# Miscellaneous Writings, Volume 5

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# The Great Commission

The Great Commission

C. H. Mackintosh.

"And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning Me. Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behaved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead on the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of My Father unto you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24: 44-49).

This splendid passage of Holy Scripture sets before us the great commission which the risen Lord entrusted to His apostles just as He was about to ascend into the heavens, having gloriously accomplished all His blessed work upon earth. It is truly a most wonderful commission, and opens up a very wide field of truth, through which we may range with much spiritual delight and profit. Whether we ponder the commission itself, its basis, its authority, its power, or its sphere, we shall find it all full of most precious instruction. May the blessed Spirit guide our thoughts, while we meditate, first of all, upon the commission itself.

The apostles of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ were specially charged to preach "repentance and remission of sins." Let us all remember this. We are prone to forget it, to the serious damaging of our preaching, and of the souls of our hearers. Some of us are apt to overlook the first part of the commission, in our eagerness, it may be, to get to the second. This is a most serious mistake. We may rest assured that it is our truest wisdom to keep close to the veritable terms in which our blessed Lord delivered His charge to His earliest heralds. We cannot omit a single point, not to say a leading branch of the commission, without serious loss in every way. Our Lord is infinitely wiser and more gracious than we are, and we need not fear to preach with all possible plainness what He told His apostles to preach, namely, "repentance and remission of sins."

Now the question is, are we all careful to maintain this very important connection? Do we give sufficient prominence to the first part of the great commission? Do we preach "repentance?"

We are not now inquiring what repentance is; that we shall do, if God permit. But, whatever it is, do we preach it? That our Lord commanded His apostles to preach it is plain; and not only so, but He preached it Himself, as we read it in Mark 1: 14-15: "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye and believe the gospel."

Let us carefully note this record. Let all preachers note it. Our divine Master called upon sinners to repent and believe the gospel. Some would have us to believe that it

is a mistake to call upon persons dead in trespasses and sins to do anything. "How," it is argued, "can those who are dead repent? They are incapable of any spiritual movement. They must first get the power ere they can either repent or believe."

What is our reply to all this? A very simple one indeed — Our Lord knows better than all the theologians in the world what ought to be preached. He knows all about man's, condition — his guilt, his misery, his spiritual death, his utter helplessness, his total inability to think a single right thought, to utter a single right word, to do a single right act; and yet He called upon men to repent. This is quite enough for us. It is no part of our business to seek to reconcile seeming differences. It may seem to us difficult to reconcile man's utter powerlessness with his responsibility; but "God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain." It is our happy privilege, and our bounden duty, to believe what He says, and do what He tells us. This is true wisdom, and it yields solid peace.

Our Lord preached repentance, and He commanded His apostles to preach it; and they did so constantly. Harken to Peter on the day of Pentecost. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptised, 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." And again, "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." Harken to Paul also, as he stood on Mars' Hill, at Athens: "But now God commandeth all men everywhere to repent; because He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom He hath ordained;

whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead."

So also, in his touching address to the elders of Ephesus, he says, "I kept back nothing that was profitable [blessed servant!] but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." And again, in his address to king Agrippa, he says, "Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision, but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."

Now, in the face of this body of evidence — with the example of our Lord and His apostles so fully and clearly before us — may we not very lawfully inquire whether there is not a serious defect in much of our modern preaching? Do we preach repentance as we ought? Do we assign to it the place which it gets in the preaching of our Lord, and of His early heralds? It is vanity and folly, or worse, to talk about its being legal to preach repentance, to say that it tarnishes the lustre of the gospel of the grace of God to call upon men dead in trespasses and sins to repent, and do works meet for repentance. Was Paul legal in his preaching Did he not preach a clear, full, rich, and divine gospel? Have we got in advance of Paul? Do we preach a clearer gospel than he? How utterly preposterous the notion! Well, but he preached repentance. He told his hearers that "God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." Does this mar the gospel of the grace of God? Does it detract from its heavenly fullness and freeness? As well might you tell

a farmer that it lowered the quality of his grain to plough the fallow ground before sowing.

No doubt it is of the very last possible importance to preach the gospel of the grace of God, or, if you please, the gospel of the glory, in all its fullness, clearness, and power. We are to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ — to declare the whole counsel of God, to present the righteousness of God and His salvation, without limit, condition, or hindrance of any kind — to publish the good news to every creature under heaven.

We should, in the very strongest possible manner, insist upon this. But at the same time we must jealously keep to the terms of "the great commission." We cannot depart the breadth of a hair from these without serious damage to our testimony, and to the souls of our hearers. If we fail to preach repentance, we are "keeping back" something profitable." What should we say to a husbandman, if we saw him scattering his precious grain along the beaten highway? We should justly pronounce him out of his mind. The plough-share must do its work. The fallow ground must be broken up ere the seed is sown; and we may rest assured that, as in the kingdom of nature, so in the kingdom of grace, the ploughing must precede the sowing. The ground must be duly prepared for the seed, else the operation will prove altogether defective. Let the gospel be preached as God has given it to us in His Word. Let it not be shorn of one of its moral glories; let it flow forth as it comes from the deep fountain of the heart of God, through the channel of Christ's finished work, on the authority of the Holy Ghost.

All this is not only most fully admitted but peremptorily insisted upon; but at the same time we must never forget that our Lord and Master called upon men to "repent and believe the gospel"; that He strictly enjoined it upon His holy apostles to preach repentance; and that the blessed apostle Paul, the chief of apostles, the profoundest teacher the Church has ever known, did preach repentance, calling upon men everywhere to repent and do works meet for repentance.

And here it may be well for us to inquire what this repentance is which occupies such a prominent place in "the great commission," and in the preaching of our Lord and of His apostles. If it be — as it most surely is — an abiding and universal necessity for man — if God commands all men everywhere to repent — if repentance is inseparably linked with remission of sins — how needful it is that we should seek to understand its true nature!

What, then, is repentance? May the Spirit Himself instruct us by the Word of God! He alone can. We are all liable to err — some of us have erred — in our thoughts on this most weighty subject. We are in danger, while seeking to avoid error on one side, of falling into error on the other. We are poor, feeble, ignorant, erring creatures, whose only security is in our being kept continually at the feet of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. He alone can teach us what repentance is, as well as what it is not. We feel most fully assured that the enemy of souls and of the truth has succeeded in giving repentance a false place in the creeds, and confessions, and public teachings of Christendom; and the conviction of this makes it all the more needful for us to keep close to the living teachings of Holy Scripture.

We are not aware of any formal definition of the subject furnished by the Holy Ghost. He does not tell us in so many words what repentance is; but the more we study the Word in reference to the great question, the more deeply we feel convinced that true repentance involves the solemn judgment of ourselves, our condition, and our ways, in the presence of God; and, further, that this judgment is not a transient feeling, but an abiding condition — not a certain exercise to be gone through as a sort of title to the remission of sins, but the deep and settled habit of the soul, giving seriousness, gravity, tenderness, brokenness, and profound humility, which shall overlap, underlie, and characterise our entire course.

