew better, when he said, albeit in dubious phraseology, that he came through faith to works, but through works was established in faith. Had Bede said through the gospel, instead of 'through works,' it would have been more in accordance with the truth; but those who cite him approvingly seem not more intelligent than our venerable light of the dark ages. It was really God putting honour on the accomplished sacrifice of Christ; and now that the Jews nationally had rejected their Messiah calling by the gospel Gentiles into equal privilege with believing Israelites.

But the known godly character of Cornelius was suited to silence the prejudices of the ancient people of God. He looked to God and served Him in faith before He knew present salvation. If it were too much to say as Calvin does that, before Peter came, he had a church in his house, we are told on the highest authority that he was devout and feared God with all his household: no idol, we may be sure, was tolerated there. Instead of the

rapacity of a Roman abroad, with contempt unbounded for the Jew, Cornelius abounded in alms-giving to ‘the people’ in their low estate, and this in Caesarea where Gentiles predominated. Best of all he entreated God continually. To suppose all this in one destitute of life is absurd. Cornelius was born of God and walked accordingly, though he had not yet peace; and God was now about to meet the wants and longings of his soul by the full revelation of His grace in the gospel.

An angel of God he sees in a vision not of the night. It was broad daylight, in the afternoon; nor was he asleep, but inquiring learns that God, not unmindful of his prayers and alms,94 bids him fetch Simon Peter from Joppa. As the great apostle of the uncircumcision wrote at the end to instruct the slow mind of the believing Hebrews, so the great apostle of the circumcision was to be employed at the beginning in evangelizing at God’s command the Gentiles. Does this beautiful interlacing offend you? If so, it proves how little you have entered into the divine ways which cut off all room or excuse for human independence. Neither in Judea nor in Rome (pace Eusebii)95 nor anywhere else was there to be, if God were obeyed, the unseemly suicidal sight of a Jewish church distinct from a Gentile church. The assembly was on God’s part meant to be on earth, let there be ever so many assemblies, the saints composing but one assembly, of which in due time it could be said, even when Corinthians were splitting into divisions, ‘all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas’ (1 Cor. 3:21, 22). Here, however, it was a question of getting the gospel, as necessarily this is the true order, though the church follows in its proper course:

individual blessing must be known before collective privilege and responsibility.

On the other hand, while these messengers were approaching Joppa, about noon of the next day, Peter retired to pray and, growing hungry saw in a trance, into which he fell, a sheet of striking significance, which he soon learnt to apply.

‘And on the morrow, when they were journeying and drawing near to the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray about the sixth hour, and he became hungry and desired to eat, and while they made ready, a trance came over him, and he beholdeth the heaven opened and a certain vessel descending96 as a great sheet by four corners let down upon the earth in which were all the quadrupeds and reptiles of the earth and [the]97 birds of the sky. And there came a voice unto him, Arise, Peter, slay and eat. But Peter said, By no means, Lord; because never did I eat anything common and unclean. And a voice [came] again a second time unto him, What God cleansed deem not thou common. And this was done thrice; and straightway98 the vessel was taken up into heaven’ (vers. 9-16).

Peter had not departed from that condition of dependence on God which he had expressed on the occasion of choosing ‘the seven’ to their diaconal service in Jerusalem. ‘It is not fit that we [the twelve] should forsake the word of God and serve tables. Look ye out therefore... but we will give ourselves closely to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’ (Acts 6:2-4). So he assuredly was doing now when a special mission was being assigned him by God. He had withdrawn to be alone before Him. It was no question of repairing to the

temple as once, or even to an oratory. The housetop sufficed; but it is well, when forms vanish, if the Spirit abides and grows stronger as here. We cannot afford to be slack in that which God honours in the apostle. The needy should not grow weary in telling out their need to Him and in counting on Him to act worthily of His great Name.

Peter receives a threefold testimony of God's purifying the Gentiles by faith, instead of separating Israel by circumcision. The cross had changed all, and put no difference between believers, Jew or Gentile. The former had lost thereby their old superiority according to flesh; both were now open alike to incomparably better blessings in Christ by faith. It was no question now of the law or of becoming a proselyte, or even of laying hold of the skirt of a Jew. From the open heaven light streamed on the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus, and grace declared the uncleanness gone which Sinai had denounced for a while with rigour. For all was over with the first man under the law. The Saviour speaks from heaven where such a distinction as Jews or Gentiles has no place, and acts on the efficacy of that blood which has procured everlasting redemption for all believers equally, be they Jew or Greek, barbarian or Scythian, male or female, bond or free. A Jew hitherto could no more eat of an unclean animal than he could eat with a sinner of the Gentiles. But the sheet, which came down from heaven and was taken up there, taught Peter in due time the immense change which hinges on the cross, answers to the glory of Christ on high, and drew from him on a later day even in Jerusalem itself the gracious confession. 'We believe that we shall be saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus, even as they also': not

merely the Gentiles as the Jews, but the Jews in like manner as the Gentiles.

How far the saints or even the apostles anticipated the grace of the gospel must be evident to the least attentive reader of the inspired narrative. Even up to this hour Peter had no thought of, and ventured to object in the vision to, what the voice commanded from heaven. So little was the special character of the gospel in its free grace indebted to the hearts or minds of its most blessed preachers; so incontrovertibly does the word of God prove that what concerns us incalculably above all else for time and eternity proceeded from God alone, feeling and acting for Christ in His own love and to His own glory, though for these very reasons to our best and surest blessing also.

Very careful is the Spirit of God to give us full details: so grave a change as the reception of Gentiles on the same footing as a Jew was not made or owned lightly.

‘And as Peter was perplexed99 in himself what the vision which he had seen might mean, behold, the men that had been sent by Cornelius, having sought out the house of Simon, stood at the gate, and having called were inquiring whether Simon surnamed Peter lodged there. Now while Peter was pondering over the vision, the Spirit said to him, Behold, three men seek thee; but arise, go down, and journey with them, nothing doubting because I have sent them. And Peter went down unto the men and said Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause for which ye are here’ And they said, Cornelius, a centurion, a man righteous, and fearing God, and attested by the whole nation of the Jews, was divinely warned by a holy angel to send for thee unto his house

and to hear words from thee. Having therefore called them in he lodged [them]. And on the morrow he arose and went off with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa went with him' (vers. 17-23).

Men were employed throughout after the angelic mission to Cornelius but God is apparent in every part to disarm prejudice, own righteousness, display grace, and put honour on the name of Jesus to the blessing of man and to His own glory, for all which weighty ends the law, of which Israel boasted, had proved altogether unavailing. The great apostle Peter was indebted under God to the Gentile's invitation to solve the problem of his vision. But the Spirit is the agent of all blessing, intelligence, and power in the believer; and so His place is made conspicuous here (vers. 19, 20). It must be a divine impulse, and not a mere deduction of reasoning: for us and all this is a lesson of inestimable value. At first no doubt, sensible signs and extraordinary power ushered in His presence and manifested the new truth of His action in man; but the reality abides, as He abides with us, for ever, though outward signs in divine wisdom are no longer vouchsafed. This draws greater importance than ever to scripture in these last days when unbelievers turn from it more and more to unprofitable and mischievous fables.

It was thus made plain, beyond doubt, that God it was, not man nor yet the church, nor even the apostles, who opened the door to the nations equally as to the Jews. So the gospel intrinsically wrought and proclaimed: but even the believer is dull to appreciate the full import of what he has really received, and is wholly dependent on God's word and Spirit to give him growth and progress. The hour was come for the formal and public owning of

believing Gentiles in the enjoyment of full gospel privileges. And it was meet that he who was, beyond doubt, of the twelve should be the one employed, rather than he who, already called, was designated to be the apostle of the uncircumcision. Thus was the uniting bond of the Spirit best maintained in peace.

But it was of all moment that man's will should be excluded as well as man's wisdom. What could be more effectual to this end than the vision of Cornelius on the one hand and that of Peter on the other? The character of each gave special weight to what they saw and heard; and their concurrence, as attested by the 'three men' from Caesarea, as well as the 'six brethren' that accompanied Peter from Joppa, was of high value and unmistakable significance. Men were largely employed, as they were concerned in the deepest way, but so as to demonstrate to every upright mind that God was the moving spring in it all. The 'devout soldier' with two domestics has his lowly but valuable place and was soon to share the blessing, as well as the devout centurion on whom he waited closely; a blessing which is as distinctly characterized by the power of grace that brings down far higher than Cornelius, and lifts up far lower than the Roman soldier, uniting all believers even here below in one heavenly and indissoluble relationship to Christ.

The message delivered by the men from Caesarea was to the point. For a Roman officer in a garrison town to have the good report of the whole nation of the Jews was no small thing; but it was more for his own household to bear witness that he was a righteous man and God-fearing, as his soldier attendant evidently was also. And the prevalence of Jewish Sadduceanism did not lead to any toning down of the divine communication, which

was calmly affirmed by men accustomed to frank uprightness. Cornelius, they said, ‘was oracularly warned by a holy angel to fetch thee unto his house and hear words from thee.’

What a clear communication to Peter when his vision was followed up by the Spirit’s application of it! Nor can anything be plainer than the divine authority with which the Spirit speaks, and acts here as elsewhere — ‘I have sent them’: He is God.

How vividly too is set forth the value of ‘words’ in the gospel! Let the law demand ‘works’ of man to prove his powerlessness and that the offence may abound so as to overwhelm him with despair of himself and cast him only upon Christ. The gospel makes known in its ‘words’ the true God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent, and is thus the means of life eternal to every one that believes. The Jew might claim the law as imposed on His people in the stern solitude of Sinai, not so God’s gospel concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, dead, risen, and glorified in heaven, which is now as open to the Gentile as to the Jew, but to neither save by the faith of Christ and His redemption.

Peter then set out with the rest from Joppa. ‘And on the morrow he entered into Caesarea, and Cornelius was awaiting them, having called together his kinsmen and his near friends’ (ver. 24).

Dear reader, have you nothing to learn from the zeal now, as well as the habitual piety and devotedness we saw before (vers. 2, 22), in the Roman centurion? Are we to be less zealously affected because we are more familiar with the wondrous grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ? Sorrowful fruit, not indeed of better light,

but of fleshly indifference and worldly ease, which hinder the due activity of divine affections that others may live, as well as our own souls grow, by the knowledge of God.

‘And when it came to pass that Peter entered, Cornelius met him and, falling at his feet, did homage, but Peter raised him, saying, Rise up, I myself also am a man’ (vers. 25, 26). It was the more remarkable, as a Roman in general never offered the salaam of prostration to a stranger. But the lowly and pious mind of Cornelius was wrought to such a pitch of expectation by the angelic message that he failed to sever the preacher from the truth he was sent to make known, and was thus disposed to pay more than honour meet to him whom God had directed him to send for. On the other hand the dignity which accompanies the truth is not only compatible with the deepest humility but produces and increases it in proportion to the power which grace acquires over the soul. Impossible not to be humble, if we are consciously in God’s presence; and this the gospel is calculated above all things to make good habitually, as it does in the measure of our faith and spirituality. Peter refused such mistaken homage at once.

Oh, you who claim to be Peter’s peculiar and exclusive successor, are you not ashamed? Why are you of all men the most distant from his ways the most opposed to his spirit? Silver and gold you have, which he had not; but the faith he preached you deny and corrupt, and the lowliness he practised even to an unbaptized Gentile pronounces the most solemn rebuke on your pride, when you (installed as Pope) seat yourself ‘on the very spot where the pyx containing the host usually stands’,100

and the cardinal princes of the empire repeatedly adore you, each prostrating himself before you and kissing the slippered toe as well as the covered hand. Can contrast be more complete? And this is ‘succession’!

‘And conversing with him he entered and findeth many come together and he said to them, Yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to join himself or come unto one of another race. And me God showed to call no man common or unclean: wherefore also without gainsaying I came when sent for. I ask then on what account ye sent for me. And Cornelius said Pour days ago till this hour I was fasting and the ninth [hour] praying in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and says Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms had in remembrance before God: send then unto Joppa, and call for Simon who is surnamed Peter He lodgeth in the house of Simon a tanner by [the] sea. Forthwith then I sent unto thee, and thou hast done well in arriving. Now then we are all here before God to hear all the things that have been commanded thee of the Lord’ (vers. 27-33).

Peter, after entering not only the house but the apartment where Cornelius had his company waiting to hear the gospel, explains first what they all knew, then what God had just shown to himself. For their part they were aware that for a Jew to be familiar with a Gentile was unlawful: he on his had it shown of God that he was not to call any man common or unclean. Now that the true light shines, the old distinction is gone. It was not so at the beginning; it is no longer in force. If God was entitled to institute such a difference, He was no less free to annul it; and so He had shown Peter in special preparation for Cornelius whom God had directed to

send for Peter, who had come thereon ‘without gainsaying’, as became him. For what has faith to do in such circumstances but to obey? If Christ Himself was beyond all the Obedient Man, the apostles differed from others not more in their gift and power than in the measure of their obedience. And to this is every saint sanctified by the Spirit — to the obedience of Jesus Christ, as distinctly as to the sprinkling of His blood. Let us exhort one another to this, and so much the more as we see the day approaching.

Cornelius then in answer explains why he sent for Peter. It was not without divine authority. He had been four days also praying, if not fasting also (for the reading is seriously questioned); on that afternoon an angel in a man’s guise told him that his prayer was heard, and that he was to call to him Peter, who had well done in coming, as they were all there to hear all the Lord’s commands through him.

Hear it, you that desire to honour Peter truly, that you may be saved from the destructive superstitions of his false successors. Were there succession, surely the first in the line is peculiarly to be regarded. See how readily he comes, without a word to say against it, at Cornelius’ request. Ah! it is not Peter who demanded or received worldly pomp and human honour; it is you who have lost the word of truth, the gospel of salvation, and are under the dominion of dark and evil traditions which make God’s word of none effect, and play into the hands of the god of this age who has blinded the minds of the unbelieving that the light of the gospel of Christ’s glory should not dawn on them. Listen to Peter, I beseech you, and learn, not merely your error in departure from the

living God, but the precious truth which is able to save your souls.

It was a serious moment for the apostle of the circumcision, prepared though he was by God's dealings with himself and with Cornelius. But there could be no doubt of the Lord's will, and the first step in the new departure must be taken then and there by himself.

'And Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him. The word which He sent forth to the sons of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all101) — ye know the matter that came to pass throughout the whole of Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached — Jesus of Nazareth, how that God anointed Him with [the] Holy Spirit and power; Who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, because God was with Him. And we [are]102 witnesses of all things which he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem, Whom also1 they slew, hanging [Him] on a tree. Him God raised on the third day and gave Him to be manifest, not to all the people, but to witnesses that were chosen before by God, to us which ate and drank with Him after He rose from [the] dead. And He charged us to preach to the people and testify that this is He that is ordained by God judge of living and dead. To Him all the prophets bear witness that every one that believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins through His name' (vers. 34-43).

The coming and work of Christ have put all things in their true place. Only since then has God Himself been

either manifested or vindicated, for during previous ages, since the flood or at least the law, God seemed the God of Jews only, and not of Gentiles also. Now it is made evident that He cares for Gentiles no less than Jews; but it never was evident in the fullness of the truth till the Son of God was come Who has given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true. Not till we know His Son Jesus Christ can we say, This is the true God and eternal life. Nor had anyone more difficulty to pierce through the cloud of Jewish prejudice than the instrument here employed, but God had cast the true light of the cross more fully on his soul; and now he could say, 'Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons' (even were they Hebrews of the Hebrews), 'but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him.' Of this Cornelius and perhaps others of his house were already to a certain extent a living but hidden example. The principle, however, was now to be extended immensely, and what had been comparatively hidden was to be avowed and made public through the gospel. The very piety of Cornelius kept him from appropriating to himself as a Gentile what he knew God had sent forth to Israel, till grace sent it to him also. Thus should the charge of the risen Lord, hitherto suspended as it were, be applied no longer partially but in all its wide extent: 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation.' The law had been proved and declared powerless, and pretension to keep it unto life became the plain proof that no life was there. Christ is all. 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that disbelieveth shall be condemned' (Mark 16:16). Peter understood all this as he never did before. Legal mist was passing away from his eyes. But nothing was farther

from the truth than that there could be among Gentiles any more than Jews one to fear God or work righteousness without real living faith. The Jewish feeling which denied to any nation save their own the possibility of this acceptableness with God, he declares to be unfounded. His mission on God's part to Cornelius was expressly to assert His indiscriminate grace, as well as to begin authoritatively by one whom God set in the first place in the assembly the sending of the gospel to every creature.

Cornelius and those with him already knew the word which God sent forth to the sons of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ. But Peter carefully adds that Jesus is Lord not of the Jews only but of all. That which was a thing spoken of throughout Judea, beginning from despised Galilee of the Gentiles, after the baptism which John preached (as we read in Mark 1:14, 15, where the Lord Himself called men to repent and believe the gospel) is the only salvation for Jew, or for Gentile when afterwards called as he now began to be. Jesus of Nazareth is the object of faith, Whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit and power.103 He was come to Whom all pointed that had in figure been anointed of God. The love of God to sinful man was evident in Him, and that love effectual in deliverance; for He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, because God was with Him. He was the true Messiah, but both in Himself and in His work immeasurably more, and this came out into the brightest evidence on His rejection. Yet was there ample testimony to Him before that rejection; so that man was without excuse. 'And we are witnesses of all things that He did both in the

country of the Jews and in Jerusalem, Whom also they slew, hanging Him on a tree.'

Whatever appearances may say, the will and word of God stands for ever; and faith knows it. 'Him God raised on the third day and gave Him to be manifest, not to all the people but to witnesses that were chosen before by God, to us who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead.' The resurrection is the pivoting and clenching of the gospel. If unbelief hold out against its testimony, what is clearer than that man hates both the love and the truth of God, and will not be saved at any price? The same resurrection of Jesus separates those who believe according to the value of Christ's death before God, making in their measure witnesses of Christ men who bowed to the testimony of the fore-appointed witnesses. He Whom they slew on a tree ate and drank with His own after He arose from the dead: not that He needed the food, but they needed the testimony that He was alive from the dead, a truly risen Man, Who having loved His own that were in the world, loved them to the uttermost.

He it was Who charged His disciples to preach to the people and testify that this is He that is ordained of God Judge of living and dead. Such a testimony clearly goes beyond Israel to take in all mankind within its scope, as the resurrection demonstrated beyond controversy. For if the Son of God deigned to be born of woman, born under law, His rejection by Israel, His death on the cross, broke all links with that people and left Him free for the display of sovereign grace in righteousness now while He is in heaven, as surely as He is determinately appointed by God Judge of living and dead when He comes again in glory. What has the risen Man to do with

one nation more than another? He is the divinely defined Judge of living and dead by-and-by, as He is now Saviour of all that believe be they who they may. Judgment and salvation are equally cleared by the gospel and concentrated in His person. The law made nothing perfect. The prophets, on the failure of all, bore their precious intermediate testimony, and Peter appeals to them. 'To Him bear all the prophets witness that through His name every one that believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins.'

To be born again, as has often been remarked, is not a proper privilege of the gospel, as all the ritualistic sects of Christendom suppose: for the new birth was always true for souls that believed (before, within, and without, Israel) since sin was in the world. The O.T. saints were as truly begotten of God as any of the New. Remission of sins is the primary boon of the gospel, though of course the new birth attached by grace to the same persons, and the privileges of the gospel go far beyond that gracious beginning. Here all is confusion, especially in the Christian bodies which boast of antiquity. Nor were even the Reformers at all clear in this fundamental and necessary truth. Lutherans, Calvinists Anglicans and others made baptism to be the means of life! either to all the baptized or to the elect among them. According to God's word they are all wrong, and inexcusably so. For scripture never treats baptism as the sign even of life-giving, but of death with Christ to sin, and of sins washed away for such as are already quickened. Christian baptism is a blessed institution, as the initiatory sign of the peculiar though primary privilege of the gospel. Blinder than the Jews are they who pervert it into a quickening ordinance, denying too, as

generally they do, that the life given in the Son is eternal life: so that sacerdotal pretension is as vain as the doctrine is false.

And so we find in this very context: ‘While Peter was yet speaking these sayings, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those that were hearing the word. And the faithful of the circumcision, as many as came with Peter, were amazed, because upon the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit. For they heard them speaking with tongues, and magnifying God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid the water, that these should not be baptized, which (οἵτινες) received the Holy Spirit even as we? And he directed them to be baptized in the name of 104 Jesus Christ. Then they entreated him to abide certain days’ (vers. 11 48).

It is striking to notice the various ways of divine wisdom. At Pentecost the believing Jews had to be baptized before they received the gift of the Spirit. They must solemnly take the place of death with Christ to all they had previously trusted. And even to this day the Jews feel its force; for when one of them is baptized to Christ Jesus, he is viewed and treated as dead to them and their religion. And so do the Brahmins, Mohammedans, or any who are not indifferent to their own profession. But the believing Gentiles as we see received the Holy Spirit while hearing the word, as most — perhaps all of us — have done; and baptism follows. Who could refuse the outward sign to the manifest recipients of that divine seal? Their gifts in speaking with tongues and magnifying God proclaimed the more precious and the ever-abiding gift of the Spirit. His seal is the true ground why those having it should be owned as members of Christ’s body: not ecclesiastical intelligence in them;

still less the will or the consent of other men. Our business is to honour God and to obey, not to legislate. If ways unworthy of Christ be done and persisted in, there is the remedy of scriptural discipline.

Here, whatever his old prejudices might have been, even Peter bowed. And they were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, it would seem, not by Peter, but at his direction by one or more of the brethren who accompanied him (ver. 48). There was neither vanity nor superstition in getting it done by Peter, though he took care in obedience to the Lord that it was duly done. It was of moment that they of the circumcision should go thoroughly with the mighty work of God's grace in sealing Gentile no less than Jew that believed. It was not too soon to be of moment that all may know that a simple brother may lawfully baptize even in a great apostle's presence, and that the act derived no value from office or gift. Only the evangelist should see that it be done after an orderly sort. No room was left for circumcision or the law. All is of grace reigning through righteousness. But a disciple is not on the external ground of a Christian till he is baptized. It is a privilege conferred on him who confesses Christ, and a sign of salvation through His death and resurrection.

92 τε 'both' is In Text. Rec. which LP support with most cursives, et al., but the most ancient and best reject.

93 Authorities are divided, so that 'one' is here hardly certain.

94 It is not without interest to note the difference of Scripture from the Apocrypha. For in Tobit 12:12 the angel is made to bring the memorial of prayer before God. in the Acts the prayers and the alms rise up there

without intervention, whether or not an angel brings the answer. Canon Humphrey has well reminded us of this.

95 ‘The reference is to Eusebius (A.D. 264 340), Bishop of Caesarea, who wrote The History of the Christian Church. He has been called the ‘Father of Church History’ — Editor.

96 Text. Rec. (supported by LP and most cursives) adds ‘upon him’ — I suppose from Matt. 3:16, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22, John 1:32, 33, and, very strangely contrary to the best MSS., Versions, et al.

97 The article here is doubtful, though its insertion in Text. Rec. has ancient authority as well as numbers.

98 The best MSS., et al., sustain ‘straightway’ as against the Text. Rec. which gives ‘again’.

99 Such is the true construction, not ‘in himself’ separated from the verb, as by G. Wakefield and Valckenaer (like the Codex Bezae).

100 So testifies an eye-witness, Mr. Thompson of Banchory.

101 Perhaps ‘of all things”. The two accusatives

λόγον and

ῥῆμα are dependent on the verb

οἶδατε, ‘ye know’, the second being in apposition with the first.

102 ‘Are’ is wanting in the best copies, which read ‘also’ omitted in the Text. Rec. ‘We’ here is emphatic, contradistinguished from the ‘ye’, also emphatic, in ver. 37.

103 It is amazing how intelligent Christians can repeat the ignorance of the Fathers, repeated by Petavius (Dogm. Theolog.) and others, confounding the action of the Spirit in the incarnation of our Lord with the anointing and seal at His baptism. But the operations of the Holy Spirit are sadly mistaken by most.

104 The older MSS. and Versions omit ‘the Lord’; some give ‘the Lord’, only; a few supply both.

Acts 11

Never had there been so important a step taken by man on the earth; never one demanding faith so urgently and evidently as now. Hence, though the assembly was then in its pristine order and beauty with the twelve acting together, notwithstanding the dispersion after Stephen's death which had scattered the saints generally, the Lord acted by a single servant of His whose own Jewish prejudices were notoriously of the strongest. The assembly is responsible to act together in all ordinary questions of godliness and discipline; it is bound to guard practically the foundations of truth and righteousness according to the written word. But a new departure needed and found a suited instrument, chosen and filled of God to initiate His will, and to take the step in advance, assuredly gathering it to be the will of the Lord.

Peter's faith was severely tried. For the first time since Pentecost he had to encounter doubts on the part of those who stood first in the church, and the fierce opposition of such as knew least of God and His ways. It was now not mere fleshly feeling of the Hellenists against the Hebrews, but the very serious question whether the foremost of the twelve had not compromised the testimony of Christ by the formal reception of Gentiles at Caesarea.

'But the apostles and the brethren which were in Judea heard that the Gentiles also received the word of God. And when Peter went up unto Jerusalem, they of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in unto men uncircumcized, and didst eat with them. But

Peter began and set forth to them in order, saying, I was in the city of Joppa, praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain vessel descending like a great sheet, let down by four corners out of heaven, and it came as far as me. On which having fixed mine eyes, I considered and saw the quadrupeds of the earth and the wild beasts and the reptiles and the birds of the heaven. And I heard also a voice saying to me, Arise, Peter, slay and eat. But I said, In no wise, Lord, because common or unclean never entered into my mouth. But a voice answered a second time out of heaven, What God cleansed make not thou common. And this was done thrice, and all were drawn up again into heaven. And, behold, immediately three men stood at the house in which I was, sent from Caesarea unto me; and the Spirit bade me go with them, doubting nothing. And there went with me also these six brethren, and we entered into the house of the man; and he reported to us how he saw the angel in his house, standing and saying Send to Joppa, and fetch Simon that is surnamed Peter, who shall speak words unto thee, whereby thou shalt be saved, thou and all thy house. And on my beginning to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them as upon us also at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord how He said, John baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with [the] Holy Spirit. If then God gave to them the same gift as also to us when we105 believed upon the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could forbid God? And when they heard these things, they were still, and glorified God, saying, Then indeed also to the Gentiles did God give repentance unto life' (vers. 1-18).

It was undeniable on the face of things that Peter had openly traversed the distinction so long set up by God

between Jew and Gentile. This he had to Justify by God's authority; and so he does by the simple recital of the vision already before us in the preceding chapter, which he repeats for the conviction of the brethren in Jerusalem. The moment was come for the seeds which the Lord Jesus Himself had sown to germinate and bear fruit visibly. Had He, Who in Matt. 10:5, forbade the twelve to go to any way of the Gentiles not also when risen told them expressly to go and make disciples of all the Gentiles? The vision of Peter was merely the reduction to practice of this great commission, or at least a kindred one. For in Luke 24:47 the Lord about to ascend had declared that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name unto all the Gentiles, beginning from Jerusalem. And so it was. With Jerusalem they had begun. But now the tide was turning. From Jerusalem the saints had been scattered abroad. Samaria had already received the word of God, not by the church agreeing to it, nor even by the action of the apostles. And now God had left nothing ambiguous as to His will about the Gentiles. The gospel henceforth must go out indiscriminately. The holiness of Israel had come to naught in the cross of Christ. By virtue of the blood of the cross God could and would wash even the Gentiles clean Ritual had come to its end. Henceforth there must be reality by faith And as the cross of Christ pronounced all alike ruined, so now salvation was going forth to any that believed, Jew or Gentile alike. Such was the purport of the vision; and grace reasoned with Peter when he in the ecstasy ventured to controvert the Lord Himself. Who then so proper as he to convince the obstinate men of the circumcision? If they were contending with him, could he not tell them truly that he had himself dared to

contend even with the Lord, Who had repeatedly and emphatically reproved his prejudices and had forbidden him to deem common what God had cleansed?

Peter told them also how the three men from the Gentile Cornelius appeared in person at that very moment before the house in Joppa, and how the Spirit bade him go with them without a question. Such a threefold cord could not be broken, each part was independent of the other, and all of them from God. For Cornelius in Caesarea had a vision no less than Peter in Joppa. But Peter had in addition, while he thought on the vision the Spirit directing him to go with the messengers of Cornelius before he knew that the three men were making inquiry at the gate.

Nay, there was more than this. God had manifestly used His word as only He could: 'As I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell upon them, as also upon us at the beginning.' It was the gospel of their salvation. To them also the Spirit was supplied, Who wrought powers among them beyond possibility of cavil or question. The promise of the Father was therefore fulfilled in the Gentiles, as much as in the Jews who believed, according to the word of the Lord in Acts 1:4, 5.

Again, let us remark how clearly this discourse of Peter distinguishes new birth from salvation.106 Cornelius was assuredly born of God before Peter visited him at Caesarea. Nevertheless Peter was to speak unto him words whereby he should be saved. It is a gross mistake to suppose that the salvation which he now found is not far beyond new birth. Present salvation is the first foundation privilege of the gospel. To be born again was always true from Abel downwards. But those who are

merely born again do not enter Christian ground until they have received at least the first and most needful blessing, to which the accomplishment of Christ's work entitles all who believe.

The remarkable care with which God introduced the new standing-point [of salvation] to the Gentiles makes this confusion inexcusable. Now, while faith never was without suited mercy from God, it is one of the most marked signs of unbelief to ignore the peculiar privilege which God is now giving, and to go back to that mode or means which may have been at a former time. Here, as has been already and often pointed out, the Evangelicals are as dark as the Sacramentarians. For, if the latter party attach exorbitant efficacy to the mere sign of the blessing, the former are as ignorant of what is signified. Both agree in making the initiatory institution of the gospel to be the sign of life or the new birth; whereas it is really of the remission or washing away of sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16), and of death with Christ (Rom. 6:2, 3; Col. 2:12), i.e., of salvation (1 Peter 3:21). Cornelius learnt from the apostle that for a Gentile it was no question any longer of God's uncovenanted mercy. He himself, already born of God and acquainted with the Messiah come for the deliverance of His ancient people by faith, had now to learn of salvation's door open to the Gentile believer as truly as to the Jewish. It is not promise, as hitherto even to an Israelite, it is the work accomplished, and soul-salvation henceforth given to all believers without distinction. As the seal of it, the Holy Ghost was manifestly imparted as on the day of Pentecost.

This was conclusive for the objections of the circumcision then. Who was Peter, as he triumphantly

closed his argument, who they, to resist God? None but He could give that gift, which He had granted alike to Jews and Gentiles by faith of the gospel.

But the principle is of immense importance permanently, and as much now as ever. The true ground of reception is not the acceptance of certain articles of faith, expressed or understood; still less is it a certain measure of intelligence about the one body and one Spirit, which it is improbable that a single soul in Jerusalem then possessed definitely. It is a far weightier fact, the possession of ‘the like gift’. If not so baptized of the Holy Spirit one is not really a member of Christ’s body. To be born again never did suffice. One must have, through faith of Christ as the gospel proclaims Him and His work, the Spirit given to one as a believer. Without known remission of sins one may be quickened, but there cannot be what scripture calls ‘salvation’, any more than the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry Abba, Father. There may be conversion, a divinely-given hatred of evil and love of good, God’s word prized, and prayer; there may be conscience toward God, yet a real but imperfect looking to Christ. But till one knows by faith of the gospel, that all is clear between the soul and God through the sacrifice of Christ, the Holy Spirit does not seal the person, when there is submission to the righteousness of God, He does: then the believer is actually made a member of the one body of Christ. Of course such a one is, or ought to be, baptized with water, but in scripture this is never connected with that corporate and everlasting relationship. It is individual and bound up with the simple confession of Christ; so much so, that whatever God may do in sovereign grace, no intelligent saint would think of presenting a soul for

fellowship of the church, unless he had previously taken the ground of a baptized person. But baptism of the Holy Ghost is wholly distinct from water baptism; and this is not even a sign of that, but of salvation by Christ or burial unto His death.

Even the stoutest defenders of Jewish exclusiveness were overwhelmed by the accumulated and crowning proof that God gave to the Gentiles also repentance unto life. It was now an incontestable and blessed fact. They were more than silenced, they ‘were still’. Grace had triumphed, as it ought to do, over law, in Jerusalem, and among none but Jews that believed. It was not yet a day of ruin, when the least right are apt to tee the most self-confident and jubilant. It was grace made them glorify God in reversing their previous judgment.

But God works variously to accomplish His purpose, and so we see at this point of the inspired history. The action of Peter was of the utmost moment, and its acceptance in Jerusalem by those whom God had set in the highest place in the assembly. A fresh apostle had been expressly chosen outside the twelve, called by the glorified Christ in heaven where all for man is and must be of sovereign grace, given to be apostle of Gentiles in formal and acknowledged contradistinction from those of the circumcision. Nor was this all. The free action of the Holy Spirit receives a full and rich expression in the labours of brethren, who, when driven by persecution from Jerusalem, began to preach, but were bold enough to preach, without trance or vision or personal direction, outside the ancient people of God and even proselytes.

‘They therefore that were scattered abroad through the tribulation that took place on the occasion of Stephen

passed through as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none but Jews only. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming' unto Antioch spoke unto the Greeks107 also,108 preaching the Lord Jesus. And [the] Lord's hand was with them and a great number believed and turned109 unto the Lord. And the report concerning them came unto the ears of the assembly that was in Jerusalem; and they dispatched Barnabas110 as far as Antioch: who, on arriving and seeing the grace of God, rejoiced and exhorted all with purpose of heart to abide by the Lord. For he was a good man and full of [the] Holy Spirit and faith; and a large crowd was added to the Lord. And he3 went forth unto Tarsus to seek for Saul, and on finding brought him' unto Antioch. And it came to pass that even111 for a whole year they were gathered together in the assembly and taught a large crowd, and that the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch' (vers. 19-26).

It will be observed that the account of this early and free evangelizing, first to Jews, but after a little while to Greeks, is reserved for the introduction of Saul's first connection with Antioch, the earthly starting-point of the great apostle's labours. This is quite in Luke's manner. His order (and none more orderly) is not one of simple sequence, such as we may see in the Gospel of Mark, still less does it linger on giving evidences of the change of dispensation, as in that of Matthew. He was led to deal with moral associations, which, if less patent, present a deeper arrangement, and fuller of instruction in God's ways, than a mere chronological series.

Whatever the value (and it was immense) of the episode we have lately had before us in Acts 9:32 - 11:18 (Acts

9:31 being a sort of transitional link that closes what goes before and introduces it), God took care that the gospel should reach the Gentiles first in a way altogether informal, even while the highest ecclesiastical authorities were there to commence and sanction its inauguration with the seal of the whole apostolic college in Jerusalem. It pleased the Lord that all should be ordered otherwise; and the work among the Gentiles began with not even distinct purpose nor definite intelligence on the part of its promoters, with nothing apparent save the loving zeal that knew the desperate need of the Gentiles as well as the immeasurable efficacy of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. It was therefore according to the deepest wisdom as well as divine goodness that the real beginning of the gospel outside Israel should be simply of love flowing out from God only, as far as understanding went, in the circumstances that ensued on Stephen's martyrdom. Then, as we know, the saints generally were scattered through the persecution that set in. In the course. of their passage here and there, Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch profited by their testimony. At first, however, the word was spoken to none but Jews only. Some of them, however, and these foreign Jews, Cyprians and Cyrenians, ventured farther, and in the last of the places named, at Antioch addressed the Greeks also with the glad tidings of the Lord Jesus.

Was not this very bold? Certainly it was of God Who made use of the providential circumstances for His glory. It was love, it was spiritual instinct, in the heart of those who evangelized, whose very names are unknown. God has taken particular care not to name them perhaps

lest we should attribute to them a deeper perception of His mini than was really due. The momentous fact was there, and simple-hearted labourers were those to whom God gave this mighty and profound impulse by His Spirit. Let us admire these ways of God, which are higher than those even of His people, as the heavens are higher than the earth.

Man, even the wisest of His servants, would have expected otherwise. But the same God was now at work, Who, if He brought Moses by providence into the house of Pharaoh's daughter, brought him out of it by faith, Who even then did not use him, learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, to the deliverance of His people, till he had unlearned man as well as himself, and realized alone what God is, in the wilderness for forty long years: then and then only was he fitted of God to be a ruler and a deliverer. So now did it to God seem meet to begin Gentile Christianity through men of comparatively small account in either the world or the church, before there was the smallest intercourse between Peter and Cornelius. The highest order that ever was established in the assembly on earth could not therefore boast. The Lord is above that or any other grade; to Him none can dictate. Nor has He abdicated His rights over the earth into the hands of a vicegerent any more than of the twelve. This having been vindicated by His sovereign employment of the Cyprians and Cyrenians who first planted the gospel among the nations, He does take care to send Peter to Caesarea and to have Peter's action on according to His direct command formally sanctioned by the twelve in Jerusalem. His own call of Saul to be apostle of the Gentiles was independent of both the free action at

Antioch and the formal recognition of Caesarea at Jerusalem; as it was evidently also prior in time, and in many respects superior in claim and power, one may add to both, though this was not yet fully disclosed.

Of such weight it was in God's eyes to found, confirm, and authenticate this work among the Gentiles, so supremely interesting and indispensable to us, who without it were mere sinners, 'without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.' But if to us of such moment, what was it to the glory of His own grace? What to the praise of His Son, the Lord Jesus?

And if these brethren of Cyprus and Cyrene kept speaking to the Greeks also, announcing the glad tidings of the Lord Jesus, the Lord's hand was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. If ever men dared to draw indefinitely on grace without waiting for outward sign or open commission, if any servants of the Lord ever exposed themselves to a seemingly just taunt of going beyond all bounds, more especially as 'the twelve' were not only alive but together not so far off, surely it was these pioneers of grace to the Greeks.

Antioch in Syria was no doubt a suitable place in God's mind. The city was founded in 300 B.C. by Seleucus Nicator; and there, as the Jews possessed equal privileges with the Greeks politically, great numbers lived under the government of an ethnarch of their own. God never forgets kindness shown to His poor people even in their fallen estate, and knows how to repay with an interest unmistakably divine. Here first the Greeks heard, believed, and turned to the Lord.

It is well known that large and good MS. authority supports the reading of the common text, Hellenists, Grecians, or Greek-speaking Jews. But the sense afforded by corr. A Dpm, and, if not all the ancient versions, by the Armenian, is made decisive by the requirements of the truth stated. For in Jerusalem itself before the scattering not only were ‘Grecians’ objects of testimony as well as other Jews, but notoriously the murmuring was of that portion against the Hebrews, or native Jews who spoke Aramaic. Nay more, all ‘the seven’ chosen to allay the unworthy outbreak, and to relieve the apostles from a work that hindered for an incomparably better, bore Hellenistic names, and one of them was expressly from Antioch. Again, it is recorded in Acts 9:29 how Saul of Tarsus spoke and disputed against these Hellenists in Jerusalem. Thus there would be nothing new or peculiar in similar speech at Antioch; whereas it is declared here that at first none but Jews were addressed, and afterwards ‘the Greeks also’, and this effectively under the good hand of the Lord. Now ‘Hebrew’ stands over against ‘Hellenist’, but not ‘Jew’, which includes both. So that ‘Jew’ can only be confronted by ‘Greek’, not by ‘Hellenists’, which falls under that category. The point therefore is so far from immaterial, that ‘Greeks’112 can alone bear rigid or intelligent investigation, and at once conveys a new and important fact. Further, we must on no account suppose their conversion to the Lord by the gospel to have taken place after the disciples had heard of the call of Cornelius. It has been already stated that it occurred before Peter’s visit to Caesarea. Evidently all that our chapter implies is, that the report about their conversion only then came to the ears of the assembly that was in Jerusalem. The fact of the conversion itself had of course

taken place considerably before; and we have seen how beautifully its priority contributes its quota to the full scheme of God's grace, which called apostolic authority into action no less appropriately.

Barnabas then, who was of Cyprus, though a Levite, comes to Antioch on his mission of inquiry. Nor can we conceive one more admirably chosen, if a genial heart devoted to Christ were wanted to judge fairly of the work in Antioch and to reassure those in Jerusalem adequately. For he, when he came and saw the grace of God, 'rejoiced and exhorted all with purpose of heart to abide by the Lord' (ver. 23). And striking is the comment of the inspired historian, who in no way grudges his true meed any more than Paul would because Barnabas subsequently was betrayed into unbecoming heat for his kinsman's sake: 'For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and faith.' Grace sealed his visit also, 'and a large crowd was added to the Lord.' Can we doubt that the work had still its mixed character, with Barnabas a fellow-workman in what drew out his joy?

Again, there is another trait very characteristic of this 'good man', and not only so but of the real working of the Holy Spirit, both in sending him to Antioch and now in his going off to Cilicia. 'And he went forth unto Tarsus to seek for Saul; and on finding [him] brought him unto Antioch' (vers. 25-26). Is it thus that we feel and act in presence of a large field of service where we are honoured by the Master's use? Do we in the midst of it remind ourselves of another who might be yet more efficient? Or does jealousy still hinder — still play its dark and deadly part to the dishonour of Christ and the loss of souls within and without? It was not so with Barnabas, who had already done a brother's office when

all were alas! afraid of Saul (Acts 9:26, 27). Now having learnt his value as a bold preacher when going in and out of Jerusalem, he bethinks him of the help Saul might render at Antioch, and, acting on it, he is enabled to execute his desire. ‘And it came to pass that even for a whole year they were gathered together in113 the assembly, and taught a large crowd, and that the disciples were first called114 Christians in Antioch’ (ver. 26). It was Christ’s flock, not that of either; and His love animated them both, as others also no doubt, to care for it. In those days not one said that the assembly was his own, but served in it the more lovingly and holily because they always remembered that it is God’s, and not man’s.

It is not without interest that the Spirit of God here adds that Antioch, notoriously famous of old for witty or scurrilous nicknames, first gave the designation of ‘Christians’ to the disciples, who within were styled ‘faithful’, ‘brethren’, ‘saints’, and otherwise ‘Christians’ was a name which Gentiles gave in reproach, as Jews called them ‘Nazarenes’, and Julian the apostate at a later day, ‘Galileans’. Jews would never think of ‘Christ’ as the ground of a contemptuous term: what they scorned was that Jesus is the Christ.

‘Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem unto Antioch; and there stood up one from among them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that a great famine was about to be over all the habitable [earth]; which came to pass under Claudius.115 And according as any one of the disciples had means, they determined each of them to send help [lit., for service] to the brethren that dwelt in Judea: which also they did

dispatching [it] unto the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul' (vers. 27-30).

It is a joy to see that the free activity of the Spirit which began the work and founded the assembly in Antioch was no more restive at the special gifts that ministered in their midst than it distrusted what the Lord had wrought by simple believers evangelizing as they could. It was not Barnabas and Saul only who laboured there, but prophets came down from Jerusalem, and one of them, Agabus, predicts a great dearth (as we know there was more than once) in the time of Claudius. Is it not of deep interest, the faith and love which responded to this though it was no charity sermon, without waiting for a call from saints already impoverished by their generous love after the great Pentecost which first saw the assembly here below? They believed in the coming scarcity, and thought of the saints in Jerusalem as truly 'one body'; and perhaps we may apply 1 Cor. 12:26 here, if one suffer, so do all, and as they sympathize, they succour also. So even the Jews in Ezra's day were roused by the prophets to build, before the renewed intervention of their foes drew out the great king's decree that cancelled the usurper's prohibition. It is blessed to act on heavenly motives in earthly duties; and that what we do should be in the faith that ever honours God's word. So the links of love are maintained on both sides between Jerusalem and Antioch; and this, in things spiritual yet more than in the carnal, which it was their duty to repay, as Paul afterwards did not fail to remind others.

The task was entrusted to Barnabas and Saul through 'the elders', of whom we hear for the first time in the associations of the assembly. How they were installed in

Judea we know not from the New Testament, but we have definite instruction in the sphere of the Gentile assemblies, as we may see in Acts 14:23. The term as the office seems indeed to have been derived from Israel, as anyone can observe how it runs through the O.T. even from the earliest times. It was in force fully in the synagogue, as we may see in the N.T. Vitringa (de Synag. Vet.) discusses this at length. ‘Bishop’ is now everywhere acknowledged as synonymous, but is apparently derived rather from a Gentile source, though frequently found in the LXX., and pointing to oversight or inspection; as ‘elder’ did to a man of years, and hence apart from age to a senator. In or out of Palestine each synagogue had its ‘elderhood’; and the same order reappears in the assembly. It is absurd to confound this fact with ‘the minister’ of a church so-called in modern times. Their place was to preside, though some might teach. An exclusive title to preach or teach is unknown to the N.T., nay more, it contradicts the fundamental constitution of the assembly in which God sets all variety of gifts for exercise within and without.

105 Alford takes

πιστέυσασιν as belonging to both ‘them’ and ‘us’, and expressive of the communion of the faith in the two parties, but though both of course did alike believe, this is to misconceive the reasoning which turns on the plain evidence of the Spirit given ‘on our believing’.

106 Another remark must be made here, though it is grievous that it should be needed. When Cornelius was assured that he was to be saved by hearing the words spoken by Peter, how groundless and evil to infer that ‘all his house’ were to be saved irrespective of faith!

Such heterodoxy is the result of the hot furnace and continual hammering on the anvil, of party. The terms of salvation are alike for Jew or Gentile, of grace but by faith. Here it is the more momentous because it is no question of baptism (as in Acts 16) but of salvation: only the sounder view of Acts 11 goes far to disprove theories built on Acts 16. But one error leads to another; and those who divorce the outward sign from the individual place assigned it in scripture, however blessed the number of individuals in a family, are in danger of advancing to a degree of error which would appal even the old and moderate holders of the prevalent tradition in the world-church whence this judaizing notion originated. Nobody is entitled to assume that one in all Cornelius' house was contemplated for salvation, till he too heard the gospel of salvation, unless salvation be by an ordinance.

107 The simple participle is right, not the compounded as in Text. Rec. which drops 'also' and reads Ἑλληνιστάς after BDcorr. EHLP and most, the Sinaitic giving the strange blunder of 'evangelists' as its primary reading.

108 Ibid.

109 AB and three cursives give 'that believed turned'.

110 High authorities omit 'to go through', and 'Barnabas' in ver. 25, also the word 'him'. (one or both) in ver. 26.

111 'Even' is omitted in Text. Rec.

112 No wonder that with his usual tact Abp. Ussher (Works, xi. 24) accepted the reading, even though the Vatican supports that which prevails among the more

modern copies, and the Fathers seem to vacillate with their too frequent lack of discernment. The effort of Wetstein, et al., fails to make out that Ἑλληνισταί means Gentiles, instead of Greek-speaking or foreign Jews, its real import. Equally vain (as founded on the common mix-reading), is the reasoning of Saumaise, Wolf, et al., that they were Gentiles but proselytes of Judaism. It may be well to note that while in the New Testament the Authorized Version distinguishes ‘Grecian’ (= Hellenist) from ‘Greek’, in the Old Testament (Joel 3:6) the former is used for the latter where the LXX. properly have τῶν Ἑλλήνων. Khnol is quite mistaken in referring ἐξ αὐτῶν (ver. 20) not to the scattered preachers but to the Jews just named.

113 ‘In’ seems not more literal than exact and full. ‘With’ does not convey the intimacy of their relation, themselves a part of the assembly: it might rather imply a place less close. It will be noticed that here first do we read of ‘the assembly’, or church, in a Gentile city, whence in due time the Spirit sends Barnabas and Saul separated for their work of grace among the nations. Yet God so ordered that Antioch could not, more than Rome, boast of an apostolically founded assembly for, in the simple way we have seen, it began by men who in love preached to all alike the good news of Christ.

114 It is rather bold of Mr. Myers (Norrisian Prize Essay, 1832, p. 16, note) to say as an ascertained fact that ‘the apostles gave the heathen converts this name’. The form of the Greek verb is active, no doubt; but what of its real force? The N.T. usage in the sense here required is limited to the occurrence of the future in Rom. 7:3, which is beyond controversy opposed directly to the assumption. There it means ‘shall be called’ or ‘get the

name of’ and so it is here. How much more sober is Abp. Ussher on the fact: ‘Quod nomen, Latina non Graeca a Christo deflexum, a Romanis Antiochiae tum agentibus impositum illis fuisse videatur’. Where a divine communication is intended, the form is different. The classic use for managing, and hence speaking of, business, does not occur in the New Testament, though one can see how from this people would get a name, and at length a name irrespective of their business.

115 ‘Caesar’ is added in Text. Rec.

Acts 12

The last chapter began with liberty for the Gentiles, vindicated in Jerusalem, and ended with love flowing out to the brethren in Judea from the assembly at Antioch. This drew Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem. God had not forgotten Jerusalem because He was gathering souls in Antioch, nor was He unmindful of the apostles of the circumcision because He had raised up a suited and energetic envoy for the nations. Nevertheless it is not in the same way that His name was to be celebrated even in the same outburst of persecution. The former had scattered the saints except the apostles; the new trial broke out against the apostles, and in particular against James and Cephas, two of the foremost, one slain and the other kept to be slain: so at least the king had purposed.

‘Now at that season Herod the king put forth his hands to injure some of those from the assembly. And he slew James, the brother of John, with [the] sword. And seeing that it was agreeable to the Jews, he went on to seize Peter also (but they were the1 days of unleavened bread); whom, having taken, he also put in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep, purposing after the passover to bring him forth unto the people.

‘Peter, then, was kept in the prison; but prayer was earnestly116 made by the assembly unto God concerning117 him. And when Herod was about to bring him forward, on that night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards before the door were keeping the prison. And, behold, an angel

of [the] Lord stood by, and a light shone in the cell; and he struck the side of Peter, and awoke him, saying, Rise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals, and he did so. And he saith to him, Throw thy cloak round thee and follow me. And going out he followed118 and knew not that what was being done by the angel was true, but thought he was seeing a vision. And when they came through a first guard and a second, they came unto the iron gate that readeth unto the city, which of itself opened to them; and having gone out they went forth one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. And Peter, on coming to himself, said, Now I know truly that [the] Lord sent forth His angel and took me out of Herod's hand and all the expectation of the people of the Jews. And, being conscious, he came unto the house of Mary the mother of John that was surnamed Mark, where were many assembled and praying. And when he119 knocked at the door of the gate-way, there came forward a maid to listen, by name Rhoda; and, recognizing Peter's voice, she did not for joy open the gate, but ran in and reported that Peter was standing before the gate-way. And, they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she kept maintaining that it was so; and they said, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking, and on opening they saw him and were amazed. And, beckoning to them with his hand to be silent, he related to them how the Lord brought him out of the prison; and he said, Report these things to James and to the brethren. And he went out and proceeded unto another place.

1 Some high authorities (Å BHLP, et al.) omit the article.

‘And when it was day there was no small disturbance among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. But Herod, having sought him out without finding [him], examined the guards and commanded [them] to be led away [? to execution], and he went down from Judea unto Caesarea and stayed [there]’ (vers. 1-19).

Thus, if one of the sons of Zebedee was to be preserved the last of the twelve, the other fell a victim to the sword of Herod Agrippa, the first martyr among the apostles. The king was in no way a violent arbitrary monarch, like his grandfather, Herod the Great; but as he sought to ingratiate himself with the Romans, so did this grandson of his with the Jews. And those who seemed to be pillars in the church afforded the readiest means and objects to gratify Jewish spite. But God’s thoughts are not as man’s, and, though the Lord had already shown by what death Peter should glorify God, the time was not yet come: ‘When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.’ Herod meant not merely to imprison Peter but to bring him before the people, perhaps for sentence, for execution certainly as a public example. But the Passover intervened; and Herod was too scrupulous a devotee to slight the days of unleavened bread.

Meanwhile the assembly made earnest prayer, whilst the king delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep. Deliverance was at hand, which the church scarcely expected more than the king feared it. As usual, it was just before the critical moment. ‘At evening time there shall be light.’ That night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, not only bound with two chains, but sentinels before the door keeping guard of the

prison. All seemed sure on the world's side, and on the other Peter rested in peace through the grace of the Lord Who neither slumbers nor sleeps; when behold, His angel stood by and roused him, freeing Peter of his chains, and minutely directing him, who, as in a vision, complied with each word as he was bidden. Nor did he come to himself till they had passed the two-fold watch, and the iron gate opened of its own accord, not to let the angel in but to let Peter out; and they had advanced one street off, when the angel departed. Then Peter realized his deliverance, and in full consciousness of all went to Mary's, where many were met for prayer — we cannot surely doubt — about him who knocked at the door. Nor was it fear but joy that led the maid Rhoda (or as we would say, Rose), who recognized the well-known voice, to run back and tell the news, that Peter was standing without. Luke, who all through presents the truth vividly, in no way hides the scanty faith of the saints, who could scarcely have forgotten how Jehovah's angel before now opened the prison-doors and brought out the apostles when placed in public custody by the envious high priest and his Sadducean party. Faith appropriates as well as remembers for present need.

Now it was neither the priest nor the people, but the king, to please the Jews; but what of God? If magnified in the death of James, He would be more in preserving Peter alive, whatever the pleasure of the people or their rulers. The testimony had been already fully given, even in the temple; and there was no command now to stand and speak there 'all the words of this life.' They had heard and despised the gospel of Him risen and glorified, Whom they had rejected and crucified. Peter therefore was not to make a similar stand now, though

the miracle was as great, but, according to the Lord's ordinary rule, when persecuted in this city, to flee into the other; as, after explaining all to the astonished company, he does at this time.

Cardinal Baronius treats with prudent reserve the story in the Breviary of James's preaching in Spain (where Compostella claims his burial!) with an equally curt reference to what is noted in the Roman Martyrology ('quae consulat qui haec cupit'120); but he has much to say of the alleged history of the other apostles, and above all of Peter at this juncture, as it had practical aims for the papacy. That he went to Rome then, and began his first year of reigning five and twenty years there as Pope, is the wildest of dreams, which is not only without a shred of scripture proof but in the strongest way is set aside by all that scripture does tell us. For God Who foreknew the vain and selfish wishes of men has taken care, not indeed so to speak that superstition and infidelity cannot pursue their several paths of shameless and disastrous self-will, but to give the faithful ample evidence for confuting the adversary and for establishing in truth and peace all who honour His own written word.

The apostle Paul, long after A.D. 44 (15 or 16 years), writes to the Romans in terms which imply that no apostle had as yet visited the capital of the Gentile world, in terms expressive of his own ardent desire to impart some spiritual gift to the saints there, as one who built not on another man's foundation but recognized in Rome part of that measured province which God apportioned to him. This, which is but a single testimony out of several, is enough to dissipate the tale into thin air. How can upright Christians attach the least weight

even to Eusebius of Caesarea, who retails the fable of ‘another Cephas’ to screen the apostle of the circumcision from the reluctant but necessary and instructive censure of the apostle of the Gentiles? And this is but a sample of his departure from plain scripture or contradiction of it. The word is silent where Peter went; and though one may not agree with the late Dean Alford that the expression in the end of verse 17 only implies that Peter left the house of Mary and may have stayed secretly in Jerusalem, we can think of intimations of places, not in Palestine only but among the Gentiles, where the apostle, according to the New Testament, was known. But for believers to build on conjectures is worse than idle, and tends to shake solid truth in the hands of those who least of all should allow themselves such a licence. That natural men should have most to say where scripture is reticent one can too well understand: they receive not the things of the Spirit of God, and cannot know them because they are spiritually discerned.

It is beautiful to remark the ways of God with His servants traceable already in this brief Book. First of all (Acts 4) we see Peter and John in custody and no miracle to abridge its short duration. Next, the twelve are imprisoned; but during the night Jehovah’s angel opened the door and led them out to bear testimony in the temple to the exalted Jesus: whence they are brought before the council, beaten and dismissed, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be dishonoured for the Name. Now, one apostle is slain with the sword, and another is delivered by Jehovah’s angel on the eve of a similar design by a king whose habitual mildness toward the people (if we are to credit Josephus121) did not certainly hinder extreme persecution of the truth when

his religious zeal and his political vanity were offended. And his chagrin burst ruthlessly on the guards, as we learn in verses 18, 19, though not a tittle of evidence pointed to any guilty connivance on their part at the prisoner's escape. No wonder he saw fit to go down from Judea unto Caesarea.

But this is not all. 'And he122 was at bitter enmity with them of Tyre and Sidon; but with one consent they came to him, and, having won over Blastus the chamberlain of the king, sought peace, because their country was nourished by the king's. And on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel and seated on the throne,123 made an harangue unto them. And the people shouted thereon, A god's voice and not a man's. And immediately an angel of [the] Lord smote him, because he gave not the glory to God; and becoming worm-eaten he expired' (vers. 20-23). Such was the last act of this solemn drama, if so one may speak of a succession of scenes as full of interest as of profound instruction for man with God: one apostle slain; and another delivered by an angel: the church's prayers answered beyond their faith; the mortified tyrant next wreaking his vengeance on his guards, not on his intended victim; himself struck at the moment that he accepted the deifying homage of the multitude, when he that gave not the glory to God was given up to worms, even before he gave up the ghost. 'But the word of God grew and multiplied.'

What a descent, after this tale so simply but most graphically told and pregnant with moral truth, to read the account of the same circumstances in the statement of the eminent Josephus! 'When the third year of his reign over all Judea was completed, he went to the city of Caesarea, which formerly was called Straton's Tower.

There he instituted shows in honour of the emperor, knowing there was a festival for his safety. Thither flocked a multitude of the men of rank and distinction throughout the province. On the second day of the show, having put on a robe wrought all over with silver of astonishing texture, he came into the theatre early in the day. There the first beams of the sun shone on the silver, and dazzled with such surprising lustre as to fill with fear and awe those who gazed on him. Forthwith flatterers here and there, far from good to him, began their loud acclamations, calling him a god, and saying, Be propitious; and if hitherto we reproved thee as a man, henceforth we confess thee superior to human nature. The king rebuked them not, nor rejected the impious flattery; but after a little looked up and saw an owl sitting on a cord over his head, and understood that this was a messenger (or angel) of evil as it had formerly been of good (XVIII. vii. 1), and was struck with grief to the heart. Incessant torment to the bowels supervened with vehemence from the first. Then looking toward his friends he says, I your god am already ordered to depart this life, fate instantly confuting those expressions just now falsely said of me; for I that was called immortal by you am being hurried away already a dead man. The decision that God has willed must be accepted. Yet our life has been by no means despicable, but in a splendour that is counted happy. Saying this, he was tormented with an increase of agony, and in haste was borne into the palace; and rumour spread among all that the king was at the point of death. Then immediately the multitude with wives and children clothed in sackcloth by their country’s law were supplicating God on behalf of the king. And all was full of wailing and lamentations. And the king lying in a chamber on high gave himself up

to tears as he saw them prostrate below on their faces, but after five days' continual pains in the bowels he departed this life in the fifty-fourth year of his age and the seventeenth of his reign' (Opera 871-872, ed. Hudson).

Even J. D. Michaelis remarks that this may be better Greek than Luke's, but is far less probable history. I should say it is a Jew's history of what substantially was undeniable fact among the Jews, written to please, and ingratiate them with, their Roman masters. Luke gives us the mind of Christ, as far removed as possible from the taint of ecclesiastical legends. See even the comparatively sober Eusebius' H.E. II. 10, where he tells us that the consequences of the king's attempt against the apostles were not long deferred, but the avenging minister of divine justice soon overtook him after his plots against the apostles. Now it is on the face of the inspired narrative that Luke calmly states the facts (not without laying bare the motive) of James's death and Peter's imprisonment with a like close designed. But all is said with grace and dignity: expressed feeling is wholly absent. The stroke which cut short the self-exalting monarch beyond doubt turns on his acceptance of the impious incense which the unhallowed fawning of his court and the multitude offered to him. People may talk of similar profanity unpunished in Roman emperors or others; but Herod Agrippa professed scrupulous Judaism, and therefore fell under His hand, Who waits for a later day before dealing with the nations that know not God. How different man's word from God's!

But, further, Eusebius goes on to notice the coincidence of Josephus's account with that of scripture, but in citing formally the Jewish historian he leaves out 'tine owl',

and simply quotes ‘an angel sitting above his head’. Such is the honesty of the Christian father. It is not improbable that ‘the owl’ was introduced once, or perhaps both times, in the tale of Agrippa to meet Roman taste for auguries, but we can have no hesitation in branding the bad faith of the Bishop of Caesarea in dropping, without a word of explanation, ‘the owl’ from the cited language of Josephus. It is easy, after this fashion, to make stories agree, and to express one’s admiration of it; but such a deceitful handling of things, not uncommon in the early writers, and in full bloom among the medievals, deserves the reprobation of all who love the truth.

How chastened the triumphant note that follows! ‘But the word of God grew and multiplied (ver. 24). Compare Acts 6:7; Acts 19:20. Its sphere enlarged as its agents increased, the weakness of too many that received it could not hide its own weight and value, any more than the mighty adversaries who had to fall before a Mightier that was behind it.

The last verse is a transition to the still more important movement from Antioch which follows. It shows us two of the highest rank in the assembly not ashamed to render diaconal service toward the poor saints in Jerusalem. Such remembrance had the pillars there; and certainly Paul could say later with truth that he was zealous to do this very thing, as we know how near it had ever been to the heart of Barnabas. We shall hear more ere long of John Mark. ‘And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, having fulfilled the service, taking also with them John surnamed Mark’ (ver. 25). But we may remark even here that there is no real reason to doubt that he was the future writer of the

second Gospel, which traces by divine inspiration the blessed and only perfect service of our Lord Jesus. Mark was now for a while the companion of His servants, one of them to be unequalled in labours and sufferings for Christ. We shall soon see how Mark fared. If he failed, love failed not. And recovery by grace is precious in its way, as is yet more the grace that enables the weak to stand by faith.

116 The adjective form is most common in the MSS., as is ‘for’.

117 Ibid.

118 Text. Rec. adds ‘him’, which the most ancient authorities do not express.

119 The more recent copies say ‘Peter’.

120 Which those who desire to do so may consult for themselves.

121 Much nearer the truth is the account of Dion Cassius (H.R. 59:24, ed. Sturz, iii. 700), who records the apprehension at Rome that the cruelty and lewd violence of Caius Caligula were not checked but helped on by this very Agrippa and Antiochus (IV. of Commagene) in the art of tyranny — τοὺς βασιλέας, ὥσπερ τινὰς τυραννοδιδασκάλους.

122 ‘Herod’ is read in Text. Rec. after most.

123 It is literally the

βῆμα, elsewhere in the Authorized Version translated ‘judgment seat’, or suggestus, for oratory, formal audience, or honourable reception, as well as for judicial investigation.

Acts 13

Peter, with the exception of his part in the council held in Jerusalem (Acts 15), disappears from the inspired history before us. Another figure comes not merely into prominence, but into centrality even from this, the first chapter of what may be justly regarded as the second volume of the Book of Acts. Not from Jerusalem but from Antioch (already so remarkable for Christian zeal impressing itself strikingly on those without, as well as for the first corporate stand made or mentioned among the Gentiles), we hear of a mission by the Holy Ghost.

‘Now there were at Antioch in the assembly that was [there]124 prophets and teachers: Barnabas and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius the Cyrenean, and Manaen foster-brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said Separate Me “Barnabas and 125Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they let them go. They then, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, went down unto Seleucia and thence sailed away unto Cyprus, and when they were at Salamis, they announced the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they had also John as attendant. And having gone through the whole126 island unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a Jewish false prophet, whose name [was] Bar-Jesus, who was with the pro-consul Sergius-Paulus, an intelligent man. He, having called to [him] Barnabas and Saul; desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name interpreted) opposed them, seeking to turn away the

pro-consul from the faith. But Saul who also [is] Paul, filled with [the] Holy Spirit, 127with fixed look at him said, O full of all guile and all trickery, devil's son enemy of all righteousness wilt thou not cease perverting the Lord's right ways? And now behold [the] Lord's hand [is] upon thee; and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell upon him a mist and darkness, and he went about seeking persons to lead him by hand. Then the pro-consul seeing what was done believed, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord' (vers. 1-12).

None can deny a plurality of gifted men, five of high rank in full service of Christ, and this expressly in 'the church that was at Antioch.' 'Churches' in the same place, each with its own minister, we see here as everywhere ignored. It is not meant that the faithful may not have met to break bread regularly in many houses here or there, as we know they did in Jerusalem; but none the less did they in that city as in every other constitute 'the assembly' there. Unity prevailed, which only the Holy Spirit could form or maintain; not unity invisible or for heaven merely and admitting of actual diversity or even antagonism, but rather living and manifest unity on earth: which as yet the gifts, and the elders where they existed, subserved, instead of being the instruments of expressing their independency.

It is also to be observed that these five prophets and teachers are named neither in worldly style nor in ecclesiastical rank; otherwise Barnabas had not been first, still less had Saul been last. They seem rather arranged in the order of spiritual birth — at any rate so far as they were known to the saints in Antioch. He who was Herod the tetrarch's foster-brother is neither first

nor last. But the gracious power of the Lord according to His word in Matt. 20:16 was soon to make first in the testimony of His truth him who here occupies the last place.

‘Whilst they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Separate Me [now] Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ The ministering to the Lord here must not be confounded with His service in preaching or teaching; it was no doubt mainly prayer and intercession. That the Lord’s supper was concerned is a crude and unfounded idea; for this supposes the fellowship of saints in the remembrance of Christ, and in its principle contemplates all saints, whereas the ‘ministering’ here was simply on the part of the fellow-labourers, it may be presumed, that the Lord might be pleased to direct and bless the work, and that each of them might be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master’s use, prepared unto every good work. This is confirmed by the fasting which accompanied their spiritual action toward the Lord, expressive as it of course is of the outward nature abased that the inner might be the more undividedly before Him, rather than of the chief public occasion of the church’s thanksgiving and united praise.

It is probable that the Holy Spirit may have used one or more of the prophets to convey the mind of God as to the work to which He had summoned Barnabas and Saul. So it appears to have been in Timothy’s case (1 Tim. 1:18; 1 Tim. 4:14), though we see direct action in that of Philip (Acts 8:29). Here, whatever the channel, the word was not to the church, as Alford assumes, but to the fellow-labourers as a whole to separate those two for the special work before them. The language is very

expressive of the Spirit's personal interest and authority as One here below immediately concerned in the highest and most intimate degree. It is the Spirit Who says, 'I have called them.' Neither Barnabas nor Saul was now called for the first time authoritatively to the service of Christ; for, even the younger of the two had laboured notoriously and efficiently for years, both in the gospel and in the church. Ordination by brethren of a rank inferior to themselves would be the result gained by men who are precipitately anxious to extract that rite from the passage. If there was any such thing in the case, the proceedings would be irreconcilable with all its acknowledged principles, and for episcopacy in particular. But the 'separation' here described is of a wholly distinct nature and with a different purpose, as the intelligent reader cannot but see if unbiased. Certain it is that Gal. 1:1 repudiates, with marked precision, what many ancients and moderns have erroneously founded on the interesting and instructive circumstance before us. Paul declares that he was apostle (not of men as source, nor by man as channel, but) by Jesus Christ and God the Father Who raised Him from the dead. It would have admirably suited his judaizing detractors to have argued that he owed his ministerial title to the three teachers at Antioch who laid their hands on him and Barnabas; but bold as his old adversaries were at Corinth or in Galatia or elsewhere, we are not told that they dared to go so far in their insinuations. Clearly his own statement precludes summarily and for ever all effort thus to lower his apostleship or, what comes to much the same result, to exalt ordination at the expense of the apostle Paul in this place or any other.

The third verse confirms the remarks made on the early words of verse 2, for here we have again fasting with prayer. But though an initiatory ceremony assuming to convey holy orders is not here intended, yet do we see a holy and solemn tone sustained in striking contrast with that which prevails in some modern forms mistakenly built on it. The ‘charge’ and the ‘dinner’ suit well those for whom fasting and prayer offer no attractions. ‘Ember days’ may be formal enough, but at least resemble more and might be morally better. The Lord was the one object then, and the Holy Spirit wrought in power, and a service of self-abnegation to God’s glory was the blessed fruit. The outward acts flowed from the life within. So with the laying on of hands. It was a general sign of identification, or of blessing given. In the case before us their fellow-labourers solemnly commended the honoured pair to the grace of God with this seal of their own fellowship in the work.

‘They sent them forth’ is here objectionable; because it might be, as it has been, interpreted to mean the mission to which they had authorized Barnabas and Saul. But the word chosen excludes such a thought and simply means ‘let them go’ without a shadow of commission in it. The idea of mission is conveyed forcibly in the beginning of verse 5: ‘They then, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, went down unto Seleucia and thence sailed away unto Cyprus, and, when they were at Salamis they announced the word in the synagogues of the Jews; and they had also John as attendant. And having gone through the whole island unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a Jewish false prophet, whose name [was] Bar-Jesus, who was with the pro-consul Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man.’

Thus we see Saul, not only called by the glorified Christ from heaven, but now sent out with his elder companion by the Spirit from the city remarkable for being the first directly named assembly among the nations. Here took place the apostle's 'separation' (comp. Rom. 1:1) unto gospel work, though not his only. All was outside Jerusalem and the twelve. His call was heavenly, his mission toward the Gentiles and from the bosom of the first Gentile assembly; but the energy and direction were of the Holy Spirit, though his fellow-servants testified their communion with' the two in their work. John Mark waited on them in person, and no doubt helped on the work in his measure. To call him chaplain or deacon would be ridiculous, if such perversion could admit of such a feeling. It is humbling that godly men should descend so low. Let modern practice rest on its true basis: scripture is no warrant for it.

We may notice the practice of the apostle which answered to the principle so familiar in his inspired words, 'to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.' When at Salamis they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. It was indeed the only place of a religious sort where any such liberty existed. And such also was God's order till Jerusalem was destroyed, or at least the Epistle to the Hebrews was written, when the 'no difference' which the gospel declares found a yet more manifest and final application. But till then the door was open, and those who possessed a Jewish title were free therein to read or expound the scriptures.

But it was at its capital, Nea Paphos (not exactly the spot so celebrated as the dissolute seat of Aphrodite's worship), that the gospel came into collision, not with Jewish prejudice only, but with this intensified and

embittered by religious imposture and sorcery. ‘And when they had gone through the whole island unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer (or magician), a Jewish false prophet, whose name [was] Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. He having called to [him] Barnabas and Saul sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is interpreted his name) withstood them, seeking to turn aside the proconsul from the faith.’ Salamis being on the east, as Paphos on the west, they had to cross the island as a whole; as the best copies say, though this is omitted in the common text. The interest of the Roman governor aroused the jealous opposition of the corrupt Jew who had had influence over a mind shocked with demoralizing idolatry but open to displays of power, not without some show of revelation. What could be more overwhelming to the Jewish impostor’s influence than the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ? But the pro-consul128 (not ‘deputy’ or legate, as in the Authorized Version) had a conscience in exercise and by grace an ear for the truth, which soon turned toward that which was of God, when the testimony reached his soul. Bar-Jesus (= son of Jesus, or Joshua) called himself ‘Elymas’, the wise man, or magician which was a title apparently akin to the Oriental ‘Ulemah’. This wickedness drew out the solemn rebuke of Saul (henceforward called Paul)129 accompanied by a sentence from God which the Holy Ghost gave him not only to utter but to execute. The rareness of such judicial inflictions under the gospel makes their occurrence all the more impressive.

The apostle then, ‘filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his eyes on him, and said, O full of all guile and all trickery

(villainy or craft), devil's son, enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease perverting the Lord's right ways? And now, behold, [the] Lord's hand [is] upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell upon him a mist and darkness, and he went about seeking leaders-by-hand' (vers. 9-11).

Sergius Paulius was precisely in the state for such an intervention to affect him profoundly. And we too can mark the difference of God's dealing here, as compared with the Samaritan who offered a deeper affront if possible by the proposal to buy the power of conferring the Spirit on others. For he had been baptized, and is warned of his awful state, but exhorted to pray and repent. Bar-Jesus becomes the striking figure of the Jews, blinded themselves, in their effort to turn aside the blind Gentiles from the light of life. Yet it is not for ever, but 'for a season'; as God will give them in due time to look on Him Whom they once rejected unto death to their own loss and ruin meanwhile.

'Then the pro-consul when he saw what was done believed, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord' (ver. 12)

This is worthy of all consideration. It was not the wonder which struck him most, but the truth he was taught. The miracle arrested him, no doubt, as well it might; but how many like Simon Magus may have been amazed, beholding signs and great powers wrought! Faith grounded on such evidence is only natural, and has no divine root. The senses are struck, the reason is convinced, the mind receives the testimony, and the mouth confesses it. But there is no life apart from

conscience exercised about one's own evil before God, and from Christ the object of the soul as the gift of God's love to a guilty sinner in pure grace. This was true of Sergius, not of Simon. The one was amazed at the miracle, the other at least as much or more at the teaching which brought God before his soul and himself into His presence. This only is effectual. It is eternal life And this is just the difference between a true divine work in the soul and a mind convinced by evidence or earned along by tradition. The latter may be all well in itself, and be a reasonable homage to facts which cannot be got rid of fairly but which compel honest acknowledgment from all who bow to adequate proofs. Yet this may be and is where the soul has never met God in the conscience, where sin and even our own sins are not an unbearable burden, where the love is not trusted that gave His only-begotten Son and laid the burden on Him to suffer atoningly that the believer might have life, pardon, and peace. No displays of power, however wonderful, are so amazing in the eyes of faith as the grace of God in saving the lost through His own Son. This the governor was enabled to receive from God, and not a word more do we hear of the great man. The gospel gives to the greatest on earth; but it receives no glory from man. One Man only it proclaims 'exalted in the highest'. In Him we may and ought to boast, for He is the Lord; and His grace in saving us, yea, in making us one with Himself on high to God's glory, is the wonder of wonders.

Henceforward, save perhaps under the shadow of Jerusalem (Acts 15:12, 25), Paul has the chief place, as is indeed conveyed by the well-known phrase, not so used elsewhere in the New Testament (Mark 4:10, Luke

22:49), but familiar in the best writings of Greece (Plato Crat. 440 C.; Xenophon Anab. vii. 4, 16; Thucydides v. 21; viii. 63), οἱ περὶ Παῦλον (lit., 'those around Paul'), Paul and his company.

'Now Paul and his company, having sailed from Paphos, came unto Perga of Pamphylia; and John departing from them returned unto Jerusalem. But they passing through from Perga came unto Antioch of Pisidia, and having gone into the synagogue on the sabbath-day, sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying Brethren (lit. Men-brethren), if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, speak' (vers. 13-15).

The defection of John here is remarked by the Holy Spirit. It was not a trifle in God's mind, and the difference it occasioned afterwards, when Barnabas would have joined him again with Paul, proved serious for servants so ardently and justly attached. John had not faith and courage for the work opening before them and returned to Jerusalem where were his mother and the associations so dear to the natural heart. But on the other hand we must not exaggerate with those who affirm that a stumble is fatal. It may be so in a horse; but one might suppose that Christian men better knew both their own probable experience and the teaching of scripture expressly in this very case. Grace turned past failure to future profit, and at a later day the great apostle was as earnest to commend his ministry as he could not but blame the failure when in progress.

We next see Paul and Barnabas at Antioch of Pisidia in the synagogue on the sabbath. It is remarkable what measure of liberty was enjoyed. After the reading of the

law and the prophets, a message came to them from the synagogue-rulers to speak if they had any word of exhortation for the people. Can there be a more painful contrast with the habits of Christendom? Assuredly one might from scripture expect more liberty where grace rules than among those born and bred in the trammels of the law. Yet who ever hears of such an invitation nowadays? So completely has the church departed from the enjoyment of that holy liberty, which is characteristic of the Spirit of the Lord. In this case too the visitors were but strangers, unknown to any, it would seem, save as grave godly-looking Jews. Routine governs in modern times on solemn public occasions, were the strangers ever so well known by report for their gifts and labours and life.

It was Paul who rose to address the congregation. ‘And Paul stood up and beckoning with the hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God,130 hear. The God of this people chose out our fathers and exalted the people in their sojourn in [the] land of Egypt and with a high arm brought them out of it, and for a time of about forty years bore them nurse-like in the desert, and when He had destroyed seven nations in [the] land of Canaan, He gave them their land for an inheritance, in about four hundred and fifty years. And after these things He gave judges until Samuel the prophet and then they asked for a king; and God gave them Saul, the son of Kish, a man of [the] tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And having removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also bearing witness He said, I found David, son of Jesse, a man according to My heart, who shall do all My will. From his seed, according to promise, did God bring to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, when John had preached

before [lit. before the face of] His entrance a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was fulfilling his course, he said, What suppose ye that I am? I am not [He], but behold, there cometh One after me the sandal of Whose feet I am not worthy to loose' (vers. 16-25).

It is all-important to observe the basis of fact on which the gospel hinges, no less than the hopes of Israel. It is not so in the religious systems of men. In India, for instance, all is but speculation and reasoning as in ancient heathenism, mere fable. So it is with the Buddhist and the Confucian systems. Nor is it different with Mohammedanism, as far as it puts forth any distinctive claim. Nowhere do men even pretend to a substratum of fact such as that on which repose both the Old and the New Testaments respectively. Shake the facts and their foundations are alike gone. If the facts abide irrefragable, the most momentous consequences ensue both to faith and to unbelief. And although there are weighty differences in the history of the Old Testament as compared with the one commanding figure of Christ in the New, there is nothing more marked and unstinting than the seal of truth which the New everywhere puts upon the certainty of the Old in all the wonders it records. This is the more striking because the New Testament has no enemies more determined and deadly than the Jews, to whose custody the ancient oracles were committed. The witnesses of the New Testament, on the contrary, maintain a uniform and unhesitating testimony to the absolute truth of the Old Testament; which they prove to have no adequate result, apart from the appearing and work of the Lord Jesus. And we may add that there is no sufficient key to the

present abnormal state of the Jews, without taking into account the rejected and suffering but risen Messiah; on which rock they have made shipwreck through unbelief, however else they themselves essay to explain their actual ruin as a people.

Accordingly there come to view these solemn yet plain facts, which only prejudice can overlook or deny. On the one hand the real, living, priceless value not only of the New Testament but of the Old is found by sovereign goodness in the church of God. On the other hand, alas! the ancient people of God have ears but they hear not, eyes but they see not, and hearts which do not understand at all for the present; else conversion, healing, and glory would doubtless be theirs. For the light and the love of God, inseparable from Him Who sits at His right hand on high, are only enjoyed among those who were once dogs of the Gentiles, but are now, in pure mercy yet according to the righteousness of God in Christ, made free of the riches of His grace and the counsels of His glory in Christ the Lord.

First the dealings of God from His choice of the fathers are at once connected with the exodus of the people from Egypt, and His nurture of them in the wilderness till He gave them to inherit the land. It is the Pentateuch and Book of Joshua in miniature, centring in Israel beloved for the fathers' sake. The gospel confirms, instead of annulling, God's love to Israel, though it announces 'some better thing for us' as in Heb. 11:40.

The reader will notice the beautiful expression of verse 18 weakened in the more favourite ancient MSS. BCcorr DHLP, et al., but happily preserved in ACpm. E, as well as in most of the ancient versions, as it seems truest to

the Hebrew in Deut. 1:31 which the apostle, beyond just doubt, had in view. Here Tregelles and Westcott and Hort131 part from most moderns as well as others of weight.

In verses 19, 20 there is a notable difference from the common words. It is not giving by lot which is the point, though in itself true, as (by the least and lowest possible testimony) in the received text, but causing them to inherit their land. But here there is a more united front among the editors of late; for, excepting Dean Alford, almost all accept ABC, et al., and the ancient versions save the Syrr. and Aeth. This connects the date of 'about 450 years' with the accomplishment of the promised inheritance (under law, which made nothing perfect). The common text makes it the duration of the judges.

But it appears to me that the dative of epoch suits the sense of the critical text as distinctly as it disagrees with the common one. Both before and after this phrase the accusative is given to express a term of continuance, here only the dative. Now if the idea intended were the supply of judges for 450 years, the accusative would here also be the natural construction. At any rate, it is a date within which a certain action occurred, and not duration as in the other cases. If the oldest vouchers be accepted, it was in about 450 years that Israel was made to inherit this land, after the promise to 'our-fathers', i.e., from the birth of Isaac as the starting-point. Indeed so Junius and others take the common reading, not as the space for which judges were given but in which God had fulfilled His promise at least provisionally, till judges were given in the low estate of His people. It cannot therefore be assumed that Paul assigns a duration of 450 years to the judges, and so invalidates the date (in 1

Kings 6:1) of 480 years from the Exodus to the founding of Solomon's temple. More than one period of considerable duration has been added to the space of the Judges which really fell within other assigned dates. But it suffices here to note that the extended space for judges drawn from the verses before us is illegitimate. Ussher (Works xii. 70; xiv. 340) firmly holds to the integrity of both the Hebrew and the Greek in both these scriptures, rejecting the bold conjectures of Luther and others as wholly needless and of course improper.

The apostle then rapidly sketches God's deep and constant interest in His people till a king was given, but stops with David, the known type of the Messiah as his own psalms abundantly testify. From him easy transition is made to his promised seed, whom, he declares, God 'brought'132 to Israel a Saviour, Jesus (ver. 23). Was not this like Him? Was it not assured in the law and the prophets as well as the psalms? Were the Jews not looking for Him? Did they not miserably need Him?

Nor could it be said that God had failed to attest His long promised intervention by renewed testimony, the more impressive because the living voice of a prophet was unheard for more than four centuries after Malachi. And as all took John for a prophet, so did our Lord bear witness to him as more than a prophet, being Jehovah's messenger before Messiah's face to prepare the way before Him: Isaiah and Malachi had previously intimated it. So, before the face of His entering in, John preached a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel; nor was it moral only, in self-judgment before God, but saying unto them that they should believe on Him that should come after him, that is, on Jesus. It was avowedly

a token of His manifestation to Israel (John 1:31). Of the Baptist's meaning which they quite mistook, ready as human nature is to exaggerate man and to depreciate God, no ground for doubt was left by the forerunner: 'And as John was fulfilling his course, he said, What suppose ye that I am? I am not [He]; but behold, there cometh One after me the sandal of Whose feet I am not worthy to loose;' Here again were new facts which could not be disputed. John is spoken of as a known witness, though none knew better than Paul that grace alone gives the truth efficaciously by delivering from the self-will which enables Satan to forge his chains of dark unbelief. But who knew better than he to press the value of a testimony which he too once had ignored like the rest, and would now commend as having proved its worth?

Next comes Paul's appeal, but an appeal grounded on fresh facts of the gravest and most affecting significance.

'Brethren [Men-brethren], sons of Abraham's race, and those among you that fear God, to us133 was the word of this salvation sent forth. For the dwellers in Jerusalem and their rulers, having ignored Him and the voices of the prophets that are read on every sabbath, fulfilled [them] by judging [Him]. And though they found no cause of death, they besought Pilate that He might be slain. And when they fulfilled all things written about Him, they took [Him] down from the tree and put [Him] into a tomb, but God raised Him from [the] dead, and He appeared for many days to those that came up with Him from Galilee unto Jerusalem, the which are now His witnesses unto the people' (vers. 26-31).

The sending forth to Israel of ‘the word of this salvation’ (for no less does the gospel carry) stands solemnly confronted by the stubborn ignorance of those who most boasted, the dwellers in Jerusalem and their rulers; who had the voices of the prophets read sabbath by sabbath, yet fulfilled them in unbelief, knowing neither themselves nor Him Whom they presumed to judge, the Judge of Israel smitten on the cheek, the Judge of quick and dead hung on the tree, the meek and most holy bearer of all curse from God and man on the cross. Yes, they blindly fulfilled all things written by God concerning Him, law, psalms, and prophets centring in Him Whom most of all they ought to have known Whom least they knew; for their eye was not single, and their body full of darkness consummated in the death of their own Messiah extorted from the reluctant Pilate, blind indeed and not without warning and moral witness, the contrary of the false witnesses that destroyed each other, but not so blind as they who said they saw, and so their sin remained and remains alas, to this day!

‘But God raised Him from the dead.’ Paul differs not from Peter in putting forward this foundation-truth of the gospel. What a fact proved by all conceivable evidence, that grace could, would, and did supply, of which such a thing admits suitably to God’s character and glory as well as man’s sin and folly! Nor is it only ‘the great exception’ to rebuke the vanity, pride, and will of unbelieving man; but what a spring and supply of peace, light, joy and blessing to all who believe!

Here, however, it is not the victory of righteousness, which God’s grace secures and gives freely to faith, that is set forth and that the apostle loved to enlarge as to the saints, but the demonstration of the world’s and

especially of Israel's blindness, when they had unconsciously fulfilled all that was written concerning Him till they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. 'But God raised Him from the dead.' It was not only the object of promise come, but also, when all through unbelief seemed lost in His rejection and death, God's intervention in raising Him up from among the dead. To this answers nearly the beginning of the Epistle to the Romans, where the Lord Jesus is presented, first, as Son of David according to the flesh, then, as Son of God in power by resurrection of [the] dead according to the Spirit of holiness. Glad tidings in good sooth! glad tidings of a victory over all that sin could do up to death itself. The victory over evil is won in Satan's last stronghold by God's grace in Christ, that man may believe and be saved before He executes judgment on His persistently unbelieving adversaries. It is therefore no question of man's desert, for righteousness he has none before God, but unrighteousness much in every way. God's righteousness alone avails, God being righteous in His estimate of the efficacy of Christ, and above all of His death, on behalf of those who in themselves are wholly lost.

But here the apostle points out the gracious care and wisdom of God in giving the risen Christ to be 'seen', and this not once or twice only, but 'many days'. Now who could be valid witnesses of this stupendous fact? Comparative or absolute strangers to His person, or those most familiar with Him when alive? Unquestionably the latter; and to such accordingly He appeared when risen, to the slowest of all to believe Him alive again for evermore, in proportion to their deep grief and disappointment over His cross and grave. His

enemies remembered His words that He was to rise in three days, and vainly sought to make all sure by sealing the stone that closed the sepulchre and by the watch, which only turned to their own confusion, when the guards trembled and became as dead men through fear of the angel after the Lord arose. But the very slowness of His friends to believe, inexcusable as it was, turned to account when He was seen ‘of those that came up with Him from Galilee unto Jerusalem, such as are now134 His witnesses to the people’. The common text with more than one excellent MS. of antiquity omits the adverb, though it is really emphatic and important. They are at this moment, says the apostle, His witnesses to the Jews; and none the less does he insist on it because he was not one of them. Indeed with this class he contrasts himself and Barnabas; for grace provided another character of testimony if by any means the mouth of gainsayers might be stopped. Witnesses were raised up, who were wholly unacquainted with Him when here in the days of His flesh. Nay, Paul himself was bitterly hostile till He revealed Himself to and in His enemy, henceforth His devoted bondman, outside Damascus. What possible testimony other or more could be wisely given or desired? Alas! unbelief of God is as deadly in its nature and working, as in its source its aims, and its results.

From verse 32 comes the application of the facts as to the Messiah, already given in verses 23-31, especially His death on man’s part, His resurrection on God’s, not without ample witness of His appearing subsequently among those who knew Him best.

‘And we (we, emphatic) declare to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God hath fulfilled

this to us their children 135 having raised up Jesus, as also in the seconds psalm it is written, Thou art My Son: this day have I begotten Thee. But that He raised Him from [the] dead, no more to return unto corruption, He hath spoken thus, I will give you the faithful mercies of David; wherefore1 also in another [psalm] He saith, Thou wilt not suffer Thy holy (merciful) One to see corruption. For David, having in his own generation served the counsel of God, fell asleep, and was added to his fathers, and saw corruption. But He Whom God raised up saw no corruption. Be it known to you therefore [men-] brethren, that through this [Man] remission of sins is preached to you; and136 from all things from which ye could not in Moses' law be justified, in Him every one that believeth is justified' (vers. 32-39)

Here the apostle goes over the all-important points doctrinally. The coming of Christ was the accomplishment of the promise to the fathers their children had now the glad tidings of it in His person here below. The raising up of Jesus in verse 33 does not therefore go beyond the Child thus born, the Son thus given. And with this agrees Psalm 2:7, which refers not to His resurrection from the dead, as many have supposed, but to His birth, as the words simply express it, so that a further or mystic meaning here is not only uncalled for but mistaken. He, the Messiah, born of woman, born under law, was the object, accomplisher, and heir of the promises. For, how many soever be the promises of God, in Him is the yea (2 Cor. 1:20). So to the Romans (Rom. 1:2, 3) the apostle describes himself as separated unto God's gospel (which, he adds parenthetically, He had before promised through His

prophets in holy scriptures) concerning His Son come of David's seed according to flesh, just as it is treated here in the first place. But then he goes on, 'marked out Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection of the dead'; just as here too he proceeds to cite Isaiah 55:3 and Psalm 16:10 as prophecies of Christ's proper resurrection.

Indeed it is surprising that any intelligent and careful reader ever understood the passage otherwise. For it is as certain as it is plain that, to God's raising up the Messiah according to promise and the prophecy of the second psalm, verse 34 appends as another and still more momentous truth that God raised Him up 'from the dead'. It is no mere reasoning on the verse before, no epexegetic explanation, but a further teaching of the highest value. Hence it is thus introduced, 'And' or 'But that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return unto corruption, He hath spoken thus…' Calvin accordingly is justified in his statement137 (Opera vi. Comm. in loco) that the word 'raised up' has a wider significance than where repeated just after. For it is meant that Christ was divinely ordained and as it were by God's hand brought forth into light that He might fulfil the office of Messiah, as scripture here and there also shows us kings and prophets raised up by the Lord. Acts 3:22, 26, Acts 7:37, are clear cases of this usage of 'raised up' in the same Book; so that the Authorized Version in the wake of Tyndale is not safely to be defended in going out of the way to insinuate resurrection into verse 33. 'Raised up' is correct; 'raised again', might have been said, if the text had certainly pointed, as it does not really at all, to the resurrection. But 'raised up again' is unjustifiable. In any case the

compound can only yield either ‘up’ or ‘again’, not both; and here we have seen on good and cogent grounds that ‘up’ is right, ‘again’ inadmissible, because rising from the dead is not intended in verse 33.

It would not have been necessary or advisable to spend argument on the question, if Dean Alford and Canon Cook, following Hammond, Meyer, and others, had not unwittingly played into the hands of enemies who ridicule this very misapprehension of Psalm 2:7, for which not Paul but his expounders are responsible. It has also been noticed that the addition of ‘now’ in the English Version of verse 34 is not only needless but misleading, as it might imply a previous turn to corruption. Here too Tyndale misled all the public Protestant versions since his day, even to the Revised one.

Psalm 2:7 is quoted then for Christ as Son of God in this world. It is neither His eternal Sonship, as some of the earlier Christian writers conceived, nor His resurrection, as the misapprehension of Acts 13:33 was used to teach. His birth in time as Messiah is the point, ‘Thou art My Son: this day have I begotten Thee.’

Psalm 16:10 is cited (ver. 35) in proof not of His Sonship as man and Messiah here below, but of His resurrection, and therefore stands in close and logical connection with verse 34. Peter had already used this Psalm similarly in Acts 2:24-32; and it is strange that any who believe the Christian revelation can allow a doubt that Christ’s resurrection is the just and only meaning of the tenth verse of the psalm. I do not speak of their modesty in preferring their opinion to Saint Paul’s, if they count

it becoming to slight the apostle Peter. The question is, is there such a thing as inspiration in any true sense?

The application of Isaiah 55:3 in verse 34 is no less certain if we bow to apostolic authority, but not so easy, though, where seen, most instructive. But only the death and resurrection of the Messiah could make the covenant everlasting; only so could the promised holy or merciful blessings of David be made inviolable. Thus they are, as the LXX translate, τὰ ὅσια Δαυεὶδ τὰ πιστά. Thus only could the soul even of the Jew live, or the door of grace open widely enough to take in a Gentile. Hence it will be seen that the chapter in Isaiah begins with the call of God to ‘every one that thirsteth’. He Who was lifted up on the cross will draw all, not Jews only; and a risen Messiah, though He thereby gives the utmost sureness to Israel’s promises, cannot be bounded in His grace any more than in His glory, but will certainly have all peoples, nations, and languages to serve Him with an everlasting dominion.

It is difficult in any rendering short of a paraphrase to mark for the English reader the close link between the ‘Holy One’ in Psalm16:10 and the ‘mercies’ in Isaiah 55:3. Verse 1 of Psalm 89 compared with verse 19 as in the Authorized Version may help: very far different is the Revised Version of the Psalm here which can only darken. But the reader should know that the true force in verse 19 is. ‘Then speakest Thou in vision of Thy Merciful (or Holy) One’, Who is the personal concentration of the sure mercies of which the Psalmist sings in verse 1. They are ‘the mercies’ of David no doubt, but, what is of all consequence, of Jehovah also; and so this psalm also everywhere speaks of David, and therefore confirms the truth in question. Christ beyond

controversy is here in the mind and word of the Spirit of prophecy. Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel (in this case quite a distinct word and thought), speaks of Christ as His Holy or Gracious One. It is not the same truth which the same apostle asserts in Rom. 1:4: Christ declared or determined Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection. The same power of the Spirit in which He ever walked superior to all evil was proved by resurrection. In Acts 13:34 it is the holiness of grace and mercy manifested and operative in Him risen from the dead. After His baptism of suffering, known by Him as by none else, straitening was over, Jewish barriers righteously gone, the floods of grace could flow for ever and overflow.

The apostle of the uncircumcision, in verses 36, 37, reasons pretty much as he of the circumcision in Acts 2:29-31; and both with unanswerable power. But one man, the Messiah, was, while tasting death, to see no corruption. David in his own generation served the counsel of God, but saw corruption: as did all his descendants, save that One of Whom he in the Spirit prophesied. Scripture cannot be broken. One man alone does and must fulfil the condition: Who was He but Jesus, the Christ? As a fact the witnesses attested His resurrection on the fullest evidence, apart from the predictions. All proofs centre in Him. God’s glory and love are His infinitely; so are man’s salvation, blessing, holiness, service in every true way and to the highest degree of which the creature is capable.

And thereon the apostle, though of course limited by the state of his audience, brings out the message characteristically beyond what Peter had done to hearers more informed than those of Pisidia. ‘Be it

known unto you therefore, brethren, that through this Man remission of sins is preached to you; and from all things from which ye could not in Moses' law be justified, in Him every one that believeth is justified' (vers. 38, 39). Was it not, is it not, grandly, yea divinely simple? What does a sinner supremely need? Forgiveness of sins. This the gospel proclaims: it is no question of a promise only. Remission of sins through Christ dead and risen is preached. It is a free gift of grace, as is eternal life in Christ: the two wants of a sinner are there alone found, and are by Him freely given. To all it is preached; there is no limit to the grace of Christ, any more than to the efficacy of His blood. Among those that hear the gospel it takes effect only upon all that believe. For faith glorifies the Saviour God, as it abases man the sinner; and repentance accompanies it, real if faith is, shallow or deep in like manner, or alas! as unreal as may be the faith. But faith owns God's grace in Christ, and so His righteousness revealed in the gospel. Of faith therefore is the blessing that it might be according to grace; and thus alone can either man be assured of it or God be glorified thereby.

But there is more than remission of sins, that most deeply needed, in itself inestimable but initiatory, boon of the gospel: 'And from all things, from which ye could not in Moses' law be justified, in Him every one that believeth is justified.' How boldly the apostle can speak! and this, not because his preaching or the style of it was any peculiarity of his position in the church, but in honour of the Saviour's victory over every hindrance and all evil. To speak timidly might be well, if it were simply a question of man addressing or of men addressed. But the preacher of the gospel is not only free but bound to

forget himself by grace in his magnifying of Him Who died and rose, in order that divine mercy might triumph for the worst, and this without money and without price for the sinner: Christ has paid the penalty — paid it long long ago. Here Moses' law is wholly unavailing, whatever the pride, the unbelief, or the ignorance, of the Jew might think. There is no possibility of justification by that law, holy as it is, and the commandment holy and just and good. Law is all in vain to save. It can give neither life nor pardon, neither holiness nor power. It puts a restraint on, and so alike discovers and provokes, lust; it is the power of sin, and works out wrath, it is thus a ministration of condemnation and death. What possible deliverance can it bring to the needy and lost sinner? Negatively indeed the law is used by grace to break him down, to deepen his distrust of self even when converted, and to cast him wholly on Christ outside and on high, Who gives him to know that he died with Himself, that he might walk and serve under grace, as being alive to God But the grace of God in the gospel justifies the believer 'from all things'. Indeed, if it were not so, how could the sinner's condition be met in a way worthy of God? If justification were partial, it might no less satisfy man, yea far more readily, than that free and full display of divine goodness in Christ which alone is the truth. Nothing is so excellent, so holy, so strengthening, so God-glorifying as the revelation of His grace in Christ, and this undiluted as well as unadulterated. But it seems extreme to some minds, lax to others, and dangerous to more. Consider Him in and by Whom the gospel came. He was wholly misunderstood and unintelligible to the 'wise and prudent'. As the mass believed not on Him, so many from among the rulers did not confess Him through fear;

for they loved the glory of men rather than the glory of God. Even John the Baptist was more reasonably right in their eyes than his Master and Lord; as those that refused Him Who came in His Father's name will by-and-by receive him that comes in his own. Nothing is so condemnatory of fallen man, and especially when he glories in his character or in his religion, as grace; nothing so foreign and even repulsive to his mind and to his self-righteousness. For it levels all mankind, high and low, learned and ignorant, loose or moral, superstitious or profane, in one indiscriminate grave of sin and ruin Godward — of spiritual death, whole it proclaims to faith, and only to faith, a present, full, and everlasting redemption. This is offensive to man's thought and title who can soon find reasons to argue himself into unbelief and rejection of God's word, as if it were but the opinion of fallible and mistaken man, and thus makes manifest his unremoved heart-enmity to God.

The work of grace however goes on, as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men. Conscience-stricken souls, hearts pining after God long slighted and sinned against, are won by the name of Jesus, and gladly receive that remission of sins which is preached to them, and adore as they take in the wonder of mercy in Jesus in Whom every one that believes is justified from all things, from none of which could he be justified in Moses' law or in any other way. Justification for a sinner is essentially a Pauline expression; being of faith, not of law, it was open to a Gentile as well as to a Jew. It was a word eminently suited to that great messenger of the gospel of God's grace. And here we have it tersely in the first discourse of his which Luke reports or at least

summarizes. So deals God's righteousness which is now manifested apart from law: God just and justifying the believer as he is, the ungodly as he was (Rom. 3:26; Rom. 4:4). How truly divine! No wonder man as such misses the truth: Christ is the only key that opens all.

But the apostle does not conclude without a warning, appropriately drawn, for the Jews that listened with reluctant ears, from their own volume of inspiration. 'See therefore that what is spoken of in the prophets come not on you,138 Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye will in no wise believe if one declare it to you' (vers. 40, 41). It is especially Habakkuk 1:5 which is in substance cited, with perhaps Isa. 29:14 and Prov. 1:24-31 in view. Unbelief is the same evil scorn of God's word, whether of old or by-and-by, and never worse than now when grace beseeches men as they are to be reconciled to God. And whatever the work to be done in the future, none can ever match what God has wrought already, the basis on which the gospel is proclaimed to every creature. The coming execution of judgment by the Chaldeans was sufficient to arrest any soul that heeded the warning voice of the prophet Habakkuk; and a destruction was then about to fall on Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans, as the Lord had predicted (Luke 19:43, 44; Luke 21:20, 24). But what is either providential work of God or any other than can be gleaned from the harvest of judgment in the future when compared with that which in His rejection and atoning work befell our Lord Jesus?

And as the grace to sinners is immeasurable in the work which cost God and His Son all things in unsparing vengeance on sin — our sins, so is the wrath of God not

yet executed, but revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and the unrighteousness of men that hold the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? says the same apostle writing to the Hebrew confessors of Christ. Is there less sin, less danger, for those who in Christendom have grown up in the constant iteration of the same gospel, and are now exposed as men never were to the apostate infidelity of the day, which finds its life in nature and sets up physical law as the idol of its worship, if first along with Jesus soon to supersede Him, as none can serve two masters. It must be God, or the creature, not both, even if God were not, as He ought to be, a jealous God, as He is the true, and therefore necessarily intolerant of all spurious rivalry.

Such was the discourse with which the great apostle of the Gentiles opened his missionary labours in the Pisidian Antioch (only about fifty years ago identified as Yalobatch by an intelligent British traveller). The result was cheering. And as they were going out (for the service was over, not interrupted as some have singularly imagined), the hearers besought that they might have these words spoken to them the next sabbath, the great occasion for such a discourse. Later, when the gathering was broken up, many of the Jews and the proselytes, attracted and impressed beyond the rest, followed Paul and Barnabas (for henceforth, at least away from Palestine, Paul has the precedence); as they on their part spoke more freely to them than the synagogue could permit, and urged them to abide in the grace of God. Gentiles there were none as yet to hear,

beyond the proselytes but the ensuing sabbath beheld them drawn by the report in crowds; and the effect was as marked on them for good, as on many Jews for evil, as we shall see.

Verse 42 has suffered not a little from both copyists and from commentators. The ordinarily received text instead of ‘they’ (aujtw’n), has, with some cursives, the interpolation ἐκ τῆς συναγῶγης τῶν Ἰουδαίων, which may have been due to the public lessons of early days, though more common in the passages taken from the historical books than in selections from the Epistles. But this addition, though unauthorized, does not contradict (though it may alter) the sense, like τὰ ἔθνη, ‘the Gentiles’, which is made the subject of the sentence, to the confusion of the passage as a whole, and without the least to commend it in itself. The verse is quite general. ‘And as they were going out, they kept beseeching that these words might be spoken to them on the following sabbath. Now when the synagogue broke up, many of the Jews and of the worshipping proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who (οἵτινες) speaking unto them persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. And on the next sabbath almost all the city was gathered together to hear the word of God’139 (vers. 42-44).

Dr. J. Bennett conceives that the critical reading of verse 42 points to the sense that they (i.e., Paul and Barnabas) entreated that the same things should be spoken to them (again). But this is quite a mistake. The true reading leaves us open to the people’s thus entreating the apostles; which appears to me much more simple and becoming as well as ‘delightful’. Even Calvin, who understands the sense to be that Paul and Barnabas went out while the Jews were yet assembled, holds that

they (the apostles) were then requested…, though he was misled by the misreading to think it was the Gentiles who made request. But what could have brought ‘the Gentiles’ to the synagogue on the first sabbath? It is easy to understand that they flocked there on the second, and doubtless this it was and yet more their heed, as well as the free grace proclaimed, which roused the envy of the unhappy Jews. But even this premature introduction of the Gentiles though unfounded does not yield so strange and repulsive a meaning as that Paul and Barnabas (!) entreated that their discourse should be spoken on the next sabbath. That souls struck by the truth might beseech that ‘these things’, blessed yet so startling, so momentous yet solemn, should be spoken to them again, is very intelligible, as it is the unforced sense of the true text.

Tyndale completely missed the point of time intended, for he took εἰς τὸ μεταξὺ σάββατον of the intervening week — ‘bitwene the Saboth dayes’. But this was from oversight of the later usage of μεταξύ which signifies ‘after’, not ‘between’ only, as Kypke, Ott, and others have noticed with illustrations. Calvin was quite wrong therefore in censuring here the Vulgate and Erasmus who were right; and still more is Beza to be blamed, because he was a better scholar than the great theologian he followed, and he ought to have known how thoroughly Josephus, Plutarch, and Clem., Rom. 44 (twice), justify the text of the Authorized Version against the marginal alternative. Dr. J. Lightfoot plainly confirmed it from his vast Rabbinical learning.

As verse 42 lets us know the general interest in what had been announced which prompted the desire to hear all again, so verse 43 adds that, on the break up of the

congregation, many of the Jews and of the worshipping or devout proselytes followed the preachers thereon, who not only spoke to them but urged them to abide in the grace of God, which the gospel declares and they professed to receive. What can one think of a man like Calvin doubting whether it was not these young converts who exhorted Paul and Barnabas that they should not faint but stand firmly in the grace of God! He does not however (as Dean Alford thought) incline so strongly to this interpretation as to decide for it against the common and only correct view, that the gracious speech and confirmatory exhortation came from the apostles to those on whose hearts God's grace had just dawned Again, in the beginning of verse 44 stands the expression on the 'coming' sabbath, vouched by both the most ancient uncials of highest character and the mass of cursives, and so not only adopted by Erasmus, the Complutensian, Colinaeus, R. Stephens, the Elzevirs, but also by Tischendorf {eighth edition), Tregelles, and by Westcott and Hort. On the other hand at least two of the great uncials with several good cursives testify to the exactly technical word which differs by a letter less, for 'next following', 'ensuing'. Acts 18:21 used to be cited for the former, till the critics omitted the clause; but there is no doubt that the rival reading is a standing usage of the inspired writer (Luke 13:33, Acts 20:15; Acts 21:26), as it is in the language generally. No wonder therefore that Alford, Bengel, Green Griesbach, Lachmann, Scholz, and Wordsworth accept it as right: an instructive instance, by no means uncommon, where a few copies are more accurate than the weight of both antiquity and number combined.

‘But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted the things spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, For you it was necessary that the word of God should be first spoken; but since ye thrust it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn unto the Gentiles. For thus hath the Lord enjoined us, I have set thee for a light of Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the uttermost parts of the earth’ (vers. 45-47).

How base as well as evil and malignant is jealousy, religious jealousy above all as here! In general they had hailed the joyful sound when it first reached their ears, even though closed with a most serious warning; and ‘many’ had gone farther than the entreaty to have the truth spoken again. For many of the Jews, as well as of the devout proselytes, followed the apostles who exhorted them to abide as they had begun. But ‘the crowds’ were too much for religious prejudice which was hitherto dormant and awakened the most malignant feelings in antipathy and abuse. Such is flesh in presence of grace and truth, and at the sight of hearts attracted and consciences touched. Had the gospel been powerless, the Jews had retained their equanimity, where the long preaching of Moses had never so wrought, its immediate effect in winning such large attention was intolerable. But the hatred of grace, ruinous to those guilty of it, only enlarges the field of work, as it also liberates the messengers from an overcareful waiting on the men of tradition and its narrow channels. Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, instead of being shocked into silence by Jewish blasphemies, pointed out how faith denies not but defers

to law in its own place, and, now that the ancient people of God were ignorantly spurning the best blessings of grace, announced this matchless road open to the needy and long despised Gentiles (ver. 46).

The application of Isaiah 49:6 in the following verse is as striking as richly instructive. The theme of the prophet is the Messiah rejected by Israel, Who has this consolation vouchsafed by God: His humiliation opens the door to wider glory. This the slighted servants of Christ appropriate to themselves. Infinite grace, under like circumstances, warrants the men of faith: what was said of Christ is no less true of the Christian. 'Thus hath the Lord enjoined us.' It is a principle of far-reaching application, which faith knows how to guard from irreverence, however much of direction, comfort, and strength may be reaped from it. The reader may see another instance no less bold in the use made of Isaiah 1. 7-9 in Rom. 8:33, 34. The spirit of obedience, we may add, finds an injunction where no other eye could discern one.

Here first Gentiles as such come into prominence: others in this country who had heeded the apostles were proselytes from among them. Scripture was express as to the principle.

'And the Gentiles, on hearing, rejoiced and glorified the word of the Lord, and as many as were ordained unto life eternal believed. And the word of the Lord was carried abroad through the whole country. But the Jews excited the women of rank that worshipped, and the chiefs of the city, and stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and sent them out of their borders. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them

and came to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and [the] Holy Spirit' (vers. 48-52).

The tide of blessing in God's grace was now turned to the Gentiles. Christ is a light for revealing them now, as He is the glory of God's people Israel. The nations had been long hidden as well as outside; they are now disclosed to view, the direct object not of law as Israel once, but of divine mercy in the gospel. The righteousness of God is unto all, though it takes effect only upon all that believe. So here they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord, and as many as were ordained unto life eternal believed.

The evil and the ruin are man's: all the good is of God's grace exclusively, and the believer enjoys it in His sovereign mercy. Thus the word of the Lord was carried abroad through all the country. And this roused a more systematic effort of opposition as usual on the part of the Jews, who urged on the devout women of position and the chief men of the city against the apostles with such a flood of persecution as to cast them out of their borders. As these ladies had been drawn into Judaism to their immense relief from the uncleanness as well as debasing follies of heathenism, one can understand how the sex would be peculiarly open to exciting influence against the testimony which left the law in the shade and they would know how to reach the first men of the city, as being of their own rank and in all probability nearly connected with themselves, so as to get the preachers expelled. But the apostles, bowing to the persecution, acted on the Lord's word not only in fleeing to another city, but in shaking off the dust of their feet against their persecutors; while joy in the Holy Spirit

filled the disciples, left behind as sheep in the midst of wolves.

124 ABD, more than six cursives, et al,, and almost all the ancient Versions do not read τινες ‘some’, or ‘certain’, as in the majority.

125 Text. Rec. has

τε with slight authority, but

τόν before

Σαῦλον has large support.

126

ὃλην is authenticated by the best authority, though omitted in Text. Rec. with most MSS.

127 Text Rec. in ver 9 follows many in giving the copulative.

128 Wiclif and the Rhemish, guided by the Vulgate, say ‘pro-consul’; Tyndale, Cranmer, and the Geneva Version give the vague ‘ruler of the country’. It is of the more moment to be exact, as Cyprus under the Romans had been imperial and hence governed by a pro-praetor; but not long before it had been handed over by Augustus to the people, which involved government by a pro-consul, ἀνθύπατος instead of the former ἀντιστράτηλος.

129 We need not speculate on the question whether the apostle had always two names, a Jewish one and a Gentile or Roman; or whether the latter may have been now given at this epoch, if not incident, when he entered publicly on his work among the Gentiles.

130 The place given to Gentile proselytes is here in the apostle’s address distinctly marked for the first time.

131 As usual, the note of the Cambridge Editors is ingenious, so much so as to overshoot the mark. But to bear in the sense of ‘carry is not the same as ‘to be patient with’, and both Deuteronomy and the apostle are dwelling on God’s favour to His people, rather than on their bad manners, as Chrysostom long ago remarked.

132 ‘Raised up’, as in the Text. Rec. supported by CD and many other authorities, has a weight far below what I adopt, and was due probably to the language of the preceding verse.

133 ‘Us’ ABD et al. The mass support ‘you’; but ‘us’ includes the witnesses benignly. The you’ just before may have got repeated.

134 ‘Now’ is attested by AC, more than twenty cursives, and almost all the ancient versions. Hence even Tregelles goes with modern critics generally, and only Westcott and Hort bracket the word, presumably in deference to the Vatican.

135 ‘To our children’ is the strange reading of the most ancient authorities. So the ‘first’ psalm (D, et al.) ver. 33, but this may be due to Jewish arrangement combining Pss. i. and ii. in one; and ‘because’ for ‘wherefore’ in ver. 35 136 ‘And’ is omitted by the most ancient authorities. Most of the late witnesses add ‘the’ to ‘law of Moses’.

137 ‘Hic suscitandi verbum, meo iudicio, latius pates quam ubi paulo post repetitur. Neque enim tantum dicit Christum resurrexisse a mortuis, sed divinitus ordinatum et quasi menu Dei productum in lucem, ut Messiae parses impleret; sicut passim docet Scriptura, excitari a Domino reges et prophetas.’

138 BD, some cursives, and a few Latin MSS. reject

ἐφ᾽ ὑμᾶς.

139 Many ancient authorities, as is well known, concur in reading ‘the Lord’ for God’.

Acts 14

If the Pisidian Antioch has only of late been identified, there is no doubt that Koniyeh, a considerable town of some forty thousand souls, represents in our day Iconium, the changed scene of apostolic labours which now opens to us. It was then an important city, having rapidly grown up from Strabo's estimate in the reign of Augustus, as we may gather from Pliny's account, a few years later than the inspired one, though far below what it became as the capital of the Seljukian Sultans.

Here, as in the city just left, the Jews had a synagogue, to which Paul and Barnabas repaired as usual. Persecution had in no wise daunted their courage or cooled their love and zeal in the gospel.

'And it came to pass in Iconium that they entered together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake that a great multitude of both Jews and Greeks believed. But the Jews that disobeyed140 stirred up the souls of the Gentiles and aggravated [them] against the brethren.141 A considerable time therefore they stayed, speaking boldly in reliance on the Lord that gave witness unto the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided; and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when an effort was made of both the Gentiles and Jews with their rulers to outrage and stone them, becoming aware of it they fled unto the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the [country] round about, and there they were preaching the gospel' (vers. 1-7).

There was without doubt marked blessing at Iconium, where the Lord honoured and used largely the bold preaching of His grace: ‘a great multitude of both Jews and Greeks believed.’ This roused the enemy, and the Jews that disobeyed the glad tidings (cf. 2 Thess. 1:8) stirred up the souls of the Gentiles and made them evil-affected against the brethren. It was not a visit from without but the alienation of the Jews that refused God’s message on the spot, as is confirmed by the correct form of the word (ἀπειθήσαντες) in the more ancient witnesses as against the Received Text. But this only drew out a pretty long stay and plain speaking in dependence on the Lord, Who on His part displayed His gracious power not only in the more ordinary testimony to His word but in confirmatory signs and wonders, of which we heard nothing at Antioch in Pisidia. It is a solemn fact, however, that such deeds of divine energy, as the rule, do not turn the stubborn heart. Men judge mainly in accordance with their feelings, whatever be the qualms of conscience; and where the will is set on its own way, none so hardened as those that breathe a constant atmosphere of miracle, as we see in the wilderness history. So here in the face of all, the multitude of the city was rent in twain; and if some held with the apostles, others as decidedly held with the Jews, the hereditary enemies of the gospel, ever ingenious in perverting and undermining what might have told on upright minds.

But the intent of violence, which had oozed out, brought the testimony to a close: for a plan or start of this kind seems to be the force of what is meant here, rather than an ‘assault’, as may be inferred safely from the context. Had there been an actual ‘rush’, there seems little

propriety in the words ‘becoming aware of’ what could not be doubted and made escape hard. Nor does the form of the verb admit of the rendering ‘was making’; for the aorist must signify a definite fact instead of anything merely in course, which would be rather the imperfect. If they got cognisance of purpose to outrage and stone them so generally formed as to carry along Gentiles and Jews with their rulers, they judged it wise to leave with all haste. And so they fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the country around; and there they pursued their gospel work.

‘And there sat a certain man at Lystra powerless in his feet,142 lame from his mother’s womb, who never had walked. This [man] heard Paul speaking, who, fastening his eyes upon him and seeing that he had faith to be made whole, said with a loud voice 143 Rise upright on thy feet: and he leaped up and walked. And the crowds seeing what Paul did, lifted up their voices in Lycaonian, saying, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas Zeus, and Paul Hermes because he took the lead in speaking. And the priest of the Zeus that was before the city, having brought bulls and garlands unto the gates, would have sacrificed with the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard [of it], they rent their garments, and sprang out144 unto the crowd crying out and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like affections with you, preaching [or, evangelizing] to you that ye should turn from these vain things unto145 a living God Who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all things in them; Who in the bygone generations suffered all the Gentiles to walk in their own ways. And yet He left not Himself without witness in that He did good and

gave you146 from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your147 hearts with food and gladness. And saying these things they with difficulty restrained the crowds from sacrificing to them. But there arrived Jews from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds and stoned Paul, they dragged [him] without the city, supposing that he was dead. But as the disciples encircled him, he rose up and entered into the city' (vers. 8-20).

The healing of the hopelessly lame man was eminently suited to arrest a rude heathen crowd, besides its being a practical as well as extraordinary witness to the gracious character of God so foreign to the thoughts of man left to himself. All was in contrast with the mysterious mumblings with which their wizards practised their charms. The addition to verse 10 (see footnote) was made early to save the appearance of pretension on the part of him who wrought the miracle. The absence of the clause is the instructive lesson that as such words would be unavailing in another mouth (definitely proved long after at Ephesus), so they are by no means called for where all the life and testimony were set on magnifying Christ. There was no legally required formula. Of all men Paul was most conspicuously, as he loved to call himself, the 'bondman of Jesus Christ'; so that in his case it was the less necessary by a formal declaration to disclaim any virtue to heal by his own power or holiness.

That heathen should conclude as the Lycaonians did in consequence was the more natural, as they had the fabulous tradition made current a little while before by a Latin poet (Ovid) of the Augustan age that these very deities had been entertained in a part of Asia Minor.

Physical differences would lead to the respective identification of their superstitious minds, besides the specific reason assigned in the case of Paul: and the proposal to do them sacrifice followed as matter of course. The scene is as usual set graphically before us; the crowd, the priest of Zeus (whose temple, or statue, was before the city), with the oxen and garlands all ready brought to the gates (of the house or court probably, where the apostles lodged). On the other hand we see the indignant and most earnest rejection of the God-dishonouring honour by Barnabas and Paul (for so they are presented in accordance with their assigned place), springing forth with garments rent and loud remonstrance. Their words were no less uncompromising though courteous. And what a difference from Romanist missionaries doing evil that good might come, or rather accepting a gross sin in order to propitiate their way, and to make a new and not less grievous and more guilty idolatry perpetual!

But the witnesses of the Lord Jesus are jealous for a living and true God and refuse to allow a sinful personal influence at His expense. ‘Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like affections with you, preaching to you that ye should turn from these vain things unto a living God… Substantially it was an appeal akin to what Paul afterwards uttered to the Athenians on the Areopagus. How debasing is heathenism! The ignorant Lycaonian and the refined Athenian needed the same sort of discourse. They are set to spell the alphabet of creation. Here, however, it is not so much the unity of God and man’s true and near relationship to Him in contrast with his absurd reverence of idols or his god-making, it is God’s active beneficence attested to the

Lycaonians in rains and fruitful seasons, with their results in plenteous food and gladness.

That the gods are envious at human gladness was the lie and curse of paganism. Not such is He Who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them. Who could deny that in the generations bygone He suffered the nations to proceed in their own ways? If He sent the gospel now concerning His Son, was it not in full accordance with the active goodness He had testified to all lands and times in those bountiful gifts from heaven which overspread the otherwise barren earth with every good thing for man's life and heart? We need not dwell on each phrase; but it would not be hard to prove how telling was every word, and how all the undeniable truth thus conveyed indirectly dissipated the mischievous and destructive and demoralizing falsehoods of heathenism, to which their minds and habits had been inured, not only in their religion but in the whole of their outward relations saturated with that poison, as their own literary remains show and Rom. 1 briefly declares in the burning yet holy reproofs of its latter verses.

So inveterate is the idolatry of the heart that it was with difficulty the crowds were kept from sacrificing to the Lord's servants (ver. 18). How awful to think that Christendom over its largest part pays divine honours to men of like affections as themselves! It is admitted that apotheosis goes beyond canonization; but the dishonour to God and the injury to man can scarcely be said to be less. For the distinctive truth now is the unity, not of the Godhead only, but of the true Mediator; and consequently the peculiar assault of the enemy is not by honouring more gods than the living God, but by setting

up other mediators or intercessors, as the Virgin, angels, and saints, no less than nullifying the full and intimate knowledge of God as the Father and the Son by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Here Romanism is the chief offender, though others are not free from the taint, as indeed the tendency is common to. the natural man.

But idolatry was not the only danger at Lystra though others entered the scene characteristically to oppose, calumniate, and persecute. This is mostly the work of men who know some truth, but are jealous of more and better. These are the men who stifle conscience and are athirst for blood — blood of God's saints and Christ's servants, whom their ill-will blinds them to regard as the most wicked of men. So it was, and so it is. 'But Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium; and having persuaded the crowds and stoned Paul, they dragged him without the city, supposing that he was dead.' These adversaries were not wholly ignorant of God's testimony in the gospel. They knew enough to feel how immeasurably it rose above the law, and that it exceeded in glory was enough for their hard and proud hearts, which disdained to own their ruin, any more than God's righteousness which can and does justify the ungodly through the faith of Christ. To the law they adhered, because it was theirs rather than because it is God's, to the law, even though it can, as such, show no mercy to the guilty, and itself bears witness to the Messiah, the only Saviour of the lost. But to this witness they were wholly blind, being only alive to the pride of possessing it from God to the exclusion of all others. Yet when the gospel went out to others, they were eager to persuade these poor despised heathens that the word of God's

grace which Paul preached was nothing but imposture. Alas! they found the crowds there, as ever since, ready victims. And why? That very refusal of homage, which the Lystrans were ready to pay, is most offensive to man, and disposes him to believe the most odious misrepresentations of those he was about to worship. Men exalt themselves by human adoration, and to be balked of it soon turns to the hatred and perhaps death of those who seek the honour of the only God. So it was here. Instead of changing their minds like the Maltese (who from a murderer regarded Paul as a god, Acts 28:6), they listen to Jewish calumny though ordinarily despised, and stone as a false prophet him to whom they had been so lately wishing to sacrifice, leaving him dragged without the city as a dead man.

But his life was in him, as he himself said later of Eutychus; and as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up and entered into the city (ver. 20). Paul's work was only beginning, not done. To abide in the flesh was needful for many sinners as for all saints. It could not be that he was to expire thus, though Jews had incited Gentiles to do their worst, and imagined all was over. Grace had called him to its own great work of salvation, as well as of edifying the body of Christ. Nor was it enough that he rose up; he entered into the city, from which he had just been dragged outside as a corpse. Such was the faith and love of this more than martyr soul. Of him, if of any, we may surely say that the world was not worthy. Christ alone was and is the worthy One Paul could say, as he did, 'To me to live is Christ' — not the work only but Himself, of all things the most elevating, purifying, and strengthening of motives in that work. It is the spring of lowliness as of love, of

courage as of faith. So rising up Paul entered into Lystra. Fear would have said, Go anywhere else just now. Self would have whispered, Stay there and see what a future triumph for the gospel! But the thoughts of man in neither suggestion are the mind of Christ, and this the apostle had, and acted upon. May it also be ours in His grace!

The apostle had now nearly reached the extreme point of this the first missionary journey.

'And on the morrow he went forth with Barnabas to Derbe.' This, or the country round about, was the farthest limit westward for the present. It might have seemed an inviting opportunity to have visited Cilicia or even Tarsus, but he that blamed John Mark, who left them and the work to return to Jerusalem, was not the man to allow such a claim; as even Barnabas seems to have done when he took Mark with him and subsequently went to Cyprus.

'And,1 after preaching the gospel to that city and making many disciples, they returned unto Lystra, and unto1 Iconium, and unto148 Antioch, establishing the souls of the disciples, exhorting [them] to continue in the faith, and that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God' (vers. 21, 22). It was in this neighbourhood and during this visit apparently that Timothy was brought to the Lord through the apostle Paul (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2), for in Acts 16:1 he is spoken of as already a disciple in Derbe and Lystra, well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Here no reference is made, though grace had great things in store for him. It was enough to add about

Derbe that the preaching was blessed to many there as elsewhere.

We next hear of their return, visiting in reversed order Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. The circumstances gave a new character to the work. First, they were ‘establishing the souls of the disciples’. For this is a necessary part of the labour of love, and a real need for new-born souls, and many who are blessed in awakening have little power to confirm the young disciples. Here were servants of the Lord fitted beyond all to help on the unestablished; and we are told of their exhorting them to abide in the faith. How much there is to alarm in it if not to seduce from it! But they are also warned of the difficulties in the way, especially of the numerous severe trials which intervene, or, as it is expressed, ‘that through many tribulations we149 must enter into the kingdom of God.’ So the Lord had told the early disciples who as Jews might and did expect things smooth and bright, now that the Messiah was come. But He was come to suffer and to go on high, rejected of men and of His earthly people; which gives room to a yet deeper aggravation of the suffering path before glory dawn. And if Paul was a great preacher, not less was he a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. Christ was ever his theme; ‘Whom we announce,’ as he says himself, ‘admonishing every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, to the end we may present every man perfect in Christ: whereunto also I labour, combating according to His working that worketh in me in power’ (Col. 1:28, 29). He never took any Christian duty lightly, least of all that which lies so near to God’s purpose and Christ’s affection, even for those who had not seen his face in the flesh: that their hearts might be encouraged, being

united together in love and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the recognition of the mystery of God, in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:1-3). For those are not wanting anywhere, who, deceived themselves, seek to deceive the saints by persuasive speech. The word dwelling in us, and praise and prayer flowing out to God, with diligent testimony in love within as well as without, are grand safeguards; but withal the mind made up with joy for all endurance and long-suffering, as we wait for Christ and the kingdom.

Secondly, another task, which the first visit could not effect, still remained. ‘And when they chose (or, appointed) for them elders in each assembly and prayed with fastings, they commended them to the Lord on Whom they had believed’ (ver. 23). Naturally the differences in Christendom warp the minds of too many in their impressions of this instructive verse. Jerome, though by no means so extreme as some of the early fathers, interprets the word ceirotonhvsante” (which all the early English Versions as well as the Authorized had rendered ‘ordained’, Tyndale, Cranmer, and Geneva adding ‘by election’) of ordination by laying on of hands, as if χειροτονία =

χειροθεσία. This, Mr. Humphry rightly treats as untenable, or at least unsupported by any clear example of such a sense.

But we may go farther than Dean Alford, and must affirm that scripture nowhere points to the churches selecting elders by show of hands or in any other way. Indeed the phraseology before us excludes any such thought; for, first, if χειροτονήσαντες necessarily

implied any such etymological import here, the meaning must be that Paul and Barnabas chose elders by the method of suffrage. This nobody holds or wishes, but the contrary. And, secondly, this is confirmed yet more abundantly by the pronoun ‘for them’, which excludes the disciples from their desired part in the election, and distinctly makes the apostles choose the elders for the saints concerned. Of all interpretations, therefore, none is so bad as the amiable compromise that the apostles ordained those whom each church elected. The words simply teach that Paul and Barnabas chose elders for the disciples in each assembly. No doubt the word may mean to stretch out the hand, and this especially in voting, but it had long been used, where no such form could be, to express choice or appointment. And this is certain in the New Testament without going outside it, and in Luke’s usus loquendi, as the most prejudiced must allow in Acts 10:41, and here too, unless he contends for Paul and Barnabas holding up their hands in each of these cases. This, however, is not what Congregationalism wants, but that the disciples should thus decide their choice of each elder and of one only in each church, whereas the text declares that the apostles chose elders for them in each assembly150: the most distinct and conclusive disproof of popular election which language can convey. And if laying on of hands followed, it is in no way taught here, for the word refers only to the choice of the presbyters.

Nor does 2 Cor. 8:19 support the idea of an election of the elders popularly, for the question there was solely of brethren acceptable to the assemblies for conveying funds to the saints in distress elsewhere. And it is certain that scripture does warrant the saints at large in choosing those they confide in for such a work, as we

see in Acts 6. Still less is there the slightest analogy with the two put forward (not elected) in Acts 1:23, as to whom they prayed the Lord to choose for the vacant apostolate. The lot is a wholly different principle, on which turned the numbering or enrolment of Matthias with the eleven. In short, the procedure here was, just what Calvin denies, the apostles choosing solely in virtue of their peculiar office, as afterwards Titus was commissioned by Paul to appoint the elders in every city of Crete, without a hint of sitting as moderator of a free election by the consent of all. Not only is this Book thus in harmony, but the New Testament as a whole. Where man gave, man was allowed to choose where the Lord gave, He chooses and sends apart from man; where it is a question of order, the authorized envoys of the Lord appointed in His name, not only directly as here, but indirectly through a distinctly recognized channel as elsewhere.

After the choice of elders for the saints, the apostles prayed with fasting and commended them to the Lord on Whom they had believed. The saints in general were the object in view, not the elders only. And whatever the supplication which assuredly preceded and accompanied the delicate work of appointing the elders, it would appear from the language and connection that the prayers and fasting here specified followed that appointment and concerned the saints cast on the sustaining grace of the Lord.

‘And having passed through Pisidia they came unto Pamphylia; and having spoken the word [of the Lord]151 in152 Perga they went down unto Attalia; and thence they sailed unto Antioch, whence they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they

fulfilled. And when they arrived and brought the assembly together, they repeated all things God had wrought with them, and how He had opened to the Gentiles a door of faith. And they tarried153 no little time with the disciples' (vers. 24-28).

Thus the first great evangelistic journey to the heathen by the apostles was brought to a close, Perga having heard the word on their return, if not on the earlier occasion saddened by the departure thence of John. And now Attalia (the modern Satalia, or Adalias) was touched, instead of Paphos, or any other part of Cyprus; and from that port to the Syrian Antioch, their point of departure, the voyage was readily made.

To the remarks already made it is of moment to add a few words more which may help souls. The latter part of verse 26 defines yet more, if it were needed, the import of that which had preceded this missionary visit. It was in no true sense an 'ordination' of Barnabas and Paul, but, as here described, it was their recommendation to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled. Indeed from Acts 15:40 it would seem to have been repeated on the apostle's second journey with Silas. The notion of holy orders founded on the beginning of Acts 13 is therefore not only false and alien, but it strips what was done of all its gracious meaning. It is part of that judaizing which for most has darkened New Testament scripture, and debased the true grace of ministry.

Next, we may observe that, though sent out authoritatively by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:4) and thus placed directly under responsibility to the Lord Whose bondmen they were, they were quick to share all His doings with the saints: they call together the assembly

whence they had gone out that all might rejoice in His grace, and especially in His grace to the Gentiles. The church is not the source of mission, but the scene of communion with divine grace using the truth for the blessing of the Gentiles by Paul (not Peter), and from Antioch as a starting-point on earth (not Jerusalem nor yet Rome). Patriarchal jurisdiction there was none, till men forgot that the true spring of the authority, power, and blessing was Christ in heaven, and ere long they began to dream of rival sees and their hierarchs. How soon did the little seed become a tree, so that the birds of heaven, which snatch away what was sown in the heart, came and lodged in its branches (Matt. 13:31, 32)!

We should bear in mind that the stay of Paul and Barnabas on their return to Antioch was not short.

140 ELP and most cursives support the received

ἀπειθοῦντες, but the older give

ἀπειθήσαντες, a completed act.

141 DE, et al, add at the end of ver. 2, ‘but the Lord gave (quickly) peace’. It has no stamp of truth. He was really pleased to give signs and wonders. It was needless here to speak of peace to the believer.

142 ‘Being’ HLP, et al. (Text. Rec.) but not in the most ancient. The aorist seems best for the last verb of the verse.

143 Lachmann follows CDE et al., in adding, ‘I say to thee, In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.’

144 The best MSS. ‘out’, not ‘in’ as in the Text. Rec. and most copies.

145 The definite article is probably to be omitted as in the best.

146 ‘You…’, not ‘us…’ as in Text. Rec.

147 Ibid.

148 The best MSS. support

εὐαγγελιζόμενοι, είς being repeated also.

149 There is no real ground for Dean Alford’s notion that the ‘we’ here implies the presence of the narrator, but ὅτι marks the transition from the oratio obliqua to oratio recta.

150 Dr. Bennett says that the more remote antecedent, ‘the disciples’, may be referred to, which is so certainly wrong that he himself immediately changes this by the suggestion that Luke may have designed to show what no doubt (?) was the fact (!), that the apostles concurred in their election, and held out their hands, along with the disciples (!) in favour of the elected elder.

151 Tischendorf on small but ancient authority gives ‘unto Perga’. Rather more of similar character add ‘of the Lord’, or ‘of God’.

152 Ibid.

153 The more ancient authorities do not give ‘there’.

Acts 15

The Spirit of God next brings before us the first signal working of that judaizing which was destined to play a deep, wide, and permanent portion in the history of the church of God. ‘And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, Except ye be circumcised154 after the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved’ (ver. 1).

In every point of view this was serious. It was an error, and yet it claimed to be founded on the word of God. It proceeded from men bearing the name of Christ, and withal it struck at the foundation. Satan’s habitual effort is to insinuate evil, not only under fair appearance and if possible by one part of the word made to neutralize another, but through disciples. No principle more false than to urge the reputation of advocates in defence of their doctrine, which must stand or fall according to scripture interpreted in the light of Christ and His work, for these ever call for the energies of the Holy Spirit, as they command the hearts of the faithful.

It is clear also that the truth of God is imperilled by an unwarranted addition even more than by the manifest opposition of unbelief. These men did not avowedly deny the gospel, nor teach that one could be saved by an ordinance only; but they did insist on the necessity of circumcision in order to salvation. This is to undermine Christianity, which is not merely promise but accomplishment; but mere promises leave the door open, as inspired history shows, for thereby insinuating the law, instead of sovereign grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. It was really ignorance of Christ risen from the dead and

glorified in heaven, the proper object of the Christian. He never can thus be by faith before the soul without maintaining the efficacy of His atoning death. What has law or circumcision to do with Him Who is at the right hand of God? On this side of the cross law has its place (1 Tim. 1:8-11).

But these men were occupied with their prejudices and were looking back at things and persons on earth, not through the rent veil upon Christ above. Hence their pride was wounded. They could not bear to hear that the distinctive mark, the ancient glory of a Jew, was now eclipsed and gone. They had but feebly learned the teaching of the cross. They had not discerned there the sentence of death on the flesh at its best. They would no doubt have acknowledged their need of Him Who suffered once for all their sins, but they saw not their religion (and circumcision was its initiatory and characteristic badge) treated as naught, yea, utterly condemned therein. Error flows from a wholly false measure. Had Christ, the truth been before their souls, had they estimated aright His death on the cross, they had never fallen into a mistake so profound and unworthy.

But they were wrong otherwise also. The Lord had promised the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of truth, to guide into it all and to teach what they could not bear during His earthly ministry. The truth was there in His person; but yet the best taught of His disciples did not understand at all fully even fundamentals till He was risen and glorified. But now the Holy Spirit had been sent down from heaven, and Gentiles without circumcision had received Him, no less than did the circumcised believers. Was this nothing in their eyes? Is

it not a solemn lesson that disciples could be so blinded by their religious habits as to overlook a fact so plain, certain and conclusive? For God had taken care that not the apostles of the uncircumcision but Peter himself should be His chosen instrument for the call of Cornelius in the presence of the six brethren of the circumcision that accompanied him from Joppa.

It is instructive also to observe, if faith is ever humble, bold though it may be, how presumptuous error is. For these men who were clamorous for the necessity of circumcision, ventured not to plead that apostolic authority had laid down any such dogma as they sought to impose. Their judgment and their dignity, we may say, proceeded from themselves, behaving in this like the Gentiles who know not God.

Insurrection against the truth was thus permitted to display itself in the face of the apostles that the Lord might give us His own distinct and ever-abiding correction. What a mercy to us, as well as to the church of God ever since, that this question was not suppressed till the apostles disappeared from the earth! We should then have had only an uninspired answer, however sound. Now we have what all Christians own to possess divine authority. That which an apostle writes is really the Lord’s commandment (1 Cor. 14:37).

The troublers came from Judea, which with the weak and ignorant would be apt to lend weight to their words. Of this Satan is ever active to take advantage. Human tradition readily creeps in, and as naturally flatters the flesh. The Holy Ghost falls back upon the word; only we must take care that we do not require the letter which kills when we can only have the spirit which gives life.

Subjection to Christ alone keeps us right life in Him is always obedient and holy, and is the way of true intelligence. Human tradition is never to be trusted even among disciples. God is jealous for His word, which bears constant testimony to Christ and therefore against human pride. The men who came down from Judea were imperious nominally for God; it was really for the flesh and self. They would have cut off, if they could, not only the Gentile saints but the apostles of the uncircumcision.

‘And’ when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and questioning with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up unto Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question’ (ver. 2). Here again let us admire the wisdom of God’s ways. Paul and Barnabas themselves were unable to settle the dispute. Self-will is invincible, even for apostles. God had it in His mind to interpose in a much more impressive and efficacious manner. It might have been dangerous, however desirable in itself, to have terminated the present matter of debate at Antioch. For the evil, being inveterate as to principle in the nature of things, would surely have broken out afresh subsequently, and elsewhere, probably worst of all in Jerusalem itself. It was true wisdom, therefore, to transfer the further discussion of the question to the source from whence the mischief had come; more particularly as Paul and Barnabas would go there in order that it might not only be heard but there and then settled by all the authority given of God for the governing of His assembly on the earth. All was thus directed under the good hand of God, for the evil was judged in the quarter from whence it emanated, where presumably, not to say notoriously, was its hotbed,

where lived those who knew best its promoters, and where all was rather favourable than hostile to them, with on the other hand the immense moral weight that would follow the judgment from such as God had set first in the church to govern in the Lord's name.

1 Text Rec. followed by the Authorized Version and many has 'therefore', and even Lachmann adheres to it, as AEHP and most cursives give it. But the correct particle δέ has the best support and is clearly right. The common συζητήοεως is unfounded.

In Gal. 2:1, 2 the apostle Paul says he went up 'according to revelation'. Here the inspired historian says that they (i.e., the brethren or the labourers generally without defining more) arranged or decided that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem about this question. There is no more contradiction here than in Acts 13:2 where the Spirit called unmistakably and exclusively the same servants of the Lord to a definite missionary work, while they also enjoyed the cordial and holy fellowship of their fellow-labourers in commending them to the grace of God for that tour. They may have had the revelation direct as in Acts 16:9, 10, or through the prophetic intimation of others as before, what is certain is that 'according to revelation' Paul went up, and not merely as a step appointed by others. Each statement is in perfect keeping with the document where it is given, and the Holy Spirit's design in each, though men as usual have not been wanting to set them in antagonism. Titus was one of these others, and his case at least was of immediate bearing on the question as an uncircumcised Gentile endowed and honoured of God beyond most; but this again is specified only to the

Galatians for its importance there, though room be amply and evidently left for it in the Acts. The rationalistic misuse of God's word is an instance of that ignorance or dishonesty, if not both, which characterizes the system. The believer ought to have no hesitation or difficulty, inasmuch as faith adheres to all scripture as divine.

'They therefore, having been set forward by the assembly, passed through both155 Phoenicia and Samaria, recounting the conversion of the Gentiles, and they caused great joy to all the brethren' (ver. 3). Is there any good reason why propemfqevnte" should not be rendered 'set forward' here as in Rom. 15:24, 1 Cor. 16:6; 3 John 6? No doubt the heart of the saints was with them, not with the legalists; but there was considerate and affectionate care for their wants by the way, whether or not there was any escort, as in Acts 21:5, which some conceive here. The picture is a lovely one, the joy in all created by the accounts heard of God's grace outside Israel. What a contrast with Jewish jealousy! Yet are unlettered men and women peculiarly open to superstition, prejudice, and human feeling. But divine love prevailed, in accordance with the truth. Others alas! who for the time ought to have been teachers had again need to be taught the elements of the beginning of the oracles of God and had come to need milk, not solid food (Heb. 5:12). It is harder to unlearn than to learn.

'And on arriving at Jerusalem they were welcomed156 by the assembly and the apostles and the elders, and reported all things that God did with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees, believers,

saying, It is necessary to circumcise them and charge [them] to keep the law of Moses' (vers. 4, 5).

The heart of the church beat truly, but there were adversaries now within as well as without. It was not yet the conference, but meetings preliminary to it, where the wonderful works of God by the gospel drew out sympathy or opposition among those at Jerusalem who bore the Lord's name. Those who at this time resented the liberty of grace are expressly said to have believed. The crisis, therefore, was grace. Unity — unity not merely by-and-by in heaven, but now on earth — is the blessed privilege and the inalienable responsibility of the body of Christ, the assembly. There was no such unhappy wish as to forestall the due place by dealing with the question where Paul and Barnabas had especial and commanding influence, and then arguing on the church's unity to compel the communion of the assembly in Jerusalem and of course everywhere else. Yet Antioch might have been plausibly set forward as the only proper place to discuss and determine a question which so intimately concerned the Lord's glory among the Gentile believers. For not from Jerusalem but from Antioch were those ambassadors of Christ sent forth who had been the great pioneers in the missionary work of the Holy Spirit. Self or party could have furnished abundant reasons; but Christ held His place, which first sought His will and then made all saints dear, even those who were creating trouble by their lack of grace, lowliness, and intelligence. Thus the snare was avoided by which Satan sought even then to scatter and make a Jewish church apart from the Gentile; or, at the least, by leaving out the assembly in Jerusalem the apostles, and the elders, to begin a separate course at Antioch, which

would end in division ere long, if not immediately. But grace and truth prevailed, the respect due to all those whom the Lord had honoured and, as we have seen the particular principle of dealing with evil in its root, and not merely its fruits.

It was, I presume, at this juncture that the apostle, as he tells us in Gal. 2:2-10, set the gospel he preached to the Gentiles before those of reputation in private. It was then they saw that he had been entrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision, even as Peter with that of the circumcision; and that James, Cephas, and John gave to Paul and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship according to that partition of the work which the Lord had already marked out for all that had eyes to discern. This was of the utmost moment to state in the Epistle; but it was outside the public history and independent of the council which is the Spirit's object in the chapter before us. The independence of Paul's mission and work does not enter into view here, whereas in the letter to the Galatians it was of capital moment, and the decrees of the council are not named where they could have no just place, and their mention might have wrought only mischief. How truly, in the New Testament as in the Old, to everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven! Above, such distinction is uncalled for, where all is light, peace, and love, to God's glory.

It seems evident that much was done before the council. The opposition of the judaizing party had come out fully and distinctly from the time the apostles of the Gentiles had been received by the assembly, as it had wrought since the baptism of Cornelius and his household. Naturally the public recital of what God had done in Asia

Minor provoked their prejudices yet more. What occurred privately is not stated here; but we know from the early verses of Gal. ii. that it was of high moment.

What is reported in Acts 15 had for its prime object the repression of Jewish feeling and the distinct recognition of the Gentiles who believed on common ground with the Jewish disciples. The decrees that were ordained by the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem had the greatest weight in that point of view. But, in writing to the Gentile assemblies, the apostle takes the high ground of grace, and proves the incompatibility of a fleshly ordinance, however venerable or instructive, with the truth of a dead and risen Saviour as a ground of justification before God. In that grand scheme, wherein God Himself has wrought for guilty and lost man in the cross and blood of His Son, circumcision made with hands wholly vanishes away. And the Gentile believers, dead in their offences and the uncircumcision of their flesh, Christ quickened together with Him, no less than the Jewish faithful, having forgiven us all the offences. The handwriting written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, He blotted out and took out of the way, nailing it to the cross (Col. 2:13-15).

We can understand how truly it was of God, thus to confront and set aside all Gentile inclination for ordinances by the teaching of the truth of Christ, which had buried the question in His grave and given the Christian a new place in Him, to which the flesh never had, nor can have, a claim. The decrees had their place and season most suitably while the early Jews who believed were objects of the patience of God: but the apostolic Epistles treat the question on a deeper foundation and with higher associations, which abide for

ever. But it is highly instructive to notice that the apostle was not behind others in honouring and using the decrees, which are not even mentioned in the final discussion of the case for the edification of the church in general.

‘And the apostles and the elders were gathered together to see about this matter. And when there had been much questioning, Peter stood up and said to them, Brethren (lit. Men-brethren) ye know how that from early days God chose among you157 that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And the heart-knowing God bore them witness, giving [them]158 the Holy Spirit, even as to us also, and He put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why tempt ye God, that ye should put a yoke on the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe159 that through the grace of the Lord Jesus160 we shall be saved in like manner as they’ (vers. 6-11). Here we have the opening of the council. None but the apostles and elders are mentioned as gathered together. It was emphatically for their decision, but assuredly not without the presence and concurrence of the assembly, as we know from verse 22, not to speak of verse 12; and this of course as a reality, not a mere form which Christianity forbids. But God would have the positive seal of the highest authority in the eyes even of the remonstrants. Hence the prominent mention throughout of the apostles and elders, while it cannot be doubted that the assembly was present and free to take part. It was a matter in which every soul had a real interest but in which the judgment of the wisest was particularly needed. And One wiser than any took His guiding part

here (ver. 28), Whose personal presence we have seen to be sedulously acknowledged throughout this entire Book, as indeed it is characteristic of the church of God according to the scriptures. The Holy Ghost was there and was counted upon for guidance to the glory of Christ.