We seriously question if this aspect of the subject is sufficiently understood. Let not the reader mistake us. We do not mean for a moment to teach that the soul should be always bowed down under the sense of unforgiven sin. Far be the thought! But we greatly fear that some of us, in running away from legality on the question of repentance, have fallen into levity. This is a serious error. We may depend upon it that levity is no remedy for legality: were it proposed as such, we should have no hesitation in pronouncing the remedy much worse than the disease. Thank God we have His own sovereign remedy for levity, on the one hand, and legality on the other. "Truth" — insisting upon "repentance," is the remedy for the former. "Grace" — publishing "remission of sins," is the remedy for the latter. And we cannot but believe that the more profound our repentance, the fuller will be our enjoyment of remission.

We are inclined to judge that there is a sad lack of depth and seriousness in much of our modern preaching. In our anxiety to make the gospel simple, and salvation easy, we fail to press on the consciences of our hearers the holy claims of truth. If a preacher now-a-days were to call upon his hearers to "repent and turn to God, and to do works meet for repentance," he would, in certain circles, be pronounced legal, ignorant, below the mark, and such like. And yet this was precisely what the blessed apostle Paul did, as he himself tells us. Will any of our modern evangelists have the temerity to say that Paul was a legal or an ignorant preacher? We trust not. Paul carried with him the full, clear, precious gospel of God — the gospel of the grace, and the gospel of the glory. He preached the kingdom of God — He unfolded the glorious mystery of the Church — yea, that mystery was specially committed to him.

But let all preachers remember that Paul preached repentance. He called upon sinners to judge themselves — to repent in dust and ashes, as was meet and right they should. He himself had learnt the true meaning of repentance. He had not only judged himself once in a way, but he lived in the spirit of self-judgment. It was the habit of his soul, the attitude of his heart, and it gave a depth, solidity, seriousness and solemnity to his preaching of which we modern preachers know but little. We do not believe that Paul's repentance ended with the three days and three nights of blindness after his conversion. He was a self-judged man all his life long. Did this hinder his enjoyment of the grace of God or of the preciousness of Christ? Nay, it gave depth and intensity to his enjoyment.

All this, we feel persuaded, demands our most serious consideration. We greatly dread the light, airy, superficial style of much of our modern preaching. It sometimes seems to us as if the gospel were brought into utter contempt and the sinner led to suppose that he is really conferring a very great favour upon God in accepting salvation at His hands. Now we most solemnly protest against this. It is dishonouring to God, and lowering His gospel; and, as might be expected, its moral effect on those who profess to be converted is most deplorable. It superinduces levity, self-indulgence, worldliness, vanity, and folly. Sin is not felt to be the dreadful thing it is in the sight of God. Self is not judged. The world is not given up. The gospel that is preached is what may be called "salvation made easy" to the flesh — the most terrible thing we can possibly conceive — terrible in its effect upon the soul — terrible in its results in the life. God's sentence upon the flesh and the world gets no place in the preaching to which we refer. People are offered a salvation which leaves self and the world practically unjudged, and the consequence is, those who profess to be converted by this gospel exhibit a lightness and unsubduedness perfectly shocking to people of serious piety.

Man must take his true place before God, and that is the place of self-judgment, contrition of heart, real sorrow for sin, and true confession. It is here the gospel meets him. The fullness of God ever waits on an empty vessel, and a truly repentant soul is the empty vessel into which all the fullness and grace of God can flow in saving power. The Holy Ghost will make the sinner feel and own his real condition. It is He alone who can do so: but He uses preaching to this end. He brings the Word of God to

bear on man's conscience. The Word is His hammer, wherewith He breaks the rock in pieces — His plowshare, wherewith He breaks up the fallow ground. He makes the furrow, and then casts in the incorruptible seed, to germinate and fructify to the glory of God. True, the furrow, how deep soever it may be, can produce no fruit. It is the seed, and not the furrow; but there must be the furrow for all that.

It is not, need we say, that there is anything meritorious in the sinner's repentance. To say so could only be regarded as audacious falsehood. Repentance is not a good work whereby the sinner merits the favour of God. All this view of the subject is utterly and fatally false. True repentance is the discovery and hearty confession of our utter ruin and guilt. It is the finding out that my whole life has been a lie, and that I myself am a liar. This is serious work. There is no flippancy or levity when a soul is brought to this. A penitent soul in the presence of God is a solemn reality; and we cannot but feel that were we more governed by the terms of "the great commission," we should more solemnly, earnestly and constantly call upon men "to repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance" — we should preach "repentance" as well as "remission of sins."

Part 2

Since writing our last paper, we have been much interested in the way in which repentance is presented in those inimitable parables in Luke 15. There we learn, in a manner the most touching and convincing, not only the abiding and universal necessity the moral fitness in every case of true repentance — but also that it is grateful to the heart of God. Our Lord, in His marvellous

reply to the scribes and Pharisees, declares that "there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth." And again, "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

Now this gives us a very elevated view of the subject. It is one thing to see that repentance is binding upon man, and another and very much higher thing to see that it is grateful to God. "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." A broken heart, a contrite spirit, a repentant mind, gives joy to God.

Let us ponder this fact. The scribes and Pharisees murmured because Jesus received sinners. How little they understood Him! How little they knew of the object that brought Him down into this dark and sinful world! How little they knew of themselves! It was the "lost" that Jesus came to seek. But scribes and Pharisees did not think themselves lost. They thought they were all right. They did not want a Saviour. They were thoroughly unbroken, unrepentant, self-confident: and hence they had never afforded one atom of joy in Heaven. All the learning of the scribes, and all the righteousness of the Pharisees, could not waken up a single note of joy in the presence of the angels of God. They were like the elder son in the parable who said, "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends."

Here we have a true specimen of an unbroken heart and an unrepentant spirit a man thoroughly satisfied with himself. Miserable object! He had never touched a chord in the Father's heart — never drawn out the Father's love — never felt the Father's embrace — never received the Father's welcome. How could he? He had never felt himself lost. He was full of himself, and therefore had no room for the Father's love. He did not feel that he owed anything, and hence he had nothing to be forgiven. It rather seemed to him that his father was his debtor. "Lo, these many years do I serve thee; and yet thou never gavest me a kid." He had not received his wages.

What egregious folly! And yet it is just the same with every unrepentant soul — every one who is building upon his own righteousness. He really makes God his debtor. "I have served Thee; but I have never gotten what I earned." Miserable notion! The man who talks of his duties, his doings, his sayings, his givings, is really insulting God. But on the other hand, the man who comes with a broken heart, a contrite spirit, repentant, self-judged — that is the man who gives joy to the heart of God.

And why? Simply because such a one feels his need of God. Here lies the grand moral secret of the whole matter. To apprehend this is to grasp the full truth on the great question of repentance. A God of love desires to make His way to the sinner's heart, but there is no room for Him so long as that heart is hard and impenitent. But when the sinner is brought to the end of himself, when he sees himself a helpless, hopeless wreck, when he sees the utter emptiness, hollowness and vanity of all earthly things; when like the prodigal he comes to himself and feels the depth and reality of

his need, then there is room in his heart for God, and — marvellous truth! — God delights to come and fill it. "To this man will I look." To whom? To the man who does his duty, keeps the law, does his best, lives up to his light? Nay; but "to him who is of a contrite spirit."