This, however, did not preclude discussion. Verse 7 lets us know that there was much debate or questioning. No doubt it was sorrowful and humiliating that there should be such disputation, even in the presence of the apostles, but the fact is plain and is calmly recorded by the Holy Spirit, which should convince not a few how far their notion of ecclesiastical order differs from primitive history. Even in apostolic days we see how liberty prevailed though flesh undoubtedly took advantage of it. To destroy the liberty because of its abuse were a remedy worse than the disease; and thus it is with Christendom bound in fetters of brass for ages, and denouncing true liberty as licence. Human rules have rendered the scriptural state of things just as impossible against good as against evil. But faith, when directed to God’s revelation in this, can never rest satisfied short of subjection to scripture, and the rather as the Holy Spirit was promised to abide with us for ever.

The apostles, it is evident, bore patiently with the difficulties and even disputes of their less discerning and more prejudiced brethren. They were strong in the grace that is in Christ. They had His glory livingly before their souls. They sought not lordship over the faith of their brethren, but that others should stand by faith even as they stood. As the grace and truth of Christ faded in men’s hearts, ecclesiastical authority became an idol or self-importance a snare. Such was, such is, no

small part of the present ruined state of the church: no one contends that there was perfection even in apostolic days, still less can one look for perfection now even within the most circumscribed sphere. But every faithful soul is bound to stand for the Lord's honour according to the written word, and to eschew whatever is opposed to God's order as well as to doctrinal truth and personal holiness. The denial of such a responsibility is in substance not only a sin but antinomian in principle, no matter whose be the names or what the fair-spoken pleas to excuse the unfaithfulness. It is easy to point out grievous shortcoming even where a truthful stand is made. But those who point it out with complacency fail in this very matter to exhibit the Spirit of Christ, and will never be able to justify human methods in God's church, even if they succeeded in carrying them out ever so successfully. How much more worthy to do better according to the word what they blame for being done so feebly! Is it uncharitable to say that to act themselves according to the word is far from their purpose, which is simply to discredit those who do seek it?

Peter then reminds all of his mission to Joppa, where the Gentiles received the gospel through him as God's first and apostolic instrument. Most powerfully does he urge God's dealings with them, 'the heart-knowing God' bearing witness to them in the gift of the Holy Spirit, uncircumcised as they were, nay, further, that He put no distinction between the Jewish and the Gentile believers, seeing that His purification is of the heart by faith. For this a rite avails nothing. 'Now, therefore, why tempt ye God'? Their prejudice, in itself, and specially if maintained, was a real disbelief of God's word and acts.

It was putting a yoke of law upon the neck of the disciples, which none in the past or present could bear: a circumcised man was debtor to do the whole law. For, introduced in glory as it was, it is a ministry of death and condemnation. The gospel believed is salvation through the grace of the Lord Jesus, Who bore our penalty and blotted out our sins in His blood. This is grace indeed, where all the guilt was ours and all that availed for our forgiveness and deliverance was His, to the vindication of that God, His God and Father, Whom we had rebelled against or lived without. In reality we knew Him not as He is, believing the lie of Satan rather than the truth of God. We did our own will and gave Him no credit for love, though He so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth should not perish but have everlasting life. But now we have seen the Son and believed in Him. His grace in suffering for our sins, the Just for the unjust, has made us both ashamed of ourselves and acquainted with God; and He is love. ‘Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us’ (1 John 3:16).

Formed by that grace, it is remarkable that Peter says here, ‘we believe that we Jews shall be saved in like manner as they (Gentiles)’. The natural phrase for a Jew would have been, ‘They in like manner as we’; but grace reigns and Peter says, ‘We, in like manner as they’. How worthy of the gospel! This was not Simon Bar-Jonah left to himself, but it was Peter — a true rock-man. Flesh and blood had not prompted the thought or word but the Father Who is in heaven.

Peter had made an admirable introduction and his argument was the reflection of the grace of the Lord Jesus. It was well and worthy that the apostle of the

circumcision should so speak not merely from personal experience but from the sovereign choice of God. We can understand the effect: ‘And all the multitude kept silence.’ None could doubt the strong Jewish prejudice of Peter, no more could they question now his assertion of liberty from the law for the Gentiles. But there was another reason for keeping silence. ‘And they hearkened unto Barnabas and Paul rehearsing what signs and wonders God wrought among the Gentiles by them’ (ver. 12). Here there ought not to be a hesitation that ‘all the multitude’ must take in not merely the apostles and the elders but the assembly. This seems certain from verse 22, whatever may be our judgment of the true reading in verse 23. It is interesting to note that the signs and wonders are said to have been wrought of God by Barnabas and Paul, whereas in verse 4 the more general work of the Lord is said to have been all that God wrought with them. The signs and wonders were more external and they are viewed as mere instruments. ‘With them,’ implies more of fellowship and divine association than exercise of mere power. Such a statement must have had the most powerful effect on Jewish minds. God graciously gave in abundance what they would expect peculiarly in so novel a work among the Gentiles. His grace had fully provided for all emergencies beforehand.

‘And after they had held their peace, James answered saying, Brethren [Men-brethren] hearken to me; Simeon has rehearsed how God first visited the Gentiles to take out of [them] a people for His name’ (vers. 13, 14). This is a most important proposition in its way; it gives a separate character to the present work of God. It in no way denies that God had a line of saints in Israel, and before Israel, and what is more, outside Israel; but it

asserts a special gathering ‘gut’ at this present time, and it leaves no room for the vain thought, that even one nation, as a whole, shall be brought by the gospel to confess the Lord, still less that all nations shall be so changed. The truth is that God only proposes while Jesus is at His right hand to take out of all a people for His name. This is the church of God and it is as distinct from the ways of God before the cross as from those which are to follow the Lord’s appearing and reign by-and-by.

‘And to this agree the words of the prophets, as it is written; After these things I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen, and will build again its ruins and will set it up; so that the residue of men may seek out the Lord and all the nations upon whom My name is called, saith [the] Lord, Who maketh [all] these things known from the beginning of the world’ (vers. 15-18).

It is an error to suppose that these last words allude to the mystery of forming the believing Gentiles with the faithful Jews into one body, the church. Rom. 16:25, 26 and Eph. 3:5, 6 do refer to that mystery, but not our text which simply speaks of God’s gracious recognition of those of the nations that believe as His own, though Gentiles still, whether under the gospel now or in the future kingdom. Union with Christ and the Head as His body goes much farther, though said of Gentiles now as of believing Jews, but no Old Testament prophet reveals it. The prophetic writings of Rom. 16 and the prophets of Eph. 3 are New Testament exclusively.

It will be observed that the prophets are referred to generally, though none but Amos is quoted, and the object is general. James draws from their testimony,

proved expressly by the one cited, the principle of Gentiles as such having the Lord's name called upon them. So far were they of the nations from having to accept circumcision that the prophet speaks of all the Gentiles. This will be in the days of the kingdom as no Jew could deny. They will not become Jews any more than the Jews will become Gentiles, both will be blessed of the Lord in their respective positions when the Messiah reigns. It was absurd therefore to object to God's grace toward the Gentiles now, under the gospel, and in the church where is neither Jew nor Gentile, but Christ is all and in all.

The reading in verse 18 is somewhat doubtful, and even the version, which may mean 'Who doeth these things known from the beginning of the world.' The general sense is plain enough. Accordingly James gives his judgment: 'Wherefore my judgment is that we trouble not those who from the Gentiles turn to God, but write to them that they may abstain from pollutions of idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. For Moses from generations of old hath in every city those who preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath' (vers. 19-21).

'The pollution of idols' were meats offered to idols, as in verse 29. Cf. Dan. 1:8, Mal. 1:7, not to speak of Ecclus. xl. Bentley's conjecture of χοιρείας ('pork') for πορνείας is an instance of the great scholar's audacity and erudite ignorance (perhaps suggested by Bellonius' Observat. iii. 10 whom he cites in ver. 29). We may think it strange to see unclean sin classed with idolatrous sanction; but the Jew felt differently, and to the Gentile they were equally indifferent.

Thus it was going up rather to God's ways with Noah, than enforcing the law of Moses. Noah being a sort of head of mankind generally after the flood, Gentile liberty was thus secured, idolatry was intolerable, and so was fornication, however universal both among the nations. Abstinence from things strangled and blood brought in the recognition of God's taking account of man as fallen. God forbade both: the use of the creature was not forbidden to man, but God prohibited meddling with the special signs of death; life belongs to God, and it was forfeited through sin. As for the law, there was no reason why the church should busy itself in that direction: from generations of old Moses had in every city those that preach him. The synagogues at any rate had the law read there every sabbath. The Gentiles henceforth might well rejoice in the gospel.

It may be noticed by the way that no vote was taken, nor any equivalent measure. For it was no question of the will of man but of God. Who wrought by the Spirit to give holy wisdom and general concurrence.

'Then it seemed good to the apostles and elders with the whole assembly having chosen161 from among them to send men with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, Judas called162 Barsabbas and Silas, leading men among the brethren, having written by their hand, The apostles and the elder brethren163 to the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greeting. Whereas we heard that some who went out from us troubled you with words, upsetting your souls164; to whom we gave no commandment, it seemed good to us, having been of one accord165 to choose166 and send men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have given up their lives for the name of our Lord

Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, themselves also announcing by word the same things. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these necessary things: to abstain from things sacrificed to idols, and blood, and things strangled, and fornication; from which if ye keep yourselves ye shall do well. Farewell' (vers. 22-29).

It will be observed that the most ancient authorities open with a reading which is now accepted by almost all critics. This yields a sense rather more remote from ecclesiastical tradition than the ordinary text, where 'the elders' are distinguished sharply from 'the brethren' immediately following. The 'elder brethren', however, is a formula which exactly agrees with the state of things which was obtaining at Jerusalem. No doubt they were 'the elders' there, as we find them called in Acts 11:30, as well as in Acts 15:2, 6. They were the local authorities; but they appear not to have been chosen formally, as the elders undoubtedly were in the Gentile assemblies, by apostolic authority, direct or indirect; they seem rather to have acted simply from their experience and moral weight, as was usual among the Jews. This falls in remarkably with the peculiar expression employed here, 'the elder brethren', and harmonizes with the tone of Peter's address in 1 Peter 5:1-4.

But there is another remark to make of still more immediate and important application practically. Judas Barsabbas and Silas were sent with Paul and Barnabas, characterized as 'leading men among the brethren'. They were neither apostles on the one hand, nor were they elders or elder brethren on the other, but were for their fitness chosen by the council to visit Antioch. It is

the same expression which we find three times (vers. 7, 17, 24) in Heb. 13. The Revised Version, like the Authorized translates it ‘chiefs in Acts 15:22; but ‘those that had (or, ‘have’) the rule’ in Hebrews: ‘had’ for the departed chiefs, ‘have’ for such as still lived and laboured. They are not spoken of as elders, but seem to have been identified with the ministration of the word (ver. 7), rather than with oversight or presiding like the elders. This fact gives us clear insight, when duly recognized into the far greater liberty as well as variety of gift exercised in the apostolic church as compared with the straitness of modern Christendom I do not speak of sign-gifts, such as miracles and tongues, but of spiritual endowments given of Christ for the perfecting of the saints. Denominational arrangements on the worldly system of a salary, with the claims of an exclusive position, directly interferes with the Lord’s wild in this respect and destroys the beautiful liberty of the Spirit to the famishing (not the edification) of the body of Christ.

Yet it will be found by the attentive reader not only of the Acts of the Apostles but of their Epistles, that the principle and the practice of this free ministration in the assemblies is easily vouched for apart from local authority or official rank throughout the New Testament. Rom. 12:4-8 is plain. ‘Teaching’ and ‘exhorting’, and ‘ruling’, or ‘leading’, are spoken of as ‘gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us’ distinct from ‘prophecy’, as well as one from another. In the church or assembly according to God’s word there was and ought to be room for them all. It were the sheerest unbelief to assume that they are now extinct. Woe be to the

adversaries of the Holy Ghost who affirm such a falsehood to justify their system!

The reader can compare also 1 Cor. 12 and 1 Cor. 14 throughout, as well as 1 Cor. 15:1-21, Gal. 6:6, Eph. 4:7-16, Phil. 1:14, Col. 2:19, 1 Thess. 5:12, 13, 2 Tim. 2:2; 1 Peter 4:10, 11; 3 John 7, 8, which prove in the clearest manner the full opening in the assembly as well as towards the world for those suitably gifted which scripture maintains, and only persons like Diotrephes, as far as God's word speaks, dare to oppose and neutralize.

It is in vain to plead, as unbelief blindly does, that such largeness and liberty were only suited to the apostolic day. For this really gives the highest sanction to such free action of the Holy Ghost. If inspired men, if the highest gifts that God ever set in the church, did not hinder but help on every form of gracious ministry, how can men in avowedly inferior position nowadays justify their opposition? None but the most prejudiced will contend that the ordinary gifts of edification fail. None but enthusiasts will deny that the sign-gifts, which ushered in the present economy, are extinct. Not so those, thank God, that are given by the ascended Christ unto the work of ministering, save such as were for laying the foundation (Eph. 2:20) which once laid was laid for ever.

We may remark in the letter of the council that the order is 'Barnabas and Paul' (ver. 25) as in verse 12, whereas earlier in the chapter as in verse 2, and later as in verse 35, and subsequently, it is 'Paul and Barnabas'. The feeling of the saints in Jerusalem expressed itself in the former way, as was the feeling elsewhere in the early days of the great apostle's testimony. Compare Acts

11:30; Acts 12:25; Acts 13:2, 7. But Acts 13:13, marks a great change, as we see in verses 43, 46, 50 (but not Acts 14:14). The reader of the Old Testament may find a similar principle in Ex. 6:13, 20, 26 and 27. In the order of nature it is ‘Aaron and Moses’; in sovereign grace it becomes ‘Moses and Aaron’. The author of the Old and the New is the same, and can only be God Himself working in man through His unerring Spirit.

This was the only council which was entitled to say, ‘It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us.’ If others have imitated the language, it is but profanity. Yet it was not an ecumenical assembly at all, but simply the assembly at Jerusalem where the apostles and local elders met together to consider the matter. The decision was most rightly taken there, whence the evil had sprung, and where the apostles were, Paul and Barnabas going up for the purpose. It was they with the whole assembly at Jerusalem who decided for the liberty of the Gentile converts. How different and disastrous it must have been had it been a council at Antioch, even though the decision had been the same! It is of all consequence that the way as well as the end be of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with the word of God. So it was with this council, and we hear no more of the ‘much’ discussion or questioning which had agitated the brethren before the council. Judas and Silas were sent as the most unequivocal witnesses of the decision at Jerusalem that Barnabas and Paul might thence have a support above all question. The power of divine grace had thus wrought in truth and righteousness for the name of Jesus; and there was a great calm.

There was no such portentous error as a portion of the assembly (though in Jerusalem exceedingly numerous)

deciding for itself alone then, the other portions following suit and lastly, all who objected to the fraud and force of the transaction jostled and declared outside in the city, with the like course pursued throughout the country. No wonder that breaches must be created by so gross a departure from the word, even if the object had not been partiality to a favourite preceded by unrighteous oppression. At the council in Jerusalem, as love wrought for Christ's glory so righteousness was the result, and unity throughout was maintained. Nobody thought of another judgment of the question, either in other parts of Jerusalem or anywhere else. God honoured His own principles in His word, grace triumphed, and the saints at large, however previously alienated, owned and rejoiced in the blessing, where appearances had threatened a storm of evil omen to all who valued the gospel.

But the ecumenical councils anathematized individuals and forced divisions far and wide. In this they succeeded; for nothing is so easy as to scatter the saints. To allay fleshly violence, to conciliate the alienated, to repress party, needs grace and truth wielded by the Lord: what was so rare at these councils (as the patience of Christ)? Will and passion reigned more humblingly and bitterly than in the political sphere.

Even the first and most important of these 'general councils' was convened by the Emperor Constantine, though an unbaptized man! to be held at Nicea. The number of western delegates was ridiculously small, as indeed it ever was at all the councils in the East. Later, when the popes exercised the power of the emperors, the eastern bishops were wholly absent. Thus the claim to be 'ecumenical' was a nullity, and most evidently after

the West quarrelled with the East, for thenceforward only the Latin party attended. Thus God took care that, as the departure became complete and evil was enforced by man's will, unity should be manifestly at an end, though none were so loud and arrogant in their claim of it as those who in their blind zeal had done most to destroy the testimony to it.

The scene now changes to Antioch, whither the chosen envoys repair with Paul and Barnabas.

'They then having been let go, went down unto Antioch, and having gathered the multitude delivered the letter. And when they had read it they rejoiced at the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being themselves also prophets, exhorted the brethren with much discourse and strengthened [them]. And having continued a time, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto those that sent them' (vers. 30-33).

At Antioch was the assembly where the Holy Ghost had exercised His sovereign rights in making good the glory of Christ by calling and separating His servants. It was there that Satan had sought to judaize by legal influence derived from Jerusalem. And now that the assembly in Jerusalem had repudiated and cast out that leaven of Pharisaism, Antioch is the first Gentile assembly to hear that grace had triumphed in the very circle whence the evil had spread. The multitude assembled, the letter was delivered, and, when it was read, 'they rejoiced at the consolation'.

Alas! it has been rare in ecclesiastical history when such is the fruit of 'decrees'; for they are in general a dreary record of anathemas, and, like Ezekiel's roll, lamentation and mourning and woe are written there.

Here the gracious power of the Spirit was at work, whatever the adversaries; and edification resulted, not destruction. There was no selfish design, still less a purpose to scatter. The word of God was proved to tally with the ways of His mercy, and the Holy Spirit bound all together, great or small, in giving emphasis and freedom to the gospel in its widest range. Those whose prejudice would have fettered and really corrupted its character, stood abashed and silent, however obstreperous they might have been before. Those who simply desired to hold fast grace, 'rejoiced at the consolation', which was the sweeter because the material of it came from Jerusalem.

'And Judas and Silas, being themselves also prophets, exhorted the brethren with much discourse and confirmed them.' We cannot but see the blessed liberty of ministry even where apostles were present. Clerical rights, and personal jealousies? had no place yet. The brethren accordingly confirmed all, as might be looked for, through these ample witnesses, whose one desire for all was growth through the truth. It was the same principle at work here? which was developed years afterwards in 1 Cor. 12, 14, as indeed the New Testament knows none other according to God. After some time Judas and Silas were dismissed in peace 'unto those that had sent them'? not merely 'unto the apostles?, as in the later copies and some early versions? the more important of which join the ancient in omitting verse 34 of the Text. Rec. as reflected in the Authorized Version. It was probably an insertion due to an inference from verse 40? which is as easy to account for as it is hard to conceive? the best leaving it out if

genuine. Silas may have returned, instead of abiding, which last does not well agree with verse 33.

‘But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch teaching and evangelizing, with many others also, the word of the Lord’ (ver. 35). Here again we have a plain scripture fully confirming the large and active ministry of the word which characterized these early days. If it be answered that such simplicity was suited to days of testimony before Christianity became an institution established here below, the reply is that the mischief lies there exactly. Christianity ought never to be other than a pilgrimage of faith, and never to have become a thing settled in the earth like judaism. Communion with Christ and separation from the world are the necessary conditions of fidelity. Our only right establishment will be the holy city Jerusalem? coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, in the day of Christ’s appearing. Till then neither ease nor honour nor peace nor power in the world, but, as the apostle says, boasting in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom the world is crucified to each, and each of us to the world. Hence ministry is in scripture no question of worldly rank or emolument (though the labourer is worthy of his hire) but of devoted and loving service according to the gift of Christ.

Here we cannot do better than introduce an incident of the liveliest but withal painful interest, the collision between the great apostle of the circumcision and the younger but still greater apostle of the Gentiles (Gal. 2:11 et seq.). There seems no real reason to doubt that it occurred at Antioch about this very time after the council of Jerusalem and before the departure of Barnabas, and so it is understood by Ussher (Works, xi.

51), as by others of the greatest weight of old as now. Yet as a fact never was a plain matter so distressingly perverted than by respectable ancients, never greater anxiety to alter its time among recent writers, some of whom prefer an earlier, others a later, date. The real moral is the reluctance of men to bow to the truth, which is all the more impressive if we give due weight to the time when it happened. Certainly man is not exalted thereby, but God Who does not fail of raising up an adequate testimony to His own glory.

No less a man than the chief of the twelve, after all that grace had done failed to walk straightforwardly according to the truth of the gospel; and having sinned publicly, he was publicly reproved for a compromise so dangerous, and for an inconsistency in his case most glaring. ‘But when Cephas came unto Antioch, I resisted him face to face, because he was condemned. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he drew back and separated himself fearing those of the circumcision; and the rest of the Jews also dissembled with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw them not walking straightforwardly according to the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before all, If thou being a Jew livest Gentile-wise and not Jew-wise, how dost thou compel the Gentiles to judaize? We, Jews by nature and not sinners from among Gentiles, yet knowing that a man is not justified by works of law but only through faith of Jesus Christ, even we believed in Christ Jesus…’ (Gal. 2:11-16).

One can see on the one hand what a handle was given to enemies not only by the circumcision itself but yet more

by the indelible page of inspiration; as on the other hand we may be sure the Holy Spirit would never have thus recorded it for ever unless it were due to God's glory and a most needed lesson for the highest of the Lord's servants through all time. And so we learn how Porphyry chuckled over both (Hieron. vii. 371) and Marcion turned it to his Gnostic account (Tertull. Adv. Marcionem, etc.) as the author of the Clementines to his malignant aspersion of the apostle Paul.

But there is incomparably more to humble a serious Christian in the way the truth was evaded save by very few. Clemens Alex. is mentioned by Eusebius H.E. i. 12 as authority for the notion that the Cephas in question was not Peter but one of the seventy (!) a notion which spread of old and has not quite disappeared from modern times. Far more weighty are those who condescended to the still baser idea of Origen that the dispute was a mere feint promoted knowingly by both Paul and Peter in which the latter plays the errorist in order to be crushed the more effectually by the former! The greatest preacher of Constantinople, Chrysostom, more than once advocates this monstrous figment; as did Jerome with his usual keenness. With such a representation Augustine dealt worthily, arguing that to accept inspired men's acting a falsehood was to shake the entire authority of scripture. The correspondence is characteristic of each, and may be seen in the Epistolary portion of their works. Jerome was neither humble nor magnanimous enough to sing the palinode to which Augustine had at first invited him, but his authorities, real or assumed, as well as his threats of crushing his adversary under the weight of his own blows, did not deter the Bishop of Hippo from an overwhelming

overthrow of the case alleged and a faithful vindication of the plain bearing of God's word, which in fact ought never to be called into question for one moment.

Thenceforward Peter vanishes from inspired history. This is the last of his acts noticed, though both his Epistles appeared much later. It is affecting and solemn that so it should be; but so it was. People think it strange after being so used and honoured — after Pentecost, Caesarea, and the council in Jerusalem quite recently. But the fear of man was ever a snare to Peter; nor was it the first time that he was rebuked for shrinking from the practical consequences of the truth in this world.

'But after certain days Paul said to Barnabas, Let us return now and see after the brethren in every city wherein we announced the word of the Lord, how they fare. And Barnabas was minded to take with [them] John also that was called Mark; but Paul thought good not to take with [them] him that withdrew from them from Pamphylia and went not with them unto the work. And there arose a sharp feeling, so that they parted one from another; and Barnabas taking Mark sailed away unto Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. And he passed through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the assemblies' (vers. 36-41).

Alas! further sorrow was not far off; and the ardent desire of the apostle Paul to visit the young assemblies in Asia Minor gave occasion to it. For Barnabas, already damaged by the influence of Peter, set his heart on taking with them John Mark, his cousin. Paul had not forgotten his formerly forsaking the work, its toils and its disagreeables, its shame and the self-abnegation it

entails, hence he set his face against such a companion, till grace had wrought complete restoration in self-judgment and devotedness without stint. Good a man as was Barnabas and attached to his honoured companion, this proved too much for his present state which resented Paul's estimate as severe and beyond measure. But honey, however sweet in itself, was an element forbidden in an offering to the Lord (Lev. 2:11), and Barnabas should have remembered that his natural tie was not favourable to a righteous judgment in the point of difference. Certain it is that there arose a sharp feeling between those blessed servants of the Lord 'so that they parted one from another', never more to join in common labours. It is not that there ceased on Barnabas' side earnestness in the work or the blessing of the Lord; and the apostle Paul speaks of him with nothing but warm affection and respect in subsequent allusions. Further, it is the joy of grace to hear of Mark owned in the Lord's service, put forward by the apostle where the lack of such a recognition might have stood in his way, and this with peculiar appreciation in the latest Epistle he ever wrote (2 Tim. 4:11). Lastly, it was this very Mark who, I doubt not, purchased to himself a good degree and signal honour in being the inspired witness of our Lord's ministry. Who could enter so deeply as Mark into the wonders of a gospel service where glory shone out of the clouds of unequalled humiliation without one shade of failure, where grace reigned unwaveringly in the midst of sore trial and continual provocation with not a single comfort save from above?

So 'Barnabas taking Mark sailed away unto Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.' It seems plain that

Barnabas, beloved as he was, failed at this moment to carry the conscience of his brethren with him. Paul on the other hand was once more accorded, and Silas with him, that mark of united recommendation to the grace of the Lord, which he and Barnabas enjoyed on their first mission to the Gentiles from Antioch (Acts 13:2, 3; Acts 14:26). It is almost needless to remark how unfounded is the assumption that ‘ordination’ is in question here: the renewed mention shows how little they understand the mind of the Lord who are in quest of such perverted efforts to sanction old wives’ fables, and overlook the grace which identified the brethren that tarried by the stuff with the mightier champions that went down to the battle.

Another feature of interest to note is that, while ministry is of individual faith, this does not hinder one of superior discernment choosing another as companion in work; as the Lord had Himself sent out His servants, both twelve and seventy, two and two before His face. Such a choice is scriptural; election of a minister in the word by an assembly is wholly unknown to the word.

We are meant to observe too that not a word more is said historically of Barnabas, who with his kinsman sailed off to his native isle. Of Paul it is written that ‘he passed through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the assemblies’ (ver. 41). The ‘rite’ of confirmation has no real source in God’s word; but His servants were diligent in strengthening the faith of the saints. They rightly felt that the truth is best learnt within, where practice illustrates and develops principle. Church action where living and true is the ready comment on scripture, and continual teaching draws attention to details as well as to the truth as a whole in the person of

Christ. Thus are the assemblies confirmed according to God.

154 The critical or aoristic form as in ABCD and many cursives, is preferable. The Text. Rec. though largely supported implies continuance or habit, which does not apply here.

155 Text. Rec. follows most in omitting

τε ‘both’, which the more ancient authorities insert.

156 The critical reading is stronger than that of Text. Rec.

157 Most with Text. Rec. read ‘us’.

158 The pronoun here is doubtful, the sense is clear.

159 The Sinaitic, et al., have the strange error of the future here.

160 ‘Christ’ in the Text. Rec. has some authority, but neither much nor the best.

161 ‘Chosen’, verses 22 and 25, in the Authorized and other Versions is ungrammatical. G. Wakefield is half right, half wrong.

162 Text. Rec. with some authority gives ‘surnamed’, as in Authorized Version.

163 The common text follows EHLP, et al., as opposed to ABCD et al., and probably was framed to suit verse 22; it was a mere clerical error.

164 Text. Rec. with many MSS. adds ‘saying that ye must be circumcised and keep the law’. The most ancient authorities omit.

165 The Authorized Version renders this in a way of no bearing here.

166 ‘Chosen’, verses 22 and 25, in the Authorized Version and others is ungrammatical. G. Wakefield is half right, half wrong.

Acts 16

The apostle has now fully and freely entered on his fresh missionary excursion, as well as on his visitation of the assemblies already formed. Silas is his chosen companion, no longer Barnabas. All things work together for good in the hand of divine love; whilst governmentally each shall bear his own burden: grace does not fail, but moral responsibility is untouched also.

From Syria and Cilicia Paul journeys to Lycaonia. ‘And he came unto Derbe and unto Lystra, and, behold, a certain disciple was there, by name Timothy, son of a Jewish believing woman, but of a Greek father; who was borne witness to by the brethren in Lystra and Iconium. Him Paul would have to go forth with him, and he took and circumcised him because of the Jews that were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek’ (vers. 1-3).

Little is said of the other results from the apostle’s visit to Derbe and Lystra. Our attention is concentrated on a ‘young disciple’ there. He was therefore not converted at this time, but, doubtless, during the former visit of the apostle, who speaks of him as his ‘true child in faith’. Timothy he had begotten in Christ Jesus through the gospel. The circumstances were peculiar. He was the son of a believing Jewess, Eunice, but of a Greek father, with an exceptionally good testimony from the brethren in those parts. This led to a remarkable step on the part of the apostle: he circumcised him ‘on account of the Jews’ there, ‘for they all knew that his father was a Greek’ or Gentile.

Now this was in no way the requirement of the law, which, on the contrary, in strictness placed Timothy by his birth in a painful and outside position. It was really an act of grace on the part of the same apostle who would have utterly repelled the circumcision of Titus; for Titus was a Gentile. Still less is it inconsistent with the recent council at Jerusalem; for the question there was whether the Jewish yoke was to be placed on the Gentiles that believed. It was decided, we have seen, that no such compulsion was authorized or desirable. Here, it was the child of a Jewess against whom Jews would have had a feeling because of his father. In all probability the father was now dead, of whom we never hear as alive, and who in that case, might have perpetuated the uncircumcised condition of his son. If the father no longer lived, Paul could act the more freely, and the same champion for liberty who refused compulsion in the case of Titus, himself took and circumcised Timothy.

It is of great moment that we learn to submit our souls to the largeness of divine truth. The principles which governed the cases of Titus and Timothy were quite distinct, because their nature and circumstances were wholly different. But there was a centre in which the two principles found harmony. They were alike expressions of Christian liberty; in neither instance was the apostle under law but under grace. What can be more instructive for us? We are always liable to the exact reverse: flesh and law habitually work together, as on the other hand we are called to the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ.

We may learn from this to avoid and resist the notion that there can be but one principle to govern our

conduct. It is not so, if the relationships and the circumstances of the parties wholly differ. Wisdom in that case would rather seek from God's word the Spirit's instruction for our guidance in each case respectively. Nature and tradition constantly tend to a dead level, which is as far as possible from the wisdom of God, in which we are called to judge and act. A principle however true and sound, as for instance not to circumcise Titus, might entirely fail to meet Timothy's case whom grace circumcised to stop the mouths of Jews though the letter of the law would rather have put him away than circumcise him. Routine is sure to mislead in the things of God. An eye single to Christ and His grace will discover the true way, and grace knows where to be inflexible and when to yield. It was the wise procedure of one who, free from all made himself bondman to all that he might gain the more; who became to the Jews as a Jew in order that he might gain the Jews, to those under law as under law (not being himself under law) in order that he might gain those under law, to those without law as without law (not as without law to God but as lawfully subject to Christ) in order that he might gain those without law.

What an admirable lesson was this, practically, for Timothy, henceforth to be the companion and fellow-worker of the great apostle of the Gentiles, whatever the immense gap between them! The step, too, was taken in connection with his going forth with Paul who sought to cut off occasion from them that sought occasion. Grace where there is no demand can go far to meet such as have honest difficulties; whilst it resents and refuses every effort to impose what is unauthorized by God and is inconsistent with itself (1 Cor. 9:20, 21).

We may here recall the important facts for which we are indebted to the two Epistles which the apostle wrote long after to Timothy; for they really had the most influential bearing on the course which was opening for his young companion. First, there were prophecies which went before as to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:18, 1 Tim. 4:14), and this not only as marking him out but indicating the gift of God to be imparted. The history simply gives us the apostle's wish and mind as to him, but the apostle's letter shows that there were prophetic intimations, presumably from more than one, respecting the work to which he was divinely designated; not unlike the way in which Barnabas and Saul had been called and separated to their first missionary work and journey. Even the apostle did not act without these remarkable interventions, of which he reminds his beloved child when he first wrote to enforce the commission entrusted to him and to define his duties in that charge, 'that thou mightest war by them (i.e., the prophecies) the good warfare', though this would be vain without 'having faith and a good conscience' It would brace his spirit to remember that God had designated him to a work of such difficulty and peril.

Secondly, a positive gift of God, or cavrisma, had been communicated to Timothy by the imposition of the apostle's hands (2 Tim. 1:6), the elderhood having also joined in laying on their hands at the same time (1 Tim. 4:14) as not only witnesses but as having fellowship with the apostle's act. The believer in God's word needs no argument to prove that such a power of the Spirit is wholly distinct from any qualities previously possessed by Timothy, though no doubt all he had before was the vessel in and through which the gift wrought. But such a

phrase, like so many common among evangelical, as well as Catholic, ‘sanctified intellect’, is wholly misleading, because it expresses the error of human nature rehabilitated or improved by grace, denies the judgment of the fleshly mind in the cross to which faith thoroughly bows, and leaves out the special energy of the Spirit according to the gift of Christ. This Timothy then received and in the way Scripture describes: which none should doubt because of the powerless, not to say profane, imitation of some bodies in Christendom from early days till now. With Timothy it was a special way for a special work. It is error and ignorance to generalize it, and to assume that others did not receive gifts, carivsmata, without any such laying on of hands; as it is also to aver that the Holy Ghost was given to the faithful only after a similar sort. That He was so given in peculiar circumstances by imposition of apostolic hands is true; that it was always so is to neglect the still weightier instances of Acts ii. and x. So with the gifts; they were given in sovereign grace without any such act ordinarily; and this is of all moment for the saints at all times since, when there were and could be no apostles to lay hands on any. But superstition is as blind as rationalism, though seemingly more reverent.

‘And as they passed through the cities, they delivered them the decrees to observe, which had been ordained by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem’ (ver. 4). This is particularly recorded of the apostle and his companions; and it is the more to be noticed because, when the questions discussed at the council came up for solution in the Epistles these decrees are never referred to. Here again we have to discern the wisdom of God. The decrees were given where Jewish influence

prevailed. They were of the highest value to settle the doubts of those who looked up to Jerusalem and especially to the apostles and elders there. If in Jerusalem the chiefs and the church as a whole condemned wholly the imposing of circumcision on Gentiles, who were entitled to press it elsewhere? Certainly not such as had reverence for those whom the Lord had set up in Jerusalem.

In the First Epistle to the Corinthians and in that to the Galatians, the question is argued on the broad ground of the gospel, without reference to the decrees. Here again there is no inconsistency whatever. The decrees were admirably in season and place for those to whom they were given; and Paul was conspicuously zealous in giving assemblies already formed where Jews abounded these decrees to observe. But when he wrote his Epistles in the subsequent exercise of his apostolic power, he solves the question altogether apart from the decision at Jerusalem by the truth of Christ and His work now fully revealed.

‘The assemblies then were being strengthened in the faith and increased in number daily’ (ver. 5). Thus did the Lord use the action of grace for helping on His testimony. Agitation is eminently destructive not only of the confirmation of the soul but the going forward of the work among fresh converts. Faith is nourished by grace, not by questions gendering strife, any more than ‘by meats’ as the apostle somewhat contemptuously speaks of Jewish controversies, ‘wherein they that walked were not profited’ (2 Tim. 2:23; Heb. 13:9). And grace is inseparable from Christ Who is ‘the same yesterday, and today, and for ever’. Questions apart from Him are met by diverse and strange teachings which only distract the

senses. It is good that the heart be established by grace. This was what the apostle walked in to the profit of those that heard him. Faith was strengthened and fresh assemblies sprung up more and more, or, at the least, their numbers increased daily. Such is the beautiful picture drawn by the Spirit of God; and such the encouragement given to the apostle with his companions in labour.

We know how universal was the field opened for the work of the gospel: Go ye into all the world, said the Master to the apostles, and preach the gospel to the whole creation (Mark 16:15). This general order, which ever abides, does not, however, supersede the direction in detail which the Holy Spirit knows how to supply to the Lord's glory. He will have the servant subject to Christ and exercised livingly about His will: a matter of the deepest moment for all who would serve Him thoroughly, and as obligatory now as of old though we may lack some of the means of intimation. This truth remarkably appears in what follows as it does elsewhere.

'And they167 went through the Phrygian and Galatian country, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia, and 168having come over against Mysia, they attempted to proceed into169 Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus170 permitted them not; and passing by Mysia they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul by night: There was a certain man of Macedon standing and beseeching him and saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us. And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia,171 concluding that God172 had called us to preach the gospel to them. Having therefore

sailed away from Troas we took a straight course unto Samothrace, and on the morrow unto Neapolis, and thence unto Philippi, which is a city of Macedonia, first of the district, a colony. And we were in this city staying certain days' (vers. 6-12).

It is not only in the unconverted that man's will is treated by scripture as evil: the believer now, as living in the Spirit, is exhorted to walk in the Spirit, and the power is vouchsafed in the Spirit given, though His power will not act in positive blessing save to Christ's glory in dependence on Him and obedience to His word. So it is of high moment to remember that it is not otherwise in the work of the Lord, where the labourer is constantly exposed to the danger of being guided by fair appearances or of following what pleases his own mind, or it may be the suggestions of others whom he respects. The Lord is jealous, as valuing our subjection and fidelity and confidence in Himself, that we look to Him Who does not fail to act by the Spirit that His will be known and done. The work is His, and He only is adequate to its direction in gracious wisdom and power: we are at best only His journeymen in that work. How happy to work as well as walk by faith, guided by His eye and succoured no less than sent here or there by His grace! In a world given up to self-will and all its baneful ways, how sweet to Him that His servants do not forget their absent Lord any more than their own blessedness in having Him to make His will plain, that their hearts refer to Him, that their faith expects from Him all needed to glorify Him and to preserve themselves from straying!

So was the work of Paul and his companions ordered of the Lord, and it is here set out in the written word, that

we may labour in the same spirit of faith, and neither forego the like favour nor reduce scripture to a dead letter. ‘And they went through the Phrygian and Galatian country, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.’ The allusion to Phrygia and Galatia as the combined sphere of their visitation is full of interest as a fact; but how striking the absence of detail where our curiosity would have demanded a great deal! In the Epistle to the assemblies of Galatia we have not only the fruit of sowing the gospel seed there but circumstances revealed of high value and solemn warning. Of Phrygia we know scarce any particulars, save that Paul and Silas did then go through that region as well as Galatia, ‘having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia’.

Was this province of Asia then wholly barren? Was it hopeless soil? From the beginning of the gospel, witnesses thence (Acts 2:9, 10) had heard the mighty works of God spoken in their tongue and in that of Phrygia among many others, yet here Phrygia is visited, Asia is not, while in the all-wise direction of the Lord the region of Galatia and Phrygia sees the apostle going through it in order, ‘stablishing all the disciples’ and not evangelizing only (Acts 18:23). Also Paul visits Ephesus after Apollos had wrought there not in vain, and to his own learning the way of God more carefully, and there the apostle brings on the little nucleus of disciples into full Christian truth and privilege (Acts 19), and carried on the work for more than two years, first in the synagogue, then in the school of Tyrannus, so that, not the capital only but the province also, ‘all they that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks’, and that word, not without special powers

wrought of God by the hands of Paul, ‘mightily grew and prevailed’. He Who knew all hearts, and alone can employ any mouth to God’s glory, the Holy Spirit forbade their speaking the word in Asia now. Those who believe in man may show their real unbelief in God by cavilling at the present prohibition; those whose confidence is in His grace will admire His admirable care in leading to the right place of testimony then, and in working later in the place now prohibited when He deigned in His goodness to create a fruitful oasis if not more than one in that desert. He knows infallibly, as even an apostle did not, and He it is Who is still here to guide the work to the praise of the Name of Jesus. As He knows the time to sow, so He ensures a harvest at the right season.

Nor was this the only prohibition about the same time. For ‘having come over against Mysia, they attempted to proceed into Bithynia; and the Spirit of Jesus permitted them not’ (ver. 7). Here the evidence is as plain as possible to those who justly estimate scripture of the personal action of the Spirit in correction even of the apostle’s proposed movements. ‘They attempted to proceed into Bithynia’, where we know (1 Peter 1:1) sojourners of the dispersion, i.e., Christian Jews were, as well as in Galatia and proconsular Asia, but this was not now the mind of the Lord for His service. And an expression is employed, more than usually, though by no means uniquely, connecting the Spirit with the Lord, which has therefore so much the more appropriate force in the passage, ‘and the Spirit of Jesus permitted them not.’ The Spirit is as we all know a divine person and may be spoken of simply as the Spirit, or the Holy Spirit; He may be introduced in a general way as the Spirit or the Holy Spirit of God, or as the Spirit of the Lord, i.e.

Jehovah. Again, He may be specially designated, where truth required it, as the Spirit of the Father, of the Son, of Christ, or as here, of 'Jesus', in each case securing an appropriateness not to be reached otherwise. Scarce anything shows or produces more looseness of conception among Christians than the neglect of these fine and wonderful distinctions found in no other books with any approach to scripture, but found in every book of scripture where the subject matter admits of them and in perfection, whoever may be the inspired writer, and whenever written, so as to point to one unerring and divine Spirit, the true Author. 'The Spirit of Jesus' blends the personal interest of the glorified Man Whose Name it was their heart's desire and the great object of their life to make known, subject to His will, with the power of the Spirit Who is the energy that works in the new man.

'And passing by Mysia they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul by night: There was a certain man of Macedon standing and beseeching him and saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us. And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them' (vers. 8-10).

Thus the Lord helped His servant in a positive manner. They all needed direction for their work, and Paul alone saw the vision: a favour frequently shown him, and of the highest character, which no creature has a right to expect. Grace gave him revelations also. But though set in a very different place in the assembly the condition and wants of which are so far apart from the primitive state, God never fails for present difficulties. It is we who fail in waiting and counting on Him, though the

prime directory of His written word is complete as it was not then. But special honour was put on one who was behind none in position, and whose labours were most abundant and blessed. All were immediately impressed by the apostle's vision and turned their eyes and steps toward Macedonia.

But it is well to notice that the language is 'we', and not 'they' as heretofore. Luke thus modestly but without doubt lets us see that he at Troas joined the apostle's company. That the inspired writer was a personal witness from this point is surely not a slight matter; but no error can be more profound in principle than the human notion that a higher character begins to attach to his account. Not so: inspiration excludes all question of degrees of assurance or of authority. It is equally of God, whether the writer witnessed what he wrote, or not. The Spirit of God alone secures absolute truth, which no seeing, hearing, or research could effect. Man cannot rise to the divinely given, save as a receiver. He may be indefinitely exact but is necessarily human. God, as He knows all, communicates what is due to His glory in love to His own.

In fact there is no more minuteness in what is conveyed during the writer's presence. Conversations, differences, journeys, preachings, were given when he was absent, no less than when with the apostle's companions. How comforting this quiet evidence that in the inspired word we have to do, not merely with good men doing their best, but with a God Who cannot err or lie! He provides us with His account through man of these spiritually instructive facts. Later in the history we learn that they made a little stay in the Troad where at least there was an assembly (Acts 20); but there was no indecision now,

no tarrying by the way: the gospel must be preached forthwith in Macedonia.

‘Having therefore sailed away from Troas we took a straight course unto Samothrace, and on the morrow unto Neapolis, and thence unto Philippi, which is a city of Macedonia, first of the district, a colony. And we were in this city staying certain days’ (vers. 11, 12). The description is most exact. It would not have been true to call it the chief city or capital of Macedonia; but of that part or district it was: a Roman colony too, not a Greek, which had a somewhat important bearing on the incidents that follow, of which we have so graphic a sketch. There Roman armies had engaged in deadly strife, not with strangers, but with one another. There the fate of the moribund republic was decided. There the coming empire of the world began to dawn, an empire which was to last as no predecessor had done, though it had the unenviable distinction of contact with the Lord of glory not only in His despised birth but in His crucifixion of shame; as it alone, after succombing long and notoriously, is destined to live again for a brief but awful space of lawlessness closing in a vain, blasphemous and destructive opposition to His appearing from heaven in glory.

But there were far other and happier reasons which made the entrance of the gospel and the founding of the church in Philippi full of holy interest. The work began in face of an ensnaring spirit of evil and of an adverse unrighteous world, with singular simplicity, with joy rising high and loudly above sorrow and shame, with a display of divine grace no less than divine power. There was nothing exactly like this at Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, Rome, Thessalonica, though each no doubt had

characteristics of admirably suited and special favour. Philippi too went, not without severe trials and peculiar difficulties but as a whole in spiritual power, to ripe experience beyond known parallel without so painful a brand of declension as we know befell the once fair and bright assembly in Ephesus. God would have us learn how the good seed took root and bore fruit at Philippi. Let others boast in the old almanac of man's tale as vain and unreliable in the ecclesiastical as in the secular sphere. Here the believer can rest in the certain truth of God and profit by that which He Who knows all gives for our refreshment or our admonition. We see alas! how fading was that which grace made so good and true and faithful in its measure, for where is that assembly now? how was it in the next generation after Paul's Epistle to all the saints there? If it had stood as the Latin church, it had like Rome been but a pillar of salt with every truth falsified (save perhaps those elements which the Athanasian creed owns), and every way of grace changed into judaizing. This would have been but deeper dishonour of Christ; and the assembly at Philippi, as in almost all the apostolic plantations, has passed away, that men might learn, were they not blinded by worldly wisdom and the fleshly mind, that the power and even the truth of the church of God rests not in an ecclesiastical succession, but in the living energy of the Holy Spirit working in the bond of Christ's confessors who are worse than nothing as a witness if untrue to Him, who are just of price in God's sight as they do His will and reflect His grace.

The gospel entered Europe apostolically with genuine simplicity. Two inspired men were among those who introduced it, an apostle, the greatest of them indeed,

and a prophet not the least of them, or as he is popularly styled ‘the evangelist’, Luke. Very likely he may have been an evangelist in the true scriptural sense of the term. Certainly upon such as Paul and Luke were built the saints now called of God (Eph. 2:20), as to them was revealed the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:5). The foundation was well laid, even Jesus Christ; yet what a holy absence of pretension do we see here!

‘And on the sabbath day we went forth outside the gate173 by a river where174 prayer [or, place of prayer] was wont to be; and we sat down and spoke to the women that had come together. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, that worshipped God, heard, whose heart the Lord opened to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she was baptized and her house, she besought, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide. And she constrained us’ (vers. 13-15).

There was no synagogue, it would seem, in the city, once called ‘The Fountains’ but now Philippi from his name who had annexed the district from Thrace to his ancestral Macedonia, and drew largely the treasures of this world from gold mines in the neighbourhood. By that river-side outside the city gate, among the women that assembled, one at least received richer treasure and so drank as to have within her a fountain springing up into eternal life. The good physician who writes was not a painter save graphically. Think of a philosopher, or even a rabbi, speaking to the women of what God is and gives, of the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ! Even the disciples once on a time wondered that the Lord talked with a woman, for He first vindicated the solemnity of a lost soul, the blessed value of a saved

one, be it of man or woman. And here the choicest of His servants is found, not alone but with a few of kindred mind and heart, ministering Christ and dispensing the mysteries of God to the assembled women.

Among these one attracts our attention in the narrative, Lydia, of Thyatira, a seller of that dye for which these Lydians were far famed in Homer's day (Iliad. δ. 141), as 'the dyers' may be illustrated by the inscription found in the ruins of Thyatira. She was not an idolater, but a worshipper of God, and so betook herself to the little band of Jews that met on the sabbath for prayer, separate from the heathen corruptions around, at a river-side, a spot convenient for the Jews and made use of for purifying. This seems to decide that it was the little and less known Gangas, rather than the Strymon which was more remote. Lydia was hearing, and the Lord opened her heart to attend to the things spoken by Paul: she received Him that came by water and blood, believing on the name of Jesus Christ.

It is well to observe the special form of the work of grace in souls: two never seem precisely alike. It is not merely that men differ, but that the Spirit of God gives a fresh character in the case, while all had been once alike lost sinners, and the same Christ is all and in all. Each, however, has his own individuality, and God does not withhold honour from the weaker vessel but shares His joy in love by detailing the peculiar circumstances of such a one as here before us. No doubt her conscience was exercised, she repented toward God. If this had not been before, it was now, for there is no vital operation in the soul without that self-judgment which owns our sins and ruined state, and turns to God's mercy as the sole spring of saving hope. But the glad tidings or gospel of

God presents the Christ already dead and risen, that the guilty may have remission of sins not promised only but preached to them, and every believer may know himself justified from all things — exactly what the law could not effect for its most zealous votary But here we are not told of such pungent grief and anxiety as in the Jewish converts at Pentecost confronted with their guilt in rejecting their own Messiah; nor of such great fear as smote all that heard of the judicial death of Ananias and Sapphira nor of the great grace which multiplied disciples in the face of persecutions for such as taught and preached the Lord Jesus. The Lord wrought on Lydia, opening her heart to pay heed to the discourse of Paul. It was not prayer only that day, but God's answer in the testimony of grace which in Christ supplies every want and flows, yea, overflows, evermore to His glory.

Made a disciple, Lydia was baptized as became her (John 4:1). Such was the Lord's command to His servants. Only the males among the. Jews were circumcised; disciples, both men and women, were baptized (Acts 8:12). Not only Lydia was baptized but her household also: 'And when she was baptized and her house...' What is meant thereby? We do not hear of children or of husband; she may have been a widow. without a family or never married. She had a household, and we hear (ver. 40) of the brethren there, believers therefore, and probably not men only but women. Of little ones we hear nothing; and the divine account, which is full and minutely exact to admiration in other respects, not even implies anything of the kind, so that the temerity of tradition, of intellect, of will, that would from this account extract a ground for supposing infants

in this case at any rate, is as bold and manifest as unjustifiable.

Hence Meyer, the ablest modern commentator of the Lutheran body, says honestly, in opposition to all his ecclesiastical prejudices, ‘When Jewish or heathen families became Christians, the children in them could have been baptized only in cases in which they were so far developed that they could profess their faith in Christ, and did actually profess it; for this was the universal requisition for the reception of baptism: [see also vers. 31, 33; Acts 18:8]. On the contrary, if the children were unable to believe, they did not partake of the rite, since they were wanting in what the act pre-supposed. The baptism of children is not to be supposed as an apostolic institution, but arose gradually in the post-apostolic age, after early and long-continued resistance, in connection with certain views of doctrine, and did not become general in the church till after the time of Augustine. The defence of infant-baptism transcends the domain of exegesis, and must be given up to that of dogmatics.’ Others of high eminence might be added, themselves paedo-baptist, who frankly own that neither here, nor later in the chapter, nor in 1 Cor. 1 is there the least proof that any were baptized except confessors of Christ, and that the baptism of infants has no scriptural warrant.

But this by the way. Lydia’s heart, opened of the Lord, went out toward His servants. She ‘besought [us] saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide. And she constrained us.’ The love of Christ was there and made her, little knowing the value of her gracious importunity in His sight, to be a fellow-helper with the truth (3 John 8).

Another lesson of far-reaching practical moment ought to be evident: the profound indifference not only to souls but to the Lord in that refusal to ‘judge’, which pleases the flesh and characterizes the world-church, be it Catholic or Protestant, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, or aught else that is not based on the Christ of God confessed and the Holy Spirit given of God (Matt. 16:16-18; Acts 11:17). No doubt men plead that we must not judge, or that we must exercise a judgment of charity: both pleas alike are ignorant, perverse and evil. Certainly we ought never to be censorious, never to impute bad motives where evil conduct is not manifest. But it is equally unbelieving and heartless, for such as know that faith in God’s testimony to Christ is the turning point of the passage from death into life — life eternal, to abandon or neglect discrimination in this respect. Our solemn judgment, if guided by the word, is that death is the condition of all, our judgment of charity and our joy are, that they only live through and of and in Christ who by grace hear His word; as thereon we exhort them in His name that they should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto Him that for them died and rose again.

From such a judgment as this Lydia did not shrink but rather humbly challenged it as due to the Lord. Paul and his company acted on it, and the Holy Spirit has recorded it for our admonition. There was assuredly therefore no lack of love in Peter’s judging Simon the Samaritan from his own words, and this, though a baptized man, to be in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity (Acts 8:20-23). It was rather indeed the painful side, but in the circumstances absolutely indispensable, in that judgment of love which the

knowledge of God entails on His servants; and woe be to those who, to gratify the world or for selfish ease and advantage, relinquish so plain and indisputable a duty to their Master! This did not Peter any more than Paul.

‘And it came to pass as we were going unto prayer [or, the place of prayer], that a certain maid haying a spirit of Python met us, who brought her masters much gain by divinations. She, having followed Paul and us, cried, saying, These men are bondmen of the Most High God who announce to you [or, us] salvation’s way. And this she did for many days. But Paul, being distressed, turned and said to the spirit, I charge thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And it came out the same hour’ (vers. 16-18).

As the better authorities (ABCE, et al.) insert the article with ‘prayer’ in verse 16, it is allowed that ‘the place of prayer’ is the more likely meaning. But if so here, it would go far to commend the same sense in verse 13, the article being there properly absent as it was a previously unknown and unmentioned place. The incident recorded was weighty in itself and in its consequences. Satan essayed a new means of mischief, not assailing the gospel but patronizing it and this for many days. Distressed thereby the apostle at length turned and enjoined the evil spirit to leave her, which came to pass in the name of Jesus.

Alas! not so have the servants of the Most High God acted in Europe They have accepted, instead of eschewing, the favours of the enemy, to their own shame and ruin and to their Master’s dishonour. In Asia the gospel was resisted, calumniated, and persecuted. No Python followed its preachers, nor was the cry heard,

These men are bondmen of the Most High who announced to you salvation's way. Open opposition, not flattery, was the devil's way. But Europe later had no Paul to cast out the unclean spirit, an unholy compact at last prevailed, and servants of God claimed honour to Jesus from the homage of the world. But it was hollow lip-service, as the event in Philippi soon proved. The world is at enmity with God essentially and always; and nothing is so far from its prince's heart than the honour of His Son. A liar and its father, he hates detection; and his rage came out when the faithful apostle, who had at first slighted his overtures, cast out in Jesus' name the power from its instrument of imposture.

An act of such uncompromising decision as well as power roused the enemy acting on human covetousness. But it is well to note that the apostle did not act in divine energy till Satan's persistence made it a duty.

'And when her masters saw that the hope of their gain was gone,175 they laid hold on, and dragged Paul and Silas into the market-place before the rulers, and when they had brought them unto the praetors, they said, These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city, and set forth customs which it is not lawful for us to receive or practise, being Romans. And the crowd rose up together against them, and the praetors rent their garments off them, and commanded to beat [them] with rods. And, having laid many stripes on them, they cast [them] into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely, who, having received such a charge, cast them into the inner prison and secured their feet into the stocks' (vers. 19-24).

Defeated in his effort to mix himself up with God's work, the enemy flees to his ordinary and natural opposition through human interests and passions. Covetousness is a mainspring of the world's activity, 'covetousness, which is idolatry' (Col. 3:5). Those whose hope of gain vanished with the cast-out spirit lawlessly apprehended Paul and Silas, and dragged them into the market-place, where the local rulers then, even more than now, were found. It may be noticed that here only the inspired historian specifies the magistrates in Philippi with the Greek term which answers to praetors: a striking evidence of minute accuracy, for the city was a colony, and a colony was but Rome on a small scale, with its two chiefs (sometimes modified by need, but in general duumviri). We shall see the city governors of Thessalonica quite differently designated in the next chapter, but there too with similarly characteristic accuracy as here. Compare also Acts 13:7, 12; Acts 18:12; Acts 19:31 for other instances of such exactitude.

'And when they had brought them unto the praetors, they said, These men, being (ὑπάρχοντες) Jews (or, as Mr. Humphry suggests, "being Jews to begin with"), exceedingly trouble our city, and set forth customs which it is not lawful for us to receive or practise, being (ὄντες) Romans.' This was calculated, and no doubt intended, to arouse the mob, the more sensitive on the score of Roman pride and privilege, because they were not unmixedly Roman, and such as might be Romans, though tolerant of other religionists one with another, were jealous of anything like aggression on themselves. The appeal was not in vain. 'And the crowd rose up together (i.e., with the masters of the dispossessed slave) against them, and the praetors, rending their

garments off them, commanded to scourge them with rods.' It may not be necessary to hold with Bengel that the duumvirs stripped Paul and Silas with their own hands; but the special expression employed (περιρήξαντες) and the general scope and intrinsic sense, exclude the notion that the magistrates rent (διαρρήσσω) their own clothes. It is certain that they gave command to beat them with rods, though uncondemned: an open violation of Roman law, which exposed themselves to severe punishment, had proceedings been instituted. 'And having inflicted on them many stripes, they cast [them] into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely, who, having received such a charge, cast them into the inner prison and secured their feet into the stocks.'

Such was man, civilized man, high and low, carried away into most manifest injustice, without the form even of trying the holy, harmless, and self-denying servants of the Lord, at the call of the basest who had lived by the oracles or divinations of their female slave under Satan's power.

Had God nothing to do?

'But about midnight, Paul and Silas in praying were singing praises to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and the bands of all were loosed' (vers. 25, 26). Could any facts more dearly indicate Whose purpose and hand had wrought on behalf of His injured ministers? An earthquake, men could readily argue, might happen, and with the most singular coincidence of circumstances; but who ever

heard of an earthquake so great as to shake, not windows or walls, not chains or bolts only, but the foundations of an extensive building? And withal so nicely adjusted as to cast down nothing, nor injure a soul! Only all the doors were forthwith opened, and everyone's bands were loosed! It was the same divine power which had delivered Simon Peter, though chained to two soldiers, on the eve of his execution (Acts 12); the same power which had extricated the apostles from a prison-house, shut in all safety, with the keepers standing at the doors (Acts 5).

Here a deeper purpose was in hand, and a great earthquake heralded it; and Paul and Silas, who had been praying to God in hymns, remained in the prison to declare His wonderful works; yea, those whose naturally strongest desire had otherwise been to make their escape and renew their lawless life were so overawed that not one stirred from the opened prison. It was the God of all grace, Who answered the prayers and praises of His prisoners, Who knew how to control the wicked, and Who was guiding His servants for His glory. For He was now about to do more, and most worthily of the name of His Son; and to do this so as to win to Himself as hardened a heart as beat within the prison walls.

Let us too hear. 'And the jailer, being roused out of sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm, for we are all here. And he called for lights, and sprang in, and trembling for fear fell down before Paul and Silas, and led them forth, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on

the Lord Jesus,176 and thou shalt be saved, and thy house' (vers. 27-31).

We can understand the horror of the jailer, and his first impulse, as a heathen, to make away with himself, inferring from the open doors the flight of the prisoners, and therefore (according to the stern law De Custodia Reorum) with no other prospect for himself than a violent stroke of judicial shame. But conceive the overwhelming effect on his conscience when the apostle averted his suicidal hand by the loud assurance that the prisoners were all there! Light from God penetrated his dark heart on the instant. with a deep desire for mercy, before he got the lights he called for. He needed no more intimation where to turn for the truth he wanted, no more dealings of God to prove His hand was in all that had just occurred, and that He was really with those who had been so harshly thrust into prison with mockings and scourgings. Had not the Pythoness notoriously designated them as servants of the Most High God, who proclaim salvation's way? The depths of his soul were broken up; and as his sins rose from every hiding place, he felt instinctively that now was the moment to find God. So he sprang in, and, all of a tremble, fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them forth to inquire of the great salvation.

For salvation in any lesser sense is not to be thought of. The earthquake was soon all over, the prisoners were all safe; what had he to fear from Roman justice? But God had awakened his soul, and his sins troubled him. Not death from man, but divine judgment at the close of all was before his eyes, and God's servants, for whom He had just been interposing miraculously, were there to tell him the way of salvation. Whatever learned men may

think, who, never having felt the burden of their sins, catch at words, and waste their time on questions dubious or not, the jailer's burning anxiety was about the salvation of his soul. The strange utterance respecting his two holy prisoners could not but rise before him in his then awe-stricken frame of mind. It was really God Who was at work in his conscience, as He had wrought otherwise in the prison. Not a moment was to be lost, so, having led forth the two prisoners, he says Sirs, what must I do that I may be saved?' Eternal salvation was the urgent want of his soul, as he honestly owns.

Nor was the answer of the Lord's servants less prompt. Thanks be to God, it may and it ought always to be so, when the soul is thus in earnest. For the righteous foundation on which salvation rests is already laid, and so perfectly that to add anything, to wait for aught else, is to dishonour God and to hinder the sinner. The atoning work is done and accepted of God, Who therefore sends His glad tidings to the guilty, without respect of persons. It is no question of promises on man's part or of amelioration as a ground of divine favour. Man was once let alone till his violence and corruption became insupportable, and judgment swept all away, save the few who trusted God in the ark provided for them by grace. Man was then tried fully by God's law, with every religious help possible but, as God indicated beforehand, all was vain, save to prove that man could not be saved on any ground of moral worth or religious ordinance. What remained? Nothing but a Saviour sent from God to be a propitiation for sins. The Saviour has already come, has already died, and is now risen and glorified. Yea, God has sent from heaven the

Holy Spirit thereon to declare the glad tidings by His servants. Therefore Paul and Silas could say with absolute confidence, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house.’

Such is the grace of God in the gospel. It brings salvation for all. It is no longer laid up in shadows. It has appeared to the world. It summons all men everywhere to repent, but none receives the remission of his sins save through faith; and the Lord Jesus is the object of that faith. No doubt He has suffered for our sins: else there could be no sovereign proclamation on God’s part, nor such a righteous blessing for man. But faith goes with grace, and excludes any and every desert of men; as the righteousness revealed in the gospel is God’s, founded upon the accomplished work of Christ.

But it is all-important to see and hold fast the fact that the gospel presents the person of Christ, and not His work only. The soul is called to ‘believe on the Lord Jesus’. This could not purge the conscience without the shedding of His blood; it could not give peace or liberty, unless He were not only delivered up for our offences, but raised for our justification. But it is on the Lord Jesus that we believe. Thus alone is the soul set in a right attitude from the first, and that object of faith abides to the last.

‘Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved.’ This gave joy and assurance to the jailer’s soul, as we shall see by and by. So it was intended of God, Who is the God of peace, not of uncertainty, and would bring the believer into the communion of His own mind. ‘Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.’ Faith is the

principle, and not human righteousness but God's revealed unto faith; for there is no other ground which grace or truth could accredit Anything else would exalt man, in the way either of his own merits, or of ordinances done by others for him. God's righteousness revealed by faith unto faith excludes everything of the sort. Christ alone is, and abides, the only efficacious ground — the Lord Jesus Who has already offered His one sacrifice on the cross. All scripture on this infinite theme is but the development of that which was made known to the jailer in these pregnant words, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house.'

It will be seen that salvation is no less open to the jailer's house than to himself. Jew or Gentile makes no difference, old or young, bond or free, but on the same terms of faith. In scripture there is no such notion, whatever the precious privileges attached to the head of a house, that he believes for them, or that they are to be saved because he is saved by faith. On the contrary the idea is a fleshly licence, based on letter, not spirit, as dangerous for the soul as it is subversive of fundamental truth. No wonder that it shelters itself under the dark shade of ordinance with appeal to feeling and imagination without scripture, though boasting loudly of its own spiritual intelligence. Even Dean Alford forgot the Book of Common Prayer in his allegiance to God's word, and declares that καὶ ὁ οἰκος σου [and thy house] does not mean that his faith would save his household — but that the same way was open to them as to him: 'Believe and thou shalt be saved, and the same of thy household.' So too Meyer, in the face of as great or yet greater prejudices, exploded an error opposed to the

gospel and the truth generally, and says that the epanorthosis σὺ καὶ ὁ οἶκος σου extends or belongs in effect to πίστευσον and σωθήσῃ. For, be it noted, the verse speaks not of an institution like baptism, but, of salvation, and we do well to speak seriously of what is so serious. But human levity in divine things is as incredibly common as deplorable.

But as yet, as far as I am aware, this heterodoxy is only whispered in private, or at most, taught where the ignorant and blinded votaries of party are present to hear. Its advocates do not venture to affirm it where it would be sifted to their shame, and rejected by those who still hold the truth. It will be seen in the inspired word which follows, how daringly these enthusiasts overlook the context in their haste to avail themselves of the most superficial appearance to give their favourite notion currency. This however we may leave till the rest of this scripture comes before us in due course. But it is the characteristic of error to despise what is most certain, solid, and blessed in a vain chase after shadows, and to rejoice more for one pervert, than for ninety and nine repentant sinners.

Let it be carefully weighed: the question of the jailer, the answer of the Lord's servants, was not about the sign but about the reality of salvation soul-salvation, as Peter calls it (1 Peter 1:9). And this is here, as elsewhere, bound up with faith; which of all things is personal, as is the repentance it implies. Believing for others, even so close as one's household, in order that they should be not baptized merely, but thus saved, shows not only the poverty in resource of this pretentious school, but their hardihood in advancing questions, so dangerous for souls, on such slender grounds.

The assumption which underlies the theory, in the minds of the more moderate, probably is that the jailer's house consisted only of children, young enough to be irresponsible: otherwise (of which extravagance some are not ashamed) it would be convicted of slighting repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus more flagrantly than any orthodox Christian sect: for which of the sects does not demand some such profession in candidates of riper years? No wonder therefore that all godly, or even sober, interpreters of the divine word repudiate those shifts of hard-driven controversialists. But scripture enables us to carry this disproof to the uttermost; for it is added (in ver. 32) that they spoke the word of the Lord to him 'with all that were in his house', as if the Holy Spirit by express anticipation had designed to leave no possible plea for teaching so strange. Those only who could hear the word were then concerned; none else was by the call itself included within the terms of the blessing, whatever grace might effect afterwards, if indeed any remained to be called and blessed.

'And they spoke to him the word of the Lord' [or, God]177 with all that were in his house. And at that hour of the night he took and washed [them from] their stripes, and was baptized, he and all his immediately. And having brought them up into his house, he set meat [a table] before them, and rejoiced with all his house, having believed in God (vers. 32-34).

The jailer took them 'that hour' of the night, however unseasonable it might seem; for such is the force, rather than 'the same' which is not said, though of course the latter also was true. But we must correctly reproduce what was originally written and meant. After washing

their stripes he and all his were baptized without delay, it would seem in the precincts of the prison proper. Then he brought them ‘up’ into his house, apparently over the prisoners’ quarters, attended to their bodily refreshment, and rejoiced with all his house, having believed in God.

Undoubtedly the Greek phrase for ‘with all his house’ is adverbial; but this makes no difference for the sense substantially, either here or anywhere else. Thus all the family of every man pertaining to Jacob (Ex. 1:1) came from Palestine into Egypt: the heads of each house did not come with Jacob in lieu of the members. It was equally true of all, though the heads only were specified. So here the jailer rejoiced, yet not representatively for his family; but they too as really in their measure as he, though his joy as believing in God is duly specified, It is intended that we should understand the joy of faith in the case of all. A beautiful picture of the reality and activity of God’s grace in this world, and this with the whole house of a hardened pagan; and of such it is repeatedly predicated. For is He the God of Jews only? Is He not also of Gentiles? Yes, of Gentiles also; since God is one Who shall justify circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through their faith, not annulling law thereby, but establishing it, for law never was so vindicated as in the death of the Lord Jesus; and hence the believers, once guilty, enter into peace and joy.

Such is the triumph of God’s righteousness for all who submit to it, yet it is no promise in suspense, still less a sham, but a reality of blessed and effectual grace for none but those that do submit, whatever may be one’s desire and hope for others. It is sweet to see thoughtful love and hospitality at once in motion, when faith

purifies the heart. The restraining and controlling hand of law is a great boon in a sinful world; yet what is it at best compared with the working of divine grace, even in one but just born of God?

‘And when it was day, the praetors sent the lictors, saying, Let those men go. And the jailer reported the saying unto Paul, The praetors have sent that ye be let go: now then go out and proceed in peace. But Paul said unto them, They beat us openly, uncondemned, men being Romans, and cast us into prison; and now do they cast us out privily? No indeed: but let themselves come and bring us out. And the lictors announced these words to the praetors and they were afraid when they heard they were Romans. And on coming they besought them, and bringing out entreated [them] to go out of the city. And when they went out of prison, they entered into [the house of] Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they exhorted them and departed’ (vers. 35-40).

Another evidence of a Roman colony appears here in the lictors employed as subordinates by the praetors, which is disguised in the vague name of ‘serjeants’, as the higher officials under that of ‘magistrates’.

The passionate or time-serving concession to unjust clamour had now passed away, and word was dispatched next morning to dismiss the abused prisoners of the day before. The jailer naturally repeated his orders, glad doubtless to release them. But Paul was now as firm in a dignified way for the vindication of the gospel, and even of the law, of which they were the unworthy administrators, as he and his companion before in uncomplaining meekness had borne their lawless violence. If there is a time to keep silent, there is a time

to speak; and the Spirit alone can guide as to either, for which the word alone suffices, for it warrants both, each in its due season. Here we see the two injunctions carried out in the same transaction, and both turning to the glory of the Lord.

It was not invariably so even with such honoured servants. Their own spirit might, and occasionally did, act without the sure guidance of God; as when the high priest was rebuked and Caesar was appealed to, each time with consequences less or more serious, as it may be shown when the history comes before us. Here beyond controversy the silent suffering of Paul and Silas was a mighty and striking testimony to the practical grace which our Lord would have to characterize His own. 'For what glory is it,' says another apostle, 'if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable [lit., grace] with God' (1 Peter 2:20). To this saints, as such, are called. Peculiarly does it become those to practise it who teach it, as did the blessed pair then at Philippi. They were reproached for the name of Christ, and were partakers of His sufferings without a murmur, nay, with prayers and hymns of joy that they were counted worthy to bear wrong and shame for His Name.

But now that they had thus endured, it was fitting that it should be proved that Paul and Silas were not evildoers punished justly with scourging and prison and the stocks, but that the guardians of the law had been guilty of flagrant, manifest, and inexcusable unrighteousness against the preachers of the gospel. The time was come when the praetors sent to let them go, and Paul saw this, not at first the jailer. Therefore said the apostle to them,

‘They beat us openly, uncondemned, men being Romans, and cast us into prison; and do they cast us out privily? No, indeed; but let themselves come and bring us out.’ Their exposure was complete, though only the officials and their victims might know it. There was not the semblance of resentment, not the least desire to injure them, and exact from men who lay absolutely in the power of those they had wantonly injured. But it was unanswerably demonstrated, that, in the conflict between the officials of Roman law at Philippi and the ministers of the gospel, the latter were no less honoured by the gracious power of God than the former had utterly failed to repress the mob, and had even become the ringleaders in cruel infraction of that law they were bound to enforce.

The lictors bring back Paul’s words to the praetors, who when they heard the sufferers were Romans could not hide their fear, but came and besought their prisoners. It was a humiliation on their part, as undeniable a triumph for those charged with God’s gospel, who had suffered only as Christians with the Spirit of glory and of God resting on them.

Certainly the preachers of grace were not disposed to swerve from grace, least of all now that the truth was clear; nor had they any wish to put dishonour on any human institution, but rather to be patterns in that subjection to it for the Lord’s sake, to which they were conspicuous in exhorting others. They were easily entreated, having never thought of a prosecution.

‘And when they brought them out, they asked [them] to go out of the city. And they went out of the prison into [the house of] Lydia; and when they saw the brethren,

they exhorted them and departed.' They exercised their indisputable title to liberty by a visit, on quitting the prison, to Lydia, where they saw 'the brethren'. These would seem to be her household of whom we heard in verse 15. Of none others in that holy bond of relationship do we read at this time in Philippi. These they exhorted or comforted, as well there might be need, and the Lord's servants could happily do in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. As they had rejoiced in their bonds, they took their leave: a lovely picture in their own persons, of that superiority to circumstances which the apostle in his Epistle at a later day impressed on all the saints there, for their blessing and ours.

167 The highest authorities (ABCDE) with adequate support of the cursives and versions, et al, support the finite verb against the participle in HLP and the mass of cursives, and Text. Rec.

168 The more ancient read the copulative against the majority and Text. Rec. as they give εἰς instead of κατά, and add Ἰησοῦ.

169 Ibid.

170 Ibid.

171 The authorities are more divided as to the article here, the best omitting it. So they are between 'God' and 'the Lord', but the oldest support the former.

172 Ibid.

173 The most ancient MSS., ABCD, good cursives, et al., give πύλης, instead of πόλεως, (city), as in the Text. Rec. following most.

174 Some ancient authorities give ‘where we supposed there was a place of prayer’, as in the Revised Version.

175 Literally, ‘gone out’; it would seem in allusion to the going out of the demon 176 The mass of witnesses adds ‘Christ’ as in Text. Rec., but the most ancient with some good cursives, the Vulg., et al., do not accredit it.

177 Some ancient authorities read ‘God’, but the best sustain the Text. Rec., save in preferring ‘with’ to ‘and to’, though in sense equivalent.

Acts 17

We are now brought into somewhat new circumstances. The work of the Lord goes on, the testimony varies in its character, the zeal of the labours is the same, the results differ more or less, and so does the opposition of the enemy.

‘Now, when they had journeyed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was the synagogue of the Jews’ (ver. 1).

It is remarkable that the more ancient manuscripts (ABD, et al.) omit the article before synagogue, as do the Authorized and Revised Versions; but the testimony to its existence is ample and varied. On the one hand it is well-nigh impossible to conceive its insertion unless it were originally there. On the other it is easy to understand its omission, because of its unusual connection. It would be quite justified if in fact there was but that synagogue in the district, which would give it notoriety. At Philippi we saw that there was none; there was only the place for prayer by the river, where a few used to assemble on the sabbath.

‘And Paul as his custom was went in among them, and on three sabbaths reasoned with them from the scriptures, opening and alleging that the Christ must suffer, and rise again from [among] the dead, and that this Jesus, whom I announce to you, is the Christ’ (vers. 2, 3). Here the apostle returns to a testimony of pointed application to the Jews. No doubt it is of the highest value to everyone, but the form of it exactly suited the place where his discourses were given. A suffering and a risen Christ was proved out of the scriptures, and this not

merely as a truth in what they owned to be the word of God, but the absolute necessity because of man's sin, and the only adequate remedy in God's grace, with the further and clenching conclusion that 'This is the Christ Jesus, Whom I announce to you.' No miracle was needed here to arrest attention. The scriptures are a testimony beyond miracles, and the most permanent of all testimony. Jesus alone, as far as His first advent is concerned, gives full meaning to the word of God, and this it is which completely meets the conscience and the heart of the believer for purging to the one, and giving a blessed and blessing object to the other. But it is not all that the apostle had to say at Thessalonica, as we shall shortly learn, and as it is all which is mentioned here, no more need be added now.

'And some of them were persuaded and added [joined themselves] to Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few' (ver. 4). Thus, as the apostle wrote afterwards, 'Our gospel was not with you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance' (1 Thess. 1:5). The harvest was considerable, not only from among the Jews, but far more from the Gentiles, including not a few women of rank, In no assembly of apostolic times do we find in fact greater simplicity, freshness, and power of the truth than among the Thessalonians.

But the success of the gospel is ever apt to rouse bitter opposition and nowhere so much as among the Jews, who would keenly feel that rancorous spite which is natural to those who were overwhelmed by their own scriptures, for which they could not account, but to which they would not bow. 'But the Jews, having been stirred up to jealousy, took unto them certain wicked

men of the rabble (lit., market-loungers) and gathering a crowd set the city in confusion, and besetting the house of Jason, sought to bring them out to the people. And not having found them, they dragged Jason and certain brethren before the city-rulers (or, politarchs), crying out, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also whom Jason has received; and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus. And they troubled the crowd and the city-rulers, when they heard these things. And having taken security for Jason and the rest, they let them go' (vers. 5-9).

Here we see the usual lack of common honesty, which marks the religious assailants of the truth. The Jews, who professed the fear of God did not scruple, through jealousy, to form a party with wicked men of the lowest sort against the gospel. Abandoned heathens were good enough allies against the truth of their own Messiah, Whom worldly lusts would not let them discern in the suffering, but risen Jesus. God was in none of their thoughts; and self-wit/ wrought to darken and destroy the force of His word. Their degradation could not be hidden in the company with whom they consorted to form a crowd and set the city in uproar. Yet were the Jews the exclusive representatives of divine law before all nations They were now alas! the standing proof of utter failure, not because the law was not holy, the commandment holy and just and good, but because they themselves were unholy, unjust, and evil. Even now, their own Messiah being come, they failed to recognize Him through unbelief urged the Gentiles to crucify Him, and now were also forbidding His servants to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved. Thus were they

filling up their sins always ‘but the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.’

The host of Paul, Jason, was the special object of their animosity, his house they beset in their desire to bring forward the Lord’s servants unto the people, i.e., the regular assembly of the city. Not finding them, they dragged Jason and certain brethren before the city-rulers,178 a peculiar title of the local authorities, which so much the more attests Luke’s accuracy because the term occurs in no known remains of Greek antiquity. But an inscription still extant on the marble arch of the western or Vardir gate of Saloniki proves that such was the title of the Thessalonian magistrates, and that there were seven. By a remarkable coincidence three of the names of Paul’s companions found here, or in the Epistles, answer to as many in that inscription given from Boeckh, No. 1967, in Conybeare and Howson I. 395. Sosipater, Secundus, and Gaius are common to both, a fact which points to the prevalence of these names in that region. It was a free city anciently called Therma, which afterwards received its name of Thessalonica from Cassander in compliment to his wife, Thessalonica, sister of Alexander the Great, and it remains a flourishing city of the Turkish empire in our day (1887) under the derived name of Saloniki or Salonica.

The outcry of the assailants in verses 6, 7 is strikingly instructive, at least in its latter part. That the preachers of divine grace ‘turned the world upside down’ was natural to say, and became a standing reproach, however untrue. Yet is it intelligible because the gospel penetrates among high and low, and separates from the world by a divine bond to Christ in heaven. But for that

very reason it does not meddle with the authority of the world; to which, on the contrary, it enjoins subjection on every soul as God's ordinance here below. It simply but completely attaches the heart of those who believe to the rejected One, now glorified in heaven. But we cannot look for truth in a foolish cry raised by envious Jews and idle loungers of the Gentiles. They only sought an appearance sufficient to arouse the fears of the magistrates, and therefore drive away the chief heralds of the truth But they laid another charge of a more definite kind, which has the more interest because of the light on it furnished by both the Epistles to the Thessalonians: 'And these all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.'

The insinuation was unfounded and malicious undoubtedly; but it had a show of evidence in the prominence given to the kingdom of God in which Jesus was to come. For He was gone, among other objects, to receive that kingdom and to return. Now, whatever the ill-willed folly of representing that this expectation is antagonistic to the rights of Caesar, it is plain that the teaching was very far from modern doctrine, which could never be so misconstrued. Paul and his companions held before the saints the constant looking for Christ to come and reign; and this, not as a secret for the initiated, but as a most influential hope which penetrated all walk as well as doctrine, and to be urged from first to last throughout the whole Christian life. We learn from the earliest chapter of the first Epistle that it characterized the Thessalonian converts from their starting point. They turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to await His Son from the heavens, Whom He raised out of the dead, Jesus our

deliverer from the coming wrath. (1 Thess. 1) Their conversion was to wait for Jesus no less than to serve God. That hope, therefore, was suited to the youngest believers as truly as to the apostle. It was independent of prophetic scheme, with which neophytes, especially from the heathen, could not be acquainted. Yet was it so much the more a hope bright and unembarrassed in which they lived from day to day.

So surely was this the case, that the apostle reminds them (1 Thess. 2.) how, as a father his own children, he used to exhort ‘each one of you, and comfort and testify that ye should walk worthy of God, Who calleth you to His own kingdom and glory’. What could more prove His kingdom as bearing on present walk? And in fact it is notorious that the lack of it before the eyes of the saints exposes them to seeking ease and honour, and wealth and all worldliness. With His kingdom and glory before us, we can heartily bear present shame and suffering, and the walk is elevated accordingly. Even the apostle looked for his crown of boasting in the saints only before our Lord Jesus at His coming. Then would holiness have its consummation and display at His coming with all His saints (1 Thess. 3). Dead and living saints (1 Thess. 4) would be changed and be with Him on high at His coming; and in due time the day of the Lord should fall with sudden destruction on a thoughtless, unexpecting world (1 Thess. 5).

If possible, more precise is the intimation about the kingdom in the Second Epistle. The saints in Thessalonica, through various causes, did not then enjoy so much of the brightness of the hope, but the apostle joins his fellow-labourers with himself in boasting of their endurance and faith in all their persecutions and

tribulations. This is viewed as a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God to the end that they should be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, ‘for the sake of which ye also suffer’. Retribution will come in its day at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven: He it is Who makes good, manifests, and administers the kingdom (2 Thess. 1). But that day cannot be (errorists pretended that it was already present) ere the apostasy come, and the man of sin be revealed.

There was already at work the mystery or secret of lawlessness, the upshot of which will be the revelation of that lawless one, who is yet himself to sit down in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. This will draw swift judgment on him and his adherents; for the Lord Jesus shall consume him with the breath of His mouth, and annul him by the appearing of His coming (2 Thess. 2). This need not alarm the feeblest believers seeing that God has called them by the gospel to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, though we need the Lord meanwhile to direct our hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of the Christ (2 Thess. 3) It is the second advent, as men call it, the manifestation of the Lord in glory, which introduces the kingdom judicially, when in the language of Daniel. the ‘little stone’, having executed judgment on all opposing hostile powers here below, will then expand into a great mountain and fill the whole earth. To expect universal spread and supremacy for God’s kingdom, before the King comes in personal and public overthrow of His foes, is an error of no small magnitude. The error sought early entrance but met with immediate exposure by the apostle who strengthened the Thessalonians in the truth. He from the beginning pressed the coming of

Jesus, and God's kingdom then: a truth as solemn for the world as full of cheer for the saints.

But the world was hostile, though nothing more was done then beyond taking bail179 of Jason and the rest, and letting them go, as the preachers were not found. Persecution soon fell heavily, as the Epistle shows, on the young converts.

'But the brethren immediately sent away by night Paul and Silas unto Berea, who on their arrival went away into the synagogue of the Jews. Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, being such as received the word with all readiness of mind, day by day examining the scriptures whether these things were so. Many out of them therefore believed, and of the Greek180 women of good position, and of men, not a few. But when the Jews from Thessalonica knew that the word of God was announced by Paul in Berea also, they came thither also, stirring up and troubling181 the crowds. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to proceed toward182 the sea; but Silas and Timothy abode there. But they that were conducting Paul brought [him] as far as Athens; and having received a charge for Silas and Timothy that they should come as quickly as possible unto him, they departed' (vers. 10-15).

It is blessed to mark the unwearied zeal of the Lord's servants. They had barely escaped the ill-will roused by the Jews at Thessalonica, when we behold them undauntedly repairing to the synagogue in Berea on their arrival. Here they experienced such readiness of heart in searching the scriptures as evinced a greater simplicity and real nobility of soul. To bow to the word,

to receive it as God's word, which indeed it is, is the truest condition of divine blessing; yet did they daily examine scripture, whether the things preached accorded with the things written. Therefore many from among them believed. There is no way so sure or good. And it is of interest to observe that here also not a few Greek women of rank, no less than men, believed, as well as the God-fearing Jews. It was doubtless an unspeakable deliverance from debasing immorality, as well as from empty fable — from a life of selfishness to serve an only and true God, and to await His Son from heaven.

But Jewish rancour could not content itself with driving the apostles from Thessalonica: from Thessalonica came the hostile Jews to Berea in order to counteract the preached word, stirring up and troubling the crowds there also.

Knowledge of old revelation gives no security for receiving the truth God is actually sending or using most at any given time. On the contrary, as we see in these Jews here and elsewhere, if there be pride in what is already possessed, it will act powerfully in rejecting what is meant of God to test the heart now; especially if grace be at work to open the door of faith to those who had no religious standing from of old. Hence the gospel is of all things most repulsive to the ancient people of God, who madly refused the mercy which waited on them first of all, before it was preached to the Gentiles.

Thereon Paul is again sent off by the brethren toward the sea, whilst his companions stayed there still. Athens was the apostle's destination, whither he had a loving escort, and where he charged Silas and Timothy to

rejoin him. But Athens, as we shall see, was not destined to be a fruitful field for the incorruptible seed, the living and abiding word of God.

No! Athens was to be comparatively barren for the gospel: so different are the thoughts of God from those of men. Mere love of novelty, not value for truth, characterized that city once the most renowned seat of the arts, of letters, of philosophy. It was covered with idols: God was not really in their thoughts. Indeed He cannot be known or loved apart from Jesus. But now a herald was come to set the testimony of Jesus before them, yet alas how little heeded!

'Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked in him as he observed the city to be full of idols.183 He reasoned therefore, in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout, and in the market-place every day with those that turned up. And certain also of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers184 attacked him. And some said, What would this babbler say? and others, He seemeth to be an announcer of strange divinities, because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And having taken hold of him, they brought [him] up to the Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new teaching [is], that is spoken by thee? For thou bringest certain strange things unto our ears: we wish to know therefore what these things mean. Now all Athenians and the strangers sojourning there spent their time in nothing else than either to tell something or to hear something185 newer' [i.e., than the last] (vers. 16-21).

It was an indignant and painful feeling which stirred the apostle's spirit as he beheld idols everywhere.

Companionship he loved and valued, and tidings of Thessalonica he longed for, but at once he goes to the synagogue for the Jews and proselytes, as well as to the market-place every day for those that came by. The Epicureans and the Stoics soon encountered him; the former being really Atheists under the plea of chance, and looking for the dissolution of soul and body; the latter, of a sterner school which cried up necessity or fate, and an intolerant and intolerable egotism, being really Pantheists. Some had recourse to banter: 'What would this babbler say?' Others took Paul up more gravely: 'He seemeth to be an announcer of strange divinities [or demons], because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.' So ignorant were these sages as to count the resurrection a goddess, the counterpart of Jesus, a god. The true God was unknown.

But they were no longer disposed to persecute. Intellectual levity survived the loss of their national independence and political power. Mocking or curiosity alone remained. Still they were sufficiently struck by the apostle's preaching to lay hold of him and bring him up to the Areopagus, not to try him for his life, as they once did with Socrates, but that they might know what this new doctrine was. Even they could not but avow how strange the sound was to their ears: 'We wish to know therefore, what these things mean.' The truth, however, enters not through the ear merely, but the conscience also, and what conscience was there in spending their time for nothing else than either to tell or to hear the last news? We shall see that the apostle brought God, as a personal and living reality, before themselves as morally related to Him. Till conscience is awakened, what groundwork can there be? Otherwise the gospel is

degraded into another new thing, and Jesus and the resurrection become the latest additions to the Pantheon of heathen vanities.

‘And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus, and said, Men of Athens, in all things I observe that ye are very [i.e., more than others] reverent to divinities [or demons]; for passing through and closely observing the objects of your worship, I found also an altar on which was the inscription, To an unknown God. What [or Whom], therefore, ye without knowing worship, this186 I announce to you. The God that made the world and all things therein, He, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, nor is He served by human187 hands as needing something more, Himself giving to all life, and breath, and all things. And He made of one [blood3] every nation of men to dwell on all188 the face of the earth, having determined appointed189 seasons, and the bounds of their habitation, that they should seek God190, if haply they might feel after and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. For in Him we live and move and are; as also some of your own poets have said, For His offspring also are we. Being therefore God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divinity is like gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and device of man. God therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, now commendeth men191 that they should all everywhere repent, inasmuch as192 He has appointed a day in which He is about to judge the world [inhabited earth] in righteousness, by a Man Whom He marked out, having given assurance to all in that He raised Him from [the] dead’ (vers. 22-31).

Though we have only a sketch of the apostle's discourse, we can readily see its striking difference from that which he was wont to preach to the Jews. He comes down to the lowest point and form of truth, in order, as he had done before (Acts 14) with the Lycaonian barbarians, to reach the Athenian conscience, the Jews having through the law incomparably more worthy thoughts of God and of their own relationship to Him. Nevertheless the address opens with habitual courtesy whilst there was not a particle to flatter their pride. The apostle laid hold of the only object in that crowd of honours paid to truly strange demons, which confessed the humbling fact about themselves and God. 'An unknown God' told the true tale; all else around was but deception and the triumph of the enemy. 'What, therefore, ye worship in ignorance, this I announce to you.'

The God that made the world and all things therein is the Judge of all the world by the same risen Man Who is Saviour of such as repent and believe the gospel, be they who or what they may. Creation was owned by neither Epicureans nor Stoics: the one holding the absurdity of a fortuitous concourse of atoms, the other conceiving a fixed ever-recurring cycle of generation and dissolution in the universe, which was their god if they can be allowed to have had any. But the Creator of all things is also Lord of heaven and earth; He neither rests in apathy, nor is He the mere active soul of the passive world, but supreme Ruler, not of heaven only, but of the earth. He is not therefore to be limited to human sanctuaries, nor to be served by human hands, as though He needed anything, seeing that He Himself gives to all life and breath and the whole of what they

enjoy. Some elements of these truths might be accepted here and there, for man has a conscience, but seen fully and simply they swept away the dark clouds of philosophic dreamers, maintaining for God His own place of sovereign goodness towards man, let him be ever so proud, dark, and miserable.

The apostle adds more. He struck next at a well-known theme of Athenian vanity, by no means however peculiar to that race, or land, or time: ‘And He made of one [blood] every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined appointed seasons and the bounds of their habitation, that they should seek God, if indeed they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.’ The one origin of man goes with the unity of God, as the pretension to distinct races goes with their respective patrons of polytheism. The Jews as they fell away helped on the falsehood in their self-exalting vanity, though to them only was committed the revelation of the twofold truth, which Christianity alone applied thoroughly and carried out according to God. It was not only the mere passing testimony to His goodness in the gift from heaven of rains and fruitful seasons, to which the apostle here pointed, but also to appointed seasons, and the boundaries of the dwelling of the various nations, all under God’s hand with peculiar favours distributed to each, and at least a whisper to seek after (not ‘the Lord’, which is true neither in the Jewish sense of Jehovah, nor still less in the only just revealed exaltation of the rejected Messiah, but) ‘God’, if haply they might grope after and find Him, though He is not far from each of us.

It is not however without interest to compare Job’s treatment of the same truth generally (Job 12:23-25):

only he dwells rather on the side of the divine sovereignty of Him to Whom the nations, haughtily indifferent about Him though they might be, are ‘as a drop of a bucket’, and are counted ‘as the small dust of the balance’ (Isa. 40:15). But the glowing heat of the inspired preacher does not fail to urge the moral aim of His beneficent arrangements on the grandest scale, that they might seek after Himself, if perhaps they might feel after and find Him: teaching quite in keeping with his own Epistle to the Romans (Rom. 1:20). Even in the darkness of heathenism more than one had owned, if not Paul’s fine statement of man’s absolute dependence on God for continued life, activity, and existence, God as the source of the race: a truth already given most distinctly in Luke 3:38, supposed parabolically in Luke 15:11, and taught formally in the first clause of Eph. 4:6. The poets among them (the heathen Greeks) had expressed it; not the Cilician Aratus only (whom he cites verbally), but Cleanthes also in nearly similar words, as well as others substantially.

With this acknowledgment of their poetical seers the apostle states the confutation of the folly of idolatry. If man alone of creatures on earth is God’s offspring, how maintain that the divinity is like a work of man’s craft and imagination in gold, or silver, or stone? ‘We ought not’ so to think, he says graciously, not forgetting that Israel too had to bear the sterner irony of Isaiah (Isa. 44:9-20). A lifeless stock that man forms cannot be, or duly represent, the God Who made him and all things.

Yet the God, Who was thus shamefully misrepresented in the times of the ignorance that was past, would no longer overlook as heretofore such delinquency; He is now charging on men that they all everywhere repent

(ver. 30). Here was a death-blow, not only for the self-indulgence of the Epicurean as well as for the self-righteous Stoic, but also for the careless and the proud of all mankind, and not least in that city. And the apostle followed it up with the solemn reason for heed and urgency, 'because He had appointed a day in which He is about to judge the habitable [earth] in righteousness by a Man Whom He had marked out, having afforded assurance [or, ground of belief] to all in that He raised Him out of [the] dead.'

Here the prevalent thought of Christendom errs greatly. The Jews used to, and perhaps in some measure still, look for a judgment of living men; the mass of Christians, notwithstanding the Creeds, only look (all but exclusively in fact) for a judgment of the dead before eternity. The apostle here and elsewhere pressed the judgment of this habitable scene at our Lord's appearing to introduce His kingdom in displayed power and glory, as He did Himself in Matt. 24, and 25; Mark 13; Luke 17, 19, 21, and other scriptures. The pledge of His thus coming to judge and to reign is His own resurrection, as ours who believe will be at His coming preparatorily to our appearing and reigning with Him.

This scripture shows how vital and fundamental a truth is His resurrection, which so blessedly involves our own, besides being the witness to His victory over death and Satan to the Father's glory in vindicating His Son to the efficacy of His sacrifice to the believer, and to the displayed condition of man for heaven according to divine counsels. Granted that in the nature of the case it is a fact attested by His own, though with the most abundant and weighty evidence, above all by God's word long before the fact, as well as by fresh revelation

immediately after. Could any other fact be shown possessed of grounds to be compared with these? All that on which the soul stands for ever before God rests on the self-same ground of divinely given testimony; and, consequently, as being addressed to faith, purifies the heart through the operation of the Holy Ghost, as nothing else can do.

What was the effect on the Athenians? ‘Now when they heard of resurrection of dead [men], some mocked, but others said, We will hear thee concerning this yet again. Thus Paul went out from their midst. But some men crave to him and believed; among whom also was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them’ (vers. 32-34)

Nor should we wonder at these heathen philosophers and newsmongers being staggered by a call resting on a basis so irrefragable on God’s part so crushing to human will and unbelief, as resurrection. For human science never rises above sensible causes and effects, or phenomena arrayed according to natural laws. This is all true and interesting in its own sphere. The folly is in denying what is as wholly different in kind, as grace necessarily is from nature, and in rejecting facts attested by the fullest and surest testimony, the most unreasonable course to be conceived in things which must and ought, as facts, to depend on testimony: a course only intelligible in this exceptional case through the desperate antagonism of fallen humanity to God, even when He is waiting on and speaking to man in the richest mercy.

But man, and not least philosophic man, rebels against resurrection. He might endure a whole night’s Socratic

discussion of the soul's immortality; for this gratifies the nobler sort, if it be offensive to the morally degraded. But a dead man raised brings in God; and proves God intervening in the midst of a busy world to mark out the Man Whom they crucified, Who is going to judge this habitable world one day, as also in due time the dead raised later, ere all things are made new for eternity. To science as science, I repeat, this fact is repulsive, because impossible for their idol for what can be the cause of resurrection? Certainly not death, but God in the person of the Son.

Bow, proud man, bow to Him, Who in love sent His Son that we might live through Him, true God as He is, and that He might die for us — for our sins, without which the gift of eternal life had been the merest anomaly, but with it the deep blessing of a full and everlasting salvation of His grace, yet righteous, to the glory of God for ever. There were mockers and triflers then as now. Oh! may you, like the others of old, cleave to the apostle, and find your place with the true Dionysius of Luke, not with the Neo-Platonist impostor who borrowed the scriptural name for his fables and rhapsodies of the sixth century manufacture. Doubtless that blessed place must be shared with a Damaris and others, whose names are written in heaven if unknown on earth. May Christ satisfy your soul, as well He may Who is all, and in all!

178 The Greek noun here,

πολίαχος, not

πολίταρχος, is a word, with its cognate verb, of common occurrence in Dio Cassius, for praefect or commandant of a city, besides its broader usage in the past as said of a king or prince. But I do not find it applied to

magistrates in Greek cities, only to the praefect of Rome.

179 This is expressed, not in the more ancient Greek technical expression ἐγγύη but in the equivalent of the Latin satisdatio, τὸ ἱκανὸν.

180 They were not Grecians or Hellenists, but Greeks.

181 ‘And troubling’ has ancient and wide support.

182 Ignorance of the idiomatic use of

ὡς here probably led to

ἓως in ABE and some other authorities, and to its omission in D, et al.

183

Κατείδωλός πόλις Actor. Apost.xvii. 16 quod non est, ut quidam opinantur simulacris dedita urbs, sed simulacris referta.’ Zeunius ap. Viger, de pr. Gr. L Idiom. 638, ed iii. Lips. 1822.

184 ‘Also’ has good authority, though omitted in Text. Rec., which inserts ‘the’ before Stoic, and ‘to them’ before ‘preached’.

185 The most ancient authorities support the double ‘something’.

186 The neuter form has more ancient support than the much more general masculine.

187 ‘Of men’ in Text. Rec. must yield in antiquity to ‘human’.

188 ‘Blood’ is not in AB, eight cursives, and most ancient Versions, some reading ‘every face’.

189 ‘Foreappointed’ rests on D and a few more.

190 ‘God’ has ample support of the best kind.

191 Text. Rec. has ‘all men’ with many, but not the best witnesses, as in the text followed.

192

καθότι ABDE, et al.,

διότι ‘because’, has inferior weight.

Acts 18

In marked distinction from Athens is the dealing of divine grace with Corinth, the wealthy capital of Achaia, the southern province of Greece under the Roman empire. Thither the apostle repaired after his brief visit to Athens: with what result the record stands, not in the inspired history alone, but in the two great Epistles to the church of God in Corinth.

‘After these things he193 departed from194 Athens and came unto Corinth And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, of Pontus by race, lately come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded195 all the Jews to depart from196 Rome. And he came unto them; and because he was one of the same trade, he abode with them, and [? they]197 wrought, for by their trade they were tent-makers. And he was discoursing in the synagogues every sabbath, and persuading Jews and Greeks’ (vers. 1-4).

The ways of grace are wholly above man’s thoughts. None could have anticipated that God would raise a trophy to His Son, not in intellectual Athens, but in demoralized Corinth. Was there any antecedent link, or natural suitability whatever, between the Holy One of God and this proverbial seat of impurity? The grace of God gives no account of its matters, but works to the glory of Christ; and most of all where man is most needy. Even so the apostle asked in the beginning of his First Epistle to the Corinthians, ‘Where is [the] wise? Where [the] scribe? Where [the] disputer of this age? Did not God make foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God the world through wisdom knew not

God, God was pleased through the foolishness of the preaching to save those that believe. Since Jews ask for signs, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumbling block, and unto Gentiles foolishness, but unto the called themselves, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [the] power of God, and [the] wisdom of God, because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.' The wisdom of this age had proved its folly in Athens; the compassion of God yearned over Corinth in the face of all its dissolute manners and corruption.

'For behold your calling, brethren, how that there are not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, 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 base things of the world, and the things despised, did God choose, and the things that are not, that He might bring to naught the things that are; that no flesh should glory before God.' Never was this more realized than in Corinth, where in due time a numerous assembly was formed from both Jews and Gentiles, for the most part of no great account in this world.

Paul was not long alone. He found in Corinth a certain Jew, called Aquila, who though of Pontus by race (like his namesake of a later date, who, however, was a Jewish proselyte and translated the Old Testament into Greek most literally), had just come from Italy, with Priscilla, his wife. This is their first mention in scripture. We hear of them afterwards in Ephesus and of the assembly at their house. Later still they were found once more in Rome, and saluted as Paul's fellow-workers in

Christ Jesus, ‘who for my life staked their own necks, to whom not I only am thankful, but also all the assemblies of the Gentiles’ (Rom. 16:3, 4). There also we hear of the assembly at their house. In the last Epistle which our apostle ever wrote he bids Timothy salute them once more and for the last time in Ephesus.

The occasion of their coming from Italy at this time was because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Suetonius, the Roman biographer of the Caesars, states that this emperor, because of a Jewish outbreak, ‘impulsore Chresto’, expelled them from Rome. The Latin words cited are probably an error on his part, but may allude to violence on the side of unbelieving Jews against those who believed, or may be a confusion (owing to Roman jealousy) with the preaching of the Messiah elsewhere. Bp. Pearson is of opinion that this expulsion happened about A.D. 52, in which year Tacitus (Ann. xii. 52) puts the Senate’s decree for expelling the ‘mathematici’ or ‘Chaldaei’; but whether they were identical or connected is uncertain. It is known that Claudius was deeply indebted to Herod Agrippa the First for his nomination to the empire, and did not forget him but rewarded the Herod family: so one could hard]y suppose so hostile an attitude towards the Jews, while Herod Agrippa was in Rome; and we can easily understand that, if enacted in his absence, the decree soon fell through. This consideration clears up the statement of Dio Cassius (Ix. 6), which some have supposed to contradict St. Luke, as well as Suetonius, that the emperor did not expel them, but ordered them not to congregate in Rome. If we distinguish the times, all is clear and true.

But God made use of the edict to bring Aquila and his wife into lifelong communication with the apostle. Whether they were converted or not before they first met is not quite certain. Much stress has been laid on Aquila's description as 'a certain Jew', rather than as a disciple; but this may be satisfactorily enough accounted for, both as qualifying the place of his birth, and as furnishing the ground of his quitting Rome for Corinth. Then we must bear in mind that, as the Romans and strangers in general did not in these early days distinguish Christian Jews from their brethren after the flesh, so Paul repeatedly designates himself a Jew afterwards in this Book (Acts 21:39; Acts 22:3). The apostle never speaks of them as his children in the faith, however warmly he may greet or characterize them. Certain it is that they were abundantly blessed through him, as he graciously owns the large debt due to them, not by himself only, but by all the assemblies of the Gentiles.

We never hear of this devoted pair in Judea, they were widely known outside the land among the Gentiles where assemblies met. Their wealth or their trade afforded the means to welcome the gathering of saints at their own house; a circumstance not unusual in those days (or even much later, as we know from the Acta Martyrii S. Justini, Ruinart). So we see also in the cases of Nymphas and Philemon. It abides now a happy resource where a few can only thus be gathered to Christ's name according to His word. That they should first wait for a bishop is either an Ignatian tradition or a notion at the present day flowing from the same unbelieving superstition which gave birth to the tradition in the past. Only the ever-living truth of 'one

body and one Spirit' would call for fellowship in such an act. Independency is a denial of true church action.

Another fact in solving a principle of deep practical moment comes out in verse 3: 'And because he was one of the same trade, he abode with them and wrought; for by their occupation they were tent-makers.'198 God was pleased so to order things that the great apostle, in the wealthiest and most luxurious city of Greece, should carry on an honest occupation for necessary wants. What a death-blow to clericalism on the one hand, and to worldliness on the other! Yet, in the circumstances of both Paul himself and Corinth, it was just the course which was worthy of the gospel of the grace which sent it out. It is unreasonable to suppose that this blessed servant of the Lord failed in ordinary foresight for his missionary journey, or that the assemblies of the saints were lacking in care for him or in zeal for the work, especially in the regions beyond those where the faithful were already gathered together unto Christ's name.

The apostle had pushed forward alone without means into a quarter of abounding ease and distinguished elegance, to say nothing of the dissoluteness of morals which followed in their train; and here, labouring with his own hands for the necessities of others not less than his own, as was his wont, he truly represented the Master Who came not to be ministered unto but to minister. It was for the Son of man alone to give His life a ransom for many, it was His exclusively to suffer once for sins, Just for unjust, to bring us to God. But the apostle of the Gentiles was Christ's follower, or imitator, with energy of devotedness unparalleled not among saints or servants only, but among the apostles, whom God set foremost in the church. And grace gave his

single eye to discern how best to please and glorify Christ in such circumstances. At a later day he exhorted the presbyters of the Ephesian assembly in his affecting farewell charge at Miletus; for he was not the man to urge on others what he shrank from himself. Neither did he hesitate to commend such a path of gracious self-abnegation to those whose function it is to feed or tend the flock of God.

The labourer is indeed worthy of his food, and of his hire for there are other necessities beyond food; and the Lord forgot none, as is plain from this twofold statement (Matt. 10:10, Luke 10:7, as cited in 1 Tim. 5: l 8): so the apostle declares (1 Cor. 9:14), the Lord ordained that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel, as the law had done before for those that ministered about holy things. But, while insisting on a title so just and true for others, we see the blessed man foregoing it for himself in the same context: 'But I [emphatically] have used none of these things; and I write not these things that it may be so done in my case; for it were good for me rather to die than that any man should make my glorying vain. For if I preach the gospel I have nothing to glory of; for necessity is laid upon me; for woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel. For if I do this willingly, I have a reward, but if not of mine own will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me. What then is my reward? That in preaching the gospel, I make the gospel without charge, so as not to use for myself [or, to the full] my title as to the gospel' (1 Cor. 9:15-18). Here was not letter but spirit, not self but Christ, in the full stream of that love which displayed itself to sinners in Christ sent that we who were dead might live through Him and that He might die a propitiation for our sins. It was meet that

the highest witness of grace among men should be a manifest giver in his measure as God is infinitely.

So he told the Thessalonians in his earliest Epistle, that he sought not glory of men, ‘neither from you nor from others, when we might have been a burden as apostles of Christ.’ None ever so well felt the value of Christ’s words, It is more blessed to give than to receive. His reason was far more elevated than that which Calvin imputes — because the false apostles taught freely without taking anything, that they might craftily insinuate themselves. In 1 Cor. 9, where his motives are shown, there is no allusion to these evil workers, and in fact there could be no such persons in Corinth when Paul came to preach, and no assembly as yet existed. It was a heart filled with love, and burning to illustrate the gospel in deed and in truth as he proclaimed it in word, without question of adversaries yet to arise and set up cheap and vaunting pretensions to similar grace. In his Second Epistle (2 Cor. 11) no doubt he does speak of his keeping himself in everything from being a burden to the saints in Corinth, and of his determination so to keep himself, that he might cut off the occasion of those wishing for an occasion, that wherein they boasted they might be found even as we [not we even as they].

‘And he was discoursing in the synagogue every sabbath and persuading Jews and Greeks’ (ver. 4).

The same word means either ‘discoursing’ in general, or in particular ‘reasoning’, or even ‘disputing’, as in Mark 9:34; Acts 17:2; Acts 24:12; Jude 9. Here as in Acts 20:7, 9; Heb. 12:5, the more general force seems preferable; in others ‘reasoning’ may be right as between the extremes. Context alone can decide. As the synagogue

was the scene of the discourses, we may gather assuredly that the testimony of the Old Testament was the ample ground-work on which Paul appealed to his hearers, who were not exclusively Jews, for we are expressly told that (not Hellenists but) Greeks were the objects of his habitual persuasion. If they were not proselytes, they must have been men whom the licentious excesses of heathenism drove them there, and no wonder, when, as another has said, their religion itself corrupted man; and he made of his corruption a religion.

Nowhere was this more deeply and conspicuously true than in Corinth, where the worship of Aphrodite with her infamous ἱερόδουλοι prevailed (the counterpart of Venus at Rome, and of Astarte, or Hebrew Ashtoreth in Syria). Abandoning all fear or thought of the true God, they fell below even the natural decency of man, and dishonoured themselves in the dishonour of God. The synagogue cold as it was, attracted consciences which revolted from evil which philosophy indulged in, or at best was far too weak to supplant or restrain, and Greeks there listened with Jews, to the holy and persuasive discourses of the apostle. We shall find a crisis that went farther ere long, but not till the apostle had the companionship of beloved fellow-labourers.

It may be added that too much has been made of the word ‘persuade’ in verse 4, as if it meant to ‘induce by little and little’. It is on the contrary the word by which the apostle himself expresses the preaching of the gospel to win souls in view of the awful reality of Christ’s tribunal for the hard or heedless (2 Cor. 5:10, 11). Paul’s word was not certainly in persuasive words of wisdom, as he told the Corinthians in his First Epistle (1

Cor. 2:3-5), but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, at the very time when he was with them, from his coming in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. He was not there as a philosopher or as ‘the power of God which is called great’, but as much of a contrast as one can conceive; and this, that the faith of such as believed might stand, not in man’s wisdom but in God’s power. But, as the effect of his discoursing in the synagogue, he was persuading Jews and Greeks.

When his companions arrived, this was what they found, and more soon followed. Great is the virtue, even for an apostle, of fellowship in labour, and cheering was the news then brought.

‘And when both Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was engrossed with (or constrained by) the word,199 testifying to the Jews that Jesus was200 the Christ. But as they opposed themselves and blasphemed, he shook out his clothes, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own head; I [am] pure; from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. And departing thence he went into a certain man’s house, by name Titus201 Justus, a worshipper of God, whose house adjoined to the synagogue’ (vers. 5-7).

It will be noticed that the two fellow-labourers are said to have come down from ‘Macedonia’, as the Roman province of northern Greece was called in distinction from Achaia, of which Corinth was the metropolis. Macedonia is the natural phrase, if Silas and Timothy came down from different quarters, and the repeated article would well fall in with this. They were no doubt together at Berea; and Timothy, if not Silas, joined Paul at Athens, whence he was dispatched to Thessalonica

with a view to establish them and encourage on behalf of their faith, that none should be disturbed in the afflictions then and there so severe. Both Silas and Timothy now joined the apostle at Corinth, but not necessarily at the same moment, any more than from the same point of departure. 1 Thess. 3:6. omits all mention of Silas as the companion of Timothy on this mission to Thessalonica, who brought to Paul the glad tidings of the Thessalonian saints, whereas the apostle speaking of the preaching at Corinth joins Silas and Timothy with himself in the address of that Epistle (2 Cor. 1:19). The apostle had forewarned these young converts of the tribulation that befell them; but this only the more increased his desires for them; and now he could rejoice that the tempter had failed, and that they were steadfast The apostle was then occupied earnestly with the word when the two came down; and assuredly their joint labours with him were as cheering to his heart as the good report brought about his beloved Thessalonians. Not the least ground seems to support the notion that their arrival with supplies enabled Paul to give up tent-making for the exclusive preaching of the word: certainly the verb suneivceto does not mean anything of the sort, but rather that the state of absorption with the word, by which he was characterized, went on, for it is the imperfect, not the aorist as it should have been if indicative of a fresh act or course consequent on their coming.

But there is another word which has to be taken into account, in order to a sound judgment. Were πνεύματι genuine, I cannot but think Erasmus (pace Bezae) right, and that the meaning would then be ‘straightened in spirit’. But it is not so. The Received reading πνεύματι

(‘spirit’) is not sustained by the best authorities which give λόγῳ (‘word’), πνεύματι having crept in from Acts 17:16; Acts 18:25; Acts 19:21, et al. Hence such a rendering as Wakefield’s must be summarily and on every ground discarded, ‘the mind of Paul was violently disturbed’, and none the less because the translation is commended by its author in his notes as perfectly agreeable to the original. Similarly erroneous is the turn given by Hammond, Mill, and Wolf, as if the apostle’s spirit was vexed at the unbelief of the Jews; or the opposite notion of Beza and others, who construe it into the zealous ardour which carried him away. Others again like Casaubon, Grotius, et al., depart still farther and consider ‘the spirit’ to mean the Holy Spirit by Whose impulse he was borne away at this time: a rendering which is in every way faulty, for the verb cannot bear such a force, and the reading is certainly erroneous. If genuine, it would rather require the article absent (unless ἁγίῳ were expressed): its insertion simply would point to one’s own spirit.

It is needless, however, though instructive in some measure, to discuss these departures from the truth, for it may be laid down as certain that the passage intimates that the apostle was occupied in the word when his fellow-workmen came from Macedonia. He was testifying thoroughly (διαμαρτυρόμενος) to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ or Messiah, the constant stumbling-block of that blinded people. Undoubtedly Jesus is much more than ‘the Christ’; and none ever preached His higher glory, both personal and conferred, more than Paul. But none the less did he press on the Jews that Jesus is the Christ, as the break-up of their

unbelief, and the necessary hinge of all further light and blessing.

‘But as they opposed themselves and blasphemed, he shook out his clothes and said unto them, Your blood [be] upon your own head: I [am] pure, from henceforth I will go [proceed] unto the Gentiles’ (ver. 6).

With rare exceptions such is the spirit of the Jews, and in it they fulfil the awful warnings of their prophets from Moses downwards. They are a perverse and crooked generation, and very froward withal, children in whom is no faith, moving Jehovah to jealousy with that which is not good, and provoking Him to anger with their vanities; as He has moved them to jealousy with those which are not a people, and provoked them to anger with a foolish nation. Ignorance is bearable and claims patient service in presenting the truth; but opposition is quite another thing, especially in the face of ample and convincing testimony; and speaking injuriously, or blasphemy yet more, is worse still, seeing that it is grace and truth in Christ which is thus outrageously rejected. This is fatal. Those who despised Jesus on earth had a fresh testimony concerning Him risen and glorified and still waiting to be gracious. There is no third, no other, witness to render unto those who reject Him speaking from heaven, as He is now — nothing but judgment for His adversaries when He appears in glory.

The apostle accordingly answered in significant deed as well as word: ‘he shook out his clothes, and said unto them…’ It was the spirit if not the form of Matt. 10:14, as even more rigidly carried out by himself and Barnabas at the Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:51). It was as if the dust of the place they dwelt in defiled, and must be

shaken off202 as a testimony against them, Sodom and Gomorrah were more tolerable.

Paul said also, Your blood [be] upon your own head. So, and yet worse, had those cried who actually urged on the Lord to the cross when Pilate would have let Him go, His blood be upon us and upon our children. And so it is until this day. ‘I [am] pure,’ added the apostle, ‘henceforth I will proceed unto the Gentiles.’ It was in perfect harmony not only with his own course elsewhere, but, what is of deeper importance still, with the ways of God in the gospel. The Jews were to have testimony first, and so they had and not quite in vain. Some did hear to the salvation of their souls; there is an elect remnant. But when the mass reject the gospel with hatred and blasphemy, the stream of blessing flows, though it is not lost but blessed amid the barren sands of the Gentiles.

It may interest some to know that, even in so simple a passage as the last, men of learning have differed. Lachmann suggested, and Alford followed, a punctuation which yields the sense, ‘I shall henceforth with a pure conscience go to the Gentiles.’ Wakefield follows the Peschito Syriac in breaking it up thus: ‘From this moment I am clean therefrom, I go to the Gentiles.’ In his note he says, ‘This disposition gives a degree of abruptness to the periods more suitable to an angry man’! The irreverence of the translator seems to my mind as manifest as his lack of judgment, and the ordinary division most consistent, dignified, and impressive.

‘And departing thence he went into a certain man’s house, by name Titus Justus, a worshipper of God, whose house adjoined to the synagogue’ (ver. 7).

Many, from Chrysostom to Alford, et al, have understood that the apostle removed from his quarters with Aquila203; and they have sought to assign motives and reasons in justification of the change. But there is no need to take the trouble, for it was a question of leaving not his lodgings, but the synagogue, and of finding therefore, not new quarters for his abode, but a suited place wherein to continue the testimony rendered previously in the synagogue. And this appears to me strikingly confirmed by the contiguity to the synagogue of the house, the use of which was offered at once by the devout Gentile whose heart was opening to the truth. If it were a mere lodging, why speak of its joining hard to the synagogue, on which Paul was henceforth turning his back? But if a suited room were wanted for testimony, two conditions met in the house of Justus; one, that the owner was himself a Gentile, and hence most proper to win the attendance of Gentiles, as well as to accentuate the grave and new step of the apostle; the other, that it was close enough to the synagogue to attract both Jews who might have a conscience about the rejected truth of God, and Gentile proselytes who had been in the habit of attending the synagogue, like Justus. The school of Tyrannus in the following chapter exactly answers to the change here. There nobody questions that a place for meeting apart from the synagogue is meant. We need not therefore infer that the apostle ceased to reside with Aquila, because the house of Justus furnished a suitable place for preaching when the synagogue no longer served. The apostle was

not consulting for himself but for others without allowing Calvin's idea, 'that he might the more nettle the Jews' — a petty and evil motive, very far from his heart who had just forewarned them of their obstinacy and danger of destruction. To remind them of the baneful consequences of impenitence was of God; to 'nettle' them by abandoning the house of his godly friends, Aquila and Priscilla, for that of a Gentile proselyte, seems inconsistent with Christ, with godly wisdom and right feeling. But with the gainsaying and blaspheming of the synagogue it was impossible to go on without constant strife; and therefore to use for testimony the house of one who valued the gospel, became the evidently proper step, particularly as it was hard by the synagogue, whence any disposed or in earnest might the more readily come.

Remarkable blessing followed the decision of the apostle not among Gentiles only, but among the Jews themselves.

'And Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed the Lord with all his house, and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. And the Lord said by night204 through a vision to Paul, Fear not, but speak and be not silent; because I am with thee, and no one shall set on thee to harm thee, because I have much people in this city. And he settled down a year and six months, teaching among them the word of God' (vers. 8-11).

It is not a small thing that the Holy Spirit singles out the name of any man for everlasting record in scripture. Thus 'Crispus' is mentioned as believing the Lord; and the rather, as he had been 'the ruler of the synagogue';

nor this only, for ‘the whole of his household’ believed also, though nothing is said of their baptism. Their faith, the great matter, was no slight cheer to the labourers, and a powerful appeal to the Jews generally. The phraseology is peculiar: not here believing ‘on’ the Lord as object of faith, though this was true also, but believing what He says. 1 Cor. 1:14 states that the apostle baptized him, but not a word about his house, yet assuredly they too, also accepting His testimony, were baptized though not by the apostle, who did but little in it, as he tells the Corinthians. Under the Lord’s keeping he had been preserved from any appearance of prominence personally.

‘And many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.’ The work now went on vigorously under the blessing of the Lord. It was a time of rich ingathering. These were clearly not Jews but Greeks, but none the less did many of them hear and believe the gospel; and, as became them, they submitted to the outward mark which severs the confessor of Christ from the careless or hostile world. They were buried with Christ through baptism unto death. In that act, had they been dumb, they said they died with Christ to sin; not only that He had died for their sins, now remitted on their faith, but that they were to reckon themselves to be dead to sin and alive in Him to God. Sin, therefore, was not to reign in their mortal body. What a change and deliverance for men once bondmen of sin unto death, now made free from sin, and become bondmen of righteousness, bondmen to God, having their fruit unto sanctification and the end eternal life! For in Corinth abounded fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with men, thieves, covetous drunkards,

revilers, extortioners; ‘and such were some of you,’ said the apostle, to the Corinthians who believed (1 Cor. 6:11). In no way had they been exempt from those vile corruptions.

Grace does not find, but makes, the saints after a new and heavenly pattern, as will be manifest when they are manifested with Christ in glory. It levels all in an utter condemnation, but it freely and fully sets in Christ all who believe according to the good pleasure of God’s will which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved, in Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our offences, according to the riches of His grace. This men hate, because it makes nothing of human distinctions in which the pride of man exalts and loses itself. It forbids all glorying in flesh that the sole glorying may be in the Lord. For there is but one man who is of all weight in the eyes of God, not the first, but the Second, even the Man Christ Jesus, Who gave Himself a ransom for all, the testimony in its own times, which becomes the turning-point of every soul: if heard, he lives; if rejected, he perishes in his sins, whatever the appearances or pretensions.

For in believing, man best owns his guilt and God’s grace, reversing the world’s sentence and endorsing heaven’s estimate of the Crucified One. Baptized in His name he becomes His to serve, where he was once Satan’s slave, in not a few cases shamelessly. Henceforth by virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, he is, whatever the condition, to please Him in all things; if a slave, he is Christ’s freedman; if free, noble, royal, none the less is he Christ’s bondman. You cannot have the heavenly and everlasting privileges without the responsibility meanwhile here below. Of this, for the

individual, baptism is the sign; as the Lord's supper is the sign of communion corporately. And none had the significance of the latter so fully laid open to them, as the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 10, and 11. They needed the instruction and the warning peculiarly; and therefore grace gave them both.

But the Lord was pleased also to vouchsafe extraordinary encouragement to His servant. Paul had a vision, in which he heard as well as saw. At his conversion he had seen and heard the Lord by day (Acts 9); as afterwards in a trance or ecstasy, when he returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, he saw Him Who bade him to get out of Jerusalem for his mission to the Gentiles (Acts 22:17-21). 2 Cor. 12:2-4 records his translation (whether in the body or out of the body, he did not know) to the third heaven. Thus visions and revelations were comparatively frequent with the apostle. At this time the design was practical. The Lord said to him, 'Fear not, but speak and be not silent' (ver. 9). The structure of the phrase implies that he was anxious. He needed a spring of courage beyond what his fellow-labourers could supply, and the Lord gave accordingly. Natural boldness is a force wholly unsuited to spiritual warfare, where the rule is, 'When I am weak, then am I strong.' All, to be safe and of God, must be in dependence on the grace of Christ. Then, as He Himself said to the apostle, 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for power is perfected in weakness' (2 Cor. 12:9). Most gladly, therefore, the apostle could say, will I rather glory in my weakness, that the strength of Christ may spread a tabernacle over me. So it was now: instead of fearing more he was to persevere in speaking and not to hold his peace, of which he was in danger, though (as

the form of the phrase implies) he had not begun to yield to it.

In the next verse the Lord condescends to give two reasons: the first, ‘because I am with thee, and no one shall set on thee to harm thee’, the second, ‘because I have much people in this city.’ What could be more consolatory to the tried servant? The Lord bound Himself, on the one hand, to give His gracious and mighty presence against all adversaries and, on the other, to open to him a great door and effectual in his work. Rage as Satan’s emissaries might the Lord had many to bring to Himself as His own in that depraved an] godless city.

It is lamentable to hear such remarks as those of Limborch, who will have the Lord to mean, not so much objects of mere and sovereign grace to magnify His own mercy in redemption, as virtuous and well-disposed brethren, for this reason called His people here, and His sheep in John 10:16. To mistakes we are all liable, and not least those who flatter themselves to be most secure from them, but an error of this kind undermines the gospel, as it indicates the feeblest sense of man’s utter ruin, and of our need of grace to the last degree. No one doubts God’s wisdom in bringing such a one as Cornelius under the gospel, when He first sent it out publicly to the Gentiles by Peter; but the great apostle of the Gentiles tells a very different tale (1 Cor. 6:9-11) of the characters whom grace deigned to bless at Corinth. Again, the Lord, in the parable of the marriage-feast for the king’s son, directs His bondmen to go into the thoroughfares of the highways, and as many as they could find, to invite to the feast. Accordingly they went out into the highways, and, gathered together all, as

many as they found, both bad and good, and the wedding-feast was filled with guests (Matt. 22:1-10). They are men met and, in believing the gospel, saved indiscriminately to the praise of the riches of God's grace; for the 'good' discover through the truth of Christ that they too sinned and come wholly short of the glory of God, while the 'bad' find in His plenteous redemption that His grace justifies freely, the same One being Lord of all, and rich toward all that call upon Him. There is no difference, as at bottom in the ruin, so in result in the salvation, that as sin reigned in death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

At Corinth, in the face of all difficulties, the apostle abode longer than we have yet heard of elsewhere. 'And he settled down a year and six months, teaching among them the word of God' (ver. 11).

The result was, not only the salvation of many souls, but the church of God there: holy, catholic, apostolic, if ever there was such an assembly anywhere. It was planted by one inferior to none; it was watered by others who were not surpassed by any, and God gave the increase beyond controversy. Yet how soon the fair scene is blighted, not merely by the presence in their midst of such sin as was unheard of ordinarily among the Gentiles, but by the low, fleshly, and worldly-minded condition of the saints generally! So much so, that the apostle had to vindicate his own office before the self-assumed bar of his own children in the faith, and put off a visit in their dire need of his help, because he must have come then with a rod, and he wished rather to see them in love and in a spirit of meekness; and this could only be on their self-judgment which in fact his First Epistle wrought in

them. Men picture the apostles going about and their words received implicitly, and their presence had but to be known in order to secure unhesitating deference among the saints. This was not so. Miracles, inspiration, and the highest place in the church produced no more submission then and there than when an analogous place was given Moses and Aaron in the congregation of Jehovah of old.

But the failure at Corinth in so brief an interval was turned to God to the double end; first, of refuting the folly that a true assembly may not err and become corrupt, even in a few short years, in both doctrine and practice; and, secondly, of drawing from God the suited correction at any time for all saints who are enabled by faith to gather on the footing of God's church according to His word and by His Spirit. No doubt, recovery was the fruit of the apostle's writing, as his Second Epistle bears witness; but how long this lasted, who can say? Certain it is that the second century, if not the first, A.D., saw the assembly everywhere, departed from the very aim our gracious God and Father had in gathering the saints — the glory of Christ therein by the Spirit. Christ's coming was no longer an object of hope but rather of fear, His word became more and more overlaid by human authority and tradition, and the world began to seem a prize to possess and enjoy increasingly, instead of a scene of suffering and testimony, till He come Whose right it is, when we shall reign with Him in glory.

During the apostle's stay at Corinth an event occurred which was of interest enough for the Holy Ghost to claim a place in the inspired narrative and thus to carry on the design of the work given to Luke for accomplishing.

‘But when Gallio was pro-consul205 of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul, and brought him before the judgment-seat, saying, This [man] persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If indeed it were some wrong, or wicked villainy, O Jews, with reason should I have borne with you, but if they are questions about a word and names and your own law, ye shall look yourselves:206 I do not intend to be judge of these things. And he drove them from the judgment-seat. And having all207 laid hold on Sosthenes the ruler of the synagogue, they beat [him] before the judgment-seat. And Gallio cared for none of these things. And Paul having remained yet many days, took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila, having shorn his head in Cenchreae, for he had a vow’ (vers. 12-18).

The testimony went forth fearlessly; the vision answered its purpose. Paul was not afraid but spoke and held not his peace; and while much people came forth to the Lord’s name, none else was allowed to do His servant harm. If not a sparrow falls on the ground without our Father if the very hairs of our head are all numbered, if the Lord Himself will confess before His Father him that confesses the Son before men, there is ground for good courage, not for fear of man. And the impotence of the most exasperated was proved in an unexpected way and quarter, but not without the Lord.

Gallio was notoriously one of the most amiable of men. ‘None of mortals,’ said the famous Seneca of him, ‘is so sweet to one man, as he to all men.’ This no doubt expressed the admiring affection of a brother; but the general character of the Roman governor is

indisputable. And the Jews hoped to profit for their rancorous hostility by his pliant temper and love of approbation against the uncompromising witness of the one true God the Father, and of one Lord Jesus Christ. But malice defeats itself against grace and truth whenever God is pleased so to order it; and here, as He had distinctly promised to be with Paul and that none should injure him, so it came to pass in a way strikingly different from the apostle's experience elsewhere.

It may be well to notice again the precise position of Gallio. He was 'pro-consul' of Achaia. It is the more striking, because the province under both Tiberius and Caligula had been imperial, and hence under the authority then of a pro-praetor. Claudius, the reigning emperor, had restored Achaia to the senate, which involved the change of its former government to that of a pro-consul. Accordingly at this time Luke speaks accurately not of a pro-praetor, but of a pro-consul. We saw a similar instance in Sergius Paulus the pro-consul of Cyprus, which, like Achaia, had been under imperial authority, but was afterwards transferred to the senate, and thus became pro-consular. The inspired historian made no mistake in these details, where it was exceedingly easy to do so if he had not been under divine guidance, and the more so, as the early Christians notoriously kept aloof from all meddling with political administration. But in scripture we are entitled to look for the truth in things small and great; and this should be recognized by giving as exactly as possible the reproduction of its meaning.

In fact Luke had been supposed in one at least of these instances to have erred by applying the term erroneously according to the state of things which had

existed before the transfer to the senate, till a passage was found in an historian not read generally which confirmed the change, and coins with the new title made it still more evident. Had there been no coins, no statement in Dio Cassius, extraneous evidence would have failed, yet the truth would have remained all the same in scripture: only even Christians would have trembled because history did not speak in support of scripture. It is such incredulity which is so deplorable, and this among not heathens and Jews only but the baptized. But how sad that men bearing the Christian name should be swayed in a moment by human testimonies, after showing their readiness to doubt even when they had the inspired word for it! Can anything evince more clearly that men naturally distrust God and His word? These things ought not so to be.

The Jews then with one accord rose up against Paul, and brought him to the well-known seat of the governor whence they counted on a sentence favourable to their desires. ‘This [man]’, said they, ‘persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.’ Gallio saw through the case in a moment, and that it needed no defence. ‘The law’ in their mouth meant the law of Moses. This was enough for the Roman, whose pride was roused for his own. ‘And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews…’ He had heard enough to be sure that neither state law, nor public morality, nor private rights, had been violated, and it was no business of his to inquire farther. The contempt in which Jews were generally held no doubt strengthened his decision, of which the accused reaped the benefit. His amiable indifference did not wish to be troubled with what the apostle had to say. Religious opinion or the worship of

God, as a question between the Jews and one they blamed, did not concern him or his office; God was in none of his thoughts, and he preferred to hear no more. The time would come when Christ's servants would be brought before governors and kings for His sake, for a testimony to them and the Gentiles, when it should be given them in that hour what was to be spoken. Here it was not the time to speak, though Paul was arraigned before the bema. The Lord guarded the interests of the gospel, and of its blessed witness, through employing providentially the careless amiability of the judge; who assuredly could not be accused of any real partiality for the apostle, and the less if he entertained views akin to those of his philosophic brother. Seneca's Stoicism was as far from appreciating the faith and humility of the Christian as from receiving the revelation of the Father and the Son, or the eternal life and redemption which the Holy Spirit now makes the known portion of the believer.

The Roman left the Jews to settle their religious questions in their own way. Gallio declined to have his hand forced, he had no mind to be a judge of these things. 'Were it indeed some wrong, or wicked villainy, O Jews, with reason I should have borne with you; but if it be questions about a word and names and your own law, look to it yourselves: I am not minded to be a judge of these things.' The kindest and most courteous may be contemptuous enough when the truth is concerned, of which he knows nothing. 'And he drove them from the judgment-seat' (ver. 16). Even if physical force was not used, there is implied at the least peremptoriness.

Such an issue on the part of an official so exalted would unavoidably act on an impressionable people who

shared the prevalent scorn of the heathen towards Jews disappointed of their prey. It is not needful to specify that ‘all were Greeks’, who assailed the prominent Jew who complained in the case, though there is large and good authority for this addition, adopted in the Text. Rec. Certainly the reading of some cursives, which attributes the assault to ‘all the Jews’, refutes itself as intrinsically worthless and absurd. Had not Sosthenes but Crispus been said to be the object of animosity, such a reading could be understood. But Sosthenes would seem to have succeeded Crispus in that office, without a hint of his conversion as yet, though he may have been the one who is later spoken of as a brother. The best, though not the most considerably authenticated, variant is that which is found in the Sinaitic, Alexandrian, and Vatican Uncials, and some of the most ancient versions. These witnesses simply say that they ‘all’ laid hold of Sosthenes the ruler of the synagogue, and were beating him before the judgment-seat, and that Gallio gave himself no trouble about the matter. Thus did God in His providence bring to naught the malicious attack of the Jews on Paul, while manifesting the unbelieving easiness of Gallio.

It is interesting to note also that the apostle did not quit Corinth at once as indeed the failure of the Jews before the governor left him free. ‘And Paul having remained yet many days took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence unto Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila, having shorn his head in Cenchreae, for he had a vow’ (ver. 18). It was during his stay at Corinth that the two Epistles to the Thessalonians were written, with an interval between them, short but sufficient to show what mischief could befall the saints in a brief time, so

mistaken are those who think it was only after centuries that error was able to enter. So it also was, as we know, among the assemblies of Galatia in a more fatal way, and on a subject yet more fundamental. And both occasions were where the saints had the inestimable benefit of an apostolic planting, which Rome had not any more than other places, which vaunted as proudly as with scanty reason. Indeed Corinth itself was to manifest the same liability to go astray, though it was chiefly in ecclesiastical truth and order, though by no means confined to it and yet there Paul stayed many days before the charge made to Gallio, and, as we are told, ‘yet many days’ after. But at length he bade the brethren adieu and sailed thence unto Syria, and with him his beloved companions Priscilla and Aquila.

There is a clause at the end of verse 18 which has afforded matter for debate. The ancients do not seem to have doubted that Paul himself is in question, the preceding words being parenthetical. Others, especially of late, as Wieseler and Meyer, have been more willing to attach the vow, and shaving of the head, to Aquila. But the great apostle went far in compliance with, and in condescension to, Jewish forms in certain circumstances which left the grace of the gospel untouched. It was the effort to impose the law on the Gentiles who believed, which roused a tempest of feeling and irresistible argument, as indeed his whole soul was engaged with burning zeal at once for the cross of his Master, and for the liberty of the souls imperilled by that effort. Some ancients indeed, not the Aethiopic Version only, gave the sense that more than one shaved the head according to vow; but I see no sufficient reason to doubt that it was Paul; for he is the one before the

mind of the inspiring Spirit, rather than to speak of Aquila.

Not only was Paul's head shorn in Cenchreae, and this as a vow, but we ought to gather from the subsequent history, if not from the immediate context, that it was of the Spirit to reveal the fact as important for us to observe in the account He is giving of that blessed man and of his labours. Not that we are meant to infer that Paul in thus acting was at the height of the fresh revelations of Christ given to him, but that along with these he acted thus with a good conscience. He was apostle of the Gentiles and minister of the church, but he was also, as he said, a Pharisee, son of Pharisees, who even after this charged himself to his nation with alms and offerings, and was found purified in the temple. Grace was bringing out its new and hitherto unrevealed wonders in Christ, and in the church, to God's glory; but the most deeply taught and fully furnished witness of heavenly truth heartily loved the ancient people of God and never forgot that he too was an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin; and this, not only within the precincts of Jerusalem and the land, but, as we see here, among the Greeks. This is often a great difficulty to those imbued with the spirit and habits of traditional Christianity, but it is because they are and would be logical, where the Holy Spirit is giving in those most honoured of the Lord things just as they were. Prejudices and prepossession are not so quickly shaken off, even where we behold an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile. The Lord deals pitifully with a true heart, where a cold intellect can only spy out an inconsistency; but the criticizing mind could not follow that heart for a moment either in its zealous

service or in the spiritual might and power which pursues the service to the Lord's glory. We shall see that more follows of a similar character, which in the inspired record points beyond controversy to no less a man than the apostle.

'And they208 arrived at Ephesus, and he left them there; 209 but he himself, entering into the synagogue reasoned210 with the Jews. And when they asked him to remain211 for a longer time, he did not consent, but taking his leave and saying, [I must by all means keep the coming feast at Jerusalem;]212 I will return again unto you if God will, he sailed from Ephesus. And landing at Caesarea, he west up and saluted the church, and went down unto Antioch. And having spent some time he departed, going through the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, establishing all the disciples' (vers. 19-23).

There is no doubt considerable and good authority in support of the Received Text, followed by the A.V. and most others. But the best witnesses and versions sustain the plural form in the first clause, which gives additional force to the singular in the second, in which all agree. 'And they arrived at Ephesus' is the reading given by the Sinaitic, Alexandrian, Vatican, and Laud's Bodleian, with some cursives. The Greek of Beza's MS. is probably a mere clerical error, as it makes no grammatical coherence, and the Latin agrees with the oldest authorities and several of the best ancient versions. It is certainly true that they all reached Ephesus. It is only a matter of emphasis that the apostle entered into the synagogue and discoursed to the Jews: though he did leave them there, there was no need of giving prominence to such a circumstance. Still less is it

implied that they did not accompany him to the synagogue, or that aujtou' if genuine instead of ejkei' suggests that the synagogue was outside the city; which inferences appear alike unfounded.

'And when they asked him to remain for a longer time, he did not consent, but taking his leave and saying, [I must by all means keep the coming feast at Jerusalem,] I will return again unto you if God will, he sailed from Ephesus' (vers. 20, 21). It is well known that the clause within the brackets is not in the Uncials of the highest character, though it is attested by abundant and good authority. Hence it becomes very much a question of internal evidence. Meyer lays stress on the reference of ajnabav" in verse 22; but 'going up', though unquestionably to Jerusalem, need not have been to keep a Jewish feast, unless it was expressly so explained. The only thing recorded as a fact is his saluting the church. This in no way disproves the purpose to keep the feast there; but it undoes the force of the argument founded on ajnabav". The truth is that both may be true; verse 21, if genuine, stating what he meant to do in Jerusalem, though nothing is said of its accomplishment, and verse 22 letting us know that his heart had other objects before him than the purpose he had mentioned to the Jews of Ephesus. And the history shortly after informs us that he did soon return to Ephesus for one of the most blessed services even of his wonderful life.

Such statements as these test the heart of the readers. If vain or proud irreverent or self-righteous, they will probably yield to the snare of thinking and even speaking disrespectfully of the great apostle to the damage of their own souls and the injury of others. For

nothing is easier than for persons superficially conscious of their own grave faults to mark with eagerness and self-satisfaction any acts of Paul, a servant of Christ so deeply taught and devoted, which sprang from his excessive attachment to the ancient people of God, and to the habits of their religious life. It is easy also to forget that it is to his inspired writings, more than to all other sources put together, that they owe the means of sitting in judgment on him in this respect. But is this the return that divine grace would produce in hearts which have truly profited? Does it become us? Is it not a wiser and a holier conclusion to see how affections of the sweetest kind may entangle even the most faithful and spiritual, and to watch that we who have it all set before us by the unwavering and impartial hand of the Holy Spirit may learn from it, so that, far behind in self-abnegation and untiring labours and sufferings for Christ, we slip not through less elevated affections into far more serious delinquency?

It was after this visit to Jerusalem that the apostle went down to Antioch (ver. 22). Was it not then, as it was certainly there (Gal. 2:11-13), that Cephas, blessed man as he was, must needs be resisted to the face? Indeed he stood condemned, for his conduct was no mere lingering respect for Jewish institutions, nor self-sacrificing love for the people of whom, as to flesh, the Messiah came, but a wavering compromise of God’s gospel to the Gentiles through fear of the circumcision; and this, after not only a special revelation to him when he went to Caesarea, but his stand with the apostles and elders at the council in Jerusalem. It was not condescension to Jewish feeling, but what Paul did not hesitate to call dissimulation and not walking uprightly according to the

truth of the gospel; and it was so much the worse and more dangerous because of the eminence and influence of the defaulters. True, it was very far from the awful evil which began to rise up against the truth or teaching of Christ in the ‘last hour’ of John, which this apostle of love vindicated so sternly (1 John 2:18, 19). But hitherto men had not sunk to the unclean reasoning that heinous sin is to be excused, because it is practised by those who claim to be dear children of God, though even they had had the warning that one who boasted of his readiness to lay down his life for Christ was precisely the man who at that very moment was on the eve of denying Christ repeatedly with oaths.

All that we are told by Luke is that, having spent some time (i.e., at Antioch), Paul ‘departed, going through the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, establishing all the disciples’ (ver. 23). When the apostle planted the gospel in Galatia, he had entered the country from Phrygia, which lay to its south and south-west (Acts 16:6). But now coming from a different direction, he traversed Galatia before Phrygia. And as it was a second visit, we hear of his passing through the country ‘in order’, that is, where assemblies existed, and establishing ‘all the disciples’ who had already received the gospel. This is of much interest in its bearing on the Epistle which was certainly written not long after their calling: ‘I wonder that ye are so quickly removing from him that called you in the grace of Christ, unto a different gospel, which is not another’ (Gal. 1:6). Such is man even where the foundation had been laid a little before by the greatest of apostles.

Here is introduced an incident of importance in its bearing on the history of souls passing out of the

transition state, which John the Baptist's teaching represents, into the full light of gospel. The episode indeed is twofold, one part closing Acts 18, the other opening Acts 19, both tending to illustrate the same thing in substance: only the former deals with it as a question of truth, the other, of the consequent power of the Spirit which was received on the faith of the gospel. Let us look at each in due order, and first at the conclusion of the chapter before us.

'But a certain Jew, Apollos213 by name, an Alexandrian by race, an eloquent [or learned] man, arrived at Ephesus, being mighty in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the way214 of the Lord, and being fervent in his spirit he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus,215 knowing only the baptism of John, and he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla216 and Aquila heard him, they took him up, and more accurately expounded to him the way of God.217 And when he was minded to go through into Achaia, the brethren wrote and urged the disciples to receive him; and he, on coming, contributed much to those that had believed through grace. For he forcibly confuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ' (vers. 24-28).

There simply comes before us a Jewish workman, who soon needed not to be ashamed, however unformed at first. He was a native of the city which was afterwards to play a notorious part in the corruption of heavenly truth by earthly wisdom, himself a man of learning, or eloquence (for the word lovgio" is used for both), and able in the scriptures. Nor was he merely a scholar and otherwise competent, but already instructed in the way of the Lord. Born of God, he was as to intelligence in

advance of a God-fearing Jew, but short of the fuller truth which the gospel affords as the foundation for the mystery to be revealed, with all its wonderful light on God's counsels and ways. Further, being fervent in his spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things 'concerning Jesus' (for the right reading helps to clear the true sense). He was ignorant of all truth beyond 'the baptism of John'. Nor was he lacking in moral courage or zeal; 'and he began to speak boldly in the synagogue'.

This raised the question, practically of great moment, how souls thus endowed, yet little acquainted with the truth, are to be dealt with? Grace answers and settles all according to its own power. The latest advance beyond the dead level of orthodox tradition is to be hailed and cherished. How lamentable to despise those today who are where we were yesterday! 'Who maketh thee to differ? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive, why dost thou glory as if not receiving?' So at a later moment did the apostle reprove the vain Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:7). Far different was the feeling of the godly pair with whom he had abode in that very city. 'But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him up and expounded to him the way of God more accurately.'

Nor did the learned Alexandrian resent the private instruction, not only of the Christian Jew, but of his wife, who, as we may gather from the unusual order, seems to have entered into the truth with a more spiritual mind than her husband. Was it inconsistent with the apostolic exhortation in 1 Tim. 2:12? In no way. A woman might possess the highest spiritual gift, as we find (Acts 21:9) that the four daughters of Philip did in fact; and assuredly there is room, not to say responsibility, for the

due exercise of that and every other gift from the Lord, without collision with His word, nay only carrying it out the more. To him that hath shall be given. Apollos had enough to encourage those who knew the grace of Christ better to set out the truth according to the word, as he had enough true knowledge of the things concerning Jesus to value and welcome for his soul all that Priscilla and Aquila could open from the scriptures. Ought He not to have suffered unto death for our sins and to enter into His glory? 'Thus it is written, and thus it behoved the Christ to suffer and to rise from among the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all the nations' (Luke 24:46, 47).

This rises far beyond the promised Messiah which was the substance of John's teaching, with repentance urged on the souls that received it. Apollos knew no more, however eloquently he might proclaim its value and however ably he might fortify its truth by apt proofs from the Old Testament scriptures. It may be argued, no doubt, that John went farther in his preaching because he testified of Jesus as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. But the conclusion is invalid that John knew or taught redemption by His blood. Not even the apostles did till the Lord rose from the dead. John spoke in the Spirit beyond anything which he personally apprehended. He thoroughly knew that He, Who was standing in the midst of those who knew Him not, was the Christ and Son of God in a sense peculiar to Himself alone. And therefore, did he preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, owning the One mightier, Whose sandals he was not fit to unloose, Who should baptize with the Holy Spirit. The efficacy of His

death, the power of His resurrection, the glory of His place on high, John did not enter into as the disclosed and enjoyed objects of his faith; nor did any other till the mighty facts took place, and were set out in the Spirit from the word of God.

Thus the help of the Christian pair was as welcome to Apollos as they were needed to supply the defects of his instruction. And we may observe how distant and different were the means employed of God from the formal methods of a divinity school. Can the moderns boast of superior efficiency? This may well be doubted by those who know what fertile hotbeds of heterodoxy theological schools have proved in all ages and lands, Protestant as well as Catholic or any other. They may be more or less learned, they may cultivate for a few terms Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, and the like; they may teach their own peculiar traditions and dogmas, with the commonplaces of theology, they may exercise their students in composition and elocution. But the truth of God must be known by faith, and to faith only can it be entrusted profitably; and these are commodities so rare in the schools as never to be reckoned on, though of course now and then to be found there, but even where they enter, all is unfavourable for growth: so encumbered are they with that which is extraneous and human. The means afforded by grace to Apollos, and recorded for our guidance by the inspiring Spirit, would, I fear, find scant favour in the eyes of the professors, or even of the divinity students, that believe; and would be assuredly scorned by all who believe not, whether leaders or led.