It will perhaps be said that the words just quoted apply to Israel. Primarily, they do; but morally they apply to every contrite heart on the face of the earth. And, further, it cannot be said that Luke 15 applies specially to Israel. It applies to all. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that" — What? Does his duty? Nay, it does not even say, "that believeth." No doubt believing is essential in every case; but the interesting point here is that a truly repentant sinner causes joy in Heaven. A person may say, "I fear I do not believe." Well, but do you repent? Have your eyes been opened to see your true condition before God? Have you taken your true place before God as utterly lost? If so, you are one of those over whom there is joy in Heaven.

What gave joy to the shepherd's heart? Was it the ninety and nine sheep that went not astray? Nay, it was finding the lost sheep. What gave joy to the woman's heart? Was it the nine pieces in her possession? Nay, it was finding the one lost piece. What gave joy to the father's heart? Was it the service and the obedience of the elder son? Nay, it was getting back his lost son. A repentant, broken-hearted, returning sinner wakens up Heaven's joy. "Let us eat and be merry." Why? Because the elder son has been working in the fields and doing his duty? No; but "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

All this is perfectly wonderful. Indeed, it is so wonderful that if we had it not from the lips of Him who is the Truth, and on the eternal page of divine inspiration, we could not believe it. But, blessed be God, there it stands, and none can gainsay it. There shines the glorious truth that a poor, self-convicted, broken-hearted, penitent, though hell-deserving sinner, gives joy to the heart of God. Let people talk as they will about keeping the law and doing their duty: it may go for what it is worth; but be it remembered there is no such clause within the covers of the volume of God — no such sentence ever dropped from the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ as "There is joy in heaven over one sinner that does his duty."

A sinner's duty! What is it? "God commandeth all men everywhere to repent." What is it that can really define our duty? Surely the divine command. Well, here it is, and there is no getting over it. God's command to all men, in every place, is to repent. His commandment binds them to do it; His goodness leads them to it; His judgment warns them to it; and, above all, and most marvellous of all, He assures us that our repentance gives joy to His heart. A penitent heart is an object of profoundest interest to the mind of God, because that heart is morally prepared to receive what God delights to bestow, namely, "remission of sins" — yea, all the fullness of divine love. A man might spend millions in the cause of religion and philanthropy, and not afford one atom of joy in Heaven. What are millions of money to God? A single penitential tear is more precious to Him than all the wealth of the universe. All the offerings of an unbroken heart are a positive insult to God; but a single sigh from the depths of a contrite spirit goes up as a fragrant incense to His throne and to His heart.

No man can meet God on the ground of duty; but God can meet any man — the very chief of sinners — on the ground of repentance, for that is man's true place; and we may say with all possible confidence that when the sinner, as he is, meets God as He is, the whole question is settled once and forever. "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." The moment man takes his true place — the place of repentance — God meets him with a full forgiveness, a divine and everlasting righteousness. It is His joy to do so. It gratifies His heart and it glorifies His name to pardon, justify and accept a penitent soul that simply believes in Jesus. The very moment the prophet cried, "Woe is me; for I am undone" — "Then flew one of the seraphim with a live coal from off the altar" to touch his lips, and to purge his sins (Isa. 6: 5-7).

Thus it is always. The fullness of God ever waits on an empty vessel. If I am full of myself, full of my own fancied goodness, my own morality, my own righteousness, I have no room for God, no room for Christ. "He filleth the hungry with good things; but the rich He hath sent empty away." A self-emptied soul can be filled with the fullness of God; but if God sends a man empty away, whither can he go to be filled? All Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, goes to prove the deep blessedness as well as the moral necessity of repentance. It is the grand turning-point in the soul's history — a great moral epoch which sheds its influence over the whole of one's after life. It is not, we repeat, a transient exercise, but an abiding moral condition. We are not now speaking of how repentance is produced; we are speaking of what it is according to Scripture, and of the absolute need of it for every creature under

Heaven. It is the sinner's true place; and when through grace he takes it, he is met by the fullness of God's salvation.

Here we see the lovely connection between the first and second clauses of "the great commission," namely, "repentance and remission of sins." They are inseparably linked together. It is not that the most profound and genuine repentance forms the meritorious ground of remission of sins. To say or to think so would be to set aside the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ, for in that, and in that alone, have we the divine ground on which God can righteously forgive us our sins. This we shall see more fully when we come to consider the "basis" of "the great commission."

We are now occupied with the commission itself; and in it we see those two divinely settled facts, repentance and remission of sins. The holy apostles of our Lord and Saviour were charged to preach among all nations — to declare in the ears of every creature under heaven "repentance and remission of sins." Every man, be he Jew or Gentile, is absolutely commanded by God to repent; and every repentant soul is privileged to receive, on the spot, the full and everlasting remission of sins. And we may add, the deeper and more abiding the work of repentance, the deeper and more abiding will be the enjoyment of remission of sins. The contrite soul lives in the very atmosphere of divine forgiveness; and as it inhales that atmosphere, it shrinks with ever — increasing horror from sin in every shape and form.

Let us turn for a moment to the Acts of the Apostles, and see how Christ's ambassadors carried out the second part of His blessed commission. Hear the apostle of the

circumcision addressing the Jews on the day of Pentecost. We cannot attempt to quote the whole of his address; we merely give the few words of application at the close. "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified both Lord and Christ."

Here the preacher bears down upon the consciences of his hearers with the solemn fact that they had proved themselves to be at issue with God Himself about His Christ. What a tremendous fact! It was not merely that they had broken the law, rejected the prophets, refused the testimony of John the Baptist; but they had actually crucified the Lord of glory, the eternal Son of God. "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men, brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptised 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" (Acts 2: 36-38).

Here are the two parts of the great commission brought out in all their distinctness and power. The people are charged with the most awful sin that could be committed, namely, the murder of the Son of God; they are called upon to repent, and assured of full remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost. What wondrous grace shines forth in all this! The very people that had mocked and insulted the Son of God, and crucified Him, even these, if truly repentant, were assured of the complete pardon of all their sins, and of this crowning sin amongst the rest. Such is the wondrous grace of God — such the mighty efficacy of the blood of Christ — such the clear and authoritative testimony of the Holy Ghost — such the glorious terms of "the great commission."

But let us turn for a moment to Acts 3. Here the preacher, after charging his hearers with this awful act of wickedness against God, even the rejection and murder of His Son, adds these remarkable words: "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. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."

It is not possible to conceive anything higher or fuller than the grace that shines out here. It is a part of the divine response to the prayer of Christ on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." This surely is royal grace. It is victorious grace — grace reigning through righteousness. It was impossible that such a prayer should fall to the ground. It was answered in part on the day of Pentecost. It will be answered in full at a future day, for "All Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob."

Mark particularly the words "Those things which God before had showed... He hath so fulfilled." Here the preacher brings in God's side of the matter: and this is salvation. To see only man's part in the cross would be eternal judgment. To see God's part, and to rest in it is eternal life, full remission of sins, divine righteousness, everlasting glory.

The reader will doubtless be reminded here of the touching scene between Joseph and his brethren. There is a striking analogy between Acts 3 and Genesis 14. "Now therefore," says Joseph, "be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God did send

me before you to preserve life.... And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God."