But God has deemed it good and wise to let us know how Apollos fared under his tuition. ‘And when he was

minded to go through into Achaia, the brethren wrote and urged the disciples to receive him; and he on coming contributed much to those that had believed through grace.' For he forcibly confuted the Jews in public strewing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.' His progress was thus manifest to all; and arrogant opposers were put to shame, as the faithful were built up by his means. For Apollos could work with a force beyond those who privately had led him on. Such is the scriptural way of obtaining a good degree, and much boldness in faith that is in Christ Jesus.

193 Good MSS. add

ὁ Παῦλος as in Text. Rec., the Authorized and other Versions but the best omit.

194 The form varies in copies, with the same sense in substance in all the words thus marked.

195 Ibid.

196 Ibid.

197 'They' wrought is sustained by pm B, Coptic and Origen, for one can scarce add the loose Æthiopic Version. It seems strange that the Revisers should adopt so precarious a reading in the face of all other authorities.

198 It is known that among the Jews of that day it was usual for a son to learn a trade. Some, if not all, of the greatest Rabbis exercised a handicraft. Indeed in the Talmud Rabbi Juda says, He that does not teach his son a trade, virtually teaches him to be a thief; and Rabban Gamaliel compares a man with a trade to a vineyard that is fenced.

199

λόγῳ ABDE, six cursives, Vulg. Memph. Theb. Syrr. Arm. Aeth.; πνεύματι (as in Text. Rec.) has quite inferior authorities.

200

εἶναι is read by the best witnesses.

201 Titus, or Titius, is vouched for by BDgr2 E, four cursives, Vulg. Memph. Syr.-Harcl. Arm. Indeed Syr.-Pesch. and Theb. gave Titus only; and a cursive corrects Justus by Titus.

202 Think of Wakefield, while he retains the ordinary version, saying, ‘I am partly inclined to think it means here — throwing off his garment: which exhibits a striking image of the conduct of the apostle: As I throw off this cloak, so I relinquish all further concern with you.’

203 Indeed, instead of

ἐκεῖθεν the Codex Bezae and a cursive (137) expressly change ‘thence’ into ‘from Aquila’s’, which marks how strong was the current in this direction. Of course it was a mere gloss, and even a misinterpretation to boot.

204 The order of the words differs in the MSS.

205

ἀνθυπατεύοντος is the Text. Rec. supported by most cursives, but ABD with several good juniors give the two words ἀνθυπάτου ὄντος. The additions of Codex Bezae are numerous here as elsewhere, but hardly call for remark.

206 Text. Rec., supported by four uncials and most cursives, adds γάρ ‘for’; but the oldest MSS. and Versions do not give it.

207 Text. Rec. with most adds

οἱ

Ἕλληνες, ‘the Greeks’, but the best authorities are adverse.

208 So read ABE, et al., Sah. Syr.-Pesch. Are Aeth. pp; Dgr καταντήσας, the rest supporting the Text. Rec., as in the A.V., et al.

209 Some ancient authorities omit, or transpose, this clause, to make the narrative more flowing, and there is much conflict of testimony as to αὐτοῦ or ἐκεῖ for there’.

210

διελέξατο has the best suffrages,

διελέχθη the most numerous,

διελέγετο has a few MSS. and Versions of value, but is hardly consistent with the next 211 ‘With them’ (or ‘there’), is added by some, as in Text. Rec., but the best omit.

212 Very weighty witnesses omit the words in brackets; as to which Tischendorf refers to Acts 19:21, Acts 20:16.

213 The Sinaitic pm, two cursives, the Coptic and the Arm. confound Apollos with Apelles (Rom. 16:10).

214 Beza’s uncial with more than fifteen cursives reads ‘word’ for ‘way’.

215 For ‘the Lord’ in Text. Rec. (supported by HP, et al.), the best witnesses have ‘Jesus’.

216 The order in the inferior uncials, etc., is ‘Aquila and Priscilla’ but ABE with Vulg. Cop. Aeth. as above.

217 The order, and even words, fluctuate in the copies.

Acts 19

Here we have another fact of deep interest as illustrating the state of souls not as yet favoured with the apostolic or even more ordinary gospel testimony. The grace of Christ displays its elasticity in meeting them with the truth which they needed, in order to bring them into the full enjoyment of the Christian condition:

‘And it came to pass, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having gone through the upper parts, came [down(?)]218 unto Ephesus, and finding219 certain disciples, said unto them, Received ye [the] Holy Spirit since ye believed? And they [said]220 unto him, Not even if [the] Holy Spirit was did we hear. And he said, 221 Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John’s baptism. And Paul said, John baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him that was coming after him, that is, on Jesus’222 (vers. 1-4).

It is important to recognize what is here clearly made known in the inspired narrative that these imperfectly instructed souls, whom Paul found at Ephesus, after Apollos had gone to Corinth, are owned as disciples. The apostle does not question the reality of their faith. He observed probably a certain legalism in them, which raised the question not whether they were born of the Spirit, but whether they were sealed by Him. ‘Received ye the Holy Spirit since ye believed?’ Their answer makes the distinction as plain as it is momentous. They had not so much as heard of the Holy Spirit as the apostle asked. They were doubtless not unacquainted with the Old Testament, nor of course with John’s

testimony, as appears from what followed. They were therefore familiar with the Holy Spirit as spoken of in the scripture, and must have heard directly or indirectly that John declared the Messiah was to baptize with the Spirit. Whether this was a fact yet, they knew not.

The existence of the Holy Spirit was never in question. What they had not even heard was of any answer to the promise, still less had they been made partakers. This raised the further question, To what then were ye baptized? with the answer, To John's baptism. They were not therefore even on the ground of Christian profession, for, as the apostle wound up, John's was 'a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him that was coming after him, that is, on Jesus.' Christian baptism supposes Him to be dead and risen, the work of redemption accomplished, with eternal life and remission of sins proclaimed in His name. They were believers, the Holy Spirit had wrought in their souls so that the word of God had entered, but they were wholly short even of those immediately conferred privileges which faith in the gospel enjoys.

Now the case before us is not without its bearing on souls around us in the present day. How many saints there are who know nothing beyond the new birth, imagining this to be the common blessing of Christianity if they be not also betrayed thereby into the delusion of what they call higher life, holiness, sanctification, or perfection! The last three of these are scriptural terms, but when treated as a goal of attainment, and especially in the sense of the amelioration of nature or the practical extinction of sin within, they veil very grave deflections from the truth.

It is therefore to be noted how careful scripture is to distinguish between the early vital work of the Holy Spirit in awakening souls by the application of the word, and the subsequent reception of the Spirit when the gospel is believed. In the men at Ephesus before us there was as yet no such reception; yet they were born of God, which never is apart from subjection to His word. But it may be far from the gospel of His grace. Any part of the divine word, one might say generally, is applicable to quickening a soul, hardly as in this case going beyond what an Old Testament saint experienced. How many in Christendom rest on promise and have no notion of accomplishment! They of course allow that the Saviour is come, but of salvation come, and of God's righteousness revealed, they are wholly ignorant. They are still in quest of what they have not got as the present gift of God, they if earnest are therefore anxious, tried, groaning after they know not what, if not over their own proved unworthiness and the treacherous evil of their hearts. They quite overlook the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ; still less do they rest on His work of redemption as valid for their own souls. Am I His, or am I not? is the question that harasses them habitually. Attracted by His love they listen to His words and are momentarily bright, then the thought of self rises in their conscience, and they are in the depths, wholly unable to reconcile the love of a holy God with their actual state which they cannot but feel. Hence they are driven, from ignorance of the gospel, to search after as many signs of a renewed condition as they can discover within them; and thus they toil in a life of hopes balanced against fears, having as little sense of total ruin as they have of God's love toward them. And no wonder, for they are occupied not with Christ but with

themselves. How then can such escape that sense of internal misery inevitable to the spirit, and the more so if born of God, till they know, by faith, the mighty work of Christ, where all evil is judged, all sins forgiven, perfect righteousness established without us and yet for us immutably, and ourselves brought nigh to God as His saints and children without a question unsettled?

Of all this the Ephesian disciples could know nothing. They were avowedly waiting where John's doctrine and baptism left them, believing on Him that should come after him, that is, on Jesus. But they were wholly unacquainted with the blessing that had already come, the glad tidings taking the place of promises, because all that God requires, as well as every need of the poorest of sinners, is already accomplished in the atoning work of our Lord Jesus. And so it is practically with many a believer now, not speaking merely of schools of doubt, where on principle the right state is laid down to be the most painful shrinking from rest in the saving grace of God, but in view of the thousands who, without a doubt of Jesus as the only Saviour, have no idea that God is proclaiming peace to them through the blood of the cross of Christ.

They too are under law in effect; and hence in a state of habitual bondage through fear of death, feelings as to themselves constantly clouding the simple truth (on which the gospel insists) that we are lost, and that all is grace on God's part, Who has been already glorified perfectly as to sin in the cross, so that He can righteously afford to bless the believer fully. Ignorant of this wondrous grace which excludes all thought of self save as evil and lost, what can one do but look for good as a ground of hope with God, while vaguely conscious

withal that nothing but mercy will do? In truth all is comparatively vague in such a state, alas! far too common in Christendom, where not the wicked only need the gospel, but many a righteous soul, quickened by the Spirit to feel in a measure for God, but as yet never realizing that it is for the lost the Son of man came and died, that they, resting by faith on His blood, might know their sins blotted out, and their old man crucified with Him that the body of sin might be destroyed that they henceforth should not serve sin, but, freed from it and become servants of God, have their fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life.

Now, in the state described, it is too much to assume that souls, wretched in the present, and drawing a precarious and oft vanishing comfort from the future, albeit prayerful and pious, have received the Holy Spirit, the incomparable privilege of the gospel; and this, because they have not really moved on from the promise to which an Old Testament saint clung rightly as to his sheet-anchor in a storm when the light had not yet dawned. It is sad for a disciple now to be in a similar state, instead of submitting to the righteousness of God and thus having peace with Him, as justified by faith through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are none of us apostles, but it is no mean part of our work and testimony to meet the true’ wants of such souls. Else in vain do you look for an unworldly walk, for worship in Spirit and in truth, in vain, or worse than vain, do you force on these weakly plants into the high region of the church’s privileges as Christ’s body, or even of its responsibilities as of God’s house. Such souls really need the gospel as well as the Spirit in power for their souls. It is after hearing the word of truth, the

gospel of their salvation, that saints, it may be as in the case before us born of God are on believing sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Then, and not till then, can they thrive, flourish, and bear the fruit of righteousness, which is by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God. The blessing turns on ‘the hearing of faith’, not on works of law, which works wrath and a curse. ‘They which be of faith are blessed’ — they only.

It can hardly be supposed that the twelve disciples in Ephesus here brought before us had enjoyed the teaching of Apollos, still less the help of Aquila and Priscilla who unfolded to him the way of God more exactly. If so, they would have been led on, as they were by the apostle afterwards. For it was pure ignorance which hindered their advance in truth, and not either obstinacy or the absurd and wicked error imputed by some to them, which appeared later in the East, and left traces to a recent epoch, as Neander states in the first volume of his Church History. John’s baptism, in scripture, went with his call to repent, as we have just seen, and that they should believe on the coming Messiah, i.e., Jesus. In no way was it the blasphemy of accepting John as Messiah. They knew of promise, not of accomplishment: but that was to stop short of the gospel. They are now given to receive the full truth and blessing. Paul preached to them Jesus. What is there for souls which is not through Him and in Him?

‘And when they heard this, they were baptized unto the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied; and they were in all about twelve men’ (vers. 5-7).

But here it is well to understand what is taught; for some have inferred from the inspired historian that the original formulary had lapsed, and that the apostles here and elsewhere in the Acts are represented as baptizing only to the name of the Lord Jesus. This is a serious position. It professes to stand on the letter of scripture which cannot be broken; yet is it one which demands and deserves the fullest consideration, for it really annuls scripture. It has been entertained, and even acted on, by not a few whose principle it is to abhor any view or practice which puts a slight on the immediate authority of our Lord. Yet no one denies that He clearly laid down for that institution baptizing to the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19).

So it is laid down in the earliest of the Gospels, where the great commission is given to the eleven. They were told to go forth and disciple all the nations, the Jews having already been made the object of their testimony in Acts 10:5, 6. But now, Messiah being not only rejected but risen, and themselves associated with Him, the circle is enlarged consequently on His death and resurrection; and it is no longer a question of the rights of Jehovah, the one true God and Governor of Israel, but of God fully revealed, not only in the person, but by the work, of the Lord Jesus; and those disciples His servants are to baptize unto the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Here in Matthew was the fitting place to make that Name known, for in this Gospel more than any other, we have the consequences of the rejection of the Messiah, and the new witness substituted for the old, all authority being given to Him in heaven and on earth. From this point of view the

rejecting and rebellious Jews are left with their house, and, we may add, their city, desolate till grace works repentance in their hearts another day. Meanwhile, in virtue of the accomplished work of the crucified Christ now risen from the dead grace sends out a message of sovereign mercy to all the Gentiles. It is not the Son of David filling the throne of Israel, nor is it the Son of man with His dominion and glory and kingdom given Him, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him — His dominion an everlasting one which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

These are glories of the new age when the Lord Jesus is displayed from heaven in power and presence on His return. Here it is the Trinity revealed and testimony to be rendered before that day, when they were to teach (not the law nor the prophets, but) all things whatsoever Jesus enjoined on them. And the Lord said, 'Lo! I am with you all the days until the completion of the age' an age not completed till even the last week of Daniel's seventy is fulfilled. This may not be and is not the revelation of the mystery which was reserved for the Holy Spirit through the apostle of the Gentiles, but it is in contrast not only with the law of Moses, but with the promises given to the fathers and the seal attached to them. And Paul could say, as the twelve could not, that Christ sent him not to baptize but to preach the gospel. Yet did he in his place as a confessor submit to that institution of the Lord, as he also baptized from time to time those who confessed Him, as the inspired history abundantly testifies.

But nothing would be less like scripture than to rehearse the formula every time a record of baptism was made in

it. The fact was stated, and the mode of statement in scripture is invariably formed according to the character and design of the Book wherein it occurs. Now it lies on the face of the Acts that the Holy Spirit is throughout bearing testimony to Jesus as the Lord. Baptism therefore when predicated of any in its course is so described. This exactly accords with the record, and is as it should be, if the Book be really stamped with that design, as it evidently is to any intelligent eyes. Besides it is in the highest degree probable, that those who administered baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, as bound by the injunction of the Lord, would also add the Lord's name as confessed by the baptized. So in some way it is habitually done at this day by those who follow in their steps. Certainly the Book of the Acts has Christian baptism mentioned as 'on', 'in', or 'to' the name of the Lord, each case being in strict harmony with its own character. But this in no way warrants the inference that the twelve, or Paul, or any other dispensed with the divinely given formulary. The form of the history is due to that design equally divine which controls this Book like every other in the Bible.

Another circumstance may be noticed: namely, that these Ephesian disciples received the Holy Spirit through the imposition of Paul's hands as the Samaritans did through the hands of Peter and John. It was a signal mark of God's honouring the apostles. As the work in Samaria was due to the free action of the Spirit in Philip, it was the more necessary to bind all together lest there should have been with God's sanction a church in Samaria independent of that in Jerusalem. The unity of the Spirit was safeguarded by

giving the new converts the seal of the Spirit only in answer to the prayers and by the hands of two chief apostles from among the twelve. What simpler proof that, as the Spirit is one, so is the church, however locally severed? So it is now. The Ephesian disciples, baptized to Jesus on hearing the gospel, had Paul's hands laid on them in order to receive the Holy Spirit. It was one body everywhere; and Paul's authority, as of God set first in the church, is attested like that of Peter and John before him.

It is in vain to argue that the Holy Spirit here conferred means only spiritual powers. These powers indeed were included in the divine gift, as the close of verse 6 intimates. But speaking with tongues, or even prophesying, was not all that the reception of the Spirit conveyed, nor yet the best part of the blessing. It is the Spirit Himself Who is given, as well as gifts for sign or for edification, which are both particularly indicated here. Even Bp. Middleton, according to his own too narrow and defective principle, would have been compelled to own the Holy Spirit here personally given. And this gift it is which is never withdrawn, and which indeed makes the Christian and the church to be such. There is neither the one nor the other if there be no gift, nor sealing, of the Spirit any longer.

Nor is it true that this gift depends on an apostle, or an imaginary apostolic succession which is wholly unknown to scripture and excluded by it. For the intervention of apostles, as in Acts 8 and 19, was exceptional, however right and wise on each occasion. The large and typical instances were when He was given, first to Jewish believers at Pentecost and afterwards to Gentile believers at Cornelius' house; at neither of which times

does scripture speak of the apostles laying on hands. The Spirit was given directly on their faith of the gospel, a fact made absolutely certain and clear beyond controversy in the case of the Gentiles (Acts 10:44-46), which of course is especially of interest and importance to us who are not of Israel. Such a fact is decisive for one who believes in the wisdom and goodness of God, not only in so doing then, but in recording it for the comfort of souls ever afterwards; lest they, ignorant of the direct gift to Jewish and Gentile believers, as warrant for the like expectation afterwards, might fall into the error, either of despair because the apostolic order existed not, or of presumption in dreaming of a fresh apostolic choir or band as being necessary for the supply of that gift, or for any other kindred function. The Catholic systems indeed suppose a sort of perpetual apostolicity, and thus solve the difficulty by an error no less portentous, Protestantism believes not in the abiding presence of the other Paraclete so as to make good the promise of the Father for ever; while Irvingism boasts of a new apostolate (well nigh gone) to effectuate an order which would ignore the ruin-state of the church — a gross moral mistake. But the truth is as blessed in its permanence, as these errors are pernicious.

The rather peculiar but instructive case of the twelve disciples in Ephesus being given, the apostle is next seen resuming his service among the Jews at their synagogue. Compare Acts 18:19-21. He was there according to his pledge.

‘And entering into the synagogue he spoke boldly for three months, discoursing and persuading the223 things concerning the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way

before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, discoursing daily in the school of 224 Tyrannus. And this was done for two years, so that all those that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord,225 both Jews and Greeks. And God wrought uncommon powers by the hands of Paul, so that even upon the sick were brought from his body handkerchiefs, or aprons, and the diseases left them, and the evil spirits went out' (vers. 8-12).

The apostle's patient perseverance was great. For three months he spoke boldly in the circumscribed sphere of the synagogue, 'the things concerning the kingdom of God' (ver. 8) being the matter of his discourse and persuasion, as we can readily conceive of all subjects the most suited to inquiring Jews, who knew the law and the prophets. The godly, as we hear of Joseph of Arimathea, were looking for the kingdom of God (Luke 23:50, 51). This involved his opening to them the sufferings of Christ and the glories after these. It never occurred to his mind to disparage that kingdom, still less to deny it, because of higher possessions and richer grace in the great mystery as to Christ, and as to the assembly (Eph. 5:32) meanwhile revealed for the Christian. Even salvation as now opened in the gospel of God's grace has depths beyond the kingdom. But the Jews, from tradition with its darkening effects, and from unbelief which overlooks what is of the deepest import in scripture, were apt to turn from Jesus as the Christ, and thus got blinded in presence of that light which if heeded would have made everything manifest. It is only by light divine in Him that all things have their true character exposed, and His grace not only frees us from all fear of consequences from it, but emboldens us to

desire it as the assured blessing of our souls to God's glory. Some there were who did go on in faith and taste that the Lord is good; others stumbled at the word, being disobedient.

'But when some were hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way226 before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, discoursing daily in the school of Tyrannus' (ver. 9).

The truth preached in the synagogue had now brought out plainly those who received the love of it that they might be saved, and with at least as much distinctness those whose hard rejection of it led them to speak evil of the Way in presence of the multitude. To have continued longer could have answered no good end; it would have led to bitterness of altercation and reviling from the adversaries. To withdraw from them at this point was clearly of God. Thus were the disciples separated in the capital of the province, the religious centre of an area far larger still. The synagogue being no longer a seemly place, a room commodious enough was due, not only to the disciples, but to the testimony; and the apostle carried on his work of daily discourse in the school of one who was, as far as we can judge, a rhetorician or a philosopher.

What a contrast in that school, no doubt at different hours of the day, between the Christian teacher and the heathen! The one was filled with the grace and truth which, as a revealed whole, came into being by Jesus and in His person, flowing from the love of God to man, and with not a whit less divine authority than the law pronounced at Sinai more than fifteen centuries before, and last, not least, which brought home to heart and

conscience by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven, a Spirit not of fearfulness, but of power, and love, and a sound mind; the other, not perhaps lacking in imaginative thought clothed in attractive language, gave out speculation, being wholly destitute of certainty on all that most deeply concerns God and man, ignorant of all means of his reconciliation with God on a righteous basis, or of forming near and holy relationships with Him, possessing no present assurance of His will nor affections for every day's enjoyment and obedience, and still less able to lift up the veil which hides the unseen and eternal. Yet here each of them addressed his hearers, Paul, if not Tyrannus, day by day; the one presenting a work of art which gave scope for excellency of speech, and the assumption, but not the reality, of wisdom; the other a simple yet deep witness, dependent on the Holy Spirit, to the One Who gave Himself a ransom for all, the testimony in its own times, for God delights in grace.

Hence it is, that the place of testimony was of no moment: all the value, virtue, truth, grace, and glory that we boast is in the One preached. Holy place, or most holy, was nothing now, Jesus only. Had He not been cast out by the people of God, by their scribes and doctors, by Levites, and priests, and high-priests? and when they slew Him by the hand of lawless men, had not God Himself testified by rending the veil from top to bottom? Earthly holiness was utterly desecrated. The temple therefore is nothing, nor Jerusalem, nor the mountain of blessing in Samaria. One sacrifice has swallowed up all others, and is alone efficacious. AH centres in the crucified but exalted Jesus on high, where

is the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, not man; where is the Great Priest, even Jesus Himself.

Hence the same building, which man misused for vanity, faith could use for magnifying the name of the Lord. The consecration of a building since the ascension of Christ is a return to Judaism and one of the beggarly elements of the world; and the grander the building is, the more flagrant its inconsistency with the cross. Popery in all this is consistently but outrageously wrong, in rebellion against God and the truth, resuscitating all that received its death-blow in the death of Christ; for it boasts of its temples, its priests, and its sacrifices for the living and the dead. But where is the consistency of the Anglican who, admitting the one sacrifice as already complete and accepted, contends for earthly priests as well as holy places? where is that of the Dissenter, who, discarding an earthly priesthood, clings to the delusion and pride of his temple, chapel, or miscalled ‘church’?

The practice of the early church coincided with and confirms this principle. For those who had boldness to enter into the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, the Great Priest over the house of God, what mattered the mere place of assembling themselves together? Alas! indeed, that a place of earthly splendour must cloud the truth and moral glory of the cross. An upper room, a private house, however obscure the quarter, or (if occasion required as here) ‘the school of Tyrannus’, any place, small or great, according to the exigencies of the time, sufficed for the assembly. If numbers grew in a large town, they might for convenience meet in many rooms, but never so as to jeopard the characteristic truth that it was ‘the church’, not ‘churches’, in that town. Where

unity is abandoned, save for the foundations, it is no longer God's church, but man's.

At Ephesus as yet things were in their infancy, the disciples were separated (i.e., from the Jews who adhered to the synagogue), and in 'the School of Tyrannus' the apostle discourses daily. 'And this was done for two years, so that all those dwelling in Asia, heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks' (ver. 10). A great and effectual door of testimony lay open to him, if there were many adversaries. Proconsular Asia had the gospel before it. Many may not have listened more than once, for curiosity reigned among the Greeks, which, if easily attracted, is not less easily sated. But if ever an attractive centre existed for Asiatic Greeks, it was in Ephesus. It was a time too, when men, weary of pretentious philosophy and sick of the mental and moral horrors of paganism, yearned after something sure, solid, and good, if they knew not what, which they had found very partially in the synagogue.

They wanted, in the language of Job, 'an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man what is right for him, and God could be gracious to him and say, Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom' (Job 33:23, 24). And in the apostle they had one of the rarest interpreters, and, more than that, one who beyond all men could feel for Jews and Greeks; for no Jew had, in his unbelief, ever hated Jesus more bitterly than he, no Greek more proudly than he despised that name. And who had felt or developed so much the riches of God's grace in Christ? For the space of two years all that dwelt, not in the city only, but in the province (where the seven Apocalyptic churches and others are afterwards known to have been gathered), heard the

word of the Lord from one so laboriously zealous and so every way competent to proclaim and unfold and apply it. He was content to go about preaching the kingdom; nor was it enough for him to urge on perishing souls repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. He did indeed testify the gospel of the grace of God; but he shrunk not from declaring the whole counsel of God. Nowhere do we see a spot so favoured; nowhere did this wise master-builder lay a foundation so broad deep, and strong, though indeed it was none other than that only one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. But who laid it so well as Paul at Ephesus, according to the grace of God which was given to him?

In due time God's building in Ephesus comes before us with a wonderful lustre and fulness, not only in the Book now occupying us, but in the apostolic Epistle to the saints that were there and the faithful in Christ Jesus. To no assembly elsewhere does the Holy Spirit so freely bring out the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit, and by none was it revealed as by the apostle Paul and to no saints communicated as to those addressed in that Epistle. Yet in the eyes of tradition the church in Ephesus is of slight account compared with that in Antioch, or in Alexandria, to say nothing of Rome or of Constantinople afterwards. But God's ways are higher than man's ways and His thoughts than those of the sons of men. No more humiliating proof of the departure of Christian profession from the divine estimate than is found in ecclesiastical history, with its ever-increasing homage to the spirit of the world.

But we may notice the honour which God at this time put on the apostolic testimony to the Lord Jesus and the gospel in the new sphere. ‘And God wrought uncommon powers by the hands of Paul, so that even upon the sick were brought from his body handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases left them, and the evil spirits went out’ (vers. 11, 12). The beneficent power of God in man and for man was thus attested. By-and-by it will triumph in the kingdom where all things are to be put into the hands of the glorified Son of man. But He is glorified already, although we see not yet all things put under Him. Meanwhile the Spirit is here on earth to bear witness of Him and His victory achieved in righteousness over Satan. This is the principle of those early displays of divine energy in man. They were testimonies to His defeat of the devil in man’s favour, powers of the world to come, though of course but samples of what will be then universal. Certainly neither the church nor any individual saint has ground for long centuries to boast on this score. But God did work marvellously not only by Paul but in the assembly, as we see even in Corinth, to the glory of Jesus, that man might learn on all sides and in every way the delivering power in His hands, not only over human infirmity, but over all the power of the enemy.

Through the apostle this victorious power was manifested here with no little splendour. The God, Who gave and sent His Son to become a man as well as a propitiation for our sins, is not indifferent to man’s miseries, or to Satan’s malicious pleasure in rebellion and ruin. And these early days of the victory of the ascended Christ were illuminated with brilliant manifestations that all power in heaven and on earth is

in Him Who is at God's right hand, and Who answers to the faith that called on His name. Nor was it only in the presence or at the word of the apostle: what had touched his person did not fail upon the sick who could not approach him. The faith that brought handkerchiefs or aprons from him to them had its reward: the diseases departed from them, and evil spirits (a distinct class) went out. Truly it was delivering energy to the Lord's glory in and for man; and it could not but deeply impress those who are sensitive enough to their interests and feelings in this life. But what is it at the best compared with the still deeper glory of the Son of man when God was glorified in Him dying for sin, that there too righteousness might be vindicated and be for ever on the side of man, of believing man unequivocally and absolutely?

But the Lord was pleased to manifest in another way, negatively indeed but effectively, what His grace delivers from in this present evil age.

'And certain ones of the Jewish exorcists that went about took in hand to call upon those that had wicked spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of Sceva, a certain227 Jewish chief-priest, doing this. But the wicked spirit answering said to them, Jesus I know, and Paul I am acquainted with, but who are ye? And the man in whom the wicked spirit was, leaping upon them and mastering them both,228 prevailed against them, so that they fled out from that house naked and wounded. And this became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, that inhabited Ephesus. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. Many too of those that had believed came confessing and declaring

their deeds. And not a few of those that practised curious arts brought their books and burnt them before all. And they summed up the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So with might the word of the Lord increased and prevailed' (vers. 13-20).

During His ministry (Matt. 12:24-28), the Lord answered the reproach of the scornful Pharisee by appealing to those sons of Israel who cast out demons; He did so Himself by the Spirit of God. The spirits were subject not to the twelve only (Mark 6:7), but to the seventy also through His name, nor was there any exhibition of divine energy which more affected their minds (Luke 10:17). It was the first sign which, when He rose from the dead, He promised should follow those that believe (Mark 16:17). Whether by sickness or by spirits' unclean possession, there was no case which resisted the power of the Holy Ghost (Acts 5:16). We have seen a similar record of Philip in Samaria (Acts 8:7), and especially of Paul (Acts 16:18; Acts 19:12).

It is the more important to press the word of God as to those evil possessions, because, on the one hand, the bias of man has set in so strangely in modern times to treat their existence with unbelieving contempt, where, on the other hand, people are not given up to besotted and blinding superstition. For Satan catches men by snares of the most opposite kinds. The truth is the one thing which men do not affect. And as they treat evil spirits in possession of human beings as an exploded old-wives' fable so they no less scout the reality of the Holy Spirit's dwelling in every believer, and working in some by way of special gift, not to speak of His action in the assembly. The Book of the Acts is most explicit in bearing witness to spiritual power, good and evil: to

doubt the continuance of both is mere incredulity, and unworthy of the believer particularly.

Here the Lord displayed His resentment of those who, without owning Himself, sought to avail themselves of the apostolic action in His name as a charm to which divine energy must be attached. Seven were concerned in a general way, two (it would seem) directly, on whom consequently the blow fell. Their position too, as sons of a Jewish chief-priest, drew the more attention to so solemn a discomfiture. In vain did they call over any the name of the Lord, indeed their daring to adjure 'by Jesus Whom Paul preacheth' brought out the more distinctly His vindication of His servant, and their own impotence, as well as the reality of the enemy's power. For the wicked spirit attested at once his acquaintance with Paul and his knowledge of his Master, not only with withering contempt for the hollow profanity of those who abused His name, but with the most practical demonstration that the evil power could tread down and put them to shame, instead of submitting to a victory at such unholy lips.

It is interesting to note how the wicked spirit identifies himself with the one whom he possesses, just as the Spirit of God is graciously pleased to work in those who are made, by His dwelling in them, vessels to magnify the name of Jesus. It is He Who effects all that is blessed yet is it all blended with their minds and affections; so that it is as a whole set to their account. Thus here the demoniac, 'leaping upon them and mastering both, prevailed against them, so that they fled out from that house naked and wounded.' It was his doing, though he could not by any means have done it save by that terrible power. The moral impression of this defeat was

great on all outside in Ephesus. Nor was it only that fear fell on them all, but the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. It was not simply that God and the enemy were brought before men's consciences; there was a testimony to the Deliverer also.

But there was even more. What became known universally acted with especial power on many of those who had believed. They came confessing and declaring their deeds; and if any went farther still, they gave the best proof of the abhorrence with which they now regarded their tampering with the wicked one. For 'not a few of those that practised curious arts brought their books and burnt them before all.' The price was reckoned up. and it was found not inconsiderable. Living facts brought home the power of the word, and conscience responded at once.

This was one of the many ways in which the Holy Spirit wrought at Ephesus; as we find the varied action of the Spirit one of the most prominent characteristics of the Epistle written to the saints long after. It was the word of the Lord that thus mightily grew and prevailed: not a company of saints merely, but the word of the Lord — that word which He has magnified above all His name. It is now the holiest answer on earth to Christ in heaven; and how precious to see, not merely the fear of His name overawing Jews and Greeks, but those who believed so zealous for His glory as to tell out their own shame and worst degradation in converted days, and to take vengeance on all they had, no matter how costly, which breathed of the enemy's power and wiles!

Yet it is salutary to bear in mind that, whatever be these dark arts and diabolical energies, the god of this age

carries on his most widely destructive work by methods of no seemingly unusual character, but suiting his delusions to the passions and the lusts of the flesh, even to the natural affections as well as interests of men, through the meshes of that world of which he is the prince. It is in this way above all that souls are kept blind through the exclusion of the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ. In Christendom now, as of old in Judea, the mass perish, not in the terrible displays which appear here and there or now and then, but under the placid surface of what is respected and enjoys an unquestioned character of patriotism and even religion, where the Father is unknown, and consequently it is not the true Christ brought home to the heart by the Holy Spirit. But the word of the Lord accomplishes the gracious purpose of Him Who sends it forth, and extensively too in the conversion and blessing of souls, if no longer in the might of apostolic days.

Thus in Ephesus did the word of the Lord grow and prevail ‘with might’ according to the remarkable expression of Luke. Every testimony had been at full tide there, the evident power and presence of the Spirit, attested by tongues and prophesyings, bold preaching of the kingdom of God for months in the synagogue, and still less restricted discoursing daily in the school of Tyrannus for two years, during which time the disciples took up their due separate position; so that not only they of Ephesus, but, speaking generally, all those that dwelt in the province of Asia, Jews and Greeks alike, heard the word of the Lord. The uncommon powers wrought by the hands of Paul proved even externally where and with whom God was, as the ignominious penalty of the Jewish exorcists demonstrated that even Satan despised their

selfish and profane use of the name of Jesus, so as to overawe all inside, and to exercise healthfully the conscience of many within, where it was for the Lord's glory. What need was there for the prolonged stay of the apostle whose heart went out to the regions beyond?

'Now after these things were fulfilled, Paul purposed in his spirit, passing through Macedonia and Achaia, to proceed unto Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there I must see Rome also. And having sent into Macedonia two of those that ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in229 Asia for awhile' (vers. 21, 22).

It is not correct to interpret 'in the spirit' here of the Holy Ghost. No more is meant than that the apostle purposed it 'in his spirit'; a frequent phrase of his, not only in this Book but elsewhere. He longed once more to go to Jerusalem after passing through the two Roman provinces of Greece. He felt that his work was closed for the present at Ephesus, and that after visiting Jerusalem he must see Rome also. With this we may compare Rom. 1:9-13, as well as Acts 15:22-29, though the journey to Spain appears nowhere else in the inspired writings, and we know not that it was ever realized.

How immense the energy which comes out in these few words! How much more, when we consider how fully he preached the gospel of Christ, not where He was already named, but where the good news had never penetrated before! It was also a spiritual capacity and zeal that embraced not heavenly truth only, and the whole scope of divine counsels for eternity, as well as the Old Testament prophecies of the kingdom, but the most ordinary matters of need for the peace and fellowship of

the saints, yea, even for their temporal good day by day. We see too, how with apostolic authority he directed the service of others, and this at all cost to himself personally, for at this very time he sent into Macedonia two of those that ministered to him, not Erastus only, but the fellow-labourer nearest to his heart, his beloved child, Timothy, whilst he himself stayed awhile in Asia.

‘And about that time arose no small disturbance about the Way. For a certain [man] by name Demetrius, a silver-beater, making silver shrines [miniature temples] of Artemis, brought no little business to the artisans, whom he gathered together with the workmen of like nature, and said, Men, ye are aware that we230 have our prosperity from this business. And ye behold and hear that this Paul hath persuaded and turned away a considerable crowd, not only of Ephesus, but of almost all Asia, saying that they are no gods that are made by hands. Now, not only is there danger for us that this trade come into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be counted for nothing, and that even she should be deposed from her231 magnificence, whom all Asia and the world [habitable earth] revereth. And when they heard, they were filled with wrath and kept crying out, saying, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. And the city was filled with confusion; and they rushed with one accord into the theatre, having seized together Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul’s fellow-travellers. And when Paul was minded to enter unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. And some of the Asiarchs also, being his friends, sent unto him and urged him not to adventure himself into the theatre’ (vers. 23-31).

Such was the fresh effort of the enemy, not so much by means of Jews as Gentiles, and accordingly by an appeal to worldly lusts rather than by spiritual power in an evil shape. Nevertheless, religious motives, such as they were, even here threw a certain halo around that which was really selfish and utterly sordid. Nor is any device of the enemy more common or permanent. Satan contrives in this world to interweave debasing and destructive superstition with the present interests and honour of mankind. This being so, one cannot wonder that the mass of men are most readily inflamed by the testimony of the truth which threatens to undermine their religion and their worldly property. It is the same today, in principle, as then at Ephesus. An active leader was easily found to take the matter up and blow it into a flame. The artisans and the workmen engaged in the trade of the silver shrines of Artemis were roused by their employer Demetrius, who appealed to their covetousness and at the same time pointed out that Paul's teaching threatened not only their trade but the discredit of the great goddess Artemis. And the appeal was not in vain; it never is, save where grace makes known the truth.

Man, ignorant of God, will fight for nothing more keenly than for his wealth and his religion. Nor could it be denied that throughout much more than Ephesus, or even Asia, Paul had persuaded and turned away much people from their gods many and lords many. There was no doubt that he really did mean that those are no gods which are made with hands, that to us there is one God, the Father, of Whom are all things, and we unto Him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom are all things and we through Him (1 Cor. 8:6). We ought not to think,

therefore, that the divinity is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and device of man. And that one God now commendeth men that they should all everywhere repent, because He hath appointed a day in the which He is going to judge the world, or habitable earth, in righteousness by the Man Whom He hath ordained, giving to all proof of it in that He raised Him from the dead. So had Paul openly preached at Athens during his brief visit; assuredly his long abode in Ephesus was not less fruitful in the solemn proclamation of the truth. We need not have wondered if the silversmith had taken fire at the beginning of his stay. But grace knows how to make the wrath of man praise God, as well as to restrain the residue of wrath It was well ordered, however, that the outburst should come while the apostle was still there. Two of his fellow-travellers were actually seized; and Paul intended to go in to the raging populace in the theatre, but the disciples would not suffer him. And very interesting it is to see the moral effect of Paul's teaching and life on certain of the chief officers of Asia, who while distinguished from the disciples are expressly said to have been his friends. These sent unto him and besought him not to trust himself in the theatre. What is more, the scripture shows that Paul, whatever his own courage or feeling, did not despise these friends, notwithstanding their position. but gave way to the remonstrance of his brethren. He who on fit occasion knew how to wield on earth the power of heaven for the Lord's glory, and who wrote with divine authority for the saints here below till Christ comes, could graciously bend to others, as well as stand alone where this was of God. Only the Holy Spirit can give the discernment at the moment, where the eye is single to Christ.

Such was the uproar which pervaded the crowd in the theatre at Ephesus. ‘Different ones therefore kept crying somewhat different things; for the assembly was in confusion, and the mass knew not wherefore they were come together. And from the crowd they instructed232 (or, drew together) Alexander, the Jews putting him forward; and Alexander waving his hand wished to make defence to the people. But when they came to know he was a Jew, one shout arose from all, crying for about two hours, Great [is] Artemis of [the] Ephesians. And the town clerk after stilling the crowd, says, Ephesians, which of men is he who knoweth not that the city of [the] Ephesians is temple-keeper of the great Artemis and of what fell from the sky? Since then these things cannot be gainsaid, you must be quiet and do nothing rash. For ye have brought these men, neither temple-robbers nor blasphemers of our (or, your) goddess. If then Demetrius and the artisans with him have a matter against anyone, court-days are going on, and there are pro-consuls: let them accuse each other; but if you make any inquiry about other things, it will be settled in the lawful assembly. For indeed we are in danger of being accused of riot today, there being no cause concerning which we shall be able to render an account of this concourse. And having said thus (or, these things) he dismissed the assembly’ (vers 32-41).

In this Book we have already had the Holy Spirit’s account of religious excitement among the Jews, not only when it issued in the death of Stephen, but on other occasions where they were the chief instigators of the heathen against the gospel and its messengers. It was meet that we should have a living picture of a quasi-religious tumult among the heathen themselves, and this

in the most capacious theatre of which there are remains to the present day. Assuredly the Gentiles were rather more senseless than the Jews, though their convictions were in no way so deep. ‘Some, therefore, cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was tumultuous, and the most knew not wherefore they were come together.’ Whatever the selfish motives underneath, their expression of wrath was about the great Artemis, of whom Ephesians boasted. Nevertheless, as we have seen, God wrought providentially through wiser men of high station among them, for the Asiarchs, whose chief or chiefs lived at Ephesus, had the easiest means and best position in the state, and by their very office would be expected most to resent any dishonour done to their religion. But kind feeling, if not conscience, made them tender the prudent advice to Paul that he should not adventure himself into the theatre. God used them to shelter His servant, where zeal and courage would have been unavailing, and might have exposed him to danger.

Here again we find the Jews putting forward Alexander. This, nevertheless, was a move, which however craftily devised, did not benefit themselves, but rather inflamed the multitude so much the more. The instincts of the heathen resented such an apologist. Was it in common honesty possible that the Jews would have more respect than the Christians for their great goddess?

It was in vain, therefore, for Alexander to beckon with his hand in the desire to make a defence to the people. It was enough that they perceived him to be a Jew, and therefore hostile to their idolatry. There was one voice from all, about the space of two hours, as they cried out, Great [is] Artemis of [the] Ephesians. What a true

reflection of the world governed by prejudice and feeling in what is of all moment, not only for the life that now is, but also for that which is to come! God, the true God, is not in their thoughts, which are therefore open to any and every delusion.

The town clerk, or recorder, now appears on the scene; a much more important person in that age and country than in most others, as we learn from ancient inscriptions and otherwise. He was a heathen like the rest; but his common sense was shocked by their objectless excesses, and his speech sets forth in plain and pointed terms their own folly and wrong, not as to God but as among men, and more particularly before their Roman governors.

Having stilled the crowd, he says, ‘Ephesians, who233 is there of men that knoweth not that the city of the Ephesians is temple-keeper of the great Artemis, and of that which fell down from Zeus (or, the sky)? As these things cannot be gainsaid, ye ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. For ye have brought these men neither temple-robbers234 nor blasphemers of our goddess. If, therefore, Demetrius and the artisans that are with him have a matter against anyone, court-days are going on, and there ere pro-consuls: let them accuse (or prosecute) one another. But if you make any inquiry about other things,235 it will be settled in the regular assembly. For indeed we are in danger of being accused for the riot of today, there being no ground concerning which we shall236 be able to give account of this concourse. And, having said this, he dismissed the assembly.’

Thus is man beguiled. He assumes as unquestionable what is a mere delusion of the enemy. No intelligence secures against the lie of Satan, nothing but the truth brought home by the Spirit of God. For this man, otherwise sensible, the great Artemis and the stone that fell from the sky, were things which could not be gainsaid. On this supposition he insists on calmness as the only state of mind befitting his co-religionists. He urges that those concerned were neither temple-robbers nor revilers of their goddess. Why, therefore, should such men be brought before them? But he is more precise also, and sets before Demetrius and the artisans in company with him, that their procedure was irregular and dangerous for all. A charge must be laid at a proper time and place, and before the suited judge. There alone could there be a lawful result. Any other enquiry must be settled in the lawful assembly, which the present was not. More than that, ‘we are in danger’, nor they only, but ‘we’, of being accused of riot for this day’s proceedings, no cause existing for which they could render an account of this concourse. The Romans, it is well known, were most jealous of such disorderly assemblages; which they often punished with bloodshed without measure. As his speech thus closed with a most significant hint, he had no difficulty thereon in dismissing the assembly.

218 Text. Rec.

ἐλθεῖν, BHL., most cursives and Versions;

κατελθεῖν AE, many cursives, Arm.

219 Text. Rec.

εὑρὼν... εἶπεν, DEHLP, et al.

εὑρεῖν... εἶπέν τε AB, several cursives, Vulg., et al.

220 Text. Rec. on large authority adds

εἶπον, which does not appear in ABDE, et al.

221

ὁ δὲ εἶπεν simply AE, et al.

ἐίπε τε Text. Rec. with BHLP and most (HLP, et al, adding πρὸς αὐτούς).

222 Text. Rec. has

τὸν χριστὸν

Ἰησοῦν HLP, most cursives; as some with several Versions support 'Jesus Christ' but the best τὸν

Ἰησοῦν, D giving only

χριστόν.

223 Some MSS. and Versions omit the article, but most insert it, which Luke's usage confirms.

224 Most support Text. Rec. in adding 'a certain', but the most ancient omit.

225 Text. Rec., with HLP and most cursives, adds 'Jesus, but not ABDE, and all the old Versions.

226 [In apostolic days the Christian faith seems to have acquired the name of 'the Way'; see Acts 9:2; Acts 19:9, 23; Acts 22:4, Acts 24:14, 22. Peter uses the term, 'the way of truth' (2 Peter 2:2).]

227 So it stands in the Vatican and other good authorities. The ordinary text has 'certain ones, sons of...", and much the larger support.

228 The better reading is

ἀμφοτέρων (ABD, et al.), not ‘them’, as in the common text, a change to suit the ‘seven’, whereas two only were concerned in this case.

229 Dgr has

ἐν, but this is evidently to avoid the difficulty of

εἰς, which expresses the direction of the apostle, though it was only a question of abiding where he was, a pregnant construction not at all infrequent.

230 Tischendorf has shown the mistake of Griesbach in giving ὑμῶν for ἡμῖν (ABDE, et al.), instead of the vulgar ἡμῶν. This error is faithfully repeated in the notes of Scholz, a very inferior critic.

231

τῆς μεγαλειότητος ABE and near 20 cursives, et al., rather than τὴν μεγαλειότητα as in Text. Rec.

232

συνεβιβασαν is the best reading (ABE and many cursives) and means as above. The vulgar text hardly falls in with προβαλόνῖων following without tautology.

233 The

γάρ, ‘for’, not expressed in our version, or perhaps any other, implies, without bluntly saying, Why this ado? For ‘which of men is there who knoweth not..., 234 All the old Protestant English Versions have the absurdly false rendering ‘robbers of churches’. So inveterate is bad habit, even beyond the vulgar. Wiclif and the Rhemish were preserved from it by adhering to the Vulgate.

235 B and many cursives support

περαιτέρων, and so Mr. T. S. Green, ‘further’, which makes good sense, but the ancient versions are adverse.

236 ‘The best authorities add a negative here. It may be due to οὖ immediately preceding. If genuine, it may be explained by emphatic speech, which is not always logically correct.

Acts 20

It would appear from the Epistle to the Corinthians, that the tumultuous meeting in the theatre was but one incident of a dangerous crisis at Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:32). Certainly the apostle did not quit the city till there was a lull.

‘And after the uproar had ceased, Paul having called [or, sent237] for the disciples, and exhorted and saluted [them], departed to go into Macedonia. And, having gone through those parts and exhorted them with much discourse, he came into Greece. And having spent three months, and a plot being laid against him by the Jews, as he was about to sail for Syria he determined to return through Macedonia.238 And there accompanied him (as far as Asia3); Sopater, a Berean, [son] of Pyrrhus239; and of Thessalonians Aristarchus and Secundus, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and of Asia Tychicus and Trophimus. These going before waited for us at Troas; and we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened [bread], and came unto them to Troas in five days, where we tarried seven days’ (vers. 1-6).

In this passage, as in many others of scripture, we have a living testimony to the joints and bands which operated so efficaciously in apostolic times to preserve the saints in unity, fellowship, and love. There was no lack of missionary zeal; but, besides, the Spirit of God wrought much in the exhortation and encouragement of the saints. Thus was the body of Christ built up. It is in this care that we see the most manifest contrast of modern times with the primitive. If the converts are guarded from turning aside, it is in general the most

that is now attempted. Zeal habitually goes out towards the conversion of sinners, and those devoted to that work are regarded as eminently faithful and enlightened if they do not yield to superstition on the one hand or to philosophy on the other. Growth in the truth is rare and practically unknown even among the teachers, not to speak of the converts. The consequences are deplorable: teachers and taught in these circumstances are ever liable to the many misleading influences around.

In these early days we see on the contrary the utmost care and zeal in visiting afresh those who had been already brought to God, and gathered to the name of Jesus. Nor was it only by oral instruction. That new and characteristic form of Christian instruction which expressed itself in the apostolic Epistles was now fully in operation. No composition admits of greater candour and intimacy; none gives such scope to the affections of the heart. It was from Ephesus that the apostle wrote the First Epistle to the Corinthians, as grand a development of Christian and church truth as was the Epistle to the Romans, written not long after as we shall see, on the great foundations of grace in justifying the ungodly, and on the reconciling of the indiscriminate gospel with the peculiar promises to Israel, as well as on the practical walk of the believer in view of all this.

There is no fresh inspiration going on now; but these two modes of seeking the edification of souls ought surely both to proceed. Preaching and teaching have a most unquestionable importance in reaching sours more simply and directly than any other; but there is an exactness as well as a fullness of treatment, which are best conveyed in a written (and, we may add, a printed) form. There is another object also of great value

attained in the latter way — that souls can be reached thereby all over the world, most of whom neither could nor would listen to oral instruction of distinctive weight.

In those early days then we see not only the principle of both oral and written teaching, but the highest form of either ever reached on the earth. The apostles and prophets were the foundation on which the church was built. By the gracious power of the Holy Ghost they had immunity from error. It was not men doing their best, but God conveying His mind perfectly through chosen instruments.

Their writings alone constitute the Christian standard. Others at the present day may be raised up to recover what is forgotten, and to propagate this and all truth, the Spirit may work energetically by them, and give reliable accuracy to their thoughts and words in unfolding revealed truth; but they are in no wise a standard. Their writings are not God-inspired and, as they are not entitled to issue their convictions under the authority of 'Thus saith the Lord', for every or any word of theirs, so the saints are responsible to judge all they say or write, and still more what they do, by unerring scripture.

Here then, after the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for and exhorted the disciples, and, after bidding them farewell, departed to go into Macedonia the scene of his former labours. There too we find him passing through those quarters, and, after exhorting the saints with much discourse, he came into Greece. It was during the three months spent there that he wrote the Epistle to the Romans. He had long desired to visit Rome in person, but was hindered hitherto. Urgent duties

detained him elsewhere; and God had it in His purpose that His servant should enter Rome only as a prisoner. It was not so that even the apostle would have ordered matters, still less the saints themselves. It is good, however, to learn and accept God's profound wisdom in all these dealings of His.

In weakness, and fear, and much trembling, Paul at first testified at Corinth (1 Cor. 2:3). After much danger and persecution he had left Ephesus. An ill-understood man, his deep spirituality and zeal ran athwart much prejudice at Jerusalem. He could at length only go to Rome with a chain. Such were the ways of God in the unequalled path and service of the blessed apostle.

Nevertheless thorough sobriety pervades the action of Paul. When there was a plot on the part of the Jews against him, as about to sail into Syria, he avoids it by adopting the resolution of returning, not from Achaia direct, but through Macedonia. The Jews had enormous influence in that great commercial entrept, Corinth; and injury or death could easily have been, humanly speaking, inflicted upon him as a passenger in one of the numerous ships of that day. He therefore changed his plan and returned through the northern province. And there accompanied him Sopater, Pyrrhus' son, a Berean, and of Thessalonians Aristarchus and Secundus, and Gaius of Derbe and Timothy, and of Asia Tychicus and Trophimus.

It was not therefore that merely the apostle laboured in all directions. Here we find not less than seven companions in service, who were in no way restrained to one fixed local sphere. The presbyters or elders laboured and took the lead locally. There were many

others besides the apostles who moved about with perfect liberty, seeking the blessing of the faithful and the spread of the gospel. Of these labourers we may discern at least two classes. Some few attached themselves as much as possible to the companionship of Paul. Of these we have a sample before us. But there were others like Apollos who laboured in a more independent way and enjoyed less of his society, though they had his entire love and confidence.

In verse 5 we learn of another deeply attached personal companion Luke, the inspired writer of this very Book. 'And these having gone before awaited us at Troas.' Thus quietly does this honoured man intimate that he too was with the apostle at this time and at Philippi. It will be remembered that it was in these regions that Luke had first become the companion of Paul (Acts 16:10-12).

'And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened [bread], and came unto them to Troas in five days, where we tarried seven days' (ver. 6). Why the party did not move together, why the others went before, and Paul and Luke waited till after the feast, we can only conjecture. But we see the special association of Luke with the apostle and utterly reject the vain key to it which Wieseler suggests, that Luke travelled with him as his physician. If men cannot trace below the surface of the word with spiritual insight, how sad that they should exercise their wits in such degrading ingenuity! And will even saints learn how deeply the church is fallen when such thoughts are repeated instead of provoking indignation?

The delay of seven days furnished the ever-desired privilege of partaking the Lord's Supper together. That the stay of the brethren for that time had a special and spiritual aim appears from what follows.

'And on the first [day] of the week, when we240 were gathered together to break bread, Paul discoursed to them, about to depart on the morrow, and prolonged the word till midnight. And there were many lights in the upper room where we were gathered together. And a certain youth, by name Eutychus, as he was sitting241 in the window, being overpowered with deep sleep, as Paul was discoursing yet longer, fell overpowered by the sleep down from the third storey, and was taken up dead. But Paul went down and fell upon him, and clasping him round said, Be not troubled, for his life [soul] is in him. And when he went up and broke the242 bread and had eaten, and conversed with them a long while till daybreak, so he departed. And they brought the boy alive and were not a little comforted' (vers. 7-12).

There is no real difficulty or doubt as to the day intended. It was not the Sabbath or seventh, but the first, day of the week marked out to every Christian by the resurrection of our Lord. So we find the disciples meeting on that day, the first of the week — the very day that Jesus came and took His stand in their midst risen from the dead. So it was eight days after, when Thomas was with them and was delivered from his unbelief (John 20:19-29). It was the day of new (not old) creation, of grace and not law. There was no transfer from the seventh day to the first, nor is the first ever called Sabbath-day; but as the apostles and others who had been Jews availed themselves of the Sabbath and of

liberty to speak in the synagogue, so the first day was unequivocally the special and honoured day for the Christian assembly. When they were all together from Pentecost and onwards in Jerusalem we can understand their being day by day in close attendance with one consent in the temple and breaking bread at home. Here we find among the Gentiles, when time had passed over, that the first day called the Christians together as such. This is made the more marked in the passage before us because it is said that Paul discoursed 'to them'. Twice over it is said that 'we' gathered together (vers. 5, 6). The constant duty for all the family of God as distinct from the Jews was to assemble on that day to break bread; the special object of Paul's discourse then was found in the saints who lived at Troas: 'Paul discoursed to them'.

This is entirely confirmed by 1 Cor. 16:2: 'Every first day of a week let each of you set by himself a store according as he may thrive that there may be no collections then when I shall come.' 'The first day' of the week was clearly a settled institution for the Christian body.

Not the first day but the Sabbath was the memorial of creation rest, which the law imposed in due time as a most holy commandment peculiarly bound up with God's authority and honour. The resurrection of Christ has brought in a new creation, after having by Himself purged our sins on the cross. Hence the first day is the day of manifest and triumphant life in Christ, our life, when our hearts go forth in worship, communion and service. A bodily rest which one shared with the ox and the ass certainly does not rise up to the blessed associations of Christ risen from the dead. Nor does the

canon of the New Testament close without stamping this day as ‘the Lord’s day’ (Rev. 1:10). Efforts have not been wanting on the one hand to make this a prophetic day with which it really has not one idea in common. For ‘the day of the Lord’ will be one of ever-increasing and solemn judgments from God on the earth, whereas ‘the Lord’s day’ is one of heavenly grace, bringing us already into the victory of His resurrection from the dead, the pledge of our own resurrection or change at His coming. On the other hand it is to lower the character and authority of the first day of the week beyond calculation, to treat it merely as the day appointed by the church.

Thus neither creation nor law nor human arrangement had to do with it. The first of the week is a day marked out by the Lord’s repeated appearing, by the inspired sanction of the Holy Ghost, and by the final sanction of it as devoted to the Lord in the one great prophetic Book of the New Testament; just as the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:20) alone shares, as distinct from all other suppers, the same striking and distinctive designation.

Again, some have sought to lower the breaking of bread at Troas, here spoken of, to the love-feast; but there is no ground whatever for such a notion. From the first, the breaking of bread was appropriated to the Lord’s Supper: so we see it from the beginning of Christianity (Acts 2:46). It is there clearly distinguished from partaking of food with rejoicing and singleness of heart. Earlier in the chapter, verse 42, the breaking of bread or the loaf refers solely to the Lord’s Supper. This is shown by its surroundings — the teaching of the apostles and the fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers. These constituted the united holy walk of the saints, and no doubt they had the most powerful influence on the

ordinary habits and necessary wants of believers every day; but it is plain that the verse distinctly speaks of that which was most sacred.

Nor is it denied that ‘breaking of bread’ might be said of an ordinary meal, when the context so demands. So we find on a most impressive occasion where the Lord Himself taking the loaf blessed and, having broken, gave it to His disciples (Luke 24:30-35). It remains true however, that where the context speaks of the communion in the breaking of bread, the Lord’s Supper alone is meant. So it is here; and, in this most interesting way, the Lord’s Supper and the Lord’s day were thus bound up together. It was no doubt a time when the assembly enjoyed the exercise of gifts, as here Paul discoursed to them, not ‘preached’ as the Authorized Version says, which might convey the thought of the gospel proclaimed to unconverted souls. ‘Discourse’ is clearly a word of more general bearing, and quite as applicable to those within as to any without.

But the circumstances of this moment were peculiar. Paul was about to set out on the morrow, and extended his discourse till midnight. This gave occasion to the painful incident which befell Eutychus. It was not done in a corner; for ‘there were many lights in the upper room where we were’. The youth so named was sitting on the window-seat; and being borne down with deep sleep, as Paul was discoursing at great length, he fell, overborne by the sleep, from the third storey to the bottom, and was taken up dead. It must be acknowledged that the inspired physician who wrote the account was a most competent witness. It is not merely that he appeared dead, or that he was taken up for dead,

as some have said. He was really dead, but Paul went down, fee upon him, as the prophet of old notoriously did, and clasping him said, ‘Trouble not yourselves, for his life (soul) is in him.’ Assuredly the apostle in these words had no desire to make Light of the power of God which had wrought in this miracle.

It may be well to compare with this Luke 8:49-56, where ‘the spirit’ of the Jewish maiden had departed. But the Lord’s words were enough; and ‘her spirit returned’. Here it was not so: ‘his soul is in him’, said the apostle, though divine power alone could retain it or hinder the proximate break-up.

Some have supposed that when Paul had gone up and broken the loaf and eaten, it was the interrupted celebration of the Lord’s Supper. This appears to me opposed to the intimations of the context. Scripture describes it, not as fellowship, but solely as the personal act of the apostle. No doubt it was ‘the loaf’ of the Lord’s Supper, but it was that loaf now partaken of by the apostle for his own refreshment, after so long speaking and circumstances so trying, about to go forth on his journey. This seems borne out by the word, γευσάμενος, rightly translated ‘eaten., or literally ‘tasted’. We can readily understand therefore why the Lord avoids such a word in calling on His disciples to ‘take, eat’, in the institution of His supper. The word φαγεῖν could be, and is, used in the most general way, but it is here γεύομαι. Again, the apostle’s ‘conversing’ with them a long while, tilt daybreak, much better suits a meal than the assembly. So, we are told, he departed; as they brought the boy alive and were not a little comforted. The joy much exceeded the sorrow.

Such was the close of the visit to Troas. At this time the apostle appears to have been deeply impressed that his ministry, in the east at any rate, was soon to close. So he had intimated to the saints in Rome a little before, for he lets them know that as he had been hindered these many times from coming to them, so now that he had no more any place in ‘these regions’ he hoped to see them (Rom. 15:22, 23).

Paul was bent on his ministration of the contribution from Macedonia and Achaia for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. This done, his purpose was to go on by Rome into Spain, assured of coming to the saints in the capital with the fullness of the blessing of Christ. This deep feeling appears to have affected his ministry wherever he went. It was no doubt in the earnestness to which it gave rise that he had discoursed so long the last night of his stay in Troas.

But now the journey must be entered on. ‘But we, having gone before on board the ship, set sail for Assos, there intending to take up Paul, for so he had arranged, intending himself to go on foot’ (ver. 13). Here was another effect of the same solemn feeling. There is a time for social intercourse, there is a time also for isolation; and the apostle who enjoyed fellowship of heart with his brethren as no saint ever perhaps equalled, realized that it was now a season to be alone. One can hardly doubt that this was by no means an infrequent thing for one so actively engaged in public work as Paul. His habitual piety would dispose him now and then to seek such an opportunity of unburdening his spirit, and of renewing, in a marked and full way, his sense of dependence on the grace of Christ. These secret dealings with the Lord were so much the more

needful because the exigencies of the work called for energy and prominence before men.

At this juncture, beyond any question, we see that Paul had appointed to be apart from his beloved companions, who went on board ship, even though it involved his own more laborious progress by land. It is left for us to judge its motive and meaning,243 and we cannot but think that what is here suggested is a better key than the mere notion of a visit to one and another by the way. The general context rather adds to the conclusion that Paul was avoiding all but indispensable visits just then, and that having but a short time for his journey, he gave what time he could spare to the most important objects before his heart. Unnamed visits would scarcely have furthered this aim.

'And when he met with us at Assos, we took him up, and came unto Mitylene, and having sailed thence on the morrow we arrived over against Chios, and on the next day we touched at Samos, and [having remained at Trogyllium] the day after we came unto Miletus. For Paul had determined to sail past244 Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hastening, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost' (vers. 14-16).

There is no spiritual reason to dwell upon the associations which Assos or Mitylene, Chios or Samos, Trogyllium or Miletus might suggest. They are here brought before us simply as the varying points of the apostolic journey, from which it would divert us if we occupied our minds with historical questions interesting enough as to each of them.

Suffice it to say that, although Paul had his heart filled with that which was of the deepest importance for the saints in Ephesus, Miletus was the point of approach, rather than the capital of Asia. Here too the motive seems plain. Had he gone to Ephesus itself, with a strong affection and the many ties he had with the numerous saints there, he could not have left them without a considerable delay. He therefore preferred to sail past Ephesus, that he might not frustrate the object of his journey to Palestine. If one so known and loved and loving as he was had visited Ephesus, he could not have avoided a stay of some length among them. He therefore made Miletus his place of passing sojourn, in order that nothing should hinder the fulfilment of his desire to be at Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost.

On the other hand, it was of the utmost moment that the saints at Ephesus should receive words of wise and gracious counsel at this moment. The apostle therefore adopts a method by no means usual. 'And from Miletus he sent unto Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church' (ver. 17). These presbyters were the fitting medium. They had the regular and responsible ecclesiastical charge in that city. We can hardly doubt from the general impression of the rest of the chapter, that they were not a few in number. As this does not fall in with the usual habits and thoughts (not to say, selfishness) of men, the notion slipped in even from ancient times that the elders of all the churches round about are meant. But such a tampering with the word of God is not to be allowed for a moment. The apostle sent to Ephesus and called to himself the elders of the church there, not of the churches around. There may have been many meeting-places in Ephesus, but, as is well known,

scripture never speaks of the assemblies, always of the assembly or church, in a city. Hence, however numerous, they are here styled the elders of the church, and they no doubt cared for the affairs of all. Whilst local responsibility was also preserved in its place, unity was not therefore forgotten. Common action would be the natural and proper result. So it was in Jerusalem, as we know from the revealed notices of that assembly, which consisted of many thousands of saints; and so we see it here in Ephesus, though no details of numbers are given. The grand principles of the church prevailed and were the same everywhere, though at first there were Jewish elements at work in Jerusalem if some of them indeed did not linger still. But such unity was of and for heaven, not of Judaism, being pre-eminently of the Holy Spirit. 'There is one body and one Spirit' (Eph. 4:4).

Another matter may claim brief notice here, though it may seem somewhat of an anticipation. The elders of the church are designated 'overseers' or 'bishops' by the apostle (ver. 28): 'Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Ghost made [set] you bishops, to feed [tend] the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood.' This identification falls in with every scriptural notice we possess. Such is the genuine inference from 1 Tim. 3:1-7 as well as from 1 Tim. 5:17-19 and still more plainly from Titus 1:5, 6, compared with verses 7, 9, as well as from Acts 11, 14, 15, 16, and 21, and from 1 Peter 5 and James 5, no less than Phil. 1:1. The great distinction which soon reigned in Christendom between bishops and presbyters is wholly unknown to the word of God.

Not one, but more were appointed in each assembly or city, where charges were conferred at all. There was

regularly a plurality of elders and bishops. They might be men of gift, teachers, or evangelists; but the indispensable work was to ‘rule’ or ‘preside’. This was the object of their appointment, for appointed they certainly were by apostolic authority direct, or indirect when an apostle could not be there (as for instance by Titus commissioned for the purpose by the apostle Paul (Titus 1:5). The gifts, on the other hand, were given by Christ without any such intervention. A pastor, teacher, or evangelist, as such, was never nominated by an apostle or an apostolic delegate.

The distinction from elders or deacons, it is well to bear in mind. ‘The seven’ at Jerusalem, who rendered diaconal service, were chosen by the multitude of the believers before they were appointed by the apostles (Acts 6:1-6). That this election by the church does not apply to elders is plain from every scripture that treats of their appointment, which lay exclusively with the apostles or their expressly authorized deputies. Still less was there by men an election of those so called gifts: in their case Christ chose. As Christ gave them, they preached or taught on their direct responsibility to Him. Where Christians gave of their means, they were allowed to choose dispensers in whom they had confidence. Such is the uniform teaching of the New Testament, and the only legitimate inference from it. The painful departure of Christendom, nationalists and dissenters, Catholics and Protestants, is so glaring that one only wonders how godly men can overlook the facts in the word which make the will of God manifest, or, how, if they apprehend them, there can be indifference to the truth and to the inalienable duties involved by it.

It is the more important to notice the fact that the elders were of ‘the church in Ephesus’, because the old error of Irenaeus re-appears, among other moderns, in Dr. Hackett’s Commentary on this Book. ‘Luke speaks only of the Ephesian elders as summoned to meet the apostle at Miletus; but as the report of his arrival must have spread rapidly, it could not have failed to draw together others also, not only from Ephesus, but from the neighbouring towns where churches had been established’ (pp. 334, 335). The truth is that ancient and modern arrangements are alike inconsistent with Scripture. Irenaeus was embarrassed by the prejudice of episcopacy, as were the authorized translators, but the plurality of elders or bishops from the church in Ephesus is not a whit more compatible with the ‘minister’ of the dissenting bodies. It is certain that neighbouring towns or churches are in this instance wholly ignored, and that the presbyters of Ephesus only were summoned, and are alone addressed. Verse 25 is quite consistent with this. But it will be noticed that the apostle summoned the elders with authority, and that they responded to his call without question. To lower the apostle to the place of an ordinary minister is wholly unscriptural.

‘And when they were come to him, he said to them, Ye know from the first day that I came to Asia how I was with you all the time serving the Lord with all lowliness of mind, and245 tears, and temptations, which befell me by the plots of the Jews; how I kept back nothing of what is profitable, so as not to announce to you and to teach you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ’ (vers. 18-21).

Here the apostle does not refrain from reminding them of his own service in their midst. This was a habit of his, as we see very particularly in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians and elsewhere; burning zeal and a good conscience before God alone account for it. Nothing could be farther from his character than liking to speak of himself. He calls it his folly in reminding the Corinthians of his labours and his sufferings; never would he have said one word of either, had it not been of the utmost moment for the saints. They knew very scantily what the glory of Christ demands what the walk and service and devotedness of the Christian should be. They had been conversant only with the gross darkness of heathenism, or with the hollow and pretentious hardness of the Jews. They needed not precept only, but, what is so much more powerful along with it, a living example to form and fashion the ways of Christ.

Unswerving fidelity characterized the apostle's course habitually, as he says, 'Serving the Lord with all lowliness of mind, and tears, and temptations which befell me by the plots of the Jews.' Such an one could well appeal to others who knew him, as he does now with peculiar solemnity to the Ephesian elders. It is not learning or success in ministry which he puts before them, but serving the Lord with all lowliness of mind. How often that service puffs up the novice! What dangers surround even the most experienced! Lowliness of mind is of all moment in it, and the Lord helps by the very difficulties and griefs which accompany it. Paul was not ashamed to speak of his tears any more than of the temptations which befell him through the plots of the Jews, the constant adversaries of the gospel, animated with special bitterness against Paul.

Further, he could say that they knew how he kept back nothing of what is profitable. This needs faith without which fidelity will fail; for the apostle was altogether above the fear of man, and withheld in nothing what was for their good, but announced to them and taught them publicly, and at their houses, testifying both to Jews and Greeks repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

Naturally the subject-matter points to his work from the beginning of his arrival at Ephesus, but also to that which every soul needs as the first testimony of the gospel. Hence we hear of testifying to Jews and Greeks. It is what every man wants that he may come to God. Repentance and faith are inseparable where there is reality, and the language is as precise as we are entitled to expect from one who not only had the mind of God but expressed it like the apostle. As there is no genuine repentance without faith, so there is no faith of God's elect without repentance. Repentance toward God is the soul judging itself, and confessing its ways as in His sight. Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ is the soul receiving the good news God sends concerning His Son. 'Repent', said Peter on the day of Pentecost to the Jews already pricked in heart, who accepted the word and set to their seal that God is true. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house,' said Paul and Silas to the Philippian jailer and to all that were in his house. How unfounded it would be to imagine that in the one case there was repentance without faith, or, in the other, faith on the Lord Jesus Christ without repentance toward God! In a divine work both are given and found.

The Holy Spirit, Who works all that is good in the soul, takes care that repentance and faith shall co-exist. There may be difference in the outward development. Some souls may manifest more deeply the sorrow of repentance; others may be abounding in the peace and joy of faith, but wherever it is a true operation of God, there cannot but be both. We must allow for the different manifestations in different persons. No two conversions present exactly the same outward effect, some being more simple, others going through the dealings of God more thoroughly. It is well when the repentance toward God is as deep as the faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ is unhesitating. All then goes happily forward with the soul. But this is far from a common case. In most so far as we can see faith may be somewhat feeble, and consequently the soul is not a little tried with the sense of its sinfulness before God. In such circumstances self-occupation is apt to cloud the heart.

The spiritual eye is to be set on Christ as the object of faith, but with scrutiny of self subjectively before God, and hence comes a real judgment of sins and sin. There may not be peace, and there is not when this self-judgment with sorrow of heart begins; but faith in a God revealed to the conscience is surely there, though not yet rest by faith in the accepted and appropriated work of redemption. When Christ’s work and God’s grace are better and more fully known, the self-judgment of repentance is so much the more profound. In this case the judgment-seat of Christ, however solemn, is no longer an object of dread. All is out already in conscience, and the flesh is judged as a hateful thing, and so evil really that nothing but the cross of Christ

could be an adequate dealing with it, but there it is now known that our old man was crucified with Him that the body of sin might be done away (not merely our sins be forgiven), so that we should no longer serve sin; for he that died has been justified from sin. As surely as death has no more dominion (sin never had) over Christ Who, having died to sin once for all, lives unto God, even so we also may land should, reckon ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:6-11). We died with Him.

Repentance toward God then is not the gospel of His grace, nor is it remission of sins, but is that inward work in the conscience by the Holy Spirit's use of the word, without which the privileges of the gospel are vain and only hurry on the soul the more rashly to destruction. The low views which make repentance a human work as a preface to faith are no less objectionable than the so-called high views which merge all in faith making repentance no more than a change of mind. Neither legalism nor antinomianism are of God, but the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ. Truth does not spare the flesh or its works, faith and repentance bow in self-loathing to Christ, and grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Repentance then is not mere regret or remorse (which is expressly μεταμέλεια);

μετάνοια is that afterthought, or judgment on reflection, formed by God's working through His word to which conscience bows, self and its past ways being judged before God. It is never apart from a divine testimony and hence it is from faith, God's goodness, not His judgment

only, leads to it; and godly sorrow works repentance unto salvation not to be regretted, as the sorrow of the world works death (2 Cor. 7:10). ‘I have sinned against heaven and in Thy sight’, ‘God be merciful to me the sinner’: such is its confession and cry in a broken and contrite spirit. The gospel, the good news of grace, is God’s answer.

Next, the apostle turns from his ministry at Ephesus to the prospect before him. He was well aware that the severest trials awaited him (compare Rom. 15:30, 31), and it would appear, he had no slight presentiment that Jerusalem would prove the source of much that was imminently hanging over him. ‘And now, behold, I go bound in the [or, my] spirit246 unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Spirit testifieth to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me’ (vers. 22, 23).

Though he was not aware of the precise shape, he thus lets it be known that he went with eyes open to that coming pressure of troubles, which was only interrupted for a little while before all terminated in a martyr’s death. He knew further that, whatever might be the close, bonds and afflictions intervened, and what could be more serious for the testimony of the Lord and saints generally to the heart of one who loved the church? Nevertheless God was in it all, for during these very bonds Paul wrote the Epistles which furnish, as we happily know, the fullest and brightest light of Christ and on heavenly things that was ever vouchsafed for the permanent instruction and comfort of the saints of God. We shall see that loving remonstrances did not fail on every side, which must have added so much the more to his grief in resisting all such appeals.

Indeed the apostle here gives the pith of his answer to every entreaty and dissuasive: ‘But I hold not my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God’247 (ver. 24). Nothing could frustrate such a resolve. It was to him no question of success, as men speak, nor of present effects, however promising. His eye was on the glory of Christ, his ear only for the will of God. Suffering or death as a sequence he would not allow to deter him for an instant. His Master had shown him, in the highest degree and for the deepest ends, how in a world of sin and misery suffering glorifies God.

Undoubtedly there was that in the cross of Christ which belongs to none but Himself. The expiation of sin falls exclusively to Him, the infinite Sacrifice, but sacrifice, though the deepest, is far from being the only element in Christ’s death. There were other sufferings which the saints are permitted to share with Him — to be despised, to be rejected, to suffer for love and truth, as well as for righteousness. These sufferings are not confined to Christ, as it was to suffer for sin; and Paul perhaps more than any other was one who could rejoice in his sufferings for the saints, as well as fill up that which was behind of the tribulations of Christ in his flesh, for His body which is the church. The sufferings of the gospel also were for him to glory in; and no mere man before or since ever won so good a title or those honourable scars (Col. 1:24, Gal. 6:17).

Most truthfully, therefore, could the apostle say that he made no account of his life as dear to himself: nor is it merely before the Ephesian elders that he felt transport, or on any transient occasions of like kind. He had it

before his heart to finish his course with joy, and the service which he had received of the Lord Jesus to testify the glad tidings (or gospel) of the grace of God. The large-heartedness of the apostle is as refreshing as instructive. Who had such a crowd of daily pressure on him? Who like him bore the burden of all the assemblies? If he had to do with weak consciences, who could be weak like Paul? Who went out in heart toward one who stumbled as he did? Nevertheless the gospel was as near to his spirit as to the most earnest evangelist. There was no one-sidedness in this blessed servant of the Lord. He was here simply to carry out all the objects of His love, to promote His glory wherever His name penetrated, and Christ is not more the Head of the church than the sum and substance of the gospel.

It will be noticed that the gospel is here designated ‘the glad tidings of the grace of God.’ This appears to be the most comprehensive title given to it in Scripture. Elsewhere the apostle speaks of it as ‘the gospel of the glory of Christ’, where its heavenly side is meant to be made prominent. Again, he speaks of it as ‘the gospel of God’, when its source in divine love is pointed out. Furthermore, we hear of ‘the gospel of Christ’, where He is in view through Whom alone the glad tidings become possible from God to man. In the Gospels we read of ‘the gospel of the kingdom’, looking on to Messiah in power and glory: in the Revelation, of the ‘everlasting gospel’, the revelation of the bruised Seed bruising the serpent’s head. Each has its main or distinctive meaning; but as none can be, apart from Christ, so none of them appears to be so full as ‘the gospel of the grace of God’. Nor is any other designation of it more than this last in keeping with the Acts of the

Apostles, as well as with that apostle's heart who was now addressing the Ephesian elders. The person and the work of the Lord Jesus are fully supposed although not expressed by it; for in whom or through whom, can God's grace shine out, save in Him or by Him?

'And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom 248 [of God], shall see my face no more' (ver. 25). It is his farewell. His work, as to presence in their midst, was ended.

Here we have another and distinct topic, and one that is apt to be overlooked in modern preaching, viz., 'The kingdom'. He who examines the Acts of the Apostles will find how large a place it occupies in the preaching not of Peter only but of Paul, and, we may be assured, of all the other servants of the Lord in those early days. It is a grave blank where the kingdom is left out as it is now. Nor is it only that the future according to God is habitually lost to the faith of saints through the unfaithfulness of modern preachers, but thereby the gospel of God's grace also suffers. For in that case there is sure to be confusion, which, mingling both characters never enjoys the simple and full truth of either 249: for the kingdom will be the triumph of righteousness by power when Christ appears in His glory. A truth it was, most familiar, to those who were bred in the constant and glorious vision of Old Testament prophecy. Christianity, though it open to us heavenly things, was never intended to enfeeble this prospect; rather should it enable the believer to taste its blessing more, as well by imparting a deeper intelligence of its principles as by bringing in the heavenly glory. We can enjoy it in an incomparably larger and more distinct way, and we have its principles explained by a deeper and fuller view of its

basis in the reconciling work of the Lord Jesus on the cross.

‘Wherefore I testify to you this day that I am pure from the blood of all. For I shrank not from announcing to you all the counsel of God’ (vers: 26, 27). The apostle could thus solemnly attest his fidelity to the trust the Lord had confided to him. (Compare Ezek. 3:18-20). Twice at least (vers. 20, 27) he disclaims expressly that reserve which some bearing the Christian name have not been ashamed to avow as a merit learnt from Him Whose death rent the veil, and Who puts all true followers of His in the light of life, the light which makes everything manifest. Walking in darkness now that the True Light shines is a walk in the flesh without God. With such doctrine no wonder that ‘the hungry sheep look up and are not fed.’

It is a mistake that ‘all the counsel of God’ means no more than the plan of God for saving men unfolded in the gospel. ‘The gospel’ is indeed the preaching of salvation in a dead and risen Saviour; ‘the kingdom’, whether morally or in its fully manifested form, has its own distinct force in God’s reign, as we have seen; ‘all the counsel of God’ rises still higher and embraces His purpose in its utmost extent (e.g., Eph. 1:9-12).

Having thus solemnly set before them his own ministry, he now turns to the elders and their work. ‘Take heed250 to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Ghost set you overseers to tend the assembly of God which He purchased with His own blood’ [or, the blood of His own One] (ver. 28).

The first of all duties is to take heed to our own selves, whatever may be our position, and this an overseer is

more particularly to weigh. For what can be more dangerous than activity about others when there is carelessness as to ourselves? It is not from the word abstractedly, but from its shining on the path of our own experience that most is learnt practically. Undoubtedly we may learn from others, and through others; but how can there be reality, unless we take heed ‘unto ourselves’?

Still the object in appointing elders was to oversee the flock and all the flock. There might be, and in general were, several overseers; but the duty of the overseer is to take heed ‘to all the flock’ where he lives. This is the more important, as it humbles the spirit while it enlarges the heart, for who is sufficient for these things? It tends to neutralize the self-importance of ‘my people’, as well as the rivalry when one thinks of another and ‘his people’. The ‘one body’ was a new thing then; it is absolutely unheard of in modem Christianity. The saints had to learn that God had but one flock here below. There was unity whether in each place or all over the world. Yet the elders had to do with all the flock where they resided, not elsewhere. Eldership was a local charge.

In this the elders are wholly distinct from ‘the gifts’ (Eph. 4:8-11) which are in the unity of the body of Christ. They themselves of course were members like others, and as such consequently belonged not to ‘a body’, but to ‘the body’. But the office of eldership was within definite limits; the charge did not run beyond the particular assembly or city wherein they were appointed. It is admitted, nay pressed, that no one could claim to be an elder unless he were duly appointed; and it is plain from scripture that none could appoint save

the apostles, or one positively commissioned by an apostle for the purpose. In other words the bishops, or elders (for they are identical in God's word), depended for their due installation on an apostle, directly or indirectly; but when thus appointed, it could be said, as here, that the Holy Ghost set them as bishops or overseers: His sanction accompanied apostolic nomination.

The Authorized Version has gone a little beyond what the inspired word really says, 'Over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers.' It is rightly rendered in the Revised Version, ''in the which'. They were thus made to feel that they were in and of the flock of God like every other saint. Nevertheless no one ought to deny that the responsibility of every elder was to rule. For, as the apostle says to Timothy (1 Tim. 5:17), 'Let the elders that rule well be accounted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and in teaching.' They might not all labour in teaching: but they were all set to 'rule', or preside, and they were responsible to rule 'well'. They were expressly appointed to the lead, as that which pertained to their office. They were in the flock, but in the Lord they were over their brethren, though they were by no means the only persons who were.

This in no way interfered with the gifts in the body. Some may be pastors and teachers, others evangelists; but both were on a quite different footing from the elders. The business of the gifted men was the ministry of the word, whether to those within or to those without, and they were accordingly to labour entirely apart from a designated charge over any circumscribed or particular spot. Eph. 4 is decisive for this principle and

fact. It is not only that apostles and prophets had an unrestricted field of work; the lesser gifts, who were the fruit of Christ's grace to the church, had a similar title, though in a humbler way. Thus all gifts as such are in the unity of Christ's body; none of them is merely a local official (as we have seen the elder to be); though he might also be appointed to a charge, his gift otherwise goes beyond it.

The overseers then are exhorted by the apostle to tend or shepherd the assembly of God. Here again we see how strong is the contrast of scriptural truth with the system, which reigns today, of this congregation for one 'minister' and that for another. For of old the elders were all as overseers to tend the assembly, and here the whole of it in Ephesus. No doubt their duty was to carry on oversight where they resided; but it was to shepherd the church of God there, and not each one a part of it only.251 The largeness of the scriptural truth is as evident as the contractedness of men's arrangements ever since apostolic days. Men, in their wisdom, may have judged it necessary to allot a portion to this one and another to that one in the same city; but earthly prudence, however respectable and useful for present interests, is ever to be distrusted in divine things. When in fact the break-up of the flock of God came to pass, the clerical order which had crept in could not but pave the way for not schisms only, but sects, each with their governing functionaries.

So completely are the children of God fallen from His mind that the various denominations of Christendom are now supposed even by saints to be a providential arrangement, which only enthusiasts could wish to disturb. But as this is not according to the word of the

Lord, so it is far from the path of faith. Human reason can never overthrow the plain, sure, and abiding revelation of God's will as we have it in scripture, the especial safeguard in the difficult times of the last days as the apostle tells us (2 Tim. 3). Difficulties may be enormous, dangers may increase, the trials be immense; but obedience is of all things the most lowly for man and the most acceptable to God. Let every believer weigh these matters as in His sight: His will should be dear to all the children of God.

The apostle then gives the more seriousness to the task which the overseers had before them, by the consideration not only that the assembly was God's rather than theirs, which it is never said to be (however common may be the word in man's mouth), but 'which He purchased or acquired to Himself'.

'With His own blood' is beyond controversy a difficult expression, and especially in the best representation of the text, which deserves careful examination. It is not meant that there is the least cloud over the truth that He Who shed His blood for us was God. If the Saviour here was not God, His purchase would have only a creature's value, and must be wholly insufficient to acquire on God's part the assembly as it was, yea, as it is. Being a divine person, His gaining it to Himself by blood has an infinite and eternal efficacy.

But the expression, as it stands in the Authorized and Revised Versions is unexampled in scripture; and what is more, as already remarked, it is peculiarly embarrassing for the Christian scholar, because the form of it, now most approved on the best grounds, is extremely emphatic instead of being general. Indeed it would be

easier to understand the sense as commonly understood, if the form had been, as in the vulgar reading, τοῦ ἰδίου αἳματος. The critical reading, though at first sight it may add to the difficulty, seems however the right one, τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου. But it is suggested that we should take τοῦ ἰδίου in government rather than in concord. The meaning that results from this would be ‘the blood of His Own One’, i.e., of Christ, His Son, rather than ‘His own blood’. This meaning, if certain, would make all plain.

It was in all probability the perplexity here felt which led some copyists in early days to substitute the church ‘of the Lord’, for that ‘of God’. But this reading, though externally well supported (ACpm DE, et al.), is at issue with New Testament usage, and is thus on the whole inferior to that of the common text, though as far as ‘God’ goes no one need be surprised that Wetstein and Griesbach adopted it; but it is not so intelligible why Lachmann, Tischendorf, and Tregelles are not here found rather with Mill, Wolf, Bengel, Scholz, Alford (in all his editions since the first two), Wordsworth, Westcott and Hort, who hold to τοῦ θεοῦ.. It is Alford’s mistake that Matthai prefers the same, for in both his editions he follows his Moscow copies, and has the same conflate reading as the Complutensian, τοῦ κυρίοῦ καὶ θεοῦ (C3HLP, some 110 or more cursives). Other varieties there are, scarce worth noticing on any ground, as, τοῦ κυρίου θεῦυ (3,95**), τοῦ θεου καὶ κυρίου (47). Some ancient versions represent τοῦ χριστοῦ, one old Latin ‘Jesu Christi’, and the Georgian — τοῦ κυρίοῦ τοῦ θεου.

Dr. Scrivener therefore fairly enough says that our choice evidently lies between κυρίῦ and θεοῦ, though

Patristic testimony may slightly incline to the latter, as he does himself. But why he should consider that the usus loquendi of the apostle, though incontrovertibly sustaining θεοῦ against, κυρίου, 'appears little relevant to the case of either', is to my mind unintelligible. For the utmost that can be said for the immense weight on one side is that it may not have been impossible to have said the other in this sole instance. Scripture beyond doubt is larger than man's mind; but assuredly he is rather bold or careless who could slight an expression invariably found for one never found elsewhere, and here easily understood to be a change in order to escape a sentiment extremely harsh and unexampled if taken as it commonly is.

It may not be without profit to conceive how the discovery of the Sinai MS., and a clearer knowledge, not only of the Vatican copy, but of other weighty authorities, must have modified, if not revolutionized, the judgment of Griesbach. 'Ex his omnibus luculenter apparet, pro lectione qeou' ne unicum quidem militare codicem, qui sive vetustate sive interna bonitate sue testis idonei et incorrupti laude ornari queat. Non reperitur, nisi in libris recentioribus iisdemque vel penitus contemnendis, vel misere, multis saltem in locis, interpolatis. Sed nec versionum auctoritate tueri se potest. Nulla enim translatio habet qeou' praeter Vulgatum recentiorem, (quam redarguunt antiquiores libri latini,) et Philoxenianam syriacam,... Tandem neque apud Patres certa lectionis istius vestigia deprehenduntur ante Epiphanium,... Quomodo igitur salvis critcae artis legibus lectio θεοῦ, utpote omni auctoritate justa destituta, defendi queat, equidem haud intelligo.' (N. T. Gr. ed. sec. ii. 115, Halae Sax. et Lond.

1806). It is now certified, not by Birch only, who might have been more heeded, notwithstanding the silence of the collation for Bentley, but by the personal and expressly minute examination of Tregelles, who rather looked for an erasure, but found no sign of it in B, but θεοῦ as also in. Now no sober and intelligent mind can doubt that the weight of and B is at least equal to ACDE.

Among the cursives, as usual, some may be of slight account, but others are really valuable and undeserving of so sweeping a censure. As to Versions, none can be produced of greater value than the Vulgate and the most ancient and excellent copies, such as the Amiatine, Fuldensian, Demidovianus, Toletanus, et al., as well as the Clementine edition, have ‘Dei’. It is rather audacious to begin with Epiphanius among the Fathers in face of the well-known allusion of Ignatius (Πρὸς Ἐφεσίους i.) which this verse alone can account for. Greek and Latin Fathers cite the common text, or refer freely to it (as Tertullian Ad Uxorem ii. 3, Clement Alex. ii. 3, 44), though no doubt there is a vacillation which answers to the various readings.

Griesbach also argues on the improbability that Athanasius could have read the text as it stands and deny as he does against Apollinarius that αἷμα θεοῦ occurs, ascribing such an expression to the Arians; indeed many besides Athanasius objected to such language. And it would have been truly impossible if διᾶ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος had been the true reading. But it is not. The majority of later copies may support it, as they do the unquestionably wrong τοῦ κυρίοῦ καὶ θεου but all late critics agree to follow ABCDE, et al.

It would appear then that the great champion of orthodoxy must have understood τοῦ ἰδίου to be expressive of Christ, as God's 'own' One. Otherwise the emphasis, if we take τοῦ ἰδίου in concord, renders the phrase so intolerable that nothing but necessity could justify it. Is there any such need? In other words, if the true text were διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος, we must translate it as in the Authorized Version and all others which were based on that reading now recognized as incorrect; and we could then understand the phrase only as predicated of Him Who is God by what theologians call κοινωνία ἰδιωμάτων. And Meyer considers that the true reading was changed to the common but indirect one because τοῦ ἰδίον, as it ought to be, might be referred to Christ. Daederlein, Michaelis, and other moderns, when they so refer τοῦ ἰδίου, may have had low thoughts of Christ, but certainly not such was Athanasius, who, it seems, must have so understood the passage. Can it be questioned that the emphatic contrastic force, if we take it as God's own blood, brings the phrase under what he calls the τολμήματα τῶν

Ἀρειανῶν?

It is easy to ask for justification by Greek usage. This is exactly what from the nature of the case could hardly be; for in all the New Testament, as there is no other instance of a noun followed by τοῦ ἰδίου, there is no distinct matter for comparison. But it is to be noticed that, where Christ goes before, what follows is διά τοῦ ἰδίου αίματος (Heb. 9:12; Heb. 13:12). It is reasonable therefore to infer that, as the emphatic contrast would be dogmatically extravagant, the rendering most entitled to our acceptance is 'through the blood of His own One'. Dr. Hort indeed suggests 'through the blood

that was His own, i.e., as being His Son's' (The N.T. in Greek, ii. 99). It may be doubted whether this will commend itself more than Mr. Darby's.

The general truth is untouched. The question is how best to solve the very real difficulty. The suggested version seems much less objectionable than Dr. Hort's conjecture at the close of his note, that υἱοῦ may have dropped out of the τοῦ ἰδίου at some very early transcription affecting all existing documents. Conjectural emendation252 in N.T. scripture has never approached a proof of its need or value in a solitary example. He Who gave us His word has watched over it; and we need not distrust Him here.

The reasoning of Bp. Middleton (Greek Article, Rose's Ed., 291-5) is founded on the erroneous vulgar text, and directed mainly against Mr. G. Wakefield, whose version and notes are here, as ever, devoted to the confirmation of his heterodox views. But Michaelis was not so ignorant as to translate the common text as the Bp. says he did, nor ought a writer on the Greek article to have overlooked an emphasis in the repeated article, as compared with the ordinary form, which would be hard indeed to predicate of God as such, when the unemphatic only is applied to Christ's own blood. It is to be doubted therefore whether Bp. Middleton, or those who cite him in this connection did really comprehend or see the true conditions of the question. For on the one hand the common deduction involves us in thoughts and expressions wholly foreign to scripture, on the other hand, if the Greek can honestly mean by the blood of His own One the balance of truth is at once restored, and the utmost that can be alleged against the construction is that its seeming ambiguity might be supposed

improbable for the apostle's mouth. That it is sound Greek to express this meaning will scarcely be disputed save by prejudiced persons who do not sufficiently bear in mind the graver objections to the other version.253 Returning then from the consideration of the passage, one may conclude that the Text. Rec. is right in reading church or assembly 'of God' but wrong in following that form of expression at the close of the verse which would compel us to translate, contrary to all the phraseology of scripture elsewhere, 'through His own blood'. The reading of all critics with adequate information and judgment might, and ordinarily would, bear the same meaning with the force of a contrasting emphasis, which is never used even of our Lord; if said of God, it is wholly unaccountable. It seems that this moral improbability made Athanasius deny the phrase (found in Ignatius, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian) to be in scripture; which nevertheless has it, and has it in the most pointed form, if we are bound to render διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου as scholars usually do, without speaking of the Oriental Versions, which cut the knot by giving 'the Lord', 'the Lord and God', and 'Christ'. But it seems only prejudice to deny that tou' ijdivou may be as legitimately in regimen as in concord: if in regimen, the sense would be 'of His own One', and the difficulty of the right text is at an end. In this case the apostle employs unusually touching terms to enforce on the elders to shepherd the assembly of God. which He acquired to Himself through the blood of His own One, special personality being merged in a purchase so beyond measure dear and precious. That the Saviour is the Son of the Father from everlasting to everlasting is certain to the believer, but the Book of the Acts habitually presents the truth from a

broader point of view with which the apostolic charge would here coalesce.

Taking heed to themselves as well as to all the flock of God was the more necessary because of the sure and dark prospect which the apostle now puts before them: ‘I know that after my departure grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise speaking things perverted to draw away the disciples after them’ (vers. 29, 30).

On earth it has been always thus. So Moses warned Israel, when he was about to depart (Deut. 32:15 - 33). Those under grace, we now learn from the apostle, would behave themselves in the house of God no better than the people under law. And so it came to pass, as the Old Testament shows us: Israel utterly ruined, everywhere dispersed, despised outcasts, nowhere more than in their own land; and so the New Testament everywhere warns of a like result in Christendom.

The Lord Himself, in the great parabolic series of Matt. 13, sets forth its corruption from the beginning. The tares once sown were never to be rooted up until the harvest, and the time of the harvest will be the judgment of the quick on earth. So, in His great prophecy on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24 - 25), the Lord does not hide the sad future. The evil servant would say in his heart, ‘My lord delayeth His coming’, and would begin to beat his fellow-servants, as well as to eat and drink with the drunken. There cannot be, there is not, either recovery, or a general progress for good. Christ’s appearing in judgment will deal with the evil effectually. It is not shown otherwise in the beautiful picture of the ten

virgins, five wise and five foolish. Was not failure apparent and complete, when all slumbered and slept, while the bridegroom tarried? Grace assuredly awakes the wise, who had oil in their vessels, to trim their lamps, and go in with the Bridegroom to the marriage. As for the foolish, who had no oil and are therefore busied here and there in procuring it — in vain, the door was shut. So with the servants that traded with the talents given: nothing but judgment will rectify the wrong done to the Master. Not only is there to be no such thing as universal prevalence of the gospel, but within its own limited range of profession misrepresentation of Christ and opposition to His will are to characterize it to the last. No one denies that there will be, till He comes, as there ever has been, a witness of Christ and truth in life and suffering for His name; but there is also the sad and ever swelling succession of the evil done to that name, not merely by persecution from without, but still more painfully and shamelessly by every spiritual pravity within.

The Epistles entirely confirm and fill up the dark outline presented by our Lord. Of this declension we have spoken perhaps sufficiently elsewhere, but surely 2 Thess. 2 is the adequate testimony, and from an early day: l Tim. 4, and 2 Tim. 3 fall in with this preparatively. Peter in his Second Epistle (2 Peter 2), and Jude both announce the same in yet more sombre colours; and none goes more to the root of the matter than John, not only in his Epistles, but prophetically in the Revelation.

Here, however, we have the inroad of the declension stated by Paul as a marked starting-point: ‘I know that after my departure grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own

selves shall men arise speaking things perverted to draw away the disciples after them.' There is much unbelief as to this, even among Christians otherwise well disposed. They fail to see that the power of Christianity lies in the ungrieved guidance of the Spirit of God according to His word; and His Spirit can freely work only in Christ's name to God's glory. When men act on human principles, where the spirit of the world prevails, ruin is the necessary result. As long as the apostle was here, the spiritual power and influence to restrain was immense. There was then the most vigilant and the most decided resistance to evil of every kind. He knew that after his departure spiritual energy would decay more and more, and that the glory of the Lord would thus be swamped. So easy, so deadly, among the saints of God is compromise, to which amiability, prudence, desire of peace love of numbers, and similar expedients, would expose them.

The commentators tell us that grievous wolves are not persecutors, but rather false friends. Real foes should enter in among those who bear the name of the Lord and spare not the flock. But the commentators are surely wrong in identifying the grievous wolves with those described in verse 30 'From among your own selves shall men arise speaking things perverted.' Surely these are manifestly different classes of evil men, the first more violent, the second more subtle, the first seeking their own gratification and advantage, and the second doing the deadlier work of speaking things perverted to draw away the disciples after them. To take advantage of the flock for selfish means is wicked; to set up self and error in the place of Christ is yet worse, if more seemly in appearance.

Here it may be noticed that the Authorized Version fails to represent the full malignity of the evil. Every party leader seeks to draw away disciples. Here it is the more aggravated effort to draw away ‘the’ disciples after them. It was to mislead them all, to subject all saints to themselves. Hence the apostle’s solemn appeal: ‘Wherefore watch, remembering that by the space of three years I ceased not admonishing each one night and day with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all that are sanctified’ (vers. 31, 32).

The ministry of Paul in Ephesus at this latter day was just an answer to what it had been among the Thessalonians earlier, first as nurse, then as father (1 Thess. 2:7, 11). It was for the elders now to watch and not to forget that loving example of love; but love will never abide, never bear the strain, without real faith in God for that work; and therefore the force of his ‘commending them’ to God and to the word of His ‘grace’. It is not commendation to one only, but to both. Without God before the heart the word becomes dry and sapless, and we grow discouraged and impatient, without the word to direct the life, we are in danger from the will and the wisdom, or from the folly, of man. The word of His grace becomes the grand test and resource, while looking to God for every step and in every question. So we find the apostle laying it down by the Holy Ghost in 2 Tim. 3:15, which passage also, by the way, helps to decide the true reference of what has been questioned: in Acts 20:32, should it be, ‘which’ is able, or ‘Who’ is able, to build you up? The comparison strengthens the former rendering.

The apostle had thus set before the elders a prospect most grievous, which lapse of time has fully confirmed. Indeed, before his departure the signs of coming evils were already apparent everywhere, so that when his later Epistles more especially prophesied not merely of decay, but of utter ruin, even then he had to speak of the seeds of these coming evils as already sown. No greater error was there than that which ere long began to prevail, and most extensively in modern times, the dream of progress. It is directly opposed to these apostolic testimonies, and no less to the plainest possible facts in Christendom.

Even on the loose estimate of bare profession, how far is the Christian faith from having title to that triumph of which men fondly speak? Indeed, if these vain hopes were realized, would they not present a glaring contrast to all that the Bible teaches us of that which is committed to human responsibility? From Adam downwards the history of man is the history of failure. Not that grace has not wrought, and wrought wonders, in the narrow path of Christ here below; but as the rule, everywhere and always ruin has followed every fresh trial of man, and every fresh testimony of God because of man. Look at him in Eden or out of Eden, before the deluge or since it: have truth and righteousness prevailed for the mass? That God has wrought by individuals, that He has blessed families, that He has owned righteousness in a people, as well as faith wherever His own grace made it good in the elect, is clear. As the race as well as its head broke down, none the less did Israel, notwithstanding the singular favour which God showed; and as the people, so the priests, and so the kings, till there was no remedy, and God

swept them from His land, not only by the Assyrian and by the Babylonian powers, but still more by the Roman.

That Christendom is no exception we have already seen, and this not from experience only, but from the distinct, and repeated, and complete testimony of the inspired men who laid its foundation; and yet men venture to hope — ‘to hope’! Is it their hope that the apostolic words will prove untrue? Is it that men; so utterly fallen as they are now in Christendom, will do better than those in whom the Spirit of God first wrought with a power as much beyond consequent as precedent? But alas! poverty in its lowest state is apt to be the proudest. God will surely be true, and every man who opposes Him a liar. This decline from truth then was briefly and profoundly set forth by the apostle about to depart from Ephesus.

Let me notice again how the ordinary translation of verse 30 weakens the force of the last words. It is not merely to draw away ‘disciples’ after them: every heretic seeks to do and does this; but the object of the enemy through these perverse men is to draw away ‘the disciples, the body of those that confessed the Lord on the earth. Not less than the desertion of the whole flock was the blow aimed at the glory of Christ. He only is entitled to the loyalty of all the disciples, and if it is a serious thing for any one disciple to be drawn away from Him, from His will about His own below, how much more to seek the misleading of all! But self-will is blind to all but its own will and soon learns to confound itself with the will of the Master. But think of the dishonour which is thus cast upon His name!

‘Wherefore watch ye,’ says the apostle to the elders, ‘remembering that for three years I ceased not admonishing each one night and day with tears.’ This little glimpse, which necessity wrung out from the apostle’s heart, lets us see his entire devotedness. It was not business, nor the spread of truth even, still less the prevalence of his own opinions for good. It was one who loved Christ, and pressed this devotion to Him and to His own above all on those who took the lead. Untiring, tender watchful care filled his heart, with the deepest feeling habitually and at all cost. Such he would have us feel, as well as those he addressed that day. Who is sufficient for these things? The sufficiency is in and from God.

So Paul continues, ‘And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all that are sanctified.’ Whatever be the days of danger, difficulty, and ruin, God abides faithful, the Saviour unchangeable, Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever. If all the apostles, since they and the prophets laid the foundation, have passed away, the word of His grace remains as does the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. He only had divine power even when apostles were there. There is no excuse therefore for unbelief. Faith shines the more in a dark day, and devotedness is called out by the sense of His dishonour Who is dearest to the heart.

Nor is there anything in comparison with the word of His grace in ability to build us up. Boldness of thought and beauty of language are all vain if there be not the truth, and the truth is never so sure, and strong and holy, as in His own word, which is truth. This searches

the conscience this strengthens the heart, this nourishes faith and makes the blessed hope abounding and mighty in the love which is the strength of all that is good. For love is of God, and God is good, and as His word builds us up now so it gives us the inheritance among all that are sanctified. The word of God truly received delivers from the love of this present age, from the world and the things of the world.

Hence adds the apostle, ‘I coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel; yea, yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those that were with me’ (vers. 33, 34). Life in Christ is infinitely blessed and it is the portion of the believer by the grace of God; a life wholly and absolutely different from that old Adam life, which meets its doom not in death only, but in judgment without end. For the Christian our old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be annulled that we might no longer serve sin, so that each can say, ‘I am crucified with Christ, and no longer live I but Christ liveth in me, but in that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me’ (Gal. 2:20).

It is ruin no doubt to set aside the grace of God, as the reintroduction of the law must do. But how terrible to give a false unworthy testimony to the grace of God by allowing the desires of that life which should be buried in the grave of Christ! The old man covets silver, and gold, and apparel. All these minister to the lusts of the body as well as of the mind. Love serves others, love with faith alone glorifies God; and it is well when those who teach these things are living ensamples of all they urge on others. How few can say truthfully and throughout with the apostle, ‘I coveted no man’s silver,

or gold, or apparel, yea, yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those that were with me. In all things I gave you an example, how that so labouring ye ought to help [support] the weak, and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He Himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive' (vers. 33-35).

Then let no one who seems or claims to be a leader now forget them; yea, let us all remember these ways of the apostle and these words of the Lord Jesus. This is certainly not after the manner of men, not yet of Israel, nay, nor of Christendom. They are the words of Christ, and His life here below is the most blessed comment upon them. It certainly is not enjoyment, or present honour, but His love in tending and feeding the sheep of His pasture, looking for the day of reckoning when the Chief Shepherd shall be manifested, and faithful shepherds shall receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Yet the account is not complete without the parting scene which proves that faith in the unseen hinders not, but imparts, the love which is of God in this world of sorrow and selfishness. 'And having thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and falling on Paul's neck, fondly kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the word which he had spoken, that they should behold his face no more. And they brought him forward unto the ship' (vers. 36-38). Such was the bearing of the greatest of apostles. Oh, how fallen from its reality are those who vaunt themselves his successors! How far short are any of us who abhor such pretensions! As truth and love receded, hierarchy in every shape made for itself a throne, as far from the

mind of Christ as earth is from heaven. But let us beware lest our love grow cold in presence of abounding iniquity.

237 Most support the former, the best the latter.

238 In verse 3 structural varieties appear in the copies.

239 A few very ancient witnesses do not contain these words, which are sustained in the great mass; but '[son] of Pyrrhus' is genuine.

240 ABDE, some twenty cursives, and all the Ancient Versions, as against the Text. Rec., τῶν μαθητῶν HLP, and most cursives, probably to square with αὐτοῖς. So σῆαν in verse following with the scantiest support.

241

καθεζόμενος seems better than

καθὴμενος.

242

τόν pm. ABCD--, which Text. Rec. omits with most.

243 Calvin thinks it was for his health, and that his courtesy spared his companions, others for paying visits by the way.

244 'By' (A.V.) is equivocal as it might mean by that way. 'Past' means without stopping there.

245 Text. Rec. adds 'many', supported by CHLP, et al., but ABDE et al., omit.

246 Canon Humphry attaches more importance than is due to the old expositors as Chrysostom, Ammonius, Didymus, who will have the phrase to mean that Paul went 'led captive by the Spirit'. Usage, as well as the distinction τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον in the following verses,

point to his spirit, on which Meyer at last fell back after first taking up the notion of the Greek Fathers. Paul was not free in his spirit for any other direction than Jerusalem, cost what this might.

247 There are minor differences in the readings of the text, but nothing of weight enough to detain us here.

248 The best and oldest MSS. and Versions, save the Vulg., etc., read simply ‘the kingdom.’ Others add ‘of God’, which is meant if not expressed, others of Jesus’, and ‘of the Lord Jesus’.

249 Thus Calvin (Opera vi. 185): ‘Regnum Dei iterum vocatur evangelii doctrina, quae regnum Dei in hoc mundo inchoat, homines renovando in imaginem Dei, donec tandem in ultima resurrectione compleatur.’ (The doctrine of the gospel is again called God’s kingdom, which begins God’s kingdom in this world by renewing men into God’s image, till at length it be complete in the last resurrection.) Calvin was a pious and able man; but the value of his commentary on scripture has been extravagantly overrated. Of course, not a little turns on the spiritual intelligence of him who speaks.

250 The copula

αὖν ‘therefore’ seems an early addition, but the best copies have it not.

251 We may see the same scriptural fact in Phil. 1:1, where King James’s translators left in ‘bishops’, instead of adopting ‘overseers’ as in Acts 20:28. The cases are exactly parallel, as indeed a similar constitution prevailed wherever the apostles visited and supplied full order. The modern ‘minister’ of dissent is as unknown as the traditional ‘diocesan’.

252 G. C. Knapp, (N.T. Gr. ii. 647, 8, ed. 4th, London, 1824) hazards another guess. ‘Primitively perhaps it was thus written — the church, which He purchased with the blood of His own [namely, Son], Rom. 8:3, 32. Luke elsewhere always speaks simply of the church. Those who referred “purchased” to Christ substituted, from Heb. 13:12, διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος ‘. But leaving out his conjecture, he leans to this version, which he preferred to the usual one 253 See also J.N.D.’s footnote to the passage in his New Translation (1884).

Acts 21

The public course of the apostle was closed so far as scripture informs us. The remaining chapters of the Acts are occupied almost entirely with the personal history of the apostle, especially his collision with the Jews publicly, and through them with the Gentiles. In the first and last of these chapters we have a little of his relations with the Christians. The Book closes with him, the Lord's prisoner, in Rome, though not without liberty to see all who sought him, to whom he preached the kingdom of God and taught the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. Considerably later traces appear in the last of his Epistles. It was important in the mind of the Spirit to give us the early ministry of Peter, chiefly in Judea and Samaria, as well as in opening the door to the Gentiles. After that Paul fills up the entire scene to the close of the Book.

'And when it came to pass that we were parted from them and had set sail, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the next day unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara; and, having found a ship crossing over into Phoenicia, we went on board and set sail, and as we had sighted Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we sailed unto Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unlace her cargo. And having found out the disciples, we remained there seven days, and these said to Paul through the Spirit that he should not set foot in Jerusalem. And when it came to pass that we had completed the days, we departed and went on our journey, and they all with wives and children brought us on our way, till we were out of the city, and kneeling

down on the beach we prayed and took leave of one another, and we went on board ship, and they returned home. And when we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day' (vers. 1-7).

Such is the succinct account of the voyage. On the day after (as we shall see) they took their land journey through Palestine; in the previous verses now before us, it was sailing. Nothing more simple, yet on the journey of such a man and his companions the Spirit of God loves to dwell, and that we should dwell. We wrong His grace in thinking that the Holy Ghost has only to do with extraordinary matters, as striking utterances, strange tongues, miraculous signs, and sufferings still more fruitful when unostentatiously borne. Undoubtedly He is the power for all that is good and worthy of Christ; but as Christ Himself lived much the greater part of His life in the utmost obscurity as regards man, perfectly doing the will of God, before and to Whom not a moment was lost, so does the Spirit of God enter into all the details of life in those who are Christ's. Surely if anything could give dignity to the passing circumstances of each day, this must: but do God's children do we believe it? If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit; let us not be vain-glorious, provoking one another, envying one another.

Let us associate the commonest things with Christ's will and glory. Certainly there is nothing more closely approaching the animal than eating and drinking; yet the word of God would have us appropriate even these things to the highest purpose, and there is no way so simple and sure as by that faith which, looking upward, partakes of them in His name. 'Whether therefore ye eat

or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.' Thus shall we give no occasion of stumbling either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God. Grace avoids questions, as it abhors sin and teaches us to please all men in all things, but not with a view to one's own profit, but rather in divine love to the many that they may be saved. It was so Christ walked in the ungrieved power of the Spirit; it is so we are called to walk, though alas! we too often grieve Him. But there is no rule of life so true, so full, and so direct; and here therefore the path becomes of deep interest. 'To me to live is Christ' underlies what we are told of the great apostle.

'And when it came to pass that we were parted from them.' The last verb may be softened down sometimes, but the natural meaning implies a wrench. Christian affection is a reality on earth: in all the narrative what an absence appears of turning aside for objects of natural interest! 'We came with a straight course unto Coos, and the next day unto Rhodes.' We may be sure from the character and the capacity and the attainments of the apostle that he had an eye for natural beauty and a mind for every historic association that presented itself here below. 'But this one thing I do' was not more his word to others than his own life — 'to me to live is Christ.' The claims of the new creation altogether outweighed those of the old. So when we saw him alone at Athens with ample leisure to look around on the remains which have attracted men of the old world as well as moderns beyond most spots here below, what was the effect on him? His spirit was provoked within him, as he beheld the city full of idols. It was not sculpture that enchained him, not architecture that blinded him. He measured all around by the glory of

Christ, and yet none could show more tact in discoursing to them. If he probed their idolatry to the bottom, he availed himself of the least point of truth which the vain city confessed — the altar with the inscription, ‘To God unknown’.

Truly Paul walked by faith and not by sight; should not we? Is it really come to this, that because we have not apostolic authority or miraculous powers, we are to abandon the life of faith? Is not the Holy Spirit sent down, and sent down to abide with us for ever? It were humbling indeed to answer like the twelve men at Ephesus (who could not speak truly otherwise): ‘We did not so much as hear whether there is a Holy Spirit.’ If we Christians say so now, it is guilty unbelief of the sure and standing privilege of God’s church. All we want is to judge ourselves and walk in faith, truth, and love; the Spirit will then manifest His gracious power.

‘And having found a ship crossing over unto Phoenicia, we went on board and set sail.’ It is good to notice the providential dealings of the Lord. The same heart that abides wholly unmoved by the most violent and dangerous storm, ought to be thankful for a fair wind and a quiet journey; and so it was and is. Circumstances never create faith, though God may use unlooked-for facts to deal with conscience. But the same simple faith it is, which, in rough weather or in smooth, can alike give thanks to God. Certainly it is not indifference; but the known will of God is always good, and acceptable, and perfect; and the heart is kept up in the confidence of His love. So His hand would be seen in their finding a ship crossing over to Phoenicia. It would appear that the vessel in which they first set out did not proceed beyond Patara in the desired direction, and now, having found

one bound for Phoenicia, ‘we went on board and set sail.’ Thus in the outward but gracious ordering of God there was no loss of time.

‘And when we had sighted Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we sailed unto Syria, and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unlade the cargo.’ No doubt the term ‘sighted’ is technical for mariners, but can we conceive that the apostle passed the island without recalling the scene of his early ministry, and of his elder brother Barnabas, and his younger, John Mark, whom they once had as their attendant? We have already had proof of the goodness of Barnabas, and the Holy Ghost has pronounced upon it; and this was proved at a still later day, when he left Antioch, from the midst of an active work of the Lord, to seek for Saul of Tarsus, and brought him to labour with himself at that great centre of Christian blessing (Acts 11:22-26). But Barnabas and Mark bad parted from the apostle, yet the apostle’s heart sought them both, and felt a love that rose above all their failings, as he proved, not only by word, but by deed to the last.

And surely Syria and Tyre where they landed must have recalled deep reflections to the apostle. Here the Lord Himself had withdrawn during His earthly ministry, and from those borders came to Him the woman of Canaan who drew out from Him, not merely an answer of mercy that she wanted for her daughter, but that praise of her own faith which will never be forgotten.

Here the delay of the ship was no less ordered of God at Tyre than the finding it at once had been at Patara. The unloading of the cargo gave the apostle and his companions the time, not exactly to find disciples as in

the Authorized Version, but to find ‘out’ the disciples. We cannot as in the Greek idiom say, ‘found up’, though we do say ‘hunted up’. It would appear hence that they were the object of search, not of casual discovery. They were the disciples, and ‘so they tarried there seven days’. This we have seen before at Troas and remarked on, as giving an opportunity to spend at least one Lord’s day for the communion of the Lord’s Supper.

From an incidental statement we learn how full the early church was of the power of the Spirit: ‘And these said to Paul through the Spirit that he should not set foot in Jerusalem.’ Assuredly the apostle lacked not warning, as he said himself to the elders from Ephesus, ‘Behold, I go bound in the [i.e., my] spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the Holy Spirit testifieth to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.’ Evidently however the apostle regarded it rather as a note of danger that awaited him than of personal direction which he must obediently follow. His own mind was made up, whatever the danger, whatever the suffering, to go through with it; as the Master had done in matchless perfection for His infinite work at all cost.

‘And when it came to pass that we had completed the days, we departed and went on our journey; and they all with wives and children brought us on our way, till we were out of the city, and kneeling down on the beach we prayed and took leave of each other; and we went on board ship, but they returned home’ (vers. 5, 6). It is another beautiful peculiarity of divine affection — the family as well as social character of Christians in early days. This ought to be of great price now, if we are wise. In this cold world the saints are peculiarly exposed to

grow chilly, if kept from fleshly excitement and worldly frivolity.

‘And when we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and we saluted the brethren and abode with them one day’ (ver. 7). Here at a port called Accho in days of yore, now St. Jean d’Acre, they arrived; and though it was but for one day, how gladly they spent it with the brethren! For such there were at Ptolemais, apparently already known.

What we have seen was the voyage of Paul and his companions; that which follows is their land journey. ‘And on the morrow we254 departed and came unto Caesarea; and entering into the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we abode with him’ (ver. 8).

The words of the inspired writer are full and distinct. From their precision one might think it impossible that any intelligent mind could fail to discern the person meant; yet no less a one than the father of ecclesiastical history contrived to misunderstand the verse, and to confound Philip the evangelist with Philip the apostle. It is no pleasure to point out a lapse so strange and unaccountable in any intelligent reader of scripture; but it becomes a duty to notice the error, and urge its importance as a warning to those who cry up the authority of ancient patristic writers. Indisputably Eusebius was neither better nor worse than most of the Christian fathers. For superstitious eyes he has the advantage of holding a decidedly early place amongst them, for he flourished in the days of the Emperor Constantine (A.D. 306-337). No ancient MS. of the Greek New Testament that survives was written before his day,

and but two can pretend to be as early. Yet it is plain that, with the text as it stands before him, he grossly erred, not on a point of nice doctrine. but in a plain matter of fact. For we are here in the Acts told that the Philip, with whom the apostle's party stayed, was not the evangelist only, but one of the seven, i.e., one of the seven men appointed by the apostles for diaconal service during the days of first love, soon after Pentecost.

If the unquestionable meaning of scripture could be thus overlooked, and so serious a mistake find its way into Eusebius' history, what confidence ought to be reposed in any alleged facts or statements outside the scriptures? Not that any evil object is imputed to that historian; but the circumstance proves that in those days, as in our own, there is deplorable ignorance of God's word where one might least expect it. Patristic authority in divine things is no more reliable than modern systematic divinity. The value of scripture practically as well as dogmatically is incalculable. It is the standard as well as source of truth.

'Now this man had four daughters, virgins, who did prophesy; and as we tarried many days there came down from Judea a certain prophet named Agabus; and coming to us and taking Paul's girdle, he bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So [thus] shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and deliver him into the hands of [the] Gentiles' (vers. 9-11).

The fact stated in the 9th verse deserves full consideration. Philip had four unmarried daughters, of whom it is declared that they prophesied; that is, they

had the highest form of gift for acting on souls from God. Such prophesying was yet more than teaching or preaching. We cannot doubt, therefore, that they used their gift on the one hand; and on the other that it was forbidden to use it in the assembly. 'It is shameful', had Paul written in his First Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 14:34, 35), 'for a woman to speak in [the] assembly.' At Corinth it seems that some were bold enough to attempt this and other innovations: but it also seems to have been at that time a very unusual and unheard of notion.

In general, Christian women understood their place better in these early days. Still, there might arise some such desire here or there. At any rate, the apostle found it necessary in his First Epistle to Timothy to write (1 Tim. 2:12), 'I permit not a woman to teach, nor to exercise authority over a man, but to be in quietness.' The word αὐθεντεῖν does not convey the sense of 'usurpation', but the possession or exercise of power, where it does not mean committing murder. The woman is not set in authority, nor is she to act as if she were. As to this, there can be no dispute for subject minds. 'If any one thinketh himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize the things which I write unto you, that it is the commandment of the Lord' (1 Cor. 14:37). The Lord's will for us is on record unmistakably, if indeed we respect scripture.

But these maiden daughters of Philip did prophesy, if not in the assembly, somewhere else. Decorum would have forbidden it still more to have been in public, if God's order prohibited it for the assembly. No place can be conceived more suitable than one's father's house. 1 Cor. 11:2-16 renders it plain that the woman, in praying

or prophesying, was to see that she bore the mark of subjection, for even in prophesying she must not forget that she is a woman, and that the head of the woman is the man as the head of every man is Christ. The woman, therefore, should be veiled while the man was not so to be. ‘Every man praying or prophesying, having [anything] on his head dishonoureth his head; but every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered dishonoureth her own head, for it is one and the same thing as if she were shaven. For if the woman is not covered,’ says the apostle, ‘let her also be shorn; but if it is a shame to a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered; for a man indeed ought not to have his head covered, being God’s image and glory but woman is man’s glory.’ Both have their place respectively in the Lord, Who, if He give power, maintains order no less; but each has a place of its own which He has assigned, as all things are of God. So His word regulates all, and we should remember this the more in days when man’s voice is loud, and God’s word exposed and subjected to increasing slight.

We are not told whether these maidens predicted anything about Paul but we do hear that Agabus the prophet added to the warnings already given him by others. Not only so, but he came and took Paul’s girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, ‘Thus saith the Holy Spirit, The man to whom this girdle belongs shall the Jews thus bind in Jerusalem, and deliver him up into the hands of the Gentiles.’ This was quite in the symbolic manner of the ancient prophets; and it filled those who beheld and listened with sorrow for the honoured apostle. ‘And when we heard these things, both we and those of the place besought him not to go

up to Jerusalem; then Paul answered, Why do ye weep and break my heart? For I am ready, not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done' (vers. 12-14).

It is clear that the apostle did not understand that the Lord meant him to turn from Jerusalem. He only heard reiterated by Agabus, as he had been so often warned by others, what he must suffer there. Indeed from his conversion it was intimated how many things he must suffer for the Lord's name's sake. Paul clearly must have concluded that the Holy Ghost spoke, not to dissuade him from his perilous path, but rather to prepare him in it — certainly for prison, and perhaps death. The brotherly kindness of others would have screened him from all that was awaiting him in Jerusalem, but love goes beyond brotherly kindness. So it was working in the servant, as it had with all perfection in the Master.

The apostle now passes on to that city which had so large a part in his affections, or at least to the saints there, little as it might be conceived by those who saw in him only the apostle of the uncircumcision. 'And after these days we took up (or made ready) our baggage, and went up to Jerusalem' (ver. 15). 'Our carriages' would convey a mistaken impression to ears familiar only with modern English. It is possible that at the time of our Authorized Version, the word was used in a double sense, as has been suggested; not only as now for the vehicle which carries, but also for what was carried in it. The Old Testament likewise contains the word in its old meaning, which of course is found in profane writers of that day also.

‘And there went with us also [certain] disciples from Caesarea, bringing one Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge’ (ver. 16). An ‘old’ disciple is certainly not exact, and may not even be true, ἀρχαίῳ expressing not his age as a man, but his discipleship from the beginning. It is interesting thus to find incidentally that Cyprus had been blessed of God, not only through the visits of Paul and Barnabas, but even before.

‘And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly and the day following Paul went in with us unto lames and all the elders were present, and when he had saluted them, he explained one by one the things which God wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry; and when they heard it, they glorified God’ (vers. 17-20). Here we see in full vigour the love and honour which reigned among the saints. Not that there were no trials and special trials in those days: it could not be otherwise. In this world no difference of a religious character could compare for depth with that which severed Jews from Gentiles. God Himself under the law had maintained the separation between them to the full, as our Lord did up to the cross. This closed the old order to introduce the new — the order of grace and of the new creation in Christ which the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven carried out in power and joy and intelligence. Thenceforward Christ becomes all, and indeed He is worthy; as He is all, so is He in all; and the distinction of Jew and Greek, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, bond and free, vanish in Him before God.

Yet is there nothing which Christians find so difficult to apprehend and enjoy and practise as Christianity.

Nevertheless the Spirit given to every Christian is not a spirit of fear nor of bondage, but one of power, and of love, and of a sound mind, with Christ before our eyes. The path may be difficult, but as it is true, so is it the exercise of love; and it is all a question of appreciating Christ, and of applying the truth in a spirit of grace. As the law was given by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. We have only to believe, not to fear man, any more than to pursue our own thoughts.

The word of God is now revealed as a full answer to Christ, and by the Spirit it will be found to solve every difficulty in detail. In no place, however, were the difficulties greater than in Jerusalem, the natural focus of extreme Jewish feeling. Thither the apostle had come, animated by strong feelings of love and pity for his nation, as he himself explains in Acts 24:17: ‘Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings.’ This was hardly his proper calling, though the love which led to it always wrought powerfully in his heart, as we know from Gal. 2 and other scriptures.

But there was another reason which made his presence in Jerusalem critical for the apostle. His assigned province was toward the Gentiles (compare Gal. 2:7-9); and certainly the Holy Spirit had through prophets given many warnings along the road of perils in this city. No man, no apostle even, is strong, save in dependence on the Lord, as he said himself, ‘When I am weak, then am I strong.’ For Christ’s ‘strength is made perfect in weakness.’ And Paul above all could say, ‘Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.’ But it is instructive to see that Antioch proved a dangerous place for Peter as Jerusalem did for even Paul. The Lord wrought

effectually in Peter, yet it was mainly and conspicuously for the apostleship of the circumcision. He also assuredly wrought by Paul with the Gentiles, if ever He wrought mightily by man on the earth.

But we anticipate. The arrival of Paul and his party in Jerusalem received a hearty welcome from the brethren. It would appear that James's house was the known place for any special gathering of elders at any rate; as we heard of a meeting for prayer at the house of Mary, mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12). 'The following day accordingly Paul went in with us,' it is said, 'unto James'; and all the elders were present.' There must have been very many groups of Christian Jews in Jerusalem, where their numbers were now to be counted by thousands. Large buildings appropriated to the assembly were as yet, it would seem, unknown. The present occasion, however, was not for the meeting of the assembly, only the elders were present. They no doubt came from those many groups, and their meeting together as elders would powerfully contribute to keep up order and unity, without in the least degree superseding, while truth governed in a spirit of grace, the responsibility of the assembly. We can readily understand that James's house was a suited place for such to meet. The verse does not give us the impression of an assemblage on this occasion only, though it was very likely that the news of Paul coming and come might account for 'all the elders' being present at this time. There are constant wants which would call for the meeting of the elders ordinarily; but this occasion of course had the extraordinary element of Paul's presence.

'And when he had saluted them, he explained one by one the things which God wrought among the Gentiles by his

ministry.’ There was perfect openness on his part. No effort to put prominently forward what God had wrought among the Jews or in the synagogues. He spread before them particularly what had been given him to do among the nations. Doubtless this was intended of the Lord to enlarge their hearts. They were accustomed in Jerusalem to see or hear but little of their Gentile brethren. The apostle put it forward carefully; and when they heard it they glorified ‘God’ — for this appears to be the true reading, rather than ‘the Lord’.

The apostle could say, ‘If any man preacheth any gospel other than this which we preach, let him be anathema’ (Gal. 1:9). A different gospel is not another. It is the abandonment of what Paul preached, or a human substitute for it. It may be questioned whether any other apostle could speak so absolutely. Paul preached what they preached, but one may fairly doubt that they preached all that Paul preached. If we bear in mind the special manner of his conversion and truth therein revealed, it helps us to understand this. He commenced with a Saviour in glory, and had the wondrous truth communicated to him from the first that Christ and the Christian are one: ‘Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?’ A saint now is also a member of Christ’s body. This the others learnt; but the apostle Paul had it revealed to him from the starting point, and he was the Lord’s special instrument for carrying it out in the world. It was not ‘the gospel of God’ only, rich as this expression is, but ‘tine gospel of the glory of Christ’.

It was Christ, known no more after the flesh, but risen and glorified. Gentile darkness and Jewish law were left behind, and even promise was eclipsed by a brightness far beyond it. It was grace in its fullest exercise and

highest splendour in the person of Christ, with Whom we are associated in the closest relationship — Christ is the Head over all things, but is also the Head given to the church which is His body. The church is not among the ‘all things’, but is united with Him Who is over all things, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. Hence the apostle preached the gospel of the glory of Christ as none other is reported to have done. This comes out very distinctly in 2 Cor. 3, 4, 5. Substantially it appears in the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians; but there it is rather called the mystery of the gospel. ‘This mystery is great,’ says he, ‘but I speak of Christ and of the church’ (Eph. 5:32). He being the exalted Head, she being His body and bride, the church is even now one with Him. For the church He gave Himself up, that He might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water by the word, that He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.

The glory of Christ on high is the answer to His humiliation below, whatever else may follow. Nor is there any witness to it so bright. Hence the apostle speaks of ‘my gospel’, and ‘our gospel’ where he names his companions along with himself. The gospel of the glory of Christ was given him to preach it in all its height of blessedness; and hence the danger of letting it slip, if even one that once knew it begins to preach grace at a lower level only, true as it may be. Nothing so completely lifts above the tradition and the thoughts of men.

Hence the danger even to the apostle himself when in Jerusalem. Another atmosphere was breathed there. It is not that they did not confess Jesus to be the Christ, and

look for His kingdom and glory; but out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ‘And they said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many myriads there are among the Jews of those that believe, and they are all zealous for the law. And they have been informed concerning thee, that thou teachest all Jews that are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs’ (vers. 20, 21). This witness was true as far as they themselves were concerned; but what they were informed about Paul was an exaggeration. Whatever his sense of Christian liberty, none was more tolerant of Jewish conscience, on the other hand, none more resolute to teach the Gentile believers that they had nothing to do with law, but with Christ dead and risen. What could Gentile believers have to do with circumcision or the other institutions and customs of Israel? For heaven, as in heaven, all this was unknown.

As the full grace of God preached by the apostle startled not a few of the saints in Jerusalem, a gloss was sought to prove that he was a good Jew notwithstanding. ‘What is it therefore? They will certainly hear that thou art come. Do thou this that we say to thee: We have four men with a vow on them; these take and purify thyself with them, and be at charges over them, that they may shave their heads, and all shall know that there is no truth in the things whereof they have been informed concerning thee but that thou thyself also walkest orderly keeping the law’ (vers. 22-24).

This was not strange advice for the Christians in Jerusalem to give, but it seems a descending path for the apostle Paul to follow. No one knew better than he to walk as dead with Christ and risen with Him, no one

better than he to please the Lord without fear of the opinions of men, or even of his brethren. With him it was a very small thing to be examined of others or of himself. Had he looked to the Lord for His guidance now, perhaps he would have advised James and the rest to judge nothing before the time till the Lord come, Who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart, and then shall each have the praise from God (1 Cor. 4:5). Indeed it is doubtful whether anything done as a witness to ourselves (and this seems the gist of James' counsels to Paul) is ever blessed of God or satisfies man. We shall see what the issue was in this instance.

In their past dealings with the Gentiles who believed (Acts 15:22-29), the apostles and elders had acted with divine wisdom. So it is here added, 'But, as touching the Gentiles that believed we wrote [or, enjoined] giving judgment, that they should keep themselves from things sacrificed to idols and blood and things strangled and fornication' (ver. 25). These injunctions were clearly understood before the law was even given to Israel. It was not natural religion which ignored sin and the fall. For God man needs revelation; but in such things Christianity only confirms the broad principles God had laid down before Israel existed.

'Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them went into the temple, declaring the fulfilment of the days of the purification until the offering was offered for every one of them' (ver. 26).

The apostle yielded to his Jewish brethren. It was in no way a step which flowed from his own judgment before God; and we shall see that it was wholly in vain as far as

the Jews were concerned. No doubt there was misunderstanding on their part; but we can scarcely say, whatever one's reverence for the apostles, that the light of the Lord shone upon the course that was then recommended or pursued. Their conduct might not be without failure in this or that particular; whilst their teaching, beyond all doubt in what was written in the Spirit for the permanent direction of the church, was perfectly guarded from the least error. 'We are of God' (said one of them): 'he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth us not. By this we know the Spirit of truth, and the spirit of error' (1 John 4:6). This is stringent, but it is the truth; and, if so, it is really grace to let all saints know that there is such a standard — not Christ's person only, but the apostolic word. If we truly confess Him, we shall surely hear them: if we refuse them, we do not really own Him Who sent and inspired them. If we reject Him and them, we are irretrievably lost, and guiltier than Jews or heathen, who had not such privileges. For the true light now shines. God is fully revealed in Christ, and the written word makes both known.

It was a singular sight: Paul purifying himself to show that he walked orderly and kept the law. He was evidently walking according to the thoughts of others, which no more glorifies God than it satisfies man. 'And when the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia when they saw him in the temple stirred up all the multitude and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help. This is the man that teacheth all everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place; and moreover he brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath defiled this holy place. For they had

before seen with him in the city Trophimus the Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul brought into the temple.1 And the whole city was moved, and the people ran together, and they laid hold on Paul and dragged him out of the temple; and forthwith the doors were shut. And as they were seeking to kill him, tidings came up to the chief officer (chiliarch) of the cohort, that the whole of Jerusalem was in confusion, and immediately he took soldiers and centurions, and ran down upon them, and they, when they saw the chief officer and the soldiers, ceased beating Paul. Then the chief officer came near and laid hold on him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains, and inquired who he might be, and what he had done. And some shouted one thing, and some another, among the crowd. And when he could not know the certainty because of the uproar, he commanded him to be brought into the castle (lit., camp). And when he came upon the steps, so it was that he was borne upon the soldiers, because of the violence of the crowd. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, Away with him' (vers. 27-36).

"Zelotes putantes saepe errant (Bengelius); 'Bigots often err in their suppositions'.

No more devoted servant of the Lord than Paul ever lived. This however did not hinder the effects of a mistaken position. He had departed from those to whom the Lord sent him, out of his excessive love for the ancient people of God. At the instance of others he had sought to conciliate them to the uttermost, but the effect in no way answered to the desire either of James or of Paul. Can we say that, in going up to Jerusalem there was such a following of Christ as he loved to commend

to the saints? ‘Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ.’ When the Lord went up for His last and fatal visit, how great the difference! He cast out all them that sat and bought in the temple, He overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and of them that sold doves; He healed the blind and lame that came to Him. There He confounded those that demanded His authority; He laid before the proudest of them their inferiority to the publicans and harlots whom they despised; He set out their past and present history in the Light of God, so that they could not but own the miserable destruction which impended over their wickedness, and the passing away of God’s vineyard to other husbandmen, who should render to Him the fruits in their seasons. And whatever their enmity, they feared the multitude because they took Him for a prophet. And when the chief religious leaders came in succession to tempt Him, He silenced them Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians: and wound up the entire scene by the great test-question for the Jews, how David’s son could be, as He incontestably is, David’s Lord. It is a question which no Jew was able to answer then, any more than from that day to the present. Hence He could only pronounce woes upon their actual state, and on their proved ruin prophesy of the kingdom which He is Himself to bring in as the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Undoubtedly none the less was He rejected and crucified, but He was the faithful witness. There was not a shadow of a compromise: He said nothing, did nothing, seemed nothing, but the truth to the glory of God. He witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, the high priest of Israel having shown himself baser and

more cruel than the most hardhearted heathen who condemned the Lord to be crucified.

Yet assuredly the apostle loved the Lord, and answered to His mind as no man did, even among the apostles; still he was a man; and human feeling in its most estimable shape betrays him into (I will not say a contrast with, but) a deflection from our Lord in Jerusalem. For Christ, whatever the depth of His humiliation, oh, what triumph hung on His decease which He accomplished there!

For Paul it was not death at Jerusalem, but the hatred which threw him into the hands of the Gentiles to be, as yet a prisoner only, not yet to die though ultimately what befell him among the Gentiles was his true glory, and there he suffered simply and solely a witness for the truth. He had his heart's desire, the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, becoming conformed unto His death.

'And as Paul was about to be brought into the castle, he said unto the chief officer, May I say something unto thee? He said, Dost thou know Greek? Thou art not then the Egyptian who before these days stirred up to sedition, and led out into the wilderness the four thousand men of the assassins (or Sicarii)? But Paul said, I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I beseech thee give me leave to speak unto the people. And when he had given him leave, Paul standing on the steps beckoned with his hand unto the people; and when there was great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying' (vers. 37-40).

Here again Paul takes very different ground from that which was his wont, he pleads his Jewish race to the commander. Elsewhere who so firm to hold to the grand

truth that Christ is all? who more completely above any human distinction of plea in the service of the Lord? It was Paul the apostle indeed, yet not here in the Gentile province assigned him, but in Jerusalem, seeking to reconcile the irreconcilable. Is it too much to say that here there appeared to be the weakness of one who was strong by grace beyond all others on his own ground?

254 ‘Paul, and we that were with him’, is a later reading, which slipped into the Text. Rec., the Authorized Version, et al.

Acts 22

In the earlier part of this Book we had the history of the apostle's conversion in its historical order, bearing profoundly upon the progress of the gospel and the revelation of Christian truth. Here we have the account of it as a part of his defence before the people of Israel. It has therefore a specific object, marked by the use of the Hebrew language, which accounts for its other peculiarities. Discrepancy there is really none, any more than in other parts of scripture. The appearance of it is due solely to the difference of design, which here is most obvious, as it undeniably is later in the Book. In Acts 26 we have a short account modified by the fact that it was addressed to the king, Herod Agrippa the younger, as well as to the Roman governor. Whatever peculiarities have been observed, they are due to the same cause. The same principle in fact applies to the treatment of every object among men of intelligence. Scripture only adopts the same rule, but in a perfection to which men are unequal. Our place as believers is to learn by that which offends incredulity against all reason.

'Brethren and fathers, hear ye the defence that I now make unto you (and when they heard that he spake to them in the Hebrew tongue, they were the more quiet, and he saith), I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, and brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed according to strictness of the law of the fathers, being zealous for God, even as all ye are to-day. And I persecuted this Way unto death, binding and delivering unto prisons both men and women, as also the high priest beareth me witness, and all the elderhood, from

whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and proceeded unto Damascus to bring those also that were there, bound to Jerusalem that they might be punished' (vers. 1-5).

There was a providential training in the apostle's case as in others, but strikingly manifest in him who was a Jew, not a Gentile proselyte. He was born in Tarsus, a renowned centre of letters and philosophy at that day. But he was brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of the most celebrated Rabbi of his day. Yet if Gamaliel was learned and strict as an orthodox Pharisee, we have already had remarkable proof, quite apart from the apostle, of his singular moderation, when the Sadducees began to persecute the faith. It is not often erudite men are equally known for prudence, still less for the wisdom which brought in God, not formally, but with conscience; and God used it completely to turn away the council from their unbelieving and sanguinary thoughts (Acts 5:34-40). At Gamaliel's feet was he brought up who was to be the Holy Ghost's witness to the grace of God in our Lord Jesus as no other man was since the world began.

His early training in Jerusalem would have conveyed no such presentiment to mortal eyes: he was instructed according to the strictness of the law of the fathers. If the Pharisees of Jerusalem were zealous beyond all others, he was yet more so; but in truth when faith came, he could all the better realize the complete change from law to grace. Those who never pierced below the surface of the one fail to appreciate the other; they are apt to mingle the two — the great bane of Christianity, whence law is no more law, and grace is no more grace.

Law is the demand of human righteousness. Grace has now revealed God's righteousness, and this only is what the apostle designates the righteousness which is of faith; for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. It is not a question of man's effort, still less of his performance. He is not called to ascend to heaven any more than to descend into the abyss. It was Christ Who came down. even as Christ risen from the dead is gone up, and we become God's righteousness in Him. Salvation is wholly of Christ, it is what God loves to do — cannot but do consistently with His character in virtue of the work of Christ. 'The word, therefore, is nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart', not the word that man prepares for God, but the word which God sends to be preached: 'If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation' (Rom. 10:8-10). Thus has God indeed dealt, and can afford to deal, with sinners. It is His grace, but it is also His righteousness.

Now the more Saul when quickened studied the law, and entered into its righteous inexorable claims on man, the more were his eyes opened to the impossibility of salvation under law. It was weak through the flesh, and must be bondage, bitter hopelessness could only result when conscience became enlightened. For salvation is altogether a question for God Who, sending His own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh. Thus only could there be salvation. The law was able to do nothing but condemn the sinner. The gospel proclaims sin condemned, root

and fruit, and the believer saved and set free to walk, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

It was exactly therefore such a zealot of law, who, when his heart was opened by grace, could to the full see and appreciate the deliverance of the gospel. The same principle applies even now, though there is no doubt an incalculable distance between the apostle and other saints howsoever blest in our day or any other. Still the men who most enjoy and are best fitted to set forth the gospel, are often those who, in the days of their ignorance were deeply attached to law and ordinances, which necessarily gender bondage where there is an exercised conscience.

And this must have told powerfully upon the Jews who weighed the apostle's address. The apostle had never been a careless light-hearted Israelite! as his training was most strict, so his personal zeal was thorough. Indeed he had given the fullest proof, for he persecuted this Way unto death. None like Saul of Tarsus, who was so active in binding and delivering into prisons both men and women! He was just a sample in the highest degree of those that have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Who therefore could speak like him from personal experience to men ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own? So much the more did he now subject himself to the righteousness of God.

Nor could the high priest himself ignore the fact, but rather bear witness, and all the elderhood too; for they are reminded that he also received letters to the brethren, i.e., the Jews elsewhere, and journeyed to Damascus to bring also those that were there to

Jerusalem in bonds in order to be punished. He who was to go out to all the world with the gospel, could not of old rest in his legal zeal within the bounds of Jerusalem or Judea.

The apostle now recounts his own marvellous conversion; and as it was addressed to Jews, it is presented in a way suited to disarm their prejudices, if this were possible.

'And it came to pass, as I was journeying and drawing near to Damascus, that about midday there suddenly shone out of heaven a great light round about me, and I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And He said unto me, I am Jesus, the Nazarene, Whom thou persecutest. Now they that were with me beheld the light255 but did not hear the voice of Him that was speaking to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Rise up, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which it hath been appointed for thee to do' (vers. 6-10).

Thus the intimation here is that it was 'about midday', still more precisely than we were told in Acts 9:3. This makes the vision far more striking. It was not a trance, but an open fact. The light which shone round about him out of heaven transcended the sun at midday, in the presence of men who were travelling with him. Deception was impossible. As far as we know, he, and he only, was converted thereby. The voice addressed no. other at that time; and here it is particularly said that the rest heard not the voice of Him that was speaking to him. The same historian, who gives this as the distinct

statement of the apostle, had himself told us that his fellow-travellers stood speechless hearing the voice but beholding no one. This to a casual reader looks like a discrepancy, but a reader must be careless indeed, or bent on evil, who does not perceive that the two statements are altogether in harmony beneath the surface. In Acts 9 we learn that his companions heard a sound, and no more; and in the present chapter256 we learn that he alone heard the voice of Him that spoke to him. To the others it was inarticulate; to him it was not only intelligible, but the turning point of a life beyond all others rich in testimony to His grace Who spoke to him.

For the time was now fully come for a new step in God's ways. The heavenly glory of Christ was to be seen by a chosen witness called by Him in sovereign mercy from on high, the persecutor from the midst of his religiously rebellious career. It is grace no doubt in every case where the soul is brought from darkness into the marvellous light of God. But here all the truth shines with the utmost brilliancy. Stephen dosed his testimony with the sight of Jesus in the glory of God. Saul begins his testimony for Jesus with Him seen in the same glory. It reminds one somewhat of the two prophets of old, one of whom ended his course with being taken up to, heaven, whilst the other commenced it from that glorious sight which gave him thenceforth such a mighty impulse. It was none the less remarkable in the present case, because Saul had been privy to the death of Stephen, and had kept the clothes of the false witnesses who stoned him whose spirit went up to the Lord Whose glory he had just seen and testified.

And if a brief interval elapsed after Stephen's death, it was filled up by Saul still breathing out threatenings and

slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. Nevertheless the light out of heaven suddenly shone out round about him now. Smitten to the earth, he heard the voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?’ Embittered though he was with tradition and prejudice, he could not but ask with astonishment, ‘Who art thou, Lord?’ No man was ever more assured that he was rendering service to God in putting out of the synagogue, or even in killing, the disciples. He had a good conscience, according to the law, in the zeal that persecuted the church (Phil. 3:6). As yet he knew neither the Father nor the Son. The True Light had never entered his soul. But now the light which shone round about him was but the harbinger of a better glory invisible to human eyes, ‘the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’. His companions saw the outward brightness, they did not behold that which none can see, unless they are, by the power of God, brought out of darkness into it.

To his amazement he learned that He Who spoke, Whom he could not but acknowledge to be the Lord of all, was the very Jesus Whom he was persecuting. For thus He was known in the persons of His own: Christ and the church are one. Immense discovery! and so much the more in circumstances so unparalleled. The erstwhile enemy, broken down and henceforth obedient to the heavenly vision, has Christ in glory, God’s Son, revealed, not to him only, but in him. See Gal. 1:16. He is life, and the Christian is one with Him. If it was true of the disciples whom he persecuted, it was no less true of their persecutor, now himself a disciple. ‘He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.’ When we see the Lord at His coming again, we shall be like Him, even in body changed into the same image. If we are being

transformed now, even as by the Lord the Spirit, we shall be conformed then to the Lord and by the Lord; for we shall see Him as He is (2 Cor. 3:18; 1 John 3:3).

These great principles were all involved in the apostle's vision, though of course it is not meant that they were all unveiled to his spirit at the moment. But in due time no one knew better than he, nor so well; though these truths were thus conveyed, and in the most powerful way, in that great fact, incalculable in its bearing on the church, and even for the world. For who of all men ever made good a commission so unlimited as the apostle's? It was felt and acknowledged by the twelve that he was the apostle of the uncircumcision as truly as they of the circumcision. This in no way precluded their seeking the good of the Gentiles; still less did it hinder Paul from labours abundant among the Jews, as every place, we may say, testified where there were Jews. But it did not mark the characteristic breadth of his mission. He might seek to build up the church in entire and heavenly separation from the world; but it was his beyond any man to fulfil the word of his Master, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to all the creation.'

What an appeal, too, his own account of his conversion was to the crowd of Jews that were then listening! None could deny the facts; the high priest could not but bear witness, all the elderhood of Israel in Jerusalem would have gladly contradicted if they could. The letters he received to his Jewish brethren could not be gainsaid, any more than his own bitter persecution of the Christian Way unto death, as well as prison. The companions of his journey to Damascus, why were they silent? If they heard not the words of Jesus, they were not deaf to the preternatural sound, and they did see the

light above the brightness of the sun shine round about them all.