But when were these words uttered? Not until the guilty brethren had felt and owned their guilt. Repentance preceded the remission. "They said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us." Joseph "spake roughly" to his brethren at the first. He brought them through deep waters, and made them feel and confess their guilt. But the very moment they took the ground of repentance, he took the ground of forgiveness. The penitent brethren were met by a pardoning Joseph, and the whole house of Pharaoh was made to ring with the joy which filled the heart of Joseph on getting back to his bosom the very men that had flung him into the pit.

What an illustration of "repentance and remission of sins!" It is ever thus. It is the joy of the heart of God to forgive us our sins. He delights in causing the full tide of His pardoning love to flow into the broken and contrite heart.

Yes, if you have been brought to feel the burden of your guilt, then be assured it is your privilege this very moment to receive a divine and everlasting remission of all your sins. The blood of Jesus Christ has perfectly settled the question of your guilt, and you are now invited to rejoice in the God of your salvation.

Part 3

We shall now turn for a few moments to the ministry of the apostle of the Gentiles, and see how he fulfilled the great commission. We have already heard him on the subject of "repentance." Let us hear him also on the great question of "remission of sins."

Paul was not of the twelve. He did not receive his commission from Christ on earth, but, as he himself distinctly and repeatedly tells us, from Christ in heavenly glory. Some have spent not a little time and pains in labouring to prove that he was of the twelve, and that the election of Matthias in Acts 1 was a mistake. But it is labour sadly wasted, and only proves an entire misunderstanding of Paul's position and ministry. He was raised up for a special object, and made the depository of a special truth which had never been made known to any one before, namely, the truth of the Church — the one body composed of Jew and Gentile, incorporated by the Holy Ghost, and linked, by His personal indwelling, to the risen and glorified Head in Heaven.

Paul received his own special commission, of which he gives a very beautiful statement in his address to Agrippa, in Acts 26, "Whereupon, as I went to Damascus, with authority and commission from the chief priests" — what a different "commission" he received ere he entered Damascus! — "at midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. 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 the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus, whom thou

persecutest." Here the glorious truth of the intimate union of believers with the glorified Man in Heaven, though not stated, is beautifully and forcibly implied.

"But rise, and stand upon thy 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; delivering thee from the people and the Gentiles, unto whom 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 remission of sins" (the same word as in the commission to the twelve in Luke 24) "and inheritance among them which are sanctified, by faith that is in Me."

["By faith" is connected with remission of sins and inheritance among the sanctified.]

What depth and fullness in these words! What a comprehensive statement of man's condition! What a blessed presentation of the resources of divine grace! There is a very remarkable harmony between this commission to Paul and that to the twelve in Luke 24. It will perhaps be said there is nothing about repentance. True, the word does not occur; but we have the moral reality, and that with singular force and fullness. What mean the words, "To open their eyes"? Do they not most certainly involve the discovery of our condition? Assuredly. A man who has his eyes opened is brought to the knowledge of himself, the knowledge of his condition, the knowledge of his ways; and this is true repentance. It is a wonderful moment in a man's history when his eyes are opened. It is the grand crisis, the momentous epoch, the one turning-point. Till then he is

blind — morally and spiritually blind. He cannot see a single divine object. He has no perception of anything pertaining to God, to Christ, to Heaven.

This is truly humbling to proud human nature. Think of a clear-headed, highly educated, deeply learned, intellectual man, a profound thinker, a powerful reasoner, a thorough philosopher, who has won the honours, the medals, the degrees, that this world's universities can bestow; and yet he is blind to everything spiritual, heavenly, divine. He gropes in moral darkness. He thinks he sees, assumes the right to judge and pronounce upon things, even upon Scripture and upon God Himself. He undertakes to decide what is fitting for God to say and to do. He sets up his own mind as the measure in the things of God. He reasons upon immortality, upon eternal life, and eternal punishment. He deems himself perfectly competent to give judgment in reference to all these solemn and weighty matters; and all the while his eyes have never been opened. How much is his judgment worth? Nothing! Who would take the opinion of a man who, if his eyes were only opened, would reverse that opinion in reference to everything heavenly and divine? Who would think for a moment of being guided by a blind man?

But how do we know that every man in his natural, unconverted state is blind? Because, according to Paul's commission, the very first thing which the gospel is to do for him is "to open his eyes." This proves, beyond all question, that he must be blind. Paul was sent to the people and to the Gentiles — that is, to the whole human family — to open their eyes. This proves, to a divine demonstration, that all are by nature blind.

But there is more than this. Man is not only blind, but he is in "darkness." Supposing for a moment that a person has his eyesight, of what use is it to him if he is in the dark? It is the double statement as to man's state and position. As to his state, he is blind. As to his position, he is in darkness; and when his eyes are opened, and divine light streams in upon his soul, he then judges himself and his ways according to God. He sees his folly, his guilt, his rebellion, his wild, infidel reasonings, his foolish notions, the vanity of his mind, his pride and ambition, his selfishness and worldliness — all these things are judged and abhorred. He repents, and turns right round to the One who has opened his eyes and poured in a flood of living light upon his heart and conscience.

Further, not only is man — every man — Jew and Gentile, blind and in darkness, but, as if to give the climax of all, he is under the power of Satan. This gives a terrible idea of man's condition. He is the slave of the devil. He does not believe this. He imagines himself free — thinks he is his own master — fancies he can go where he pleases, do what he likes, think for himself, speak and act as an independent being. But he is the bondslave of another, he is sold under sin, Satan is his lord and master. Thus Scripture speaks, and it cannot be broken. Man may refuse to believe, but that cannot in the least change the fact. A condemned criminal at the bar may refuse to believe the testimony from the witness table, the verdict from the jury-box, the sentence from the bench; but that in nowise alters his terrible condition. He is a condemned criminal all the same.

So with man as a sinner; he may refuse the plain testimony of Scripture, but that testimony remains

notwithstanding. Even if the thousand millions that people this globe were to deny the truth of God's Word, that Word would still stand unmoved. Scripture does not depend for its truth upon man's belief. It is true whether he believes it or not. Blessed forever is the man who believes; doomed forever is the man who refuses to believe; but the Word of God is settled forever in Heaven, and it is to be received on its own authority, apart from all human thoughts for or against it.

This is a grand fact, and one demanding the profound attention of every soul. Everything depends upon it. The Word of God claims our belief because it is His Word. If we want any authority to confirm the truth of God's Word, we are in reality rejecting God's Word altogether, and resting on man's word. A man may say, "How do I know that the Bible is the Word of God?" We reply, It carries its own divine credentials with it; and if these credentials do not convince, all the human authority under the sun is perfectly worthless. If the whole population of the earth were to stand before me, and assure me of the truth of God's Word, and that I were to believe on their authority, it would not be saving faith at all. It would be faith in men, and not faith in God; but the faith that saves is the faith that believes what God says because God says it.

It is not that we undervalue human testimony, or reject what are called the external evidences of the truth of the Holy Scripture. All these things must go for what they are worth; they are by no means essential in laying the foundation of saving faith. We are perfectly sure that all genuine history, all true science, all sound human evidence, must go to establish the divine authenticity of the Bible; but we do not rest our faith upon them, but

upon the Scriptures to which they bear witness; for if all human evidence, all science, and every page of history, were to speak against Scripture, we should utterly and absolutely reject them; reverently and implicitly believe it. Is this narrow? Be it so. It is the blessed narrowness in which we gladly find our peace and our portion forever. It is the narrowness that refuses to admit the weight of a feather as an addition to the Word of God. If this be narrowness — we repeat it with emphasis, and from the very centre of our ransomed being — let it be ours forever.