But all wonders fail to convert the heart to God. It is the voice of Christ that quickens the dead, and now is the hour for quickening souls; as by and by there will come another hour, when the voice of the Son shall summon from the grave those that have done good to a resurrection of life, and those that have done evil to a resurrection of judgment, which last act of Christ solemnly closes the history of this world. But sovereign grace is now awakening the souls that hear the word of the Lord; and as this was in the most extraordinary manner manifested to Saul of Tarsus, so was he called in the highest degree to be a minister of God's sovereign grace, and of Christ's heavenly glory. 'And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lords aid unto me, Rise up, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which it hath been appointed thee to do.'

Here again was a singular break with all the apostolic antecedents. The Lord commanded no return to Jerusalem. Saul must enter Damascus and there, not through a previous apostle, still less the apostolic college, but through a disciple set in no high position, learn what it had been appointed for him to do. So does grace reign: have we really learnt this?

We have already seen in commenting on Acts 9 what an important event took place that day: a distinct and fresh step in the ways of God for bringing out the church (already formed, it is true) into manifestation by his ministry who was then converted so extraordinarily that divines treat it as one of the standing and most striking evidences of the truth of Christianity.

Still all was not yet done even as regards Saul of Tarsus, the basis was laid, but no more. The blindness physically which had come upon him was to be taken away; and assuredly very much more light spiritually was yet to shine into his soul; but the principle that was to be fully developed in due time was already involved in the character of the word of the Lord to him. 'And as I could not see for the glory of the light, being led by the hand of those that were with me, I came into Damascus; and one Ananias, a pious man according to the law, borne witness to by all the Jews that dwelt there, came unto me, and standing by said to me, Brother Saul receive thy sight, and in the very hour I looked upon him. And he said, The God of our fathers hath appointed thee to know His will and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from His mouth. For thou shalt be for Him to all men a witness of what thou hast seen and heard. And now, why tarriest thou? Arise, and get baptized, and have thy sins washed away, calling on His257 name' (vers. 11-16).

As Paul was to be, beyond all others, a witness of Christ to the Gentiles so God took special care to remove from every fair upright man all suspicion of collusion on the part of any Jew. Outwardly the vision of glory was unmistakable before many witnesses. What passed between the Lord and His servant was necessarily confined to Saul alone of the company. But divine wisdom apprised Ananias of what had happened, independently of Saul and of every other on earth. We are not told here of his fasting for three days and nights, but the fact was patent that by the hand of those that were with him he had to be led into Damascus. That blindness furnished occasion for a fresh display of divine

power. The channel of it was a simple disciple, yet was he a devout man according to the law, and well reported of by all the Jews that dwelt there. Unsought, he came; and standing by him who was blind he said, ‘Brother Saul, receive thy sight’, and the word was with power: Paul received his sight and looked upon him. In Acts 9 we hear of the vision that Saul had preparing for the visit of Ananias, as the same chapter lets us know that Ananias had a vision in which the Lord sent him, by no means willing, without delay to Saul. For it was well known at Damascus, as well as in Jerusalem, what a zealous persecutor of the church had been the learned Jew of Tarsus — now a man of prayer.

Here, again, we have the beautiful fruit of confidence in the word of the Lord. ‘Brother Saul’ — how refreshing it must have been to the heart of the converted zealot! The key to what is here stated, and to what is omitted, is the design: the apostle is recounting his conversion to the Jews. ‘The God of our fathers’ appears here alone. It was He, as Ananias said, and not another, Who had appointed him to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice out of His mouth. It is much more than the simple fact that the Lord, even Jesus, had appeared to him in the way which he came.

Here we learn, too, that Ananias told the apostle before he was baptized that he should be a witness for Christ unto all men of what he had seen and heard. This ought to have prepared the Jews for the wide scope given to Paul’s ministry. Would they have him resist the ‘God of our fathers’ and His known will? There were two witnesses, by whose mouth every word should be established. In Acts 9 his commission is named to Ananias by the Lord, but the historian does not there

mention that this was repeated to the apostle. Here we learn that so it was, for he repeats it himself. Everything comes exactly in place and season.

In Acts 9 we are told that, when he received his sight, he arose and was baptized, and took food and was strengthened, as well as the all-important fact that he was then and there filled with the Holy Ghost. There is no apostolic succession in this case assuredly. Ananias was but a disciple. God was acting extraordinarily in the case of Paul. Jewish order was quite set aside for the apostle of the Gentiles; yet none but the enemy of grace and truth could deny that he was an apostle, with a calling at least as high as the twelve, and called to a work incomparably more extensive and profound.

Here also we have the interesting fact of the terms in which Ananias called him to ‘get baptized’ or submit to baptism, on which a few words may be well, as to some there is no small difficulty. The reason of the departure from the Authorized Version, as well as the Revised, however slight, is an endeavour to express the force of the Middle Voice, as it is called, in Greek. This, however, is independent of the (to some) doctrinal difficulty in calling on the apostle to have his sins washed away in baptism. Why should this seem hard? It is what baptism always means, though indeed it means yet more, even death to sin, as the apostle himself treats it in Rom. 6:3, 4. Baptism is the sign of salvation, as another apostle teaches, who carefully lets us know in the same context that the effectual work rests on Christ’s death and resurrection (1 Peter 3:21, 22). Without faith no doubt all is valueless before God; but, however precious may be that which faith receives through the word, the outward sign has its importance. So much is this so, that

no one stands on the external ground of a Christian, who has not been baptized with water to the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. To refuse baptism is to despise the authority of the Lord, as unbelief slights His grace. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, he that believeth not, even if baptized, shall be damned (or, condemned).

The remarkable vision with which Paul first began was by no means the only one; we learn here of another on his return to Jerusalem. 2 Cor. 12:1-4 speaks of them also in a more general way. But what happened in Jerusalem he himself now proceeds to tell in detail. 'And it came to pass that when I had returned to Jerusalem, and while I prayed in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw Him saying unto me, Make haste and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem, because they will not receive of thee testimony concerning Me. And I said, Lord, they themselves know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue those that believe on Thee; and when the blood of Stephen Thy witness was shed; I also was standing by and consenting,258 and keeping the garments of those that slew him. And He said unto me, Depart, for I will send thee forth far hence unto the Gentiles. And they gave him audience unto this word; and they lifted up their voices and said, Away with such [a fellow] from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live' (vers. 17-22).

The incident at Jerusalem is full of interest spiritually, because it communicates the perfect ease and intimacy in which scripture sets forth the relations of the servant with the Master. It would have been easy to have suppressed the account, if it had not been of standing moment and general value. The statement of it had the

most distressing effect on the Jews who had listened till then. This excited their indignation to the highest. Nevertheless, as we see, the apostle brought it plainly out to vindicate the direction of his labours without limit as apostle to the Gentiles. We may be quite sure that naturally he had as great a reluctance to go at the word of the Lord on such an errand as the Jews had to hear about it. Traditionally the Jew was everything in the matter of religion; all this feeling and the ground of it was overthrown in the cross of Christ. How true, as the apostle wrote to the Corinthians in his Second Epistle (2 Cor. 5:17), 'The old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new, and all things are of God, Who reconciled us unto Himself by Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation'! The power of such a ministry is especially shown, not in abiding at Jerusalem, but in going out toward the Gentiles wherever they may be; for we are not Israelites, nor yet the lost sheep of that house. We are not the people, but rather in comparison 'dogs' according to the law. Now, however, all is changed. It is the gospel, and all things are become new. As the mission of our apostle is for heaven, so is his direction towards the Gentiles.

No wonder that he himself shrank even in the presence of the Lord; but so Paul is to learn in his trance at the temple of Jerusalem. 'Make haste,' said the Lord, 'and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem, because they will not receive of thee testimony concerning Me.' This was very painful to the apostle's heart, others had tasted similar sorrow even before Christianity. Moses knew it in early days, though the stiffneckedness of the Jews then was as nothing compared with what it was proved at the cross. And afterwards Jeremiah and others of the prophets

drank enough of this cup to feel the bitterness and grief. But Paul was as remarkable as Moses for the love of Israel, and tasted the bitterness of the Jew more perhaps than any of their prophets. In divine ways he was just the more suited to be sent as Christ's ambassador to the Gentiles. Had he loved Israel less, he had not been so fit for the new and heavenly mission. In everything it must be above nature to represent grace in any measure aright.

How little those that saw or knew of Paul evangelizing the Gentiles appreciated the feelings with which he had entered on the work! 'And I said, Lord, themselves know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believe on Thee.' His heart yearned over Israel, his burning desire was to have laboured in their midst. When the Lord had told him to retire from Jerusalem, because the Jews would not receive of him testimony concerning Christ, he even pleads that he was just the man to go to Jerusalem, that they themselves knew how he had hated the Way, how he had imprisoned and beat in every synagogue the believers. Yea more, he summons up the most terrible tale of persecuting zeal as the crowning reason to be allowed to preach to the Jews, and as a reason why they must surely welcome him if no other preacher of the gospel. 'And when the blood of Stephen Thy witness was shed, I also was standing by and consenting, and keeping the garments of those that slew him.' It is evident that Paul used all this as standing him in good stead to labour among the Jews. But He that made the heart knew best, better far than Paul, and He said unto him, 'Depart; for I will send thee forth far hence unto the Gentiles.'

The determining word was thus spoken: whatever might be Paul's feeling, he now learns the will of the Lord concerning his labours. It was not merely now, Get thee quickly out of Jerusalem, but 'I will send thee forth far hence unto the Gentiles.' No Israelite more fervently sought to commend the gospel to the Jews; no servant pleaded for it more earnestly with his Master. The freedom with which he appeals is a standing lesson to us of the liberty into which the gospel brings us. 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty' (2 Cor. 3:17). But we should also learn that the gospel leaves no uncertainty for the path and the service. The true light shines. Christ is the way, as well as the truth and the life, and He is not more truly the way to the Father than in Paul's case toward the Gentiles. The gospel is heavenly light shining into the heart and on the path here below.

Early in this Book we had in Peter a beautiful instance of a conscience purged by blood (Acts 3:13, 14). So complete was it that he could openly tax the Jews with denying the Holy One and the Just. Had he not been guilty of this very sin himself in a more direct way than any other? Yes; but this was now wholly blotted out through the blood which cleanseth from all sin; and so conscious was he that it was gone before God, that he could without a blush charge the Jews with the same sin, without a thought of himself save of infinite mercy towards him.

Similarly, in the verse we last had before us the apostle Paul is another instance, if possible more touching, and no less instructive. He says to the Lord in his desire to preach the gospel to them, 'They themselves know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue those that

believed on Thee; and when the blood of Stephen, Thy witness, was shed, I also was standing by and consenting, and keeping the garments of those that slew him.' Not a trace of the guilt remains on his conscience. As Peter proved in preaching to others, so he, Paul, publicly states to the same people how he had spread it personally before the Lord as the ground on which he wished to be sent as a witness to his brethren after the flesh. But the Lord knew all perfectly. Paul was His chosen vessel, not for Jerusalem, but far hence unto the Gentiles. His conscience was perfectly purged; but the mind of the Lord alone is perfectly right and wise; and so here it was soon proved. 'They gave him audience unto this word, and they lifted up their voices and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live' (ver. 22).

Intimately familiar as the apostle was with the feelings of the Jews, he was at this time scarcely prepared for their implacable jealousy of the Gentiles. Yet was it what he himself was too conscious of in his unconverted days: the people were now where he was then. The change in him was so complete that he seems to have failed in realizing their condition. Christ was all to him. That they should so abhor the grace of God, rising above all man's sin, whether Jewish or Gentile, is indeed astonishing, and the clearest proof that man is lost. Hatred of grace is in no way mitigated by intelligence, learning, or religiousness. All these had united in Saul of Tarsus, and they might be found more or less in some of the Jews of Jerusalem. But the same pride of nature and abuse of God's promises which had led the nation to crucify the Messiah, hardened them now to reject and hate the

gospel, above all the sending it to the Gentile no less than the Jew.

‘And as they cried out and threw off their garments and cast dust into the air, the commander ordered him to be brought into the castle, directing that he should be examined by scourging, that he might know for what cause they had shouted thus against him. And when they had tied him up with the thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful to scourge a man that is a Roman and uncondemned? And when the centurion heard it he went to the commander and told him, saying, What art thou about to do? For this man is a Roman. And the commander came and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? And he said, Yes. And the commander answered, With a great sum I obtained this citizenship. And Paul said, But I am also [so] born. Then they that were about to examine immediately departed from him, and the commander also was afraid when he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him’ (vers. 23-29).

The exasperation of the Jews is manifest in this striking scene. They were roused to the highest degree of feeling on behalf of their religion as they considered it. It is only the faith of Jesus which gives us to see things in God’s light. Had they measured themselves by this standard, they must have been in the dust themselves, and owned that it was all over with them as a people. It was not only that they had failed in righteousness; they had rejected God come down among them in infinite love. Repentance, there fore, of the deepest kind alone became them. They would then have seen that it was not for a guilty people to judge of God’s ways. They would have learnt how admirably suited was grace, now that

they were ruined in the last trial that God could make: Jehovah rejected of old by His own people, the Son come in love rejected, the Holy Ghost with the gospel, all rejected. It is in vain to talk of law, or even promises, before the cross. Yet God is now free to save the lost who believe in Jesus whatever they may be.

Granted that the Jews had exceeding privileges and a distinctive covenant, but the Jew had been foremost in slaying Him in Whom all the promises centre, their securer and their crown. All relationship with God for man on the earth, and we may say for Israel especially, was broken and gone, but grace could shine from heaven, and call to heaven all who believe in Christ, and this is exactly what the gospel is now making good. There is a new head and a new calling; but all is in Christ above; and consequently earthly distinctions, as well as disabilities, are alike vanished away. If man universally, Jew or Gentile, is lost, the Son of man came to seek and to save that which is lost. This, by the gospel, is effected for those who believe; and Paul's mission being both the highest and the widest, was pre-eminently to the Gentile world. It was for this heavenly and indiscriminate task he was really fitted when awakened to see his intensely Jewish zeal, now judged in the light, not only of the cross, but of the heavenly glory of Christ. He was the apostle of the uncircumcision. It was therefore a mistake to put himself forward specially before the Jews in Jerusalem, as before with the Lord in the vision.

But there is another element of interest in the passage. The commandant had given orders to examine the apostle by scourging, in order that the cause of the clamour against him might be found out. Paul has resort

to a plea most natural, in order to escape pain and ignominy; for it was a serious breach of law that he, a Roman and uncondemned, should be tied up for scourging. Nothing can be calmer too than the manner in which he put it forward. There was no excitement, still less the smallest approach to the assertion of right, which was not unknown then, but has taken an extreme hold of men in our days. The centurion names it to the commander, who inquires and learns that, whilst he had bought his own citizenship, Paul was a Roman born. This, of course, put an end to all thought of torture, and the commander was afraid because he had bound him. But was it the accustomed height of Christian truth on which the apostle stood? Where do we find an approach to it in his Epistles? And where does heavenly and suffering grace shine as in these? Present oneness with Christ effaces all our natural conditions: Jew or Greek, Scythian or barbarian, bond or free, what matters it? Christ is all, as He is in all that are His.

It would appear that what excited the alarm of the commander and the centurion was the tying up Paul with the thongs. This was a great offence against a Roman citizen. ‘Because he had bound him’, I understand to be for this purpose, for in an ordinary way it appears that he was not absolutely loosed. ‘But on the morrow desiring to know the certainty why he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him, and commanded the chief priests and all the council to come together, and brought Paul down and set [him] before them’ (ver. 30). Whatever Jews might do or wish, the Roman law was equitable enough to insist, that an accused person should have his accusers face to face, and be allowed to answer for himself as to the charge laid against him.

First, however, the commander sought to learn what the accusation was.

255 1 Text. Rec. adds on large authority of MSS. et al., καὶ ἔμφοβοι ἐγένετο, ‘and they were affrighted’, but ABH, several cursives, and the best Versions leave the words out.

256 In Acts 9

φωνή ‘sound’ or ‘voice’ is in the genitive, and merely partitive in Acts 22 it is the accusative which has the largest bearing on the object and is not partitive.

257 So the most ancient MSS. and Versions, but HLP and most read τοῦ κυρίου ‘of the Lord,’ as in the Text. Rec.

258 The Text. Rec. adds with many MSS. et al. ‘to his death,’ evidently imported from Acts 8:1, but the best copies (ABE) and versions do not sanction it.

Acts 23

‘And Paul, fixing his eyes on the council, said, Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day. And the high priest Ananias commanded those that stood by him to smite his mouth. Then said Paul unto him, God is about to smite thee, whited wall. And dost thou sit judging me according to the law, and breaking the law commandest me to be smitten? And those that stood by said, Revilest thou God’s high priest? And Paul said, I did not know, brethren, that he was high priest, for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of a ruler of thy people’ (vers. 1-5).

It is scarcely to be supposed that this was a regular assemblage of the Sanhedrim, it was done hurriedly to meet a crisis. A military commander had no authority so to assemble the religious chiefs of the Jews. This may serve to explain what ordinarily would seem scarcely intelligible. Paul appears not to have known that the high priest was present. Had he been in his official robes, this could scarcely be understood; especially as we are told that Paul looked steadfastly at the council. If it were an informal meeting, neither high priest nor other may have worn any distinctive raiment.

Ananias is quite distinct from Annas the high priest in the earlier days of which the Gospels treat; nor had he been so long appointed that Paul must have remembered him. He may have been a comparative stranger to the apostle, especially in his official capacity. But, what is of more importance to remark, the apostle’s testimony was that he had lived before God in all good conscience unto this day: not a word about Christ or the

gospel. It was thoroughly true. Even of his unconverted days we know that he could say, ‘Touching law, a Pharisee;... touching righteousness that is in law, found blameless’ (Phil. 3:5, 6). Of this he thinks and speaks as he confronted the council. Surely it was not according to this new calling and that which was his life now. For Christ was all to him. He was thinking of the Jews, he declared what seemed thoroughly calculated to meet their thoughts. But it utterly failed, and the high priest Ananias commanded those that stood by to smite him on the mouth. This was an injurious insult, perpetrated by the judge, and in the teeth of the law. But it is not surprising that the apostle’s words provoked the high priest, and none the less, because he was as far as possible from the conscientiousness of a Gamaliel.

But the apostle resented the contumely and reproved it severely. ‘God will smite thee, whited wall.’ In every respect this was true. Ananias was no more than a hypocritical evil-doer. Our Lord had made an allusion in Matt. 23:27 which will help us to understand this; and it appears that God did smite the hypocrite not long after.

As high priest he was sitting to judge Paul after the law, and there contrary to the law he commanded him to be smitten; but did Paul rise in his quick rebuke to the height of grace any more than of truth? The apostle is thoroughly righteous, but he descends rather to the same ground on which they stood; he had spoken with warmth however truly, so that the bystanders could say, ‘Revilest thou God’s high priest? And Paul said, I did not know, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of a ruler of thy people.’

The apostle hastens to acknowledge the error, as far as it was such, whatever might be the unworthiness of the conduct and of the language that occasioned it. Still Ananias was high priest that day. This Paul owns. He ought not to have spoken so of one in that position. The word is plain, 'Thou shalt not speak evil of a ruler of thy people.' Overruled of God and prophetic, was it Christ-like? Was it not rather the immediate resentment of a righteous man at an unrighteous deed? He at once apologizes, when he learnt the official state of the judge however unjust. 'I did not know'... But God loves to guide those who are kept immediately dependent on Him, even when they know nothing of the circumstances.

The apostle throughout scarcely seems to be breathing his ordinary spiritual atmosphere. This comes out still more plainly in what follows. 'But when Paul perceived that the one part were of Sadducees and the other of Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees259; concerning the hope and resurrection of [the] dead I am judged' (ver. 6). Here the root of the matter appears. The apostle avails himself of a rent between the two great parties of the Jews, to take the ground which would enlist the more orthodox and God-fearing in his favour. 'I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees,' he cried. Was this again according to the height of the truth he preached and loved? It was incontestably true; but was it Christ all in all? Was it not rather a prudent appeal sure to split up the crowd before him for himself to fall back on a ground altogether lower than his wont?

Nevertheless there was truth and important truth before all here. 'I am judged concerning the hope and

resurrection of the dead.' This thoroughly falls in with the Book of the Acts. Luke begins here as his Gospel ends with the resurrection and ascension, and gives full scope to the testimony of the risen Lord throughout. The apostle everywhere consistently urges the hope and resurrection of the dead. It was bound up with Christ, the Son of man; but he does not directly introduce the full truth of His person any more than he puts forward at this time the resurrection 'from' the dead. The resurrection 'of' the dead is a great and needed truth notwithstanding; and to this, not the Sadducees who now were in power, but the Pharisees in their way held firmly.

The apostle knew resurrection in an incomparably larger measure. To him it was inseparable from the glorified Christ, the Head of the church Who really was his life and his testimony; and for this he endured habitual rejection and suffering. But in Jerusalem the apostle is not found in the same power as elsewhere. The spirit of the place had its influence; in all this business we find him by no means according to that heavenly light which so shines throughout his accustomed orbit.

The high priest Ananias was too truly a representative of the people as a whole. They were no better than a whited wall; and they too in due time afterwards fell under the smiting of God. The apostle turns to the audience as we saw, when he perceived that the one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, and cried out in the council, Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees, touching the hope and resurrection of the dead I am judged. 'And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For Sadducees say that there

is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit; but Pharisees confess them both. And there arose a great clamour, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' part stood up and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man; and [what] if a spirit spoke to him, or an angel?' (vers. 7-9).

We have seen all through the Acts of the Apostles that the Sadducees were as prominent in opposition after the resurrection of Christ and the descent of the Spirit, as the Pharisees had been while the Lord was on earth. There seems a certain fitness in this. The Righteous One was intolerable to the earthly-minded champions of human righteousness, ever found wanting when weighed in God's balances. When He rose from the dead, the Sadducees were naturally roused to action, more especially as at the time they were in outward power. The high priests successively seem to have been of that party. The resurrection of Jesus was a death blow to their system, as it is to infidelity at all times. For it is God's intervention in power whilst the world goes on as it is, the pledge that the risen One will come and judge it, for He it is Who is of God ordained Judge of quick and dead. Resurrection is the sole and final condition of man which answers to the counsels of God, and which will manifest His glory.

Paul, therefore, perceiving that if one part of his audience were Sadducees, the other were Pharisees, avails himself of the truth held by the Pharisees, which ought to have lifted all above personalities and prejudices. In all cases grace loves to do so, even as flesh finds its wretched pleasure in continual strife and self-seeking. Here too it was of moment to press resurrection as a conditional truth of Christianity,

resurrection being not merely at the end but before the end comes. Not that the apostle here refers to resurrection as specifically from the dead; he is content to speak of that which every God-fearing Jew acknowledged — the hope and resurrection of the dead, which was certainly not for judgment of the wicked. Resurrection was not disputed but held from the beginning. Old Testament saints waited for it, not merely Israelites but those who were outside like Job, as may be seen in Job 19:25-27, when the Redeemer stands on earth at the latter day. Christ personally becomes, as every believer in Christ knows, the seal of the truth of resurrection, for in His case it is not only the dead man raised but raised from among the dead, and so it will be for those raised at His coming.

No Pharisee doubted the resurrection of the dead. Paul was not only a Pharisee but a son of Pharisees, a stronger expression than that which obtains in the Received Text or the Authorized Version. He belonged to a family of Pharisees, who rejected free-thinking and held to the common faith of God’s people.

The effect was immediate. There arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. No doubt the apostle was not here preaching the gospel nor rendering that testimony to which his heart turned habitually. Christ resorted to no such measures when He was being judged; but it was surely righteous in itself if not according to the height of grace in Christ. Yet it was the means of no deliverance to Paul, on the contrary his adversaries were divided, but power was on the side of those who felt the blow struck at their infidelity. ‘For Sadducees say that there is

no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit, but Pharisees confess them both.'

The Sadducees were the sceptics of that day and of the lowest kind; they were blinded by materialism, the poisonous error which is now prevailing everywhere throughout Christendom. How solemn that the worst unbelief of Judaism should now pervade an immense part of the baptized in Christendom! Catholic or Protestant, high church or low, or dissent makes little difference. The great expansion of experimental science has in past days fed this distemper far beyond the effect of pure or mixed sciences. Even the discoveries which have added so much to personal ease and selfish enjoyment, all tend to help it on. Man in his present life becomes everything: God is excluded, not to say denied, because He is unseen.

The resurrection of the dead, and yet more from the dead, is the grand weapon of faith against prevailing error and in favour of souls in danger of destruction. The God Who raised up Jesus from the dead is sending remission of sins through His name. To Him give all the prophets witness (how much more the gospel!), that everyone who believes on Him shall receive both the forgiveness he needs, and the life in Christ without which there can be no living to God. This alone is the true deliverance from Sadduceeism then, or from that which is akin at the present time.

'And when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul should be torn in pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them and bring [him] into the castle. And the night following the Lord stood by him

and said, Be of good cheer,260 for as thou hast fully testified concerning Me at Jerusalem so also must thou testify at Rome' (vers. 10, 11).

The Gentile in chief command was not used to the gusts of violence that blew among the Jews when a question of religious difference sprung up and roused them. At this time indeed religious indifference prevailed excessively among the heathen. It was not so among the Jews, though their modal condition was wretched in the extreme. The chiliarch, therefore, being alarmed at the agitation, had Paul removed from the midst of men who seemed excited enough to tear him in pieces.

It was a time when the apostle might have been much tried. He had appealed to orthodox feeling against the Sadducean unbelief that sought his destruction, but he was a prisoner still, though safely guarded by Roman soldiers. It was not the happiest position for one who valued nothing but Christ. So much the more gracious was that which we last read, 'And the following night the Lord stood by him and said, Be of good cheer, for as thou didst fully testify the things about Me at Jerusalem, so must thou also testify at Rome.' Truly the Lord is good: not a word of blame, nothing but assurance of help, and this by so remarkable a manifestation at the very time when discouragement would have been natural. The apostle's visit to Jerusalem had not resulted in the least as he himself desired. He might have regarded it as only a failure. The Lord noticed nothing but his faithful testimony; and He adds that so he must testify at Rome also This was evidently then the corrected and proper scope of Paul's allotted sphere: Jerusalem was outside it. For Peter had been entrusted with the gospel of the circumcision, as Paul was, beyond

all controversy, with that of the uncircumcision, under which came Rome as the then metropolis of the world. Thither the apostle was to go, not free but in bonds, a prisoner, as suited the Lord, whilst it was a part of His moral government because he would go to Jerusalem. The greatest representative of the gospel was to enter Rome in a chain!

Has the gospel ever been otherwise at Rome? It is not that God had not work there already done. Many souls there were before this, calling on the name of the Lord, both Jews and Gentiles, as the Epistle to the Romans lets us see, but the great witness of the gospel was to enter Rome as a prisoner. If released afterwards, he returned, a prisoner again, to die at Rome for Christ. It was indeed a solemn type, as foreshadowing what Rome would ever prove to the gospel of God.

‘And when it was day the Jews, having made a combination, put themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. And those that made the conspiracy were more than forty, who therefore (οἵτινες) came to the chief priests and the elders, and said, We have put ourselves under a great curse,261 to taste nothing until we have killed Paul. Now therefore do ye, with the council, signify to the commander that he bring him down unto you,262 as though ye would judge his cause more exactly. But we, before he come near, are ready to slay him’ (vers. 12-15).

It is sorrowful to read the dark conspiracy of the Jews at this time. They were no better than the heathen, but rather worse as knowing better. So it ever is where light shines in measure without grace; it becomes deeper

darkness. Deceit and violence characterized them, especially where the gospel was concerned, and none was so identified with it as Paul. God's word in the Law and the Psalms and the Prophets was too truly verified in their case. Their feet were swift to shed blood, and with their tongues they used deceit. They did not know the way of peace, but hated most him who preached and lived it. Alas! there was no fear of God before their eyes. And it is evident that the ecclesiastical chiefs were quite as much implicated as the blood-thirsty rabble, the prey of crafty leaders who taught that religion sanctifies murder (John 16:2). It is therefore said to be 'the Jews' not merely 'some of the Jews', as in the softened words of the Received Text. Accordingly, when the conspirators told the religious leaders their plot to murder Paul on his way to the council, not a word of remonstrance or horror! The chief priests and the elders were really therefore the more guilty. Dr. Hackett and others cite from Philo a passage which remarkably illustrates such conduct as a principle calmly laid down without the smallest sense of its atrocity. Now Philo was a contemporary Jew of Alexandria.

But God knows how to defeat wicked efforts against His servants. As He had comforted Paul's heart privately, so now He wrought providentially and, singular to say, through a relative of Paul himself who was there. 'But Paul's sister's son heard of the ambush, and having come and entered into the castle, he reported it to Paul. And Paul called to [him] one of the centurions and said, Bring this young man to the commander, for he hath something to report to him. He therefore took and brought him to the commander, and saith, The prisoner Paul called me to [him] and asked me to bring this young

man to thee, as he hath something to say to thee. And the commander took him by the hand, and going aside privately asked, What is that which you have to report to me? And he said, The Jews have agreed to ask thee to bring down Paul to-morrow into the council, as though they would inquire somewhat more exactly concerning him. Do not thou therefore yield to them; for there lie in ambush for him more than forty men of them, who put themselves under a curse neither to eat nor to drink till they have slain him, and now they are ready, looking for the263 promise from thee. So the commander let the young man go, charging him, Tell no man that thou didst show these things unto me' (vers. 16-22).

Whatever may have been the haste of Lysias at first, he appears to have waked up thoroughly to his duty on behalf of the prisoner against his relentless enemies, and to have sought at last to make up in kindness for the wrong then done.

It is instructive also to observe how far the apostle was from fanaticism in his proceedings. For, although the Lord had miraculously guaranteed his preservation that he might have the desire of his heart in bearing witness of Christ in Rome, he did not count it beneath him to advertise the military chief of the plot against his life. Confidence in the word of God does not despise or dispense with legitimate means. Perhaps men are not wanting who flatter themselves that they may be more faithful or spiritual than he.

The commander was prompt in action, as we have seen him considerate with Paul's young kinsman. 'And he called unto him some two of the centurions and said, Make ready two hundred soldiers, that they may go as

far as Caesarea, and seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen,264 at the third hour of the night. And [he bade them] provide beasts that they might set Paul on and bring [him] safe through unto Felix the governor, having written a letter in this form: Claudius Lysias to the most excellent governor Felix, greeting. This man when seized by the Jews and about to be slain by them, I coming up with the soldiery rescued, having learnt that he was a Roman. And wishing to know thoroughly the cause for which they accused him, I brought [him] down unto their council, whom I found to be accused about questions of their law, but to have no charge laid worthy of death or bonds. And when it was shown to me that a plot would be against the man, I forthwith sent [him] unto thee, charging his accusers also to speak against him before thee. [Farewell]' (vers. 23-30).

How the letter became known to the Evangelist we cannot say; but there it is with every mark of genuineness, and so much the more, because we can readily see that the commander was not scrupulous as to truth, and sought to commend his own zeal and services to the governor. God is not straitened as to means, knowing all without means, and ever and anon communicating what is good for us to know as He sees fit. The commander in fact only learnt that Paul was a Roman after he had caused him to be tied up for scourging, a serious infraction of the law as against a citizen. But it is quite natural that he, a heathen, should do what he could to hide his past fault by professing zeal exactly where he had failed. Little did he anticipate that a letter meant only for the eyes of Felix was to stand on the indelible page of Holy Writ with the falsehood

rendered evident by the history without a word of comment, as is the manner of Scripture. Nor was there the smallest wish in the blessed prisoner to expose the wrong. But God would give us to learn thereby what man is, and what God is, confiding in His care in abhorrence of evil and cleaving to good.

The immense guard provided for the safe conduct of a prisoner, confessedly not guilty of punishment, proved the commander's estimate of Jewish perfidy and violence; and this on the night when his information of their plot was received. How sad to see vindictiveness and deceit in the Jews abhorred and thwarted by heathen resoluteness to stand by earthly righteousness and order' Truly the foundations were out of course: not that the Romans were not evil, but that God's people, the Jews, were yet more deplorably bad.

Nor was Felix, the procurator of Judea, ignorant of their moral state, though himself a man of more than usually mean, cruel, and abandoned character. Not only was he married to a Jewish wife, but he seems to have been a joint-governor for years before his promotion to the sole dignity, though herein Tacitus and Josephus clash not a little. During his office he had ample experience of insurrection and of intrigue, of bloodshed and of plots, in dealing with which his servile origin gave only, as is usual, a haughtier tone and stronger impulse to his ruthless policy. Still he easily understood on what slender grounds the Jews might pursue to death an object of their unrelenting animosity. A Roman governor too was not to be less firm in upholding Roman law in the presence of Jews who boasted of a divine revelation. All this God's providence used in favour of His servant. The notion that so large a retinue was intended as a

special honour of Christ's minister is a blunder, from not seeing that the true glory of the Christian is in his conformity to Christ's cross.

'The soldiers therefore, as it was commanded them, took up Paul and brought [him] by night unto Antipatris. But on the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him and returned to the castle; and they, when they entered into Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, presented Paul also to him. And when he had read [it] and asked of what province he was, and understood that he was of Cilicia, I will hear thee fully, said he, when thine accusers also are arrived. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's praetorium' (vers. 31-35).

The description is vivid, as we ordinarily find in the narrative of Luke. Kefr-Saba was the ancient name of the city whence the foot-soldiers returned, as all danger of ambush or pursuit was then past. When Herod rebuilt it, he called the new city Antipatris, in honour of his father. It was some twenty-six miles from Caesarea, but considerably more from Jerusalem, even by the direct route through Gophna, discovered by Dr. Eli Smith, with many a mark of Roman use. The Jerusalem Itinerary makes the distance of Caesarea from Jerusalem sixty-eight miles, but this was the more circuitous route by Bethhoron and Lydda. Nowhere did Herod lavish such effort to render a city magnificent. It is now an utter ruin. There the apostle remained a prisoner for years before he was sent on to Rome. But of this we are to hear more in the history that follows.

259 Such is the reading of the most ancient MSS. with the Vulgate and Pesch. Syr.

260 'Paul' is not in the best authorities.

261 ‘We have cursed ourselves with a curse’ it is literally; which may be correctly rendered, ‘a great curse’.

262 ‘Tomorrow’, though read by HLP and most, is not in the oldest witnesses, but implied of course in the story.

263 Not ‘a’, but what they counted on already.

264 ‘Spearmen’ is rather a guess for

δεξιολάβους, which has been variously but not yet satisfactorily explained. Meyer cites Const. Porphyrog. who distinguishes the δεξιολάβους from bowmen and targeteers. Grasping the weapon with the right hand is not very distinctive.

Acts 24

Religious rancour is prompt and indefatigable. Disappointed of its prey by lawless violence, it loses no time in availing itself of legal processes, where unscrupulous abuse may succeed, even if the judge were not venal but only disposed, like human nature in general, to take the popular side against the righteous and godly.

‘And after five days came down the high priest Ananias with certain265 elders and an orator, one Tertullus, and they [the which] laid an information before the governor against Paul. And when he was called, Tertullus began to accuse, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great peace, and by thy providence reforms266 are made for this nation, we accept [it] every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness. But that I be not further tedious to thee, I entreat thee to hear us briefly in thy clemency. For we found this man a pest, and moving imsurrections267 among all the Jews throughout the world [inhabited earth], and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, who also attempted to profane the temple; whom we also seized (and would have judged according to our law. But Lysias the commander [or chiliarch] came and with great violence took [him] away from our hands, commanding his accusers to come unto thee); from whom thou wilt be able, by examining, thyself to take knowledge of all these things of which we accuse him. And the Jews joined in the attack, asserting that these things were so’ (vers. 1-9).

The importance attached to the trial is evident from the going down of the high priest so great a distance and with so little delay, though we may well receive the more ancient witnesses which speak only of certain elders, instead of the Sanhedrim as a whole as in the Received Text. But the more modern copies in this case present without doubt the more difficult reading. Had the authorities been reversed, the critics would probably have regarded τινῶν as a softened correction of τῶν.

The orator from his name (a diminutive of Tertius like many others so formed in Latin) seems to have been one of the young Romans or Italians found wherever there was a court of justice in the provinces, and the Jews in all probability employed him as being versed in the methods of procedure before the governor. Certainly his opening is as servile as his statement is false and scurrilous. The flattery of Felix is in flagrant contrast with the grave censure of the historian Tacitus (Annales xii. 54, Historia v. 9, as naturally referred to), while there was enough in the vigorous putting down of plotters and rebels to give some semblance of reason. What the alleged ameliorations or good measures were does not appear. Josephus does not differ from the Romans in an evil report of Felix, who only escaped condemnation for his misgovernment in Syria through the influence of his brother Pallas with Nero.

‘Providence’ is given here, rather than ‘forethought’, as it was apparently borrowed from the application of the more high-sounding term, common on the imperial coins, as Eckhel shows in his ‘Doctrina Vet. Num.’ passim.

Having thus and yet more grossly sought to conciliate the governor, Tertullus after verse 4 turns to the calumniating of Paul. He represents the apostle not merely by the vague but most injurious appellation of a pest or pestilent fellow, but more definitely as moving seditions among all the Jews throughout the world, notoriously open to such mischievous excitement beyond all others through their untoward circumstances as well as their presence everywhere since their dispersion. Next, he taxes Paul as an heresiarch, or rather sectarian chief, employing (here only in the New Testament) against the Christians that name of contempt which they fixed on their Master — 'a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.' Lastly, he renews the old accusation of profaning the temple: the unfounded rumour which had originally set on the Jews to slay Paul in Jerusalem.

The bracketed passage in verses 6-8 may be questioned fairly. It is omitted by the witnesses of chief value, and consequently is not received by the Editors, Griesbach, Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, nor by Mill and Bengel before them. Alford writes undecidedly. Undoubtedly the variations are great in the manuscripts which have the substance. De Wette represents a class of men usually bold: but here it is admitted that it is hardly to be supposed that Tertullus should have said so little, or that Luke should have omitted if he said more; and again it is plain that to stop at the seizure of Paul by the Jews, without explaining how he got rid of them and came into the custody of Lysias before being taken to Caesarea, leaves the speech remarkably abrupt. But Alford sees in verse 22 a strong argument for the genuineness of the words in debate, because γαὰρ οὗ, if the words be inserted, refer, naturally to Lysias, and we

find Felix there putting off the final hearing and decision till the arrival of Lysias. If the words are not genuine, γαὰ οὗ would rather refer to Paul which the Dean considers unlikely. Others on the contrary allow that at an anacrisis, or first hearing, this is quite correct, and altogether independent of torture, which in the case of a Roman was of course illegal. More might be added in evidence of the uncertainty which hangs over the bracketed words; but it seems unedifying to say more, if one cannot adduce proof enough to clear up the question either way. Abridgment is at least a rare fault in the copyists, who were more prone to venture on insertions in order to ease the sense when it seemed obscure.

It is sad to see how contemptible the Jewish party, high priest and elders. made themselves, even in Roman eyes, through spite against the gospel (ver 9). There they all were not only assenting to the base servility and downright falsehood of Tertullus (indeed they had instructed him), but now they joined in his attack against all truth and justice. And so the Lord had forewarned His followers. ‘Remember the word that I said unto you, A servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for My name’s sake; because they know not Him that sent Me’ (John 15:20, 21). Yes, there is the secret. The people who claimed to be His witnesses, and were so responsibly knew Him not, and proved it by rejecting Him Who is the image of the invisible God, the true and faithful Witness, His only and beloved Son. Hence their enmity against a servant of His, who made their consciences feel the truth they

could not overthrow and would not believe or confess. Deadly hatred ensues: the way of Cain against the accepted and righteous Abel, which stops not short of death. Therefore the Lord went on to say in John 16:2, 3, ‘They shall put you out of the synagogues, yea, the hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do, because they have not known the Father nor me.

It has been not otherwise in Christendom, and from the same source. Men have gone back to Jewish elements (now no better than Gentile idols as the apostle tells us in Gal. 4:1-9), and lost all true knowledge of the Father and the Son, as well as of every gospel privilege and blessing. This has ever led to enmity against those who abide in the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ. For man is at bottom the same everywhere and at all times. But far be it from the Christian to glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to him, and he unto the world. For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as many as shall walk by this rule, peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God (Gal. 6:14-16).

The defence of the apostle is characterized by straightforward truth and courteous dignity, as the accusation had been by servility to the governor and abuse of the accused. It is noticed, on the one hand, as the Jews joined in their venal advocate’s assault, affirming that his falsehoods were fact (ver. 9), that, on the other (ver. 10), there was no haste to reply till the governor gave the sign to that effect.

‘And when the governor beckoned him to speak, Paul answered, Knowing that since many years thou art judge to this nation, I 268 cheerfully make my defence: as thou canst ascertain269 that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship at Jerusalem; and neither in the temple did they find me discoursing with anyone or making a tumult of a crowd, nor in the synagogues, nor throughout the city. Neither can they prove to thee270 the things of which they now accuse me. But this I confess to thee, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I serve the God of the fathers believing all things that are according to the law and that are written in the prophets, having hope toward God, which these also themselves look for, that a resurrection271 is to be of both just and unjust. Herein also do I exercise myself to have a conscience without offence toward God and men continually. Now after several years I arrived to bring alms unto-my nation and offerings; in which they found me purified in the temple, not with crowd nor yet with tumult but272 certain Jews from Asia, who ought to have been present before thee, and to have accused, if they had aught against me. Or let these themselves say what273 wrong they found in me when I stood before the council [other] than for this one voice that I cried out standing among them, Touching the resurrection of [the] dead I am judged this day before you’ (vers. 10-21).

The length of time that Felix had passed in official relation to the Jews was a plain matter of fact, of which the apostle justly availed himself. Their feeling, habits, and prejudices were thus necessarily more familiar than to a new procurator. On this circumstance the apostle grounds his cheerfulness in making his plea. Flattery is wholly absent.

As to himself, it was so brief a space since he went up to Jerusalem that his course there could easily be traced. And when he did go — but twelve days before, it was ‘to worship’, the very reverse of moving sedition or other pestilent conduct, least of all to profane the temple. On the contrary he brought ‘alms to his nation, and offerings’. Could anything be more opposed, either to riot, or to profanation? He was at liberty to discourse if he had judged meet, but in point of fact ‘neither in the temple did they find me discoursing with any one, or making a tumult of a crowd’, common as this was in a people so zealous and so excitable, ‘nor in the synagogues’, numerous as they were, ‘nor throughout the city’. What could be less like an agitator? ‘Neither can they prove to thee the things whereof they now accuse me.’ More than this distinct challenge, or at best denial, of the vague and general calumny the apostle does not allege. The facts stated, of which the evidence was easy and ample, refuted the talk of Tertullus.

But far from denying what was said of ‘the sect’ (ver. 5), he avows it openly. ‘But this I confess to thee, that according to the Way which they call sect, so I serve the [or, our] fathers’ God.’ This was of moment for the governor. Tolerant as the Romans were toward the religious convictions of the nations they ruled, they were stern in disallowing innovations, especially such as tended to stir up civil discord. The apostle accordingly prefers here, as on two other occasions not quite similar, to depart from the usual phrase, and says πατρώῶ θεῳ rather than τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν as Khnl and others have noticed. As the heathen, without God themselves, called the Christians godless or Atheists, because they had no idols, so the Jews called the church ‘a sect’. Yet was it

the only institution on earth that could not be a sect while true to Christ. The apostle goes farther however, and confesses his faith in all things according to the law and in the things written in the prophets. There is no hesitation in declaring boldly his faith in all the ancient oracles before the high priest and the Sadducean party, who notoriously slighted the prophets, as they had no real reverence for the law. If any Pharisees were in alliance with them as ‘elders’ of Israel, what a position in confederating with infidels against a more thorough believer than themselves!

Further, there is nothing left indistinct here. For the apostle adds, ‘having hope toward God, which they themselves also look for, that a resurrection is to be of both just and unjust.’ This could hardly have been said if there had not been then present Pharisees who confessed the resurrection of the dead. They must therefore have made up their difference with the heterodox Sadducees in their eagerness to put down and punish Paul. The tendency among the Jews seems to have been to regard resurrection as the privilege of the righteous simply, which would be sure to degenerate into the reward of Israel in the kingdom of Messiah. But the apostle, guided of the Holy Spirit, shows its universal character ‘of both just and unjust’.

So this was to be inferred even from a book so ancient as that of Job, which was of the deeper interest in this respect as evidence of the faith of Gentile believers before the law. Yet it is certain that in Job 14:12 Job speaks of man’s resurrection (i.e., of man, as such) when the heavens are no more and eternity begins, contradistinguished from the rising of the righteous like himself, to enjoy their hope when the Kinsman-

Redeemer shall stand on the earth, which is clearly for the kingdom. Naturally the resurrection of the just, the resurrection from among the dead, the better resurrection, and other kindred phrases, are more frequent as a cheer and incentive to saints in present suffering; but John 5:28, 29, and Rev. 20:4-6, 12, 13, give doctrinally and prophetically the twofold resurrection, severed by a thousand years, to which Paul here alludes as that which had roused so much feeling on the part of his Sadducean adversaries.

Nor this only, for he lets them know by the way that on himself the hope of resurrection was most influential practically. 'In this [Therefore, or Accordingly] I also exercise myself to have a conscience without offence toward God and men continually.' Here not only were the Jews, but Christians for the most part are, weak indeed, rising in faith but little beyond thoughtful heathen who reason on the immortality of the soul. No doubt the God-inbreathed soul, the inner man, is immortal; but as this is no security against sin, so neither does it involve immunity from judgment. Indeed it is rather the ground why sinful man, alone of beings on the earth, has moral responsibility, from which he cannot disengage himself; for, if he refuse life eternal in the Son, he must be judged by Him at the last, as Scripture abundantly testifies. The believer of course needs no such awful measure to vindicate the rights of Christ, but, what is far better, honours Him now in the day that follows His cross, honours Him not by that tremendous and irresistible constraint, but with a ready mind as the One Who for him died and rose that he might live no longer to himself but to Christ.

People may reason, as alas! not a few in Christendom have not been ashamed to do, that the blessing of the soul is of a more spiritual nature and that any hope associated with the resurrection of the body is external. But they are beguiled of the enemy in thus preferring their own thoughts to God's word which insists on the fullest blessing for the soul now, even salvation in the richest way, but on resurrection or change at Christ's coming as our proper hope. Then only shall we be like Him when the body of humiliation is conformed to the body of His glory. It is this hope which gives power in the Spirit to mortify our members on the earth, instead of indulging the common dream of present ease and honour here before the soul goes to heaven for its glory. Never does Scripture so speak It does declare the superior blessedness of departing to be with Christ, as compared with remaining here. But it never stops short of Christ's coming for our everlasting and glorious change as the true hope which purifies us meanwhile on the earth.

The apostle next states that after a lapse of several years he arrived bringing alms to his nation, and offerings. Was this the action of a seditious pestilent man? 'In which [business of the offerings] they found me purified in the temple, not with crowd nor yet with tumult.' Was this again profaning the temple? 'But certain Jews from Asia' — they were the true culprits in the matter. It was they whose guilty rashness imputed the false charge. For the four men under the vow were not Greeks, but Jews; and with these only was Paul associated in the temple at the instance of James. Why were these Asiatic Jews not here face to face, as Roman law required? 'Who ought,' as the apostle here quietly

adds, ‘to have been present before thee, and to have accused, if they had anything against me. Or let these themselves (the Jews then present) say what wrong they found in me when I stood before the council, [other] than for this one voice which I cried out among them, Touching the resurrection of [the] dead I am judged this day before you.’

It was irrefragably and solely the Jews themselves who made the riot (stirred up by the blunder about those brethren from Asia), who were not there to be convicted that day, as Felix could not but see. Even though the witnesses were not present, those actually there were challenged to state any wrong whatever done by the apostle, unless it was his putting forward the great truth of the resurrection: as really embarrassing to the Pharisee elders now as before; for they assuredly would regard such a cry as true and right, and in no way a fault. But ‘evil communications corrupt good manners’; and those who at first felt sympathy for the truth at stake, now give their support to the enemy against the great representative of the gospel, even when they all were convicted of the grossest mistake, and of unfounded calumny. So hard is it for men engaged in a campaign, above all a religious one, to stop short of glaring injustice when arrayed on an evil side. When men are right, they can afford to be gracious. Wrongdoers and malicious men add turbulence also.

The procurator had more now to help him than his considerable experience of the Jews in the past. He had just heard an eminently and transparently truthful reply of Paul to the speech of Tertullus. He could well enough have decided on the merits of it, had it pleased him. But he was a governor as well as judge, and had to do with a

people ever refractory. Policy dictated his course, not justice, as too often happens in this world, to say nothing of the heathenism of the Romans and the unscrupulousness of Felix in particular. Bright the day, when judgment shall return to righteousness. Even now' though Christianity has raised the moral standard of men in certain respects, we are far from that state when a King shall reign in righteousness, and princes rule in judgment.

Nor does the gospel indeed propose any such present amelioration of the world. It is the proclamation of grace to the ungodly in the name of Jesus, which shows us the heavens opened for all that believe made one with Him glorified above. The Christian is called therefore to glory in nothing but the cross of Christ, whereby he is crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to him. There is no common ground therefore possible between the world and the Christian if consistent. For the world adjudged to a death of guilt and shame and suffering Him Whom the Christian confesses as the Lord of glory, alone righteous, holy and true. The world would cease to be the world if in deed and in truth it confessed Him. Not only so: the Christian sees in the cross not only the world's misjudgment of the only worthy One, but God's judgment of himself as only and altogether evil before Him, but that evil laid on Christ to be not only judged but effaced righteously. And he sees further the unbelieving world judged with its prince, though the inevitable and irreversible sentence be not executed till the Lord Jesus appear in His glory, and we too along with Him in the same glory, Thus separation from the world is alone according to truth for the Christian, as the world abides the sure object of divine vengeance.

‘Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?’

It was this that made Felix unjust toward Paul, as it had decided Pilate to let the Lord Jesus suffer. ‘But Felix, having more accurate knowledge concerning the Way, adjourned them, saying, When Lysias the commander [or, chiliarch] is come down, I will determine your matter. And he ordered the centurion that he should be kept in charge and should have indulgence, and not to hinder any of his friends from ministering to him’ (vers. 22, 23). The latitude allowed indicated not obscurely the mind of the unjust judge, if he had chosen to judge according to his convictions. But we learn also how God took care of His servant, and, while granting him to suffer for Christ’s sake, assuaged the captivity through the judge himself, not on His servant’s petition. Truly all things work together for good to them that love God, Who is honoured by their faith.

‘And after certain days Felix, having arrived with Drusilla his wife being a Jewess, sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned concerning righteousness and temperance and the judgment to come, Felix became terrified and answered, For the present go, and when I get a convenient season, I will send for thee, hoping at the same time that money would be given him by Paul; wherefore also he sent for him the oftener and communed with him. But when two years were fulfilled, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and Felix, willing to gain favour with the Jews, left Paul in bonds’ (vers. 24-27).

The essence of unbelief is that, even if God be owned in word or theory He is in fact wholly excluded. And so it was evident in the next incident, where Felix with the beautiful wife of Azizus, king of the Emesenes, whom he had seduced and taken as ‘his own’, had the apostle before them to hear of the faith in Christ. Little was the guilty Roman prepared for the many sides of the truth, which the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven turns to deal with the hearer as he is. Paul discoursed, not on the prophets as with Jews, nor on the resurrection as with Athenians, nor on the cross even as at Corinth, but about righteousness, and self-control, and the coming judgment. A bad woman, they say, is more shameless than a bad man. Certainly if Drusilla knew more than Felix, she appears to have felt less. The inspiring Spirit records the alarm of the man, not of the woman. But it was no more than a passing terror. There was no repentance toward God; else he would not have got rid of the searching, yet saving, word of the gospel; he would not have been content to wait for a ‘more convenient season’, which never really comes.

But a baser motive rises up to prompt frequent interviews afterward — that love of money which is a root of all evil. Therefore was it Paul’s lot to remain a prisoner for two years of enforced separation from those active and free and wide labours of love so precious to his spirit, because Christ filled him to overflowing. But the same Christ strengthened him to accept his bonds patiently, as Felix fully proved his depravity. Indeed, Felix was only screened from the just punishment of his manifold atrocities by the influence of his brother with the emperor.

265

τινῶν ABE, et al.

266

διορθωμάτων the more ancient reading, rather than

κατορθωμάτων as in the Text. Rec.

267 The plural form is best attested, though Dean Alford will have it to be a correction.

268 ‘The more’ is not sustained by the best copies (ABE, et al.).

269 ‘To know fully’, ‘recognize’, or ‘ascertain’, is the preferable reading (ABE, et al.).

270 ‘To thee’ is omitted wrongly in the Text. Rec.

271 The best MSS. (ABC et al.) omit

νεκρῶν ‘of dead’.

272 ‘But’ is in verse 18 read by the better authorities, as in verse 16 it should be omitted.

273 ‘What’, not ‘if’, is right.

Acts 25

The new governor, Festus, gave a fresh opportunity to the Jews. Morally more respectable than Felix, he knew not God and therefore could not be trusted for man. Faith to him was quite unintelligible, an enthusiasm. But he soon learnt enough of the Jews to make him guilty in his willingness to gratify them in the sacrifice of Paul. Policy is a sad destroyer of conscience.

‘Festus, therefore, having come into the province, after three days went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they besought him, asking a favour that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait to kill him on the way. Howbeit Festus answered that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he himself was about to depart [there] shortly. Let them therefore saith he, that are of power [authority] among you go down with me, and if there is anything amiss in the man, let them accuse him’ (vers. 1-5).

The providence of God is still in action. On the one hand the Jews sought under colour of favour to have the apostle waylaid on the road to Jerusalem; on the other the governor stood to the dignity of his office, and would not have it lowered. As Paul had already been sent to Caesarea, he declined moving him back to Jerusalem. It is possible that he knew little or nothing of their murderous designs. If so, it was the secret care of God for one unjustly assailed. But rumours would easily get currency as to any such plot. At this time the governor was not prepared to surrender a Roman citizen to the malice of his enemies, especially of a Jewish sort on a

religious dispute. The Lord in any case watched over his servant. The accused was in Caesarea, and if anywhere in that land the supreme seat of judicature was there in Roman eyes. The governor by his decision hindered the execution of their plot. He was returning to Caesarea himself shortly: if therefore any wrong was in question, they had their opportunity to come down and accuse the prisoner.

'And when he had tarried among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down unto Caesarea, and on the morrow he sat on the judgment-seat, and commanded Paul to be brought. And when he was come, the Jews that had come from Jerusalem stood round about and laid many and grievous charges which they could not prove; while Paul said in his defence, Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I sinned at all' (vers. 6-8). The case was as plain as could be. The accusations were without proof; the defence was complete. The Jews were simply bitter enemies. The apostle had not transgressed as to any of the many serious charges they had laid to his account.

But Festus was really little better than Felix. The change of judge was only slightly in favour of justice. There was the same selfishness which had counteracted equity before. Impossible to expect the fear of God in a heathen man, though some may have been more depraved and unjust than others.

'But Festus, desiring to gain favour with the Jews, answered Paul and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?' (ver. 9). So little can man be reckoned on. Festus had refused

this very favour to the Jews in Jerusalem; he could scarcely be in the dark as to the reason why Paul had been hurried down to Caesarea. His motive was to curry favour with the Jews. ‘But Paul] said, I am standing before Caesar’s judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou also very well knowest’ (ver. 10).

The apostle must have had cause for speaking so plainly. ‘If then I am a wrong-doer, and have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die. But if none of these things is [true] whereof these accuse me, no man can give me up [or grant me by favour] unto them. I appeal unto Caesar’ (ver. 11). It is clear that all the righteousness of the case lay with Paul. He therefore avails himself of his title as a Roman citizen against those who would have infringed Roman law. He agitated no change of law, he sought nothing for himself, he employed no lawyer. The law had already ruled, and he pleaded it before one in office to administer it.

Thus so far the difficulty was terminated. The governor was bound by the appeal. ‘Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Thou hast appealed unto Caesar: unto Caesar shalt thou go’ (ver. 12). The king, or emperor, was to hear, no less than subordinate magistrates, and this not by fawning on, or seeking access to, the princes of this world, but as holy sufferers with Christ and for His name (Matt. 10:18).

It was Paul’s purpose to visit Rome after going to Jerusalem (Acts 19:21), and God gave effect to it, for it was God’s purpose (Acts 23:11). But how different was the way under His hand from the apostle’s expectation! He must go a prisoner to Rome. This befell him through

his appeal to Caesar — an appeal by no means always granted, as it was evidently liable to abuse. If the guilt were manifest, it was refused: so also if the case were frivolous enough to be unworthy of the emperor's hearing. Paul, whose innocence was unquestionable, while the case was rendered in the highest degree serious through Jewish illwill, appealed when he saw the procurator trifling with justice to gratify the Jews. This decided matters for the present.

But the Spirit of God saw further testimony needed by man, and this was brought about by a visit of distinguished visitors to the Roman governor soon after.

'Now when certain days passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to salute (or, having saluted) Festus. And as they were spending several days there, Festus set Paul's case before the king, saying, There is a certain man left prisoner by Felix, about whom when I was in Jerusalem the chief priests and the elders of the Jews filed information, asking for condemnation against him. Unto whom I answered, that it is no custom for Romans to give up any man before that the accused have the accusers face to face, and have had opportunity of defence concerning the complaint. When therefore they came together here, I made no delay but next day sat on the judgment-seat and commanded the man to be brought; concerning whom when the accusers stood up, they were bringing no charge of such evil things as I supposed, but had certain questions of their own religion, and of one Jesus dead as He is, Whom Paul affirmed to be alive. And I, being perplexed in the inquiry concerning these things, asked whether he would go to Jerusalem and there be judged of these things. But when Paul appealed to be

kept for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I should send him unto Caesar. And Agrippa [said] unto Festus, I also should wish to hear the man myself. Tomorrow, saith he, thou shalt hear him' (vers. 13-22).

The royal personage here introduced was son of Herod Agrippa I., whose awful fate was described in Acts 12. Too young to reign at his father's death, he was by Claudius given Chalcis, the principality of his uncle, with certain privileges in Jerusalem; and Philip's old tetrarchy and more were added by the same emperor soon after, with the title of King. Bernice was his elder sister, Drusilla his younger, and each of them famous or infamous in that day with reason too grave. As Felix and Drusilla had a most solemn warning from the prisoner, so now were Agrippa and Bernice with Festus to hear an appeal which leaves no soul as it is found. The truth before the conscience carries with it a responsibility which eternity, not to say the judgment-seat of Christ, will fully manifest. Yet the man involuntarily forced to feel its power can ask, What is truth? and goes out hard and wretched from His presence Who alone can give the adequate answer. But wisdom is justified of all her children; as she learnt, who had been till then a child of folly: Jesus was of God made to her wisdom and every other good she lacked (Luke 7:35-50). Why was it not so with these high estates?

The governor's motive for bringing Paul before Agrippa appears to have been his own doubt what to report to the emperor. Festus was just a man of the world. Of grace, of truth, he had no notion. The invisible and eternal realities were to him only imaginative ideas. Present things, changeable and fleeting as they are,

were his life and all. God was in none of his thoughts, apart from the Lord Jesus He remains unknown.

There was another obstacle in his way, even his good opinion of himself, and his endeavour to claim from others the highest character for honesty and honour, energy and prudence. This runs through his speech, as we saw it pervading the self-applauding letter of Claudius Lysias in Acts 23:25-30. What is man to be accounted, whose breath is in his nostrils? One look at self in God's presence puts in dust and ashes, as in Job's case when approved of Him, for his three friends were not. How can ye believe, said our Lord (John 5:44), receiving as ye do glory one of another, and the glory that is from the only God ye seek not? Where there is no self-judgment, the Saviour is but 'one Jesus', like any child of man. He who so speaks is a sinner ripening for judgment.

What the sentiments of Festus were about the mythological reveries of the Greeks and Romans, bound up with their paganism, we know not. Scepticism, ever the fatal dissolvent of society and the body politic, as it is the reaction from idolatry, was then all but universal among the educated class. It is clear that, with the contempt usual in such men, they never conceived of the truth outside themselves. Above al] appeared the strange tale and great stumbling-block of unbelief, Jesus dead and risen, and this in the midst of the busy heedless world, among a despised and subject race. It is just named incidentally (ver. 19) as a psychological phenomenon in Paul and as singularly rousing the animosity of the Jews, an ever-turbulent race.

Unable to give the emperor any reasonable account of the prisoner who had appealed, Festus states the case to one whom current report declared to be, on the one hand well versed in all Jewish questions, and in some respects the more zealous religiously because he was not of Israelitish lineage, as on the other he was notoriously devoted to the Roman interest. So indeed Agrippa continued throughout the great war that demolished the Jewish polity, their ‘place and nation’, and throughout a long reign to the first year of Trajan. To hear the case might gratify the curiosity of Herod Agrippa and perhaps also relieve Festus of some perplexity.

The explanation to the king was not unskilful. It was in truth, as he intimated, a matter of Felix left over for him. Paul was a prisoner when Festus entered on his province, who could not therefore be expected to know all from the first. Next, it was certain that the leading Jews were grievously incensed against him, which could not but weigh with a governor of little or no experience locally. Roman self-complacency breaks forth in the assertion of their policy of inflexible and impartial equity: an excellent principle by no means the rule in the provinces, any more than at home, but convenient to lay down by a governor as a cheek on flagrant injustice, which Felix and Festus surely saw in the actual prosecution. Again, who could reproach himself with lack of zeal in the public cause? The Jews had been prompt enough in coming down from Jerusalem to accuse in Caesarea, and the governor had lost not a day in sitting to judge the case, if there had been one according to Roman law. But there was nothing tangible before the court; no infraction of the public peace or

propriety, any more than private wrong in violence or corruption. It was absurd to bring before a Roman tribunal such matters as occupied Paul's accusers. Facts there were none; only questions for it of a visionary nature.

It is improbable that even a Roman procurator of Juda would be so uncourteous as to speak of the views in controversy as a 'superstition', especially in speaking to king Agrippa; any more than that Paul so characterized the Athenians, when he was setting before them Jesus and the resurrection. It seems better therefore to avail ourselves of the better or at least colourless, sense which the word undoubtedly bears in authors of that day still extant. 'Religion' is therefore here chosen, while 'system of worship' has also been suggested in a similar sense.

But when one knows the infinite truth that the Son came to bring God into the world and put sin out of it, how shocking is the dark incredulity that slurs over facts so transcendent in the words, 'one Jesus now dead, whom Paul asserted to be alive'! The vindication of God's moral glory and the display of His love, and the proof of coming judgment, all turn on it. Without it sin reigns in death, and destruction for sinners without exception or hope. There is no kingdom possible of righteousness and peace, only hell filled with the wicked and accursed. Jesus alive from the dead for evermore has changed all.

Nor need we wait to see the glorious results. The Christian sees and walks by faith, not by sight. We rest, not only on a God that cannot lie, but on the fact already accomplished that Jesus died as propitiation for our sins, rose from the dead, and has taken His seat at God's

right hand in heaven. We rest on the accomplishment of God's will in Christ's one offering of Himself for sins; and now He sits as truly man on the Father's throne, as He came down from God to become man and bring in new and everlasting glory to God by His death. He therefore is made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption; and we who believe are of God in Him, as once we were only in Adam, heirs of sin and ruin. When the Lord appears again, the results will appear before the universe, and the creation, all the creation that now groans in bondage and corruption will be delivered: for He is the Second man and Last Adam, and we shah reign along with Him in glory.

But the wisdom of the world is folly, which slights the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ, Who came to His own things, and they that were His own received Him not. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. So Festus showed now, as did Agrippa afterward in the same blindness of unbelief which pervaded other princes of this age: for had they known they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. And Christendom is returning to the darkness of heathenism. Never among the baptized did naturalism so govern men's minds; never before did nominal Christians manifest such incredulity in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, or even in creation. If the dead Jesus is alive, He has the keys of death and hades; and where is then philosophy? Where is natural law? What has natural law to do with creating? Still less can it apply to grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

But to return; when Festus mentions Paul's declining to go to Jerusalem and his appealing to Caesar, Agrippa expresses the wish himself to hear; and an audience is fixed for the morrow. This leads to a yet fuller testimony as we shall see, before not a governor only but a king.

The purposed hearing of the apostle before Agrippa wholly differed from that before Felix and Drusilla. This was private, and the apostle availed himself of it in divine love and holy courage to strip the guilty pair of their vain show, and to let them see themselves as God regarded them, as He will judge by and by through our Lord Jesus. Were men not insensate by the wily power of Satan, they would feel how gracious it is of God to send one faithful and able, willing and loving, to tell them the unerring truth, that, believing, they might be saved. But if they hug their sins, it cannot be. True repentance is the inseparable companion of true faith. From both, the enemy finds plausible excuses to hold souls back. Conscience may tremble: but there is no repentance till self is judged before God, and faith alone produces this.

Here it was even more public than the indictment before Felix or Festus. And the appeal to the emperor, though it relieved Festus in the main, embarrassed him in that he had no tangible rational explanation of the case to lay before Nero. Hence when Agrippa expressed the desire in person to hear the accused, Festus gladly caught at it and fixed the next day for the purpose. Agrippa's known familiarity with Jewish affairs was too good to be lost, besides gratifying the wish of so exalted a guest.

'Therefore on the morrow when Agrippa came, and Bernice, with great pomp, and they entered into the audience-chamber with the commanders and the

distinguished men of the city, at the command of Festus Paul was brought. And saith Festus, King Agrippa, and all men that are here present with us, ye behold this man about whom all the multitude of the Jews applied to me both in Jerusalem and here, crying out that he ought not to live any longer. But as I found that he had done nothing worthy of death, and as he himself appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him about whom I have nothing certain to write to my lore Wherefore I brought him forth before you, and especially before thee, king Agrippa, so that, after examination had, I may have what I shall write. For it seemeth to me unreasonable in sending a prisoner not also to signify the charges against him' (vers. 23-27).

Our Evangelist as usual presents the scene most graphically; for which reason probably tradition gave out in error that he was a painter, whereas scripture is positive that he was a physician: a fact abundantly confirmed by evidence in both his Gospel and the Acts. The king and the queen are before us with great pomp; military chiefs add to the show, as well as the most distinguished civilians; the governor gives the word of command and the prisoner is brought into the hall of audience. Festus opens the proceedings. It is hardly to be allowed that the courteous Roman meant to insinuate a slur on Bernice when he said, 'King Agrippa, and all men that are here present with us.' Undoubtedly the word is not the general ἄνθρωποι but the precise ἄνδρες, expressive of men as distinguished from women (γυναῖκες), The truth is however that ἄνδρες is used regularly in addresses as more respectful, though women may be present (cf. Acts 1:16; Acts 2:14; Acts 3:12; Acts 13:16; Acts 15:7; Acts 17:22), and in this

sense only is it here employed. Out of courtesy the distinction is ignored for the time. That the queen's presence was implied to be improper is not the thought.

Festus addresses himself directly to the point. 'Ye behold this [person] about whom all the multitude of the Jews applied to me, both in Jerusalem and here, crying out that he ought not to live any longer.' There was no doubt of the general and vehement antipathy of the Jews to the noblest man of their stock and the most honoured servant of the Lord. Their cry in the holy city and elsewhere was that he ought not to live longer. He, the governor, found that Paul had committed nothing which deserved death, but does not explain why he himself had occasioned the appeal to the emperor by the proposal that the prisoner should go to Jerusalem for judgment. Paul knew too that worldly religion is of all things least just and most cruel, and, declining such a change from Caesar's tribunal, appealed to Augustus. To this Festus agreed, as we know, and he repeats, 'I decided to send him.'

But thereon arose a difficulty. What was he to write to send with the appellant: 'About whom I have nothing certain to write to my lord'? This was his main motive for the hearing before Agrippa, versed as he was in Jewish customs and learning and prejudice. 'Wherefore I brought him forth before you, and especially before thee, king Agrippa, so that, after examination had, I may know what I shall write.' The governor naturally considered it senseless, as he adds, to forward a prisoner without signifying the accusation laid to his charge. We shall find however that the issue was a true and fresh testimony to Christ far more than a solution of the governor's perplexity.

Acts 26

Luke sets the scene vividly before us. The king, whose opinion the governor sought, and who himself was desirous of hearing, gives courteous leave, and the prisoner enters on his defence with out-stretched hand. Orators no doubt used the same action to engage the ear of their countrymen, rhetoricians in their schools; but Paul's heart went out thus in desire over souls about to hear that message from God which, in whatever manner put, is the turning-point of salvation or perdition to all in contact with it. No doubt the soul is beyond all price for everyone in view of such everlasting issues. Yet it was no light thing even for the apostle to confront, without his seeking it but at their own desire, the great ones of the earth with all that swelled their train.

'And Agrippa said to Paul, It is permitted thee to speak for274 thyself. Then Paul stretched out his hand and entered on his defence. Touching all things of which I am accused by Jews, king Agrippa, I count myself happy that I am to make my defence before thee today,275 especially as thou art skilled in all customs and questions that are among Jews. Wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.

'My manner of life then from my youth which was from the beginning among my nation and276 at Jerusalem know all Jews, knowing me before from the outset, if they be willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand to be judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers, unto which our twelve tribes earnestly serving night and day hope to arrive. And concerning

this hope I am accused by4 Jews, O king277. Why is it judged incredible with you if God raiseth dead [men]?' (vers. 1-8).

It may be a small matter, yet it is well to avoid the mistake of confounding the apostle's act here with what he did in the synagogue of Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:16), or what Alexander did in the tumultuous assembly at Ephesus (Acts 19:33). This was 'beckoning with the hand', quite different in character and aim from stretching it forth, here too with a chain. What a witness of the world's enmity to God's infinite grace in Christ! For, to say nothing of his loving labours, wherein had His servant done wrong? He was sharing the sufferings of Christ.

It will be observed that the apostle graciously passes by the various calumnies of the Jews which had been put forward by their venal orator and the unscrupulous men who supported his charges. He expresses his satisfaction at having to speak before one so exceptionally competent as the king in all the ways and controversies of Jews, as he does not fail even in this acknowledgment to preface it with an allusion to such accusations coming from Jews, not 'the' Jews.

In this connection there is no article in the text of verses 2, 3, as there should be none in verses 4 and 7, though in verse 4 there is much conflict among the MSS. (even the best uncials), and only Lachmann, and Alford, Tregelles, with Westcott and Hort, follow BCpm. E, et al., here, against the rest in omitting the article. Nor is it to be wondered at that Tischendorf who had dropped it in his later editions up to the seventh, went back in his eighth to that of his earlier issues in 1841 and both of

1842. The fact is that the sense required in this phrase here seems without example in the New Testament, where in other cases πάντες οἱ Ἰουδῖιοι is the correct form, and the article, as far as I have noticed, could not be omitted without damage. Here there is a distinct and unusual peculiarity; for ‘all the Jews’ are not meant, but all Jews knowing Paul before from the outset. This accordingly requires πάντες Ἰουδαῖοι προγινῶσκωντές με ἄνωθεν.

All Greek Testament students know of course the late Dean Alford’s note on verse 2, which seems a long-standing reproach to scholars and ought to have been repudiated far and wide: for I cannot doubt there must be not a few besides the late Bishop of Durham, who are aware of the fallacy. ‘There is no force in Meyer’s observation that by the article before Ἰουδαίων, Paul wishes to express that the charges were made by some, not by all of the Jews. That omission is the one so often overlooked by the German critics (e.g., Stier also here), after a preposition. See Middl. ch. vi. , 1, and compare κατὰ Ἰουδαιόυς in the next verse, of which the above cannot be said’ (Greek Test. ii.. 276, fifth ed. 1865).

Now it is admitted that the celebrated German expositor’s remark is imperfect, even though in many cases true. The omission of the article is due here and everywhere to presenting the word or combination of words characteristically, whilst the use of the article presents it as an object before the mind. There may be a very few exceptions, but these only prove that the rule is otherwise universal. And prepositions are in no way an exception, though they admit freely of serving to define the characteristic design of the anarthrous construction, which has been overlooked by English scholars quite as

much perhaps as German. This is exactly one of the great defects of Bishop Middleton's able treatise, which has for effect the making imaginary exceptions as numerous as the rule. This of itself ought to have indicated failure in generalization. John iv. 9 is a plain illustration of the principle: not only πῶς σὺ

Ἰουδαῖος ὤν which every one sees, but

Ἰυοδαῖοι Σαμαρείταις where the article for either would be out of place if the object were, as it certainly is, to mark both characteristically.

It is no question of 'some' no doubt. And the article might have been with truth prefixed to both; but the meaning would have been altered. The two peoples would then stand contrasted as objects, not characteristically as they are now. Compare for this a selection from the book of the Acts: Acts 2:5, 7, 9-11; Acts 11:19; Acts 14:1, 5, 19; Acts 18:4; Acts 19:10, 17; Acts 20:21; Acts 25:10. Again, any intelligent examination of the Greek Testament cannot fail to convince that the preposition makes no difference whatever. The article is or is not used with the word in question like every other, in accordance with its principle of insertion or omission.

Thus in Matt. 28:15 character is the point, and therefore it is παρὰ Ιουδαίοις. In John 4:22 the Jews are the object, and hence it is ἐκ τῶν Ἰουδαίων: so in John 10:19, and John 11:54, ἐν τοίς Ἰουδαιονς; in John 11:19, ἐκ τῶν Ἰουδαίων; in John 18:38, πρὸς τοὺς Ἰουδαοίυς. It is really a total oversight of the nice shades of thought in the Greek language to conceive that there is the least laxity or exception after prepositions. Perhaps the notion is due to the difficulty of always representing the

distinction in English, which sometimes compels us to use our definite article where there is none in Greek. But this is no right reason to deny that there is invariably an intended difference. Weigh Acts 23:8 where we have Σαδδουκαῖοι and Φαριοαῖοι without the article, though there is no preposition. If οἱ had been prefixed to each, it would have been true; but the absence of the article makes them characteristic, however hard it may be to express it in English.

And there is an analogous difference in the cases before us, alike when with or without prepositions. ‘I am accused by Jews’ in verses 2 and 7 is far more forcible than if the article had been inserted. It was not lost on Agrippa or Festus or the Jews that heard it. Of all men Jews were the last to have accused Paul for proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection that is from among the dead. Sadduceanism had alas! withered up their old faith. As a fact too, which may have weighed with Meyer and Stier, the Pharisees diverged in Acts 23 from the dominant faction which persecuted Paul. The preposition clearly gives no licence, (ὑπό) Jews, not the Jews, being meant. Nor is it otherwise with κατὰ Ιουδαίους, however confidently urged. Doubtless ‘according to the Jews’ would have been true in fact but it is stated characteristically, and here again as ‘Jews’, not ‘the Jews’ is the force intended, so it is evident once more that the preposition does not really affect the question. The article is inserted or omitted with prepositions on its own principle. Lastly, to be correct, πάντες οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι would require οἱ προγινώσκοντές qualifying the subject, πάντες Ἰουδαῖοι προγινώσκοντές is correct as it is given; for it means only all such Jews as previously knew Paul from the outset. In a word it is characteristic and

therefore anarthrous. Not only is πάντες οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι the more usual expression, but quite distinct in sense; for it means the whole Jewish people as a known, definite and complete object, whereas the phrase here means all Jews qualified by the peculiar and described knowledge of Paul.

Returning from this digression, we may note that the apostle begs for a patient hearing from one so skilled as Agrippa, and dwells (vers. 4, 5) on his known early life under strict Pharisaic belief and discipline ‘among my nation and at Jerusalem’, as all Jews cognisant from its outset could testify if willing.

But the question, he insists, for which he stood for judgment was the hope of the promise made by God unto our fathers (ver. 6), unto which our twelve tribes earnestly serving, day and night, hope to arrive (ver. 7). How strange and flagrant that, of all men, Jews should lay accusation against him for that hope! Certainly his testimony to the risen Jesus did not weaken faith in the promise of the Messiah or in the resurrection of the dead. Yet the whole nation in their public and earnest service of God night and day bore witness of their hope of attaining to that promise. Why is it judged incredible if God raises dead men? The prisoner assuredly did believe what the service of the chosen nation confessed night and day. Were Jews then gainsayers of their own boasted faith?

The apostle returns from argument to the account of his own life, from which he had turned aside for a moment.

‘I therefore thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus the Nazarene; which things I also did in Jerusalem; and I both shut up

many of the saints in prisons, having received the authority from the chief priests, and I railed against [them] when they were put to death; and throughout all the synagogues, often punishing I was compelling them to blaspheme, and being exceedingly mad against them I was pursuing them even as far as to the outside cities' (vers. 9-11).

We have repeated allusions in the Epistles to Paul's life before conversion. Thus to the Galatians he wrote, 'For ye have heard of my manner of life at one time in Judaism that beyond bounds I was persecuting the church and ravaging it, and was advancing in Judaism beyond many of mine own age in my race, being more exceedingly' a zealot of my ancestral traditions' (Gal. 1:13, 14). To the Philippians his language is, 'As to law a Pharisee, as to zeal persecuting the church, as to righteousness that is in law found blameless' (Phil. 3:5, 6). Lastly, to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:13) he says, 'Though formerly a blasphemer, and a persecutor and an insulter; but I obtained mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief.'

Here he lets us see how unsafe a guide conscience is for the natural man, no matter what may be his religious helps. He considered it his duty to oppose the name of Jesus and zealously persecute all who called on Him. Nor does God accept such a plea. He had sent His Son with adequate proof of His Messiahship for all who would compare His written word with the facts of Jesus the Nazarene: prophecy accomplished, miracles wrought not only by Himself but by His servants, and of a character quite peculiar, yet harmonizing with a teaching altogether unexampled; and a moral power of holy life ending in a death of deepest shame on the

cross, which He ever held out as not man's sin only, but God's grace as the ransom for sinners, to the reality of which all sacrifices pointed from Abel downward. Paul therefore had acted ignorantly in unbelief, as do others who refuse all revelation or misuse one part to reject another still fuller and more glorious.

The greater the religious zeal in such a state of unbelief, the farther it carries the devotee from the present testimony of God. Hence it was that Paul gave himself up with all his soul to opposing the faith of Jesus as the Christ in Jerusalem, which he would feel was outraged by His claims. Here, before Agrippa, he does not hesitate to confess to his own shame that he shut up 'many of the saints' in prisons. To the Jews he had employed the more vague expression, 'this Way' (Acts 22:4); as Luke in the history spoke of 'the disciples of the Lord' (Acts 9:1). How little he so thought when he received the requisite authority from the chief priests! Nor was it only imprisoning. When it was a question of putting them to death, had he not given an adverse vote? Notably it was so in Stephen's case, as this Book records. Had he not visited all the synagogues, often punishing souls and forcing out blasphemy if possible? And had he not in his excessive madness pursued them even into cities outside the land?

But a mighty change was at hand. Not a hint of relenting appears here or elsewhere, not one emotion of pity for the victims, not a trace of self-judgment or hesitation in his own course. Who verified so conspicuously the Lord's own words? 'They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the hour cometh that whosoever killeth you shall think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do, because they have not known the

Father nor Me' (John 16:2, 3). This is the new revelation of the Messiah come and rejected; and on that rejection bringing to light the Father and the Son, wholly unknown to those who in their zeal for the law broke out into hatred and persecution of what was beyond them and condemned their unbelief.

'On which [business] when proceeding unto Damascus with authority and commission of the chief-priests, at midday on the road I saw, O king a light above the brightness of the sun shining round me and those that were proceeding with me. And when we all fell to the earth, I heard a voice saying unto me in the Hebrew language, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? [It is] hard for thee to kick against goads. And I said, Who art Thou Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest' (vers. 12-15).

Never was sovereign grace so signally demonstrated. I do not speak of the wonder. But now evidently the Lord was giving a typical case, in the letter it would seem for the Jews by and by, in spirit for the Christian now. For what could more completely prove that Christ is all to him that believes? To a man up to that moment blinded by his legal zeal against the grace of God in Christ, that very Christ reveals Himself, sweeping into nothingness all that a Jew boasted of and rested in, and identifying Himself in the glory of God with the One Who died, between two crucified robbers, the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

On earth Messiah is to be set God's King on His holy hill of Zion. This is the decree. Judgment will surely silence all that oppose, be they kings or nations, rulers or peoples. Their rage is as vain as all their imaginations to

the contrary. Execution of judgment will make all plain to every eye. Then will Messiah ask and receive the nations for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. Then will He break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. It will be no longer as now grace preached, but the kingdom established by divine power seen and felt beyond question; and the kings of the earth will be wise, and the judges instructed, serving Jehovah with fear and rejoicing with trembling (Psalm 2).

Now Christ sits in heaven on the Father's throne, and has a new object of love and a new testimony carried on here below by the Holy Spirit suited to His glory on high and that object of love is the church which is His body. This mystery is great, as it must be, for we speak about Christ and about the church; concurrently with which goes forth the gospel of God's grace to every creature under heaven, all distinctions of Jew and Gentile vanishing meanwhile.

Paul was called to be a minister, both of the church and of the gospel, as he says himself in Col. 1:23-25. And the special manner of his conversion was exactly suited in the wisdom and goodness of God to this ministry. For it was not only unmistakable grace in its deepest character, but from heavenly glory entirely above the distinctions so important on earth. And Paul alone was there personally favoured, though the truth of it was to act most powerfully on souls all over the earth. This may help to show the immense importance of what the apostle recounted that day, in substance recorded now for the third time in the brief Book of the Acts.

Impossible to doubt that a divine person speaks out from the brightness beyond that of the sun at midday. If all were prostrate and heard but a sound, Paul could not mistake the voice of His lips, saying to him (and in the Hebrew language), ‘Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?’ How overwhelming, yet how blessed, to hear in answer to his question of astonishment, ‘I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest’! Thus even from the starting-point he heard the truth that the saints are one with Him. To persecute them is to persecute Jesus.

Doubtless the blessed apostle had revelations of the Lord, and from Him, not a few afterwards; and the bearings of the mystery, as well as its consequences were made known to him by the Spirit. It is, however, full of interest to learn that the germ of all was planted in him, as we see here, from the moment that grace wrought in his soul and brought him into God’s marvellous light. He obeyed the truth immediately. It is hard to kick against goads, on the one hand; and on the other the Lord had drawn his heart into the love of the truth, whatever it might cost.

He was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, which thenceforth gave its impress to his life, his faith, and his testimony. ‘And straightway in the synagogues he proclaimed Jesus, that He is the Son of God.’ He was Messiah, but far more; eternally the Son; now exalted and given to be Head to the church in the heavenly places; universal Lord to the glory of God the Father, in virtue of Whose name all things shall bow; as indeed He is our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Henceforth Saul could and did say, ‘For me to live is Christ’.

The decisive words, ‘I am Jesus,’ were uttered to one who could not doubt the utterer was the Lord; nor this only, but ‘I am Jesus Whom thou persecutest’, the germ of that mystery (and it is a great one) which the astonished hearer was to develop beyond all others, even of the apostles. Thereon follows what is of the deepest interest.

‘But rise up and stand on thy feet; for to this end I appeared to thee, to appoint thee a servant and a witness both of what thou hast seen and of those things wherein I shall appear to thee, taking thee out from the people and from the Gentiles unto whom I send thee, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness unto light and the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and inheritance among those that are sanctified by faith that is in Me. Whence, king Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but reported both to those in Damascus first, and in Jerusalem, and through all the country of Juda and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance. On account of these things the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to slay me. Having therefore obtained help that is from God I stand unto this day, witnessing both to small and great saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said should come, whether Christ should suffer, whether He first by resurrection of [the] dead should announce light both to the people and to the Gentiles (vers. 16-23).

Such a vision to such an end stamped on Paul the apostolic title in its highest character. It was from heaven in the power of resurrection life and ascension glory; and this not only by one determining act, but with the guarantee of all that was to be made known from

him personally in the future. We should not know from this account that he was blind for three days and that Ananias was sent directly by the Lord to heal as well as baptize him. Nor have we particulars of his testimony either in Damascus or in Jerusalem, any more than of his going away into Arabia. Each fact is set forth where it was called for; all was stated not only with truthfulness but according to holy and divine design, as is invariably the case in scripture. The Lord led either Luke or Paul according to His will to say what was fitting. Here the apostle gives summarily what was of moment for his audience, and for all that should read and weigh the words afterwards.

It was not only to convert and save him that the Lord had spoken to Saul of Tarsus. He was to arise and stand on his feet; for the Lord had appeared to him to appoint him a servant (ὑπηρέτην) and a witness both of what he then saw and of those things in which He was to appear to him. A work lay before him of immense magnitude and unprecedented character. And the Lord's revelations then and afterwards were of all moment. He was to be a typical servant too, though his own calling might be unique; for no such appearing of the Lord was to be the portion of those who should follow in the faith and footsteps of Paul.

Verse 17 is not well given by either the Revisers or the Authorized Version. Though the word may bear 'delivering', as it often signifies, its simpler meaning of 'taking out' is far more suitable to the context and the truth intended and verified in the apostle's career. It is admitted on all hands that the Lord's taking Saul out from the people (or the Jews) is suitable, but De Wette and Meyer allege that it does not chime in with the

Gentiles. This seems quite a mistake. Separation from both is most appropriate to characterize his position, and there is no need to extend ‘unto whom I send thee’ beyond the latter. He was to be apostle of Gentiles or uncircumcision, and as such magnifies his function in Rom. 11:13, 14. The ‘I’ is emphatic, and the adverb ‘now’ only added by inferior witnesses.

The difficulty these scholars feel is owing to their ignorance of Christian position, and even of Christianity according to scripture. For the Jew believing in Christ is not levelled down to a Gentile, nor yet is the believing Gentile raised up to that of the Jew; but the Holy Spirit unites both to Christ in heavenly glory, while at the same time the gospel of grace goes forth indiscriminately, but to the Gentile practically, as the once favoured nation is given up to temporary blindness in God’s just judgment. Never was there a more striking representative of both than the apostle, minister of the church and minister of the gospel (Col. 1:23-25). Stier has only noticed half the beauty of the contrast; for if Peter declares himself a witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed’, Paul was a witness of the glory of Christ and a partaker of His sufferings; and it is him we are called to imitate, though we only by faith see Christ glorified. To share His sufferings is the Christian’s and the believer’s moral glory.

Then follows in verse 18 a vivid description of Paul’s work among the Gentiles: ‘to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness unto light and the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and inheritance among those that are sanctified by faith that is in Me’. Doubtless Jews needed these operations of grace no less really than the nations; but in the latter

case the necessity was far more conspicuous, besotted as they were not only in shameless immorality but by gross superstitions which darkened and demoralized them more than if they had had no religion at all. If, as the Jews say, it was reserved for the Messiah to open the eyes of the blind literally, here we see how He sent His apostle to do the work not physically alone but, morally. And this was manifested by Gentiles, when they heard the call of the Lord, turning from darkness into light, and (defining yet more their sources) from the power of Satan unto God, followed by the great characteristic privileges of the gospel, the reception of remission of sins and allotment among the sanctified by faith in Christ. For there was now a new, deeper, fuller sanctification, not fleshly or by ordinance merely as Israel's was; but living and genuine by believing on Christ, the permanent result of an accomplished separation to God from the Christian's starting-point.

The effect of such an announcement of sovereign grace, not only for Paul himself but in his mission, was immediate and Immense 'Whence, king Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but reported both to those in Damascus first, and in Jerusalem, and through all the country of Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance' (vers. 19, 20). Undoubtedly, it had been not only rebellion, but madness and destruction to have slighted such a vision and call; but this voucher the apostle gave, which nothing but self-willed folly could evade or escape, a life of unequalled sufferings as well as labours in bearing witness of its truth — truth so all-important to every child of man. Hence his burning zeal in reporting to all near or far off that they should repent

and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance. For as the ground of the gospel consists of a Person revealed and facts accomplished (not merely a promise as of old), no call to believe can be agreeable to man's heart, and grace only can effect aught vital or acceptable, the conscience being bad and the will estranged from God, yea enmity against Him.

There are doctrines infinitely deeper elsewhere, and beyond comparison nearer to man's heart, to say nothing of their essential furtherance of God's glory. But all the doctrines flow from Christ and His work, and a renewed child can rest confidingly in both and be drawn out in wonder love and praise, as well as in a life of devotedness and self-sacrifice. This, however, never can be apart from repentance and turning to God. As surely as there is the faith of God's elect there is a divinely wrought repentance, which through the confidence which Christ inspires wins the soul to God in self-abhorrence and earnest pursuit of His will, doing works worthy of repentance.

It would be incredible if it were not the most certain fact that a faith and life so formed are abominable in Jewish eyes. 'On account of these things the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to slay me' (ver. 21). But none of these things swerved or even moved the blessed apostle, save to sorrow over them. 'Having therefore obtained help that is from God, I stand unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying nothing but what Moses and the prophets said should come, whether Christ should suffer, whether he first by resurrection of [the] dead should announce light both to the people and to the Gentiles' (vers. 22, 23).

It is not that the Jews erred in looking for a glorious kingdom of Messiah, of which Israel should be the centre on earth, but that the law and the prophets were clear that the Messiah should suffer and die as a sacrifice, as well as in rejection by man and even Israel, and thus risen from the dead bong in blessing of grace and mercy to faith before the glory be revealed publicly. For it needs no reasoning to prove that the suffering and death cannot be after the glory; 'but first must He suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation.' 'Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?' So Christ, beginning from Moses and all the prophets, interpreted in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself (Luke 24:27).

The truth was fairly set before the king. The prophets and Moses had told out what was now accomplished in the Christ that Paul preached. If their testimony was divine, He Who had suffered and risen from the dead is their sure fulfilment, however much may remain. The question whether the Christ should suffer, and whether He first by rising from death should proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles can admit of no answer but the most distinct affirmation. The Messiah to suffer, die, rise, and so shed light on man universally, is the surest force of the law and the prophets. This alone gives meaning to sacrifices, this explains the cleansing of the defiled. No doubt there is the kingdom to come, and the judgment of the world as well as of the dead, but the basis even of all the rest lay in the dead and risen Messiah, the object of faith for salvation to every believer, Jew or Gentile. Here, however, the apostle does not go beyond present facts.

‘And as he thus defended himself, Festus saith with a loud voice, Paul, thou art mad, much learning doth turn thee to madness. But Paul saith, I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but speak forth words of truth and soberness. For the king is cognizant of these things, unto whom also I speak with openness; for I am persuaded that none of these things is hidden from him, for this hath not been done in a corner. Believest thou, king Agrippa, the prophets? I know that thou believest. And Agrippa [said] unto Paul, With little [pains] thou art persuading278 to make me a Christian. And Paul [said], I would to God that both with little and with great [pains]279 not thou only but also all that hear me this day should become as I too am, except these bonds. And 280the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them; and when they had retired, they spoke one to another, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or bonds. And Agrippa said to Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar’ (vers. 24-32).

Festus, ignorant of God and His word and bewildered to the highest degree by the assertion of Messiah’s resurrection, forgot the gravity of the occasion and of his own office, and branded the apostle as a madman, though softening the term by imputing it to his much reading. Calm in the sense of God’s presence and of the truth which alone gives true freedom, Paul shows the only moral elevation discernible in that splendid throng, and so with real courtesy rebuts the senseless charge with words bearing the stamp of the ‘truth’ he testified, and of the ‘sobriety’ in which he laid all before others.

Love gives a single eye. With that keen discernment which characterized him, he turns from the benighted

heathen who saw nothing beyond the present life and therefore saw it only as a question of power and pleasure and fame, an utter degradation for the undying soul, consistent only in shutting out the light of the truth and even the warning of conscience not wholly ignorant of sin. From the heathen he turns to the Jewish king who, immoral though he was, knew what altogether condemned himself as well as the glorious visions of which Messiah is the centre in Holy Writ. ‘For the king’, said he, ‘is cognizant of these things, unto whom also I speak with openness, for I am persuaded that none of these things is hidden from him: for this hath not been done in a corner.’ It was notorious that no man living was more interested in or familiar with all that affected the Jews than the younger Herod Agrippa. But how little such acquaintance with facts avails, unless the Holy Spirit bring the word of God home to an exercised conscience! unless a soul bow to God in the overwhelming sense of its own sin and ruin, yet clinging to the hope of mercy in Him! Still to one that owned scripture as divine the apostle could speak as he could not with the same degree of freedom to another who denied and scorned it.

Therefore he turns in the most unexpected way with an appeal to the king’s conscience: ‘King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.’ Surprised out of his imperturbable self-complacency, and endeavouring to cover his confusion by a jest the king replies for it is no answer, ‘With little pains thou art persuading to make me a Christian.’ Thus appears to be the sense if we take into account the critical reading μεγάλῳ in what follows. Were the Received Text justified which gives πόλλῳ, ‘much’, this rendering could hardly

stand, for the more natural force would then be ‘in a little while’, distinguished from ‘much time’

It is plain that Agrippa had no answer to what had been shown from scripture and the gospel facts. It is equally plain that the conclusion was irresistible, which he strove to parry. The truth is no question of reasoning but of faith in the testimony of God: only there is no root save in the conscience that owns sin and looks to God’s grace in spite of it. And Christ and His work on the cross give the troubled soul confidence; because God sent His Son into the world for the twofold blessing, blessings equally needed by the sinner and flowing from God Himself, that we should live through Christ, and that He should die a propitiation for us. Faith in God’s testimony of His love Who therefore gave His Son receives these infinite blessings in Christ. But it is not mere mind that makes the discovery; and if it were, it could avail nothing. It is only to the babe, to the broken in heart? to the consciously ruined sinner, that the truth comes from God. For He is calling souls to the knowledge of Himself, not training theologians. It is salvation made known in Christ, not religious science which the world builds up for itself out of it.

So the apostle takes up the king’s word to escape further parley, and takes it up with a love and dignity suited to the Holy Spirit that dwelt in him. It is the simple but deep utterance of a heart supremely happy in the Saviour, and in the assurance of grace in Him that could embrace not Agrippa only but all that composed his audience that day, What mercy to man! What goodness of God! What inexhaustible power and fullness in the name of Jesus! Even in the most general form such an ardent wish of blessing had been much. But the

more clearly we regard his words the wonder grows. ‘I would to God that both with little and with great pains not thou only but also all that hear me this day should become as I too am, except these bonds.’

This largeness of heart suits admirably Paul who made known God’s righteousness unto all and upon all those that believe. This readiness to take all pains is in keeping with the debtor both to Greeks and barbarians, both to wise and to foolish, who working night and day not to burden any, preached the gospel to all. But the perfect happiness of his soul flows over when he wishes to God for them that they might be as he too was. What! the man who had been beaten for dead, and in prison for years, known to be innocent by successive governors, yet chained to a soldier night and day to please a people whom these governors despised and hated. Yes, this is the man who wishes for them all, by little pains and by great as the case might be, that they might not be forgiven or saved only, good a wish as this is, but far far more, that they might become even as he, filled with the conscious joy of being blessed with Christ and enjoying the present cloudless favour of God. Indeed nothing less is normal Christianity. Yet he adds, ‘except these bonds’: this he could not, did not, wish for one of them. Truly it was a soul that kept itself in the dove of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Was there one heart that responded, one conscience pierced? We know not, but only that forthwith the court retired, yet owned that the prisoner’s cause deserved neither death nor bonds. Agrippa especially, and he was the most competent to speak, declared that he might have been set at liberty but for his appeal to Caesar. How little the king knew God’s purpose or ways! Paul, as

he suffered with Christ, was called in due time to suffer for Him. In due time he was to have his wish to become conformed to the death of Christ (Phil. 3:9-11).

274 Here and elsewhere in these verses occur several readings scarce affecting a version.

275 Beza alone adopted

εἰδώς (in his edition of 1582 and afterwards) ‘in uno codice peruetusto — certainly an error, for the three cursives that give it are comparatively modern. Had he known ἐπιοστάμενος there would have been better reason, as AC, et al., have it. But either is a gloss.

276 ABEgr., et al.

277

των and

Ἀγρίππα omitted by the best authorities

τῶν by almost all.

278 A reads

πείθῃ, ‘thou art persuading thyself’, which Alford adopts, but BEHLP, et al, support πείθεις as in the Text. Rec. Only instead of γενέσθαι AB and four cursives with several ancient versions sustain ποιῆσαι.

279

μεγάλω AB, six cursives, and almost all the ancient versions instead of πολλῳ, as in most copies followed by the Text. Rec.

280 The Text. Rec. adds ‘when he said these things’ with the mass, contrary to the most ancient and best copies. The ancient text gives the impression of an abrupt closure on Agrippa’s part; the addition takes it away.

Acts 27

Thereon follows the voyage of the apostle to Rome, a narrative full of interest in every way. What believer can fail to find refreshment and cheer as he ponders its details and sees the prisoner as perfectly master of the situation on board ship in a storm and wreck, as before in the presence of judges and a king who attested his guiltlessness? But what reader of any version, even if believing, could anticipate, what every scholar ought to know, that here is more of real information about an ancient merchant ship, quite simply and incidentally conveyed, than is found perhaps in all the extant remains of Greek and Roman authors? So the late Dean Howson owns in Smith's Bible Dictionary, as indeed the soundness of the judgment is notorious.

'And when it was determined that we should sail away for Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other-prisoners to a centurion named Julius of an Augustan cohort. And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium about281 to sail to282 the places along Asia, we put to sea, Aristarchus of Macedonia, a Thessalonian, being with us. And the next day we arrived at Sidon, and Julius treated Paul kindly and permitted [him] to go unto the (or, his283) friends and receive attention. And thence putting to sea we sailed under the lee of Cyprus because the winds were contrary. And having sailed across the sea that is along Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came unto Myra [a city] of Lycia. And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy, and put us on board. And sailing slowly many days and coming with difficulty abreast of Cnidus, as the wind did not further suffer us,

we sailed under the lee of Crete abreast of Salmone, and coasting it with difficulty, we came unto a certain place called Fair Havens, near to which was [the] city of Lasaea. And much time being spent and the voyage being already dangerous because the Fast was already past, Paul admonished them saying, Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship but also of our lives. But the centurion believed the master and the ship-owner rather than the things said by Paul. And the harbour being ill-suited to winter in, the most gave counsel to put to sea thence, if by any means they might arrive at Phoenix to winter in, a harbour of Crete, looking north-east and south-east. And when a south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and coasted close by Crete' (vers. 1-13)

We see at once that Luke is with the apostle on his voyage, and Aristarchus also. 'One' (ver. 1) in this case is quite uncalled for, as in all the Protestant English Versions from Tyndale. The fact is that he has been before us from time to time in this Book as the companion of the apostle. See Acts 19:29; Acts 20:4; as he is afterwards named in Col. 4:10; Philemon 24. Neither appears to have been at this time a prisoner. Both became partakers with the one that was so used. Love led these to Join him in the face of shame and danger. They did not therefore cast away their boldness which has great recompense of reward.

Of Julius the centurion nothing more is certainly known than what is here recorded? but we are enabled to see at least his amiability, and the moral respect inspired by the apostle from first to last, hindered, one may say perhaps, at one point which must in the sequel have

increased it more and more as we shall observe. It would seem that there was no special Augustan cohort, nor does the text say more than that he commanded a cohort which bore that designation. It is known that the emperor Nero had a body-guard organized at this very date, consisting of veterans specially called out for service. Julius may have been an officer among them. They were called Augustani (Tacitus Annales xiv. 15). Why he was in Palestine does not appear: if there, we can readily understand the prisoners and soldiers being under his charge on his return to Rome.

It seems amazing that there should be the least doubt about ‘Asia’ in verse 2. Neither the continent, nor even Asia Minor is meant, but the Roman province, which was but the western seaboard of the latter according to the usage of the Book.

‘The [or his] friends’ were the believers in Sidon, a mode of speech which we find in the Third Epistle of John (ver. 14). Evil times made them manifest: false brethren turned aside, ashamed of the cross. What the ‘attention’ was that is meant is conjectural, and may be expressly left so to meet any case in future.

The lee of Cyprus was in this instance to the north of the island, the winds being contrary. Hence they coasted along the south of Cilicia and Pamphylia. Otherwise the direct course must have been south of Cyprus. But it would seem that the ship had to touch at places (ver. 2). which called them north. Myra lay due north of Alexandria; so that the ship from this port met the one of Adramyttium284 in that Mysian harbour. Both ships were in their right course according to the winds then blowing. Where the first was bound we are not told. But

the centurion avails himself of that from Alexandria, which had a cargo for Italy, and transferred all his company accordingly (ver. 6).

Great difficulties speedily follow; but disciples need not be agitated if the Lord seem not to heed. ‘Scarce’ as in the Authorized Version (ver. 7) does not give the thought intended, but ‘with difficulty’. The wind being about N.W., as Mr. Smith shows in his interesting Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul, made it slow and hard work to bring up the ship from Myra and Cnidus, even though with the advantage of a weather shore and a westerly current. The wind did not allow them to go on (not, to put in); so that their course lay under the lee of Crete, and this time its south side after sailing abreast of its eastern point, Salmone (called Sammonium by Pliny the elder, as by Strabo Σαμώνιον). And it may be mentioned that Fair Havens to this day bears the same name corrupted — Kalolimounias, five miles west of Cape Leonda, in the immediate neighbourhood of which inland, lie the ruins of Lasaea, as distinctly identified by our countrymen lately.

The insurmountable delay from adverse winds and other circumstances brought them to a season of no small peril in that sea (ver. 9); and the apostle gave counsel on which events soon after, but too late, impressed the seal of indisputable value. Nevertheless he seems not to claim divinely given foresight for his warning: the terms employed in verse 10 are rather his own judgment simply, in apparent contradistinction from the prophetic intimation announced in verses 21-26. ‘I perceive’, introducing a general admonition of danger, differs widely from ‘I believe God’ with a precise assurance of the loss of the ship but of no life among the passengers

and crew, which last he was unable to guarantee when he first spoke out.

But the shipmates and the shipowner were opposed to the warning words of the apostle; and we can easily understand why the centurion paid more heed to the opinion of men accustomed to the sea (ver. 11), themselves no doubt disposed to regard cheaply what a landsman might think or say. Then again, whatever its title promised, Fair Havens was beyond doubt inconvenient for wintering in, as the bay is open to almost one-half of the compass; and as all could see this, the majority advised to put to sea also from there, as from other places before (ver. 12): not that they meant to pursue the voyage to Italy in such weather and at such a time, but hoping to reach the unquestionably better port of Phoenix,285 now identified as Lutro, though well aware of their risk in attempting it.

It may interest some to know that competent men declare Fair Havens to be a better harbour than its exposed look conveys at first sight. Mr. Smith who studied the whole question on the spot with minute care and professional skill pronounced it to be ‘so well protected by islands and reefs, that though not equal to Lutro, it must be a very fair winter harbour; and that considering the suddenness, the frequency, and the violence with which gales of northerly wind spring up, and the certainty that, if such a gale sprung up In the passage from Fair Havens to Lutro, the ship must be driven off to sea, the prudence of the advice given by the master and owner was extremely questionable.’ (Smith’s Voyage etc., p. 88, 2nd ed.) Hence we may learn that there is such a thing as divine guidance in the ordinary things of life, short of inspiration, no doubt, but superior

to man’s experience and wisdom. Are we so unbelieving as to deny its reality save in an apostle? Blind indeed must we be, if we do, to the facts of every day among God’s children.

The value of a close adherence to the text is remarkably shown by the numerous mistranslations of this chapter, which had introduced confusion and insuperable difficulty for exposition. A striking instance occurs at the end of verse 12, where the Authorized Version represents this haven of Crete, Phoenix or Lutro, as lying ‘toward the south-west and north-west.’ What the clause says is that the harbour looks ‘down’ (κατὰ) south-west and down north-west. But looking down a wind means along or with the direction in which it blows, and not to the quarter whence it came. The meaning therefore is that the port of Phoenix looks north-east, and southeast, the points precisely opposite to those which have been understood. Now this (says Mr. Smith) is exactly the position of Lutro, which ‘looks’ or is open to the east; but, having an island in front which shelters it, it has two entrances, one looking to the north-east, which is κατὰ Λίβα, and the other to the south-east, κατὰ Χῶρον.286 Hackett, who does not think it safe to give up the common interpretation, objects to this view of Mr. Smith that it involves two inconsistencies. First, it assigns opposite senses to the same term, viz., south-west as the name of a wind and north-east as the name of a quarter of the heavens. Secondly, it destroys the force of βλέποντα, which implies that the wind and the harbour confronted each other, and not that they were turned from each other. But the reasoning is faulty, because the fact is misunderstood. The harbour in question does look with

the wind in each case, so that the force of ‘looking’ is preserved intact; and again the winds in question are preserved in their exact force and not confounded with aught else. Only looking down south-west wind and down north-west wind means in fact looking north-east and south-east. The Authorized Version confounds κατὰ with πρός or εἰς. The direction toward the source of the wind is expressed by the latter; whereas the nautical phrase of down the wind means whither it blows. Hence Phoenix looked north-east and south-east. The look of the harbour signifies the direction to which — not from which — these winds blow. The harbour looked down the southwest and down the north-west winds, i.e., in both directions; and hence to the north-east and south-east quarters, as the resulting force. The winds are only to mark the outlook definitely. Nautical phrases abound in the chapter. Josephus uses κατὰ λίβα just as it is here (Antt. Jud. xv. 9, 6). See Liddell & Scott on κατὰ B.I. 1.

But appearances often deceive, as they did here. For when a south wind blew softly they thought to gain their purpose, and weighing anchor (‘lifting’ is the technical phrase), they coasted close by Crete. Here the Vulgate misled Wiclif, Tyndale, and Cranmer to give the imaginary port of Assos (the true place was away in Mysia, compare Acts 20:13, 14), instead of ‘close’, rectified in the Geneva Version after Beza who refuted the proper name with ability, and proved the necessity of understanding the adverb.

The result justified the apostle’s advice notwithstanding a fair start. But seamen ought to have remembered how apt a mild southerly breeze, in those seas especially, is to shift to a violent northerly wind. So it was now.

‘But not long after there beat down it a tempestuous wind that is called Euraquilo287; and when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave up and were driven. And running under the lee of a certain small island called Clauda288, we were able with difficulty to secure the boat: and when they hoisted it, they used helps, frapping the ship, and fearing lest they should be cast upon the Syrtis, they lowered the gear and so were driven. But as we were exceedingly pressed by the storm, the next day they began a clearance overboard; and the third [day] they289 cast out with their own hands the gear [or, furniture] of the ship. And when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm lay on, at last every hope that wished us saved was taken away. And when they had been long without food, then Paul stood forth in their midst and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened to me, and not have put to sea from Crete, and have gained this injury and loss. And now l exhort you to be of good courage, for there shall be no loss of life among you, only of the ship. For an angel of the God Whose I am and Whom I serve stood by me this night saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must stand before Caesar; and, behold, God hath granted thee all that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good courage; for I believe God that it shall be as it hath been spoken to me But we must be cast upon a certain island’ (vers. 14-26).

The hurricane that caught the ship ‘beat down’ from Crete, which appears to be the true force of κατ᾽ αὐτῆς, not ‘arose against it’, i.e., the ship, as in the Authorized Version (ver. 14). This is confirmed by Luke 8:23, though ἔβαλε κατὰ is a far more forcible expression than κατέβη... εἰσ as indeed the case here demanded.

Compare also, as Mr. Smith suggested, κατὰ τοῦ κρημνοῦ in Luke 8:33. Other ways of taking the words are unnatural in the extreme. Tyndale, after Luther probably, refers ‘it’ to ‘their purpose’ in verse 13. The version of Geneva (1557) should be noticed: ‘But anone after there arose agaynst Candie, a stormye wynd out of the north-east.’ Now this was not the fact. The wind blew down from Crete, not against Crete, which it could not do. Besides the accusative not the genitive would have been employed in that case. The Authorized Version, with most, understood the ship, which however is in the context always πλοῖον, and therefore ungrammatical. Only in verse 41 is ναῦς employed. The beating of the tornado down the highlands of Crete seems a far more graphic account than its striking against the ship, which was a matter of course in that sea when exposed to a rushing east-north-east wind.

And here it may be remarked that Euroclydon is no known appellation, nor is there any satisfactory source of the word. The more ancient εὐρακύλων is to be preferred, testified by the best MSS. and Versions. J. Bryant’s objections to the compound are not well grounded. Euro-Auster is a similar hybrid. A north-easterly wind fully accounts for the course of the ship. ‘Bear up into’ is more literally to ‘face’, a term often applied to the collisions of warfare and of common life. Some have attributed it to the practice of painting an ‘eye’ on each side of the prow, so common of old and not unknown still in the Levant.

The small island to the leeward of which they drove before the wind is now called Gozzo. Chlavda they say on the spot, which is the Romaic pronunciation of Clauda; so that the identification is certain. It was under

this lee that they got the boat on board, though with difficulty (ver. 16). When ἄραντες was used absolutely as in verse 13 (cf. Thucydides ii. 15), it meant weighing anchor, here in verse 17 it has its ordinary force of lifting or taking up. The ‘helps’ in question were means to counteract the violence of the gale, rather than the aid of the passengers as some have thought. ‘Frapping’ is the technical English expressed by ‘undergirding’. It is done by passing a large cable four or five times round the ship’s hull. It was common of old, but has been practised in recent times and on British ships, mercantile and naval. The precariousness of mere scholarship in explaining such a thing may be seen in the learned A. Bockh’s notion that the cable was applied horizontally. Indeed on his authority Dr. L. Schmitz so gave it in the article on ‘Ships’ in Dr. W. Smith’s Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities.

What is rendered in the Authorized Version ‘the quicksands’ ought really to be ‘the Syrtis’. Two Syrtes are spoken of. This was the greater or eastern, now the gulf of Sidra, which Admiral Smyth was the first to survey adequately, as shown in his Memoirs on the Mediterranean: an object of great and natural dread to ancient seamen.

In this same verse (17) occurs one of the most serious of the many mm takes in the older versions, even Meyer and other moderns perpetuating them. Had they ‘struck sail’, the ship must inevitably have been driven directly into the Syrtis. ‘It is not easy (says Mr. Smith) to imagine a more erroneous translation than that of our Authorized Version “Fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, they strake sail, and so were driven.” It is in fact equivalent to saying that, fearing a certain danger,

they deprived: themselves of the only possible means of avoiding it.' Some sail, as the authorities lay down and as common sense feels, is absolutely requisite to keep the ship steady, and hinder her from pitching about and rolling so deeply as to strain and work herself to pieces. Hence the measures necessary were that storm-sails should be set, and the ship go on the starboard tack. 'Lowering the gear' is the right translation. Kypke who was a sensible man and sound scholar, is surprisingly loose in his annotations here. He will have it to be 'letting down the anchor'! as βλέποντα κατὰ in verse 12 and elsewhere: he illustrates by βλέποντα πρός. It is singular that Khnl, De Wette, and Meyer followed in this wake, so inconsistent with the context.

In verse 18 we see them reduced to the very frequently adopted resource of getting rid of cargo, ἐκβολὴν ποιεῖσθαι being the proper terms employed, as we may see in the Onomasticon of Julius Pollux. In verse 19 they go farther, and 'with their own hands' the seamen threw away — what they would not have done save in imminent danger — the ship's furniture, spare gear, etc. The inability to see sun or stars added to their danger, and also the violence of the weather so prolonged.

But now leaving the details of the voyage, interesting though they are in the decisive proof they afford at every turn of the absolute reliableness of the divine word, and of its incomparable superiority to all the versions and the commentaries of the learned and pious, let us turn to the devoted servant of the Lord, who stands forth in the hour of need and danger and darkness. If he gently recalls their former slight of his counsel, it is neither to pain them nor to exalt himself. Dwelling in love, he dwelt in God and God in him; as

every Christian should; and thus he is enabled to use wisely what grace gave.

He confesses openly the secret of favour from on high, a favour that extended to them; for the true God despises not any, while He loves perfectly those whom He adopts as sons to Himself by Jesus our Lord. Yet He does not overlook His offspring, as the same apostle once preached to the Athenians, idolatrous though they were. It is of no small moment that we too should remember this; for evangelical men are apt to think only of the relations of grace. These are of all importance, and only too feebly held by the saints in general. We can scarcely exaggerate what sovereign grace has given us in Christ. But we do not well to slight what scripture reveals of the place man has, as man, and sinner though he be, in the divine mind and compassion. It is the more to be remembered in these days when infidel dreams of development or evolution entice and defile real believers. Truth ignored or neglected by the faithful is the constant resource of Satan for those who know not God and His Son.

Man has a relationship to God which he alone of earthly beings possesses. Other creatures here below began to live when they were organized. Not so man, till Jehovah Elohim breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, the ground of his immortal soul and of his immediate responsibility to God. Therefore, when for him death came in through sin, he alone is to rise again and to give account to God.

Undoubtedly another than Adam was in the counsels of God, the Second Man and Last Adam, infinitely higher than man, even the Son of God, no less than the Father,

in due time to become the new Head of divine blessing to God's glory, far, far, more than retrieving in obedience unto death what the old head had lost through disobedience; so that mercy might rejoice over judgment, and grace to the sinner be a display of God's righteousness in virtue of the blood of Jesus.

There are three considerations of no little moment to hold intact and without confusion. First, the moral nature of God abides in its invisible purity and honour. He loves good and hates evil. His will alone is entitled to guide and govern. The creature is responsible to obey Him. Secondly, the race being fallen and sinful (for Adam innocent had no child), grace in Christ alone produces what suits God's nature according to His word and by His Spirit; as grace alone provided an adequate and everlasting redemption in Christ's blood and gave that life in Him which is ever holy, dependent, obedient as He Himself was in all perfection. But, thirdly, God does not for all this give up His place as 'a faithful Creator.' He is the Saviour (i.e., Preserver) of all men, specially of those that believe. Not a sparrow falls on the ground without our Father; yea, the very hairs of our head are all numbered. Surely there is no reason to fear those that kill the body but are unable to kill the soul. He only is to be feared Who is able to kill both body and soul in hell. Not only are others not to be feared, but, as the children and servants of God, we are in a position, and ought to have the heart, to make supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings for all men; for kings and all that are in high places. no less than for the wretched, and suffering, and degraded, whom their fellows avoid and despise. Grace not only elevates above all the present glory of the world by uniting us to Christ

at God's right hand, but sheds abroad in our hearts the love of God through the Holy Ghost given to us.

All these elements we may see here full, and active, and in harmony. Christ before the heart delivers from mere and barren theory as well as onesidedness. Not only is there the union of humbleness and dignity, but faith and love with the unflinching confession of Him Whose he was and Whom he served. There is no seeking to please or win men as his aim. He abides the Lord's bondman. He testifies a direct revelation sent at that very time. He declares the witness it bore to God's compassion toward them all, united to His special favour to His servant; and all this in the midst of this busy, blind, selfish, ungodly world.

Two things are to be noticed in that divine message to the apostle, while a prisoner in the hands of the Gentiles through the malice of the Jews. First, he can speak of all his fellow-voyagers given him by God, not of course for eternal life, but for present security. Secondly, he predicts that they must be cast on a certain island, without pretending to know more. God had not disclosed its name: and he faithfully follows. Revelation was given to exalt not man but God.

'But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven to and fro in the Adriatic, about midnight the sailors surmised that they were drawing near to some country, and on sounding, found twenty fathoms, and after going a little farther and again sounding, found ten fathoms; and fearing that haply we should be cast off on rough places, they cast four anchors from the stern and wished that day were come. And as the sailors were seeking to flee out of the ship and had lowered the boat

into the sea, under pretext as though they would lay out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat and let her fall off. And while daylight was about to come on, Paul exhorted them all to partake of food, saying, [The] fourteenth day today ye wait and continue without food, having taken nothing. Wherefore I exhort you to partake of food for this is for your safety; for not a hair from the head of any of you shall perish. And when he said this, he took bread, and gave thanks to God before all, and having broken, he began to eat. And all were of good cheer, and themselves also took food. And we were in the ship, all the souls, two hundred and seventy-six. And being satisfied with food, they lightened the ship by throwing out the wheat into the sea. And when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but perceived a certain bay with a beach, on which they took counsel, if they could, to drive the ship. And casting off, they left the anchors in the sea, at the same time loosening the lashings of the rudder and hoisting the foresail to the wind, they made for the beach. And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground; and the bow stuck and remained immovable; but the stern began to break up by the violence [of the waves]. And the soldiers' counsel was that they should kill the prisoners, lest they should swim out and escape; but the centurion, wishing to save Paul, hindered them from their purpose, and commanded those able to swim to cast themselves off first and go to land, and the rest, some on planks and some on things from the ship. And it came to pass that all got safe to land' (vers. 27-44).

A fortnight's drifting under such a storm brought the end near, which is set as clearly before us as their previous course and efforts. The sounding of the lead indicated the approach of land, and no small danger imminent, which the night made more felt. There is no real difficulty in the Adriatic (ver. 27); because it was often used in a much wider application than to the sea between Greece and Italy, as has been shown in Ptolemy and in Pausanias. Modern usage confines the Adriatic to the gulf only. There is no ground, therefore, on this score to conceive of another Melita (that is, Melida) instead of Malta, as generally understood. The breakers (which are characteristic of the point of Koura, near St. Paul's Bay, as Mr. Smith has shown from Smyth's view of the headland), gave occasion, probably, to the surmise of the sailors, confirmed as it was by their repeated soundings (ver. 28). Anchoring from the stern (ver. 29) was the safer course under such circumstances; and ancient ships had many anchors. It is shown from the sailing directions that the ground is exceptionally good there; so that there is no danger as long as the cables hold.

The unworthy design of the sailors was defeated by Paul. It was not exactly 'casting out anchors', which would not require the use of a boat. Under pretence of extending anchors from the prow, which was no unusual measure, they meant to desert the ship (ver. 30); but his word of warning to the centurion and the soldiers sufficed: 'Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved' (ver. 31). With the promptitude of their class, they cut off the ropes and let the boat fall off (ver. 32). God had given His word to save all, but it must be in His way; and He

Who promised the end insists on His own means. We have only to be subject and obey.

Nor was the apostle vigilant only thus; he sought, and not in vain, to comfort all and animate them with courage and confidence in God on the eve of the utmost apparent peril. He besought all to partake of food after their long abstinence, assuring them absolutely of preservation (vers. 33, 34), and he set the example himself after thanking God before all (ver. 35). There is no ground for the observation of Olshausen that it was, for the Christians, the celebration of the Lord's Supper or of an agape. For though the terms are just such as were so employed, they are no less expressly applied to an ordinary meal in Luke 24:30, and elsewhere. Indeed, there is no small superstition in the sense too often attached to them. It is the object of the Eucharist which gives it its character; and this was quite out of place here. But the most ordinary food should be sanctified by the word of God and prayer, and the apostle here acts on his own instructions to Timothy (1 Tim. 4:5, 6). No wonder that all became cheerful and took food (ver. 36) after long dejection and disinclination with death before their eyes! Their number (ver. 37) is carefully added as two hundred and seventy-six, and then the lightening of the ship (a fresh nautical expression) by casting out the corn (ver. 38). They had eaten their last meal before the wreck, which is minutely described in the closing verses.

Wonder has been expressed that none of the sailors knew the land (ver. 39), but we are told by those competent to judge, that, remote from the well-known harbour of Valetta, this spot possesses no marked feature by which it might be recognized.

The Authorized Version here (ver. 40) is far from accurate. They did not take up the anchors, but cast them away (lit., round), and abandoned them (not ‘themselves’) into the sea. The loosing of the bands of the rudders, attached to the stern on each quarter, was a necessary act; for when a ship was anchored by the stern, the rudders had to be lifted out of the water and secured by lashings, which again were loosed when the ship got under way. Further, it was not the ‘mainsail’, but the foresail, which they raised to the wind. Possibly the French term misled here, but the weight of practical or circumstantial evidence, as in Smith’s Dissertation iii., seems decisive. In this sense ἀρτέμων occurs in no ancient Greek author. We see a foresail in an old painting of Pompeii. Luke alone designates it here. It is remarkable how the master and the pilot vanish from notice at all these times of danger, and for wise measures. The apostle really guides at the crisis. The sailors are only mentioned as meditating ineffectual treachery. The centurion takes action, with the soldiers on one occasion, on another preventing a cruel deed to secure themselves from risk as to the prisoners.

For now the supreme moment had arrived. The ship must be stranded, as it was impossible to save it any more than its lading. Making for the beach, they fell into a place where two seas met, apparently through the island now called Salmonetta, in St. Paul’s Bay; and there they drove the ship aground (ver. 41). In few spots, save there, could the fact have been as here described, owing to a deep deposit of mud, where the bow stuck and remained fast, whilst the stern began to break up, exposed as it was to the force of the waves.

The soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners (ver. 42). They were responsible under the severest penalties not to let them go, as even this Book itself shows on more occasions than one. But the centurion, not so much out of pity for the rest as through regard for Paul, interfered to save him at all cost (ver. 43). 'Wishing' is the force, not merely 'willing'. His order was for such as could swim to cast off and get to land; as the rest did, some on boards, and some on parts of the ship now going to pieces. They all got safe ashore, as verse 44 tells us. The promise was made good, to God's glory, as a living God and faithful Creator.

281

μέλλοντι (i.e. the ship) AB, some 30 cursives, and the ancient versions. μέλλοντες (i.e., we) Text. Rec. with which agrees HLP and most MSS.

282

εἰς is doubtful, but the sense remains.

283 The article is genuine, though omitted in the Text. Rec.

284 It is a strange oversight of Grotius, followed by not a few commentators, that Hadrumetum on the African coast is here meant. Even to this day Adramyti retains its old name, though reduced from an important seaport to a poor fishing village.

285 This harbour on the south of Crete ought to have been distinguished by its true name from Phoenice or Phoenicia (Acts 11:19; 15:3; 21:2), the Canaanite land of Tyre and Sidon: the one deriving its designation from the palm tree that flourished there; the other from the

famous dye, or shell fish, that produced all shades from red to violet, generally called purple.

286 The translators not only mistake

κατὰ in this connection, but they omit the precision of the repetition of it from Tyndale downwards, as others did before them.

287 So in the oldest MSS. and Versions; but most have Euroclydon.

288 In the Vatican and Vulgate it is Cauda.

289 Most MSS., et al., have ‘we’, but not the most ancient.

Acts 28

The land to which they escaped they subsequently learnt to be Malta. This ought to be beyond controversy. Yet it has been contested even to our own day. The first who argued for the islet in the Gulf of Venice called Meleda seems to be Constantine Porphyrogenitus, who hazarded this opinion in his work on the Administration of the Empire, one of the Byzantine historians and of weight in what he personally knew. But he, like the few who adopted his view of the scene of the apostle's shipwreck had not duly considered the revealed account, any more than the actual facts of the two places as fitting in with that account. The direction of the wind favours Malta, as it blew them from Crete and Clauda toward the dreaded Syrtis. This could not have driven toward the north of the Gulf. Nor is there any need to narrow the Adriatic to that gulf; for it is well known that in ancient usage, and by such careful writers as Claudius Ptolemy, the famous geographer, it comprehended the open sea where the ship really drifted to Malta, and considerably farther. Then again there is nothing in the local features, soundings, anchorings, 'rough' or rocky places, creek with a beach, place with two seas, which can apply to Meleda as to Malta. And the argument founded on 'the barbarians' is quite invalid; for the Romans like the Greeks applied the term to those who were, not savages, but speakers of a language strange to themselves. Nor am I aware of any proof, even if the word meant 'savages', that this then applied to the inhabitants of Meleda more than to those of Malta, though it is difficult to suppose that that insignificant isle would have such residents as Publius, his father, and those that honoured

Paul and his friends with many honours and kind supplies, to say nothing of the universal kindness to the soldiers and ship's company. Malta, from its position and value from of old to this day, has been an important island, never Meleda.

Scaliger and Bochart with their usual discernment and massive learning had no hesitation in refuting the mediaeval mistake, and vindicating the claim of 'St. Paul's Bay' in Malta as the true scene of the wreck and the escape. Bryant's reasoning, and later still S. T. Coleridge's pleas in behalf of Meleda against Malta, have no real ground-work.

'And when got safe we then ascertained that the island was called Melita. And the barbarians [or, natives] showed us no common kindness; for they kindled a fire-heap and took us all in because of the then rain and because of the cold. But when Paul gathered a certain quantity of sticks and laid [it] on the fire-heap, a viper came out through the heat and fastened on his hand. And when the barbarians saw the beast hanging from his hand, they said one to another, Certainly a murderer is this man, whom though got safe from the sea, justice refused to let live. He, however shook off the beast into the fire and suffered no harm. And they expected that he would be inflamed or fall down dead suddenly; but when they were long expecting and beheld nothing amiss happen, they, changing their mind, said that he was a god' (vers. 1-6).

Mr. Smith has well explained that there is no difficulty in understanding how the crew and the officers failed to make out the locality, even if ever so familiar in a general way as an Alexandrian ship with the great

harbour of the island. They had drifted there in the dark, and there is no such definite landmark on the adjacent coast as to make identification easy; and whatever peculiarity may be there, they only discovered when they got close in before the ship ran aground. But the barbarians, or men of a foreign tongue,290 behaved with unusual philanthropy, which puts to shame what has too often been experienced on British shores and other coasts alas! since Christianity. They lit not a 'fire' merely, but one so large that the term employed is one usually applied to a funeral pyre (πυρά), as indeed would be needed to meet the urgent need of such a dripping crowd with rain falling heavily, and severe cold.

This gave occasion to the incident related so graphically in verses 3-6. The apostle, with his usual earnestness and lowly love, gathers a faggot of sticks near the spot and laid it on the fire-heap, when a viper, no doubt before this dormant in the neglected wood, was roused as well as irritated by the heat and seized on the hand of Paul. It was ordered of God to verify the promise of the Lord Jesus (Mark 16:18), and as a sign to the kind heathen, and so much the more as they quite mistook its import at first by leaving out God as unbelief habitually does. For when they saw the noxious creature hanging from his hand, they were assured that he must be a murderer, escaped from the sea, only to meet a just retribution. But when he shook off the serpent into the fire without suffering anything out of the way, and they looked long in vain for either virulent inflammation or sudden falling dead, all was changed, and they called him a god. Such is the worth of human opinion outside its own sphere. Little could they conceive that he was a man of God, a prisoner in heathen hands because of the

deadly hatred of God's people, the Jews, and this really because of the good news of Christ he preached to the Gentiles. But moral enigmas in this world are more surprising than the greatest of intellectual difficulties. Of one thing we may be sure, that the natural man is here invariably astray.

Nor was this all. The signs of Christianity are characteristically beneficent, samples of that power which in the age to come will banish the evil one and chase away the dire effects of sin, when mankind as a whole, and pre-eminently Israel, shall sing, 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, Who heareth all thy diseases' (Psalm 103:2, 3). That day has not yet dawned on Israel and the nations, but meanwhile for the inauguration of the gospel and in honour of Him Who was crucified by men but now exalted of God in heaven, there was, wherever it seemed fitting, a display of the powers of the coming age, not only over a vanquished enemy, but in pity for his poor victim, suffering man. Thus another of the signs to follow those that believed was soon after added: 'they shall lay hands on sick persons, and they shall be well' (Mark 16:18).

'Now in the country surrounding that place were lands belonging to the chief291 of the island, by name Publius, who received and entertained us three days courteously. And so it was that the father of Publius lay ill of a fever292 and dysentery; unto whom Paul came in and laid his hands on him with prayer, and healed him. This then being done, others also that had sicknesses on the island came and were cured; who also honoured us with many honours, and on sailing put on board [or, laded us with] things for our need' (vers. 7-10).

Here then we have the gracious healing power attached to the Lord's name, but no pretentiousness on the apostle's part. He prayed and laid his hands on the sick man. The healing of one so prominent arrested attention. Many others in the island came with their sicknesses and were cured also, for grace is no respecter of persons. Nor did Paul or Luke decline their attentions and kind offerings, though assuredly they sought nothing at their hands. Indeed it is of all consequence that the Christian, while valuing as our Father does even a cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple, should render a simple and true testimony that the gospel, the grace and truth of Christ, has everything to give; it is never to gain what self seeks in this world. God is a Giver Himself, the Giver of the best and indeed of all good, and He loves that His own keep up the family character in this respect as in all others (2 Cor. 9:7). On the other hand, it is very far from the ways of Christ to cherish a narrow, hard, and unappreciative heart where kindness is meant, especially because of His word and work. It is only the Holy Spirit keeping Christ before the eye of faith that can enable us to discern the path in the midst of difficulties and dangers on all sides.

'And after three months we sailed in a ship of Alexandria after having wintered in the island, with Dioscuri293' for a sign. And landing at Syracuse we tarried three days; and thence having gone round we arrived at Rhegium, and after one day when a south wind sprung up we came on the second day unto Puteoli, where we found brethren and were besought to tarry with them seven days; and so we came unto Rome. And thence the brethren having heard about us came out to meet us as

far as Appii Forum and Tres Tabernae, whom when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage' (vers. 11-15).

We have seen how the Lord attracted hearts by His gracious power to that truth which is for heaven and eternity, but received here only by faith, and here productive of good and holy and godly fruits to His praise, the comfort of love among His own, and no small testimony to His name among those that are not His, if peradventure they might be won and called out of darkness into His marvellous light.

In the early spring they took ship again, this time also of Alexandria that had escaped the storm which had wrecked their former ship because the master and crew had slighted the warning of the apostle. We do not hear of preaching, though we may be sure that the grace of Christ and the love of souls did not slumber in the hearts of His servants. But we see the place given to them, and to Paul in particular, by their past experience rising more and more as God saw fit to use each occasion where man's wisdom or power was unavailing.

Syracuse, a famous city of Sicily, was soon reached, but after a stay of three days they compassed the coast and came to Rhegium and the next day to Puteoli. The former was in the south-west extremity of Italy, a port of Bruttium on the sea. The latter, in the Bay of Naples, was celebrated for its thirty-three mineral wells which indeed gave it its name, as well as for its earth valued even to this day for its uses.

Here brethren were found who entreated that the apostle and the rest should remain with them seven days, the old term of a visit so natural among Christians who valued, above all, the joy of fellowship on the Lord's

day and at His Supper, along with the manifold opportunities of edification, prayer and the word, meanwhile. ‘Then we went unto Rome.’ What a contrast with the great ones of the earth, victor or vanquished, who had so often taken the same road! ‘His be the Victor’s name’ was their life-song and brightest triumph — His Who ‘trod all our foes beneath His feet By being trodden down.’ His servants tread in His footsteps, though it was His alone to suffer for sins.

But ere they reached the metropolis of the world, a fresh witness of love greeted the apostle and his company. How refreshing to his spirit! From Rome, when the brethren heard of their arrival in Italy, ‘they came out to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Tres Tabernae’. The former was less than forty miles, the latter more than thirty miles from the great city. Neither place enjoyed a good repute even in heathen eyes. A classic poet has left a lively record of his passing through the more distant of the two with its low yet extortionate taverns and squabbling bargemen. How different the meeting of the apostle of the Gentiles with those saints of Rome to whom he wrote not long before he was taken prisoner! He was nearing brethren he had longed to see that he might impart some spiritual gift for their establishment, or, as he humbly and beautifully put the matter, that he with them might be comforted in them, each by the other’s faith, both theirs and his.

And now two companies had come forth to welcome him; for this is made plain by the mention of places distant by a few miles, but no short way from Rome in days when travelling was far from so easy as it is now. None of these was troubled by the badness of the water, nor complained of mosquitoes or marsh-frogs or

bantering slaves or lazy boatmen; no elation in the company by great friends or good cheer, still less by the wordy wars of buffoons while they dined. But debtor to Jew and Greek he that prayed for fruit to God's glory through Christ the Lord gave Him thanks and took courage when he saw those whom love in the truth had brought from Rome to welcome him. And what a joy for men delivered from the false glitter of the world and their selfish profit from its grinding tyrant, the many-headed Beast, to recognize by grace in Paul the prisoner the most honoured servant of the Lord, the inspired writer to them of an Epistle yielding to none in depth and comprehensiveness of treating and enforcing the foundations of a saint's relationship with God, and the walk and service proper to it now!

It will be noticed that there is not a trace of Peter either now or subsequently, any more than in the Epistle more full of personal notices in its last chapter than any other in the New Testament. How unaccountable if the great apostle of the circumcision were then at Rome in any capacity whatever, still more if he there held the position assigned by some traditionmongers! And if Peter did not found the church in Rome, certainly no other apostle had a hand in it. Indeed, Paul near the beginning and before the end of his Epistle to the Romans, gives us two statements irreconcilable with that ancient fable. In Romans 1:13 he evidently regards the head of Gentiledom as falling within his province, no less than heathen lands east of it, whilst the Epistle itself from the first chapter to the last is the fullest proof of a large number of saints already there, even both Jews and Gentiles. Then again, in the chapter before the last, he lays down what was the regular and constant

aim of his ministry — his labours where Christ was not named and his avoidance of building upon another man's foundation. For, as already noticed, there was a lack in Rome of what an apostle could best supply (Rom. 1:11), which it is inconceivable to suppose asserted if Peter or any other apostle had visited the city before Paul wrote or went. We may therefore dismiss absolutely what Eusebius states in the Armenian text of the Chronicon, followed as it is in the main by Jerome (Catal. 1) and by heaps of Romanists, that Peter visited Rome as early as A.D. 42! and stayed there twenty years! (Jerome et al. say twenty-five years): a statement as impossible to stand with what scripture tells of Peter as with what we learn there of Paul.

Yet we do see Paul needing to take courage, as he drew near the city he had so longed to visit in the Lord. He seems as deeply conscious of weakness and fear and trembling as when preaching at Corinth years before. His experience of the Lord's gracious care on the last perilous voyage and wreck, also the proofs of His power accompanying him with their effects on all at Malta, did not hinder this. Indeed it is in weakness that the Lord proves the sufficiency of His grace, as He had taught the Corinthians after no less real experience of delivering power in Ephesus (2 Cor. 1 and 12). And here the Lord works not by such a vision as had sustained Paul when in danger of yielding to depression (Acts 23:11) but by the faith and affection of the brethren from Rome. For it would seem that the delay at Puteoli, due to brethren there who would have him stay a week in their midst, gave occasion for the tidings of his arrival in Italy reaching the saints in Rome and of their coming to meet him. And no difficulty, it is clear, was interposed by the

authorities, who held him a prisoner, such was the moral respect inspired among the Roman officials, and not least in the centurion who had witnessed his ways and words all the journey from the east to the west.

But how sweet and wondrous the dealings of grace to know from indisputable authority that the saints he was going to help so mightily were used of the Lord for the cheer of the apostle himself on the road: the best comment on his own words written to them beforehand — his desire to have mutual comfort among them, each by the faith that was in the other, both theirs and his!

How practical is the truth that the body of Christ is one, and has many members set each one in the body even as it pleased God! 'And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay much rather, those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary: and those parts of the body which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness, whereas our comely parts have no need. But God tempered the body together, giving more abundant honour to that part which lacked, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it' (1 Cor. 12:19-26). Such is the church, called to be on earth the answer to Christ in heaven. Oh, how soon the declension, how far the departure, and how universal

the ruin! Do we feel it, judge ourselves, and seek His will?

Thus the apostle comes to the metropolis of the world a prisoner. Such was the will of God. There were saints in it then, as we know from the Epistle written to them from Corinth (Rom. 16:3). Many assemblies were apostolically founded, not that in Rome. So did God anticipate by condemning the pride of man which later on indulged in this tradition, as groundless as are most others. The chief city of the Gentiles, which lay within Paul's province, not Peter's (Gal. 2:8), could boast truthfully of no apostle as its founder. But more, there the greatest witness of the gospel came in bonds. So was the gospel to fare even more bitterly in the torture and at the stake when the pagan Babylon became the mystery of impiety, the papal Babylon. Yet the word of God was not bound, any more than crueller fiats consumed it later, even when a pseudo-Christian priest sat on the throne of the Caesars, and men masqueraded in the garb of the Lamb's followers who were ravening wolves, and really heathen in heart and unbelief.

'And when he came to Rome [the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the praetorian guard, but]294 Paul was allowed to remain with the soldier who guarded him. And it came to pass that after three days he295 called together those that were chief of the Jews; and when they were come together he said unto them, [Men] Brethren, I, though having done nothing against the people or the customs of our fathers, was delivered a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans; who, after examination, wished to release me because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spoke against [it], I was constrained to appeal to Caesar,

not having anything to accuse my nation of. For this cause therefore did I call for you to see and to speak with, for on account of the hope of Israel am I bound with this chain. And they said unto him, We neither received letters from Judea concerning thee, neither did any of the brethren on arriving report or speak anything evil concerning thee. But we beg [or, think well] of thee to hear what thou thinkest; for concerning this sect it is known to us that it is everywhere spoken against' (vers. 16-22).

Two things appear in the apostle: entire superiority to the rancour that had hitherto pursued him from the Jews, and also untiring zeal to seek that they should hear the truth, and not judge themselves unworthy of eternal life. Nor was there the least underhand work. He invited their chief men, not the less informed, and he explained that, without wrong to the Jews or to their hereditary customs, he was a prisoner from Jerusalem among the Romans, who after examination were minded to acquit him but for the opposition of the Jews, which forced his appeal to the emperor. But he points out the real offence — his stand for the hope of Israel. He might have exposed their conspiracy to murder him when in Roman hands, a fact which, if published in Rome, would have as completely served himself as blasted the Jews. But not a word escapes him, save of unselfish love, saying he had no charge against those that had so persistently sought his death. It was truly for the hope of Israel he wore the chain — for the Messiah fraught with blessings of every kind, never to wane, for Israel. And if Jews turned a deaf ear, those sure mercies (before which Israel one day will melt in true repentance) must find suited objects, if not in the favoured land, in the barren

wilderness where open outcasts now live to God’s glory, the objects of the grace of Jesus Of this grace to Gentiles, however, which had roused the hate of Jews elsewhere, the apostle does not yet speak, but simply of the fact that it was for the Christ, the hope of Israel, that he was a prisoner.

The fact is that the Jews, having failed, with successive governors, and even with king Agrippa, were shrewd enough to apprehend the folly of carrying their complaints of Paul to Caesar. They had no true criminal charge. And what would a Roman emperor care for their religious accusation? The Jews therefore replied that neither letters nor visitors had laid any formal complaint before them against Paul, but that they wished to hear what he had to say of the sect so universally spoken against as Christians. This was precisely what the apostle’s heart desired.

‘And having appointed him a day, many came unto him into the lodging, to whom he expounded, testifying the kingdom of God, and persuading them296 concerning Jesus, from both the law of Moses and the prophets from morning till evening. And some assented to the things that were said, and some disbelieved. And being disagreed one with another they left, Paul having said one word, Well spoke the Holy Spirit through Isaiah unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people and say, With hearing ye shall hear and in no wise understand, with seeing ye shall see and in no wise perceive. For the heart of this people became gross, and with [their] ears they became dull of hearing, and [their] eyes they closed, lest they should see with [their] eyes and hear with [their] ears and understand with the heart, and return, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore

unto you that this297 salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles: they also will hear' (vers. 23-28). Verse 29 in the Text. Rec. as represented in the Authorized Version is not found in the ancient Greek MSS. To cast out an innovation is the reverse of innovating.

Thus God gave His servant an open door to the very people whom he loved so well and whose brethren's malice made him a prisoner, and so much the longer because there was no one to lay a definite charge. It was a moment of exceeding solemnity to the apostle's spirit, as there in Rome he laid bare the truth of God's kingdom and of the Person of Jesus from the law and the prophets for one long day; and with the result that some were persuaded of the things that were said, while others disbelieved, a stronger expression than their simply not believing. The word of God in the light of Jesus comes to put them to the proof, as it does and is intended to do.

But if disagreeing among themselves they took their leave, Paul reiterated the long suspended sentence, already pronounced by the Judge Himself in John 12:37-41 seven centuries and more after Isaiah was inspired to utter it from the vision in the temple in the year when king Uzziah died (Isa. 6). What a witness of divine patience as well as of sure judgment on His own people! Jehovah, the God of Israel, sent His prophet with the message originally. Then Jehovah-Jesus toward the close of His rejected testimony of love and light in their midst departed and hid Himself, after having done so many signs which manifested the Father and the Son at work in grace. Yet they believed not in Him, according to Isaiah 53, yea more, they could not believe, for the judicial spell was taking effect, fruit of despising every

word and proof of God Himself, the Son, on earth ‘These things said Isaiah, because he saw His [Christ’s] glory, and he spake of Him’ (John 12:41). Such is the comment of the inspired Evangelist. Now the word is again cited by Paul, only with this emphatic reference — ‘Well spoke the Holy Spirit.’ He Who of old gave the prophet to see, hear, and write, was now sent down from heaven to make good Christ’s glory, and is declared to be the One Who then and thus spoke. The Spirit had been rejected by the Jews as the witness of the glorified Son of man, as truly as the Son on earth had been, and Jehovah as such of old On the ground of responsibility all was over with the chosen people, who, having failed in righteousness, abhorred sovereign grace in the gospel. But the mercy they despised will be their only ground in the latter day, when the last empire of the Gentile rises up to oppose the returning Lord at His appearing in glory, in alliance with the Antichrist in the land of Israel. These are the Beast and the False Prophet of the Revelation.

Meanwhile the Jew is finally cut off, and before the apostasy is come and ‘the man of sin’ revealed, the gospel goes forth on its errand of heavenly mercy to the Gentiles. ‘They also will hear,’ said the messenger from his bonds in Rome. And so it has been; so it is; though the shadows deepen as the end of the age draws near. Then an ungrateful Christendom will cast off the faith, and more and more return to naturalism, in love not only of present things but of idolatry, and in man set up as true God, that wrath may come to the uttermost on all, whether Jew or Gentile, who spurn grace and bow down to the creature lifted up to destruction by Satan in the despite and denial of the Father and the Son.

But meanwhile ‘this salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles.’ For the grace of God goes down to the lowest when the light of the knowledge of His glory shines, as now in the gospel it does in the face of Jesus at His right hand. Thus Israel is cast off, the Gentiles hear and the apostle was in bonds. So the history ends.

But the apostle, a prisoner in Rome, sent thence to the Jews the deepest message they ever received from God, as also Paul sent to the saints at Ephesus and Colosse the fullest words on the body and its Head, and on Christian experience to the Philippians, and personally to Philemon: so fertilizing was the stream that flowed through him in his captivity.

‘And he remained two whole years in his own hired lodging, and received all that came unto him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, with all boldness unhinderedly’ (vers. 30, 31).

Such is the simple, solemn, and dignified close of inspired ecclesiastical history. Some speak of it as abrupt, because it does not tell us of the subsequent imprisonment of the apostle and his death. It is the same spirit of unbelief which complains of the two Gospels that do not set before us the ascension scene, as if God did not know best how to reveal His own truth. Paul is a prisoner, yet not so as to hinder the going forth of the truth even in Rome. To know more of the apostle we must read closely the word; yet even so nothing is there to encourage curiosity, superstition, or hero-worship, but everything that God in all things may be glorified by Jesus Christ.

290 Their tongue was then Punic fundamentally, as springing from Phoenicia, the great source of eastern enterprise and commercial marine. So it was in Carthage also. But Malta has seen radical changes, and in nothing more than its race of inhabitants and consequent language, which is now and has long been an Arabic patois, however much they flatter themselves on their descent from the Phoenicians.

291 There is good reason from more than one ancient inscription to regard ‘the first’, or ‘chief’ as a title and not a vague distinction.

292 Fever is in the Greek plural, being a malady of renewed attacks. No writer in either the Old or New Testament abounds in such medical technicality as Luke; and nobody has so elaborately evinced this fact as Dr. W. K. Hobart in his Medical Language of St. Luke, an interesting volume of the Dublin University Press Series.

293 These were Castor and Pollux, the fabulous patrons of seamen among the heathen, as is familiar with those who have read the Greek and Latin poets.

294 The most ancient copies do not recognize the bracketed clause.

295 The Text. Rec. wrongly reads ‘Paul’ here on insufficient evidence.

296 The Text. Rec. adds ‘the things’.

297 The Text. Rec. inserts ‘the’: ‘this’ is the reading of AB, good cursives, and many of the most ancient versions.