If to be broad we must look to man to confirm the truth of God's Word, then away with such broadness; it is the broad way that leadeth straight down to hell. No, your life, your salvation, your everlasting peace, blessedness and glory, depend upon your taking God at His Word, and believing what He says because He says it. This is faith — living, saving, precious faith. May you possess it!

God's Word, then, most distinctly declares that man in his natural, unrenewed, unconverted state is Satan's bondslave. It speaks of Satan as "the god of this world," as "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." It speaks of man as "led captive by the devil at his will." Hence, in Paul's commission, the third thing which the gospel is to do is to turn man from "the power of Satan to God." Thus his eyes are opened; divine light comes streaming in; the power of Satan is broken, and the delivered one finds himself, peacefully and happily, in the presence of God. Like the demoniac in Mark 5, he is delivered from his ruthless tyrant, his cruel master; his chains are broken and gone; he is clothed and in his right mind, and sitting at the feet of Jesus.

What a glorious deliverance! It is worthy of God in every aspect of it, and in all its results. The poor blind slave, led captive by the devil, is set free; and not only so, but he is brought to God, pardoned, accepted, and endowed with an eternal inheritance among the sanctified. And all this is by faith, through grace. It is proclaimed in the gospel of God to every creature under heaven — not one is excluded. The great commission, whether we read it in Luke 24 or in Acts 26, assures us that this most precious, most glorious salvation is unto all.

Let us listen for a moment to our apostle as he discharges his blessed commission in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia. Most gladly would we transcribe the whole of his precious discourse, but our limited space compels us to confine ourselves to the powerful appeal at the end. "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man" (Jesus Christ, crucified, risen, and glorified) "is preached" — not promised in the future, but preached now, announced as a present reality — is preached "unto you the remission of sins. And by Him all who believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."

From these words we learn, in the clearest possible manner, that every soul in that synagogue was called upon, there and then, to receive into his heart the blessed message which fell from the preacher's lips. Not one was excluded. "Unto you is the word of this salvation sent." If any one had asked the apostle if the message was intended for him, what would have been the reply? "Unto you is the word of this salvation sent." Was there no preliminary question to be settled? Not one. All the preliminaries had been settled at the cross.

Was there no question as to election or predestination? Not a syllable about either in the whole range of this magnificent and comprehensive discourse.

Is there no such question? Not in that "great commission" whereof we speak. No doubt the grand truth of election shines in its proper place on the page of inspiration. But what is its proper and divinely appointed place? Most assuredly not in the preaching of the evangelist, but in the ministry of the teacher or pastor. When the apostle sits down to instruct believers, we hear such words as these: "Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate.." And again: "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God."

Let it never be lost sight of, when he stands up as an ambassador of Christ, the herald of salvation, he proclaims in the most absolute and unqualified manner a present, a personal, a perfect salvation to every creature under heaven; and every one who heard him was responsible there and then to believe. And every one who reads him now is equally so. If any one had presumed to tell the preacher that his hearers were not responsible, that they were powerless, and could not believe — that it was only deceiving them to call upon them to believe — what would have been his reply? We think we are warranted in saying that a full and overwhelming reply to this, and every such preposterous objection, is wrapped up in the solemn appeal with which the apostle closes his address, "Beware, therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets: Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe though a man declare it unto you."

Part 4

Having in the former papers dwelt a little upon the terms of "the great commission," we shall now, in dependence upon divine teaching, seek to unfold the truth as to the basis.

It is of the greatest importance to have a clear understanding of the solid ground on which "repentance and remission of sins" are announced to every creature under heaven. This we have distinctly laid down in our Lord's own words, "It behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day."

Here lies, in its impregnable strength, the foundation of the glorious commission whereof we speak. God — blessed forever be His holy name — has been pleased to set before us with all possible clearness the moral ground on which He commands all men everywhere to repent, and the righteous ground on which He can proclaim to every repentant soul the perfect remission of sins.

We have already had occasion to guard the reader against the false notion that any amount of repentance on the part of the sinner could possibly form the meritorious ground of forgiveness. But inasmuch as we write for those who may be ignorant of the foundations of the gospel, we feel bound to put things in the very simplest possible form, so that all may understand. We know how prone the human heart is to build upon something of our own — if not upon good works, at least upon our penitential exercises. Hence, it becomes our bounden duty to set forth the precious truth of the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ as the only righteous ground of the forgiveness of sins.

True, all men are commanded to repent. It is meet and right that they should. How could it be otherwise? How can we look at that accursed tree on which the Son of God bore the judgment of sin and not see the absolute necessity of repentance? How can we harken to that solemn cry breaking forth from amid the shadows of Calvary, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" and not own, from the deepest depths of our moral being, the moral fitness of repentance?

If indeed sin is so terrible, so absolutely hateful to God, so perfectly intolerable to His holy nature, that He had to bruise His well beloved and only begotten Son on the cross in order to put it away, does it not well become the sinner to judge himself, and repent in dust and ashes? Had the blessed Lord to endure the hiding of God's countenance because of our sins, and we not be broken, self-judged and subdued on account of these sins? Shall we with impenitent heart hear the glad tidings of full and free forgiveness of sins — a forgiveness which cost nothing less than the unutterable horrors and agonies of the cross? Shall we, with flippant tongue, profess to have peace — a peace purchased by the ineffable sufferings of the Son of God? If it was absolutely necessary that Christ should suffer for our sins, is it not morally fitting that we should repent of them?

Nor is this all. It is not merely that it becomes us, once in a way, to repent. There is far more than this. The spirit of self-judgment, genuine contrition and true humility must characterise every one who enters at all into the profound mystery of the sufferings of Christ. Indeed, it is only as we contemplate and deeply ponder those sufferings that we can form anything approaching to a just estimate of the hatefulness of sin on the one

hand, and the divine fullness and perfectness of remission on the other. Such was the hatefulness of sin, that it was absolutely necessary that Christ should suffer; but — all praise to redeeming love! — such were the sufferings of Christ, that God can forgive us our sins according to the infinite value which He attaches to those sufferings. Both go together; and both, we may add, exert a formative influence, under the powerful ministry of the Holy Ghost, on the Christian character from first to last. Our sins are all forgiven; but "it behoved Christ to suffer"; and hence, while our peace flows like a river, we must never forget the soul-subduing fact that the basis of our peace was laid in the ineffable sufferings of the Son of God.

This is most needful, owing to the excessive levity of our hearts. We are ready enough to receive the truth of the remission of sins, and then go on in an easy, self-indulgent, world-loving spirit, thus proving how feebly we enter into the sufferings of our blessed Lord, or into the real nature of sin. All this is truly deplorable, and calls for the deepest exercise of soul.

There is a sad lack amongst us of that real brokenness of spirit which ought to characterise those who owe their present peace and everlasting felicity and glory to the sufferings of Christ. We are light, frivolous, and self-willed. We avail ourselves of the death of Christ to save us from the consequences of our sins, but our ways do not exhibit the practical effect of that death in its application to ourselves. We do not walk as those who are dead with Christ — who have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts — who are delivered from this present evil world. In a word, our Christianity is sadly deficient in depth of tone; it is shallow, feeble, and

stunted. We profess to know a great deal of truth; but it is to be feared it is too much in theory — therefore not turned to practical account as it should be.

It may, perhaps, be asked, What has all this to do with "the great commission"? It has to do with it in a very intimate way. We are deeply impressed with a sense of the superficial way in which the work of evangelization is carried on at the present day. Not only are the terms of the great commission overlooked, but the basis seems to be little understood. The sufferings of Christ are not duly dwelt upon and unfolded. The atoning work of Christ is presented in its sufficiency for the sinner's need — and no doubt this is a signal mercy. We have to be profoundly thankful when preachers and writers hold up the precious blood of Christ as the sinner's only plea, instead of preaching up rites, ceremonies, sacraments good works (falsely so-called), creeds, churches, religious ordinances, and such-like delusions.

All this is most fully admitted. But at the same time we must give expression to our deep and solemn conviction that much of our modern evangelical preaching is extremely shallow and bald; and the result of that preaching is seen in the light, airy, flippant style of many of our so-called converts. Some of us seem so intensely anxious to make everything so easy and simple for the sinner that the preaching becomes extremely one-sided.

Thanks be to God, He has indeed made all easy and simple for the needy, broken-hearted, penitent sinner. He has left him nothing to do, nothing to give. It is "to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly." It is not possible for any evangelist to go too far in stating this side of the

question. No one can go beyond Rom. 4: 5 in setting forth salvation by free grace, through faith, without works of any sort or description.

But then, we must remember that the blessed apostle Paul — the greatest evangelist that ever lived, except his divine Master — did not confine himself to this one side; and neither should we. He pressed the claims of divine holiness. He called upon sinners to judge themselves, and he called upon believers to subdue and deny themselves. He did not preach a gospel that left people at ease in the world, satisfied with themselves, and occupied with earthly things. He did not tell people that they were saved from the flames of hell and were therefore free to enjoy the follies of earth.

This was not Paul's gospel. He preached a gospel which, while it fully met the sinner's deepest need, did also most fully maintain God's glory — a gospel which, while it came down to the very lowest point of the sinner's condition, did not leave him there. Paul's gospel not only set forth a full, clear unqualified, unconditional, present forgiveness of sins, but also, just as fully and clearly, the condemnation of sin, and the believer's entire deliverance from this present evil world. The death of Christ, in Paul's gospel not only assured the soul of complete deliverance from the just consequences of sins, as seen in the judgment of God in the lake of fire, but it also set forth, with magnificent fullness and clearness, the complete snapping of every link with the world, and entire deliverance from the present power and rule of sin.

Now, here is precisely where the lamentable deficiency and culpable one-sidedness of our modern preaching are

so painfully manifest. The gospel which one often hears nowadays is, if we may be allowed to use of such a term, a carnal, earthly, worldly gospel. It offers a kind of ease, but it is fleshly, worldly ease. It gives confidence, but it is rather a carnal confidence than the confidence of faith. It is not a delivering gospel. It leaves people in the world, instead of bringing them to God.

What must be the result of all this? We can hardly bear to contemplate it. We greatly fear that, should our Lord tarry, the fruit of much of what is going on around us will be a terrible combination of the very highest profession with the very lowest practice. It cannot be otherwise. High truth taken up in a light, carnal spirit tends to lull the conscience and quash all godly exercise of soul as to our habits and ways in daily life. In this way people escape from legality only to plunge into levity, and truly the last state is worse than the first.

We earnestly hope that the Christian reader may not feel unduly depressed by the perusal of these lines. God knows we would not pen a line to discourage the feeblest lamb in all the precious flock of Christ. We desire to write in the divine presence. We have entreated the Lord that every line of this paper, and of all our papers, should come directly from Himself to the reader.

Hence, therefore, we must ask the reader — and we do so most faithfully and affectionately — to ponder what is here put before him. We cannot hide from him the fact that we are most seriously impressed with the condition of things around us. We feel that the tone and aspect of much of the so-called Christianity of this our day are such as to awaken the gravest apprehension in the mind

of every thoughtful observer. We perceive a terribly rapid development of the features of the last days, as detailed by the pen of inspiration. "This know also that, in the last days, perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof from such turn away" (2 Tim. 3: 1-5).

What an appalling picture! How solemn to find the same evils that characterise the heathen, as recorded in Rom. 1, reproduced in connection with the profession of Christianity! Should not the thought of this awaken the most serious apprehensions in the mind of every Christian? Should it not lead all who are engaged in the holy service of preaching and teaching amongst us to examine themselves closely as to the tone and character of their ministry, and as to their own private walk and ways? We want a more searching style of ministry on the part of evangelists and teachers. There is a lack of hortatory and prophetic ministry. By prophetic ministry mean that which brings the conscience into the immediate presence of God. (See 1 Cor. 14: 1-3, 23-26.)

In this we are lamentably deficient. There is a vast amount of objective truth in circulation amongst us — more, perhaps, than ever since the days of the apostles. Books and periodicals by hundreds and thousands, tracts by thousands and millions, are sent forth annually.

Do we object to this? Nay; we bless God for it. But we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that by far the largest proportion of this vast mass of literature is addressed to the intelligence, and not enough to the heart and conscience. Now, while it is quite right to enlighten the understanding, it is quite wrong to neglect the heart and conscience. We feel it to be a most serious thing to allow the intelligence to outstrip the conscience — to have more truth in the head than in the heart — to profess principles which do not govern the practice. Nothing can be more dangerous. It tends to place us directly in the hands of Satan. If the conscience be not kept tender, if the heart be not governed by the fear of God, if a broken and contrite spirit be not cultivated, there is no telling what depths we may plunge into. When the conscience is kept in a sound condition, and the heart is humble and true, then every fresh ray of light that shines in upon the understanding ministers strength to the soul and tends to elevate and sanctify our whole moral being.

This is what every earnest spirit must crave. All true-hearted Christians must long for increased personal holiness, more likeness to Christ, more genuine devotedness of heart, a deepening, strengthening and expanding of the kingdom of God in the soul — that kingdom which is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

May we all have grace to seek after these divine realities! May we diligently cultivate them in our own private life, and seek in every possible way to promote them in all those with whom we come in contact! Thus shall we in some measure stem the tide of hollow profession around us, and be a living testimony against

the powerless form of godliness so sadly dominant in this our day.

Christian reader! art thou one with us in this current of thought and feeling? If so, then let us most earnestly entreat thee to join us in earnest prayer to God that He will graciously raise our spiritual tone by drawing us closer to Himself, and filling our hearts with love to Him and earnest desire for the promotion of His glory, the progress of His cause, and the prosperity of His people.

Part 5

In handling our subject, we have yet to consider the authority and the sphere of "the great commission;" but ere proceeding to treat of these we must dwell a little longer on the basis. The commission is truly a great one, and would need a solid foundation on which to rest it; and such it has, blessed be God, in the atoning death of His Son. Nothing less than this could sustain such a magnificent fabric; but the grace that planned the commission has also laid the foundation; so that a full remission of sins can be preached among all nations, inasmuch as God has been glorified, in the death of Christ, as to the entire question of sin.

This is a grand point for the reader to seize. It lies at the very foundation of the Christian system. It is the keystone of the arch of divine revelation. God has been glorified as to sin. His judgment has been executed upon it. The claims of His throne have been vindicated as to it. The insult offered to His divine majesty has been flung back in the enemy's face. If the sweet story of remission of sins had never fallen upon a human ear or entered a human heart, the divine glory would none the less have been most perfectly maintained.

The Lord Jesus Christ did, by His most precious death, wipe off the stain which the enemy sought to cast upon the eternal glory of God. A testimony has been given in the cross, to all created intelligence, as to God's thoughts about sin. It can there be seen, with all possible clearness, that a single trace of sin can never enter the precincts of the divine presence. God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity. Sin, wherever found, must be met by divine judgment.

Where does all this come most fully and forcibly out? Assuredly in the cross. Harken to that solemn and most mysterious cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" What means this wondrous inquiry? Who is the speaker? Is he one of Adam's fallen posterity? Is he a sinner? Surely not; for were he such, there would be no moral force whatever in the question. There never was a sinner on the face of this earth who, so far as he was personally concerned, did not richly deserve to be forsaken of a holy, sin-hating God. This must never be forgotten. Some people entertain most foolish notions as to this point. They have, in their own vain imagination, invented a god to suit themselves — one who will not punish sin — one who is so tender, so kind, so benevolent, that he will connive at evil and pass it over as though it were nothing.

Now, nothing is more certain than that this god of the human imagination is a false one, just as false as any of the idols of the heathen. The God of the Bible, the God of Christianity, the God whom we see at the cross, is not like this. Men may reason as they will; but sin must be condemned — it must be met by the just and inflexible judgment of a sin-hating God.

We repeat the question, Who uttered those words at the opening of Ps. 22? If He was not a sinner, who was he? Wonderful to declare, He was the only spotless, perfectly holy, pure and sinless Man that ever trod this earth. He was more. He was the eternal Son of the Father, the object of God's ineffable delight, who had dwelt in His bosom from all eternity, "the brightness of His glory and the exact expression of His substance."

Yet He was forsaken of God! yes, that holy and perfect One, who knew no sin, whose human nature was absolutely free from every taint, who never had a single thought, never uttered a single word, never did a single act that was not in the most perfect harmony with the mind of God; whose whole life, from Bethlehem to Calvary, was a perfect sacrifice of sweetest odour presented to the heart of God. Again and again we see Heaven opening upon Him, and the voice of the Father is heard giving expression to His infinite complacency in the Son of His bosom. And yet, He it is whose voice is heard in that bitter cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Marvellous question! It stands alone in the annals of eternity. No such question had ever been asked before; no such question has ever been asked since; and no such question can ever be asked again. Whether we consider the One who asked the question, or the One of whom it was asked, or the answer, we must admit that it is perfectly unique. That God should forsake such an One is the most profound and marvellous mystery that could possibly engage the attention of men or angels. Human reason cannot fathom its depths. No created intelligence can comprehend its mighty compass.

Yet there it stands, a stupendous fact before the eye of faith. Our blessed Lord Himself assures us that it was absolutely necessary. "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer." But why was it necessary? Why should the only perfect, sinless, spotless Man have to suffer? Why should He be forsaken of God? The glory of God, the eternal counsels of redeeming love, man's guilty, ruined, helpless condition — all these things rendered it indispensable that Christ should suffer. There was no other way in which the divine glory could be maintained; no other way in which the claims of the throne of God could be answered; no other way in which Heaven's majesty could be vindicated; no other way in which the eternal purposes of love could be made good; no other way in which sin could be fully atoned for, and finally taken away out of God's creation; no other way in which sins could be forgiven; no other way in which Satan and all the powers of darkness could be thoroughly vanquished; no other way in which God could be just, and yet the Justifier of any poor ungodly sinner; no other way in which death could be deprived of its sting, or the grave of its victory; no other way in which any or all of these grand results could be reached save by the sufferings and death of our adorable Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ.

But, blessed forever be His holy name, He went through it all. He went down under the heavy billows and waves of God's righteous wrath against sin. He took the sinner's place, stood in his stead, sustained the judgment, paid the penalty, died the death, answered every question, met every demand, vanquished every foe; and having done all, He ascended into the heavens and took His seat on the throne of God, where He is now

crowned with glory and honour as the divine and all-glorious Accomplisher of the entire work of man's redemption.

Such, then, is the basis of "the great commission" whereof we speak. Need we wonder at the terms, when we contemplate the basis? Can there be anything too good, anything too great, anything too glorious, for the God of all grace to bestow upon us poor sinners of the Gentiles, seeing He has been so fully glorified in the death of Christ? That most precious death furnishes a divinely righteous ground on which our God can indulge the deep and everlasting love of His heart in the perfect remission of our sins. It has removed out of the way every barrier to the full flood-tide of redeeming love which can now flow through a perfectly righteous channel, to the very vilest sinner that repents and believes in Jesus.

A Saviour-God can now publish a full and immediate remission of sins to every creature under heaven. There is positively no hindrance. God has been glorified as to the question of sin; and the time is coming when every trace of sin shall be forever obliterated from His fair creation, and those words of John the Baptist shall have their full accomplishment, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." Meanwhile, the heralds of salvation are commanded to go forth to the ends of the earth and publish, without let or limitation perfect remission of sins to every soul that believes. It is the joy of God's heart to pardon sins; and it is due to the One who bore the judgment of sin on the cross that in His name forgiveness of sins should be thus freely published, fully received, and abidingly enjoyed.

But what of those who reject this glorious message — who shut their ears against it and turn away their hearts from it? This is the solemn question. Who can answer it? Who can attempt to set forth the eternal destiny of those who die in their sins, as all must who refuse God's only basis of remission? Men may reason and argue as they will; but all the reasoning and argument in the world cannot set aside the Word of God, which assures us in manifold places, and in terms so plain as to leave no possible ground for questioning, that all who die in their sins — all who die out of Christ — must inevitably perish eternally must bear the consequences of their sins, in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.

To quote the passages in proof of the solemn truth of eternal punishment would require a small volume. We cannot attempt it here; nor is it necessary, inasmuch as we have gone into the subject again and again in other places.

We would here put a question which arises naturally out of our present thesis. It is this: Was Christ judged, bruised, and forsaken on the cross — did God visit His only begotten and well beloved Son with the full weight of His righteous wrath against sin — and shall impenitent sinners escape? We solemnly press this question on all whom it may concern. Men talk of its being inconsistent with the idea of divine goodness, tenderness and compassion that God should send any of His creatures to hell. We reply, Who is to be the judge? Is man competent to decide as to what is morally fitting for God to do? And further, we ask, What is to be the standard of judgment? Anything that human reason can grasp? Assuredly not. What then? The cross on which the Son of God died, the Just for the unjust — this, and

this only, is the great standard by which to judge the question as to sin's desert.

Who can harken to that bitter cry emanating from the broken heart of the Son of God, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" and question the eternal punishment of all who die in their sins? Talk of tenderness, goodness, and compassion! Where do these shine out most brightly and blessedly? Surely in "the great commission" which publishes full and free forgiveness of sins to every creature under heaven. But would it be just, or good, or compassionate, to suffer the rejecter of Christ to escape? If we would see the goodness, kindness, mercy and deep compassion of God, we must look at the cross. "He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all." "It pleased Jehovah to bruise Him. He hath put Him to grief." "He hath made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

If men reject all this, and go on in their sins, in their rebellion, in their infidel reasonings and impious speculations — what then? If men maintain that suffering for sin is not necessary, and that there is another and a better way of disposing of the matter — what then? Our Lord declared in the ears of His apostles that "it was necessary that Christ should suffer" — that there was no other way possible by which the great question could be settled. Whom are we to believe? Was the death of Christ gratuitous? Was His heart broken for nothing? Was the cross a work of supererogation? Did Jehovah bruise His Son and put Him to grief for an end which might be gained some other way?

How monstrous are the reasonings, or rather the ravings, of infidelity! Infidel doctors begin by throwing overboard the Word of God — that peerless and perfect revelation; and then, when they have deprived us of our divine guide, with singular audacity, they present themselves before us, and undertake to point out for us a more excellent way; and when we inquire what that way is, we are met by a thousand and one fine-spun theories, no two of which agree in anything save in shutting out God and His Word.

True, they talk plausibly about a God; but it is a God of their own imagination — one who will connive at sin — who will allow them to indulge in their lusts, and passions, and pleasures, and then take them to a heaven of which they really know nothing. They talk of mercy, and kindness, and goodness; but they reject the only channel through which these can flow, namely, the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. They speak not of righteousness, holiness, truth, and judgment to come. They would fain have us to believe that God put Himself to needless cost in delivering up His Son. They would ignore that marvellous transaction which stands alone in the entire history of the ways of God — the atoning death of His Son. In one word, the grand object of the devil, in all the sceptical, rationalistic and infidel theories that have ever been propounded in this world, is to shut out completely the Word of God, the Christ of God, and God Himself.

We solemnly call upon all our readers, specially our young friends, to ponder this. It is our deep and thorough conviction that the harbouring of a single infidel suggestion is the first step on that inclined plane

which leads straight down to the dark and terrible abyss of atheism — down to the blackness of darkness forever.

We shall have occasion to recur to the foregoing line of thought when we come to consider the authority on which "the great commission" comes to us. We have been drawn into it by the sad fact that in every direction, and on every subject, we are assailed by the contemptible reasonings of infidelity; and we feel imperatively called upon to warn all with whom we come in contact against infidel books, infidel lectures, infidel theories in every shape and form. May the inspired Word of God be more and more precious to our hearts! May we walk in its light, feel its sacred power, bow to its divine authority, hide it in our hearts, feed upon its treasures, own its absolute supremacy, confess its all-sufficiency, and utterly reject ad teaching which dares to touch the integrity of the Holy Scriptures.

Part 6

We have seen that the basis of "the great commission" is the death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This must never be lost sight of. "It behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day." It is a risen Christ that sends forth His heralds to preach "repentance and remission of sins." The incarnation and the crucifixion are great cardinal truths of Christianity; but it is only in resurrection they are made available for us in any way. Incarnation — precious and priceless mystery though it be — could not form the groundwork of remission of sins, for "without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9: 22). We are justified by the blood, and reconciled by the death of Christ.

But it is in resurrection that all this is made good unto us. Christ was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification (Rom. 4: 25; Rom. 5: 9-10). "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15: 3-4).

Hence, therefore, it is of the very last possible importance, for all who would carry out our Lord's commission, to know in their own souls, and to set forth in their preaching, the grand truth of resurrection. The most cursory glance at the preaching of the earliest heralds of the gospel will suffice to show the prominent place which they gave to this glorious fact.

Harken to Peter on the day of Pentecost, or rather to the Holy Ghost, just come down from the risen, ascended and glorified Saviour. "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.... This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. 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" (Acts 2).

So also in Acts 3: "The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.... Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.... 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."

Their preaching was characterised by the prominent place which it assigned to the glorious, powerful and telling fact of resurrection. True, there was the full and clear statement of incarnation and crucifixion, with the great moral bearings of these facts. How could it be otherwise? The Son of God had to become a man to die, in order that by death He might glorify God as to the entire question of sin; destroy the power of Satan; rob death of its sting, and the grave of its victory; put away forever the sins of His people, and associate them with Himself in the power of eternal life in the new creation, where all things are of God, and where a single trace of sin or sorrow can never enter. Eternal and universal homage and adoration to His peerless name!

Let all preachers remember the place which resurrection holds in apostolic preaching and teaching. "With great power gave the apostles witness." Of what? Incarnation or crucifixion merely? Nay; but "of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." This was the stupendous

fact that glorified God and His Son Jesus Christ. It was this that attested, in the view of all created intelligences, the divine complacency in the work of redemption. It was this that demonstrated, in the most marvellous way, the complete and eternal overthrow of the kingdom of Satan and all the powers of darkness. It was this that declared the full and everlasting deliverance of all who believe in Jesus — their deliverance, not only from all the consequences of their sins, but from this present evil world, and from every link that bound them to that old creation which lies under the power of evil.

No marvel, therefore, if the apostles, filled as they were with the Holy Ghost, persistently and powerfully presented the magnificent truth of resurrection. Hear them again before the council — a council composed of the great religious leaders and guides of the people. "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew, and hanged on a tree." They were at issue with God on the all-important question as to His Son. They had slain Him, but God raised Him from the dead. "Him hath God exalted with His right hand, a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins."

So also in Peter's address to the Gentiles, in the house of Cornelius, speaking of Jesus of Nazareth, he says, "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, to us who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead."

The Holy Ghost is careful to set forth the weighty and, to us, profoundly interesting fact that "God raised up His Son Jesus." This fact has a double bearing. It proves that

God is at issue with the world, seeing He has raised, exalted and glorified the very One whom they slew and hanged on a tree. But, blessed throughout all ages be His holy name, it proves that He has found eternal rest and satisfaction as to us, and all that was or could be against us, seeing He has raised up the very One who took our place and stood charged with all our sin and guilt.

But all this will come more fully out as we proceed with our proofs.

Let us now listen for a moment to Paul's address in the synagogue at Antioch. "Men, brethren, children of the stock of Abraham and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. For 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. 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.

"But God 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; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee. And as concerning that He raised Him up from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He said on this wise, I will

give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore He saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: but He whom God raised again saw no corruption."

Then follows the powerful appeal which, though not bearing upon our present line of argument, we cannot omit in this place. "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets: Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you" (Acts 13: 26-41).

We shall close our series of proofs from the Acts of the Apostles by a brief quotation from Paul's address at Athens. "Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God overlooked; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent; because He hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all, in that He hath raised Him from the dead" (Acts 17).

This is a very remarkable and deeply solemn passage. The proof that God is going to judge the world in righteousness — a proof offered to all — is that He has

raised His ordained Man from the dead. He does not here name the Man; but at verse 18 we are told that some of the Athenians deemed the apostle a setter forth of strange gods, "because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection."

From all this it is perfectly plain that the blessed Apostle Paul gave a most prominent place in all his preachings to the glorious truth of resurrection. Whether he addresses a congregation of Jews in the synagogue at Antioch, or an assembly of Gentiles on Mars Hill at Athens, he presents a risen Christ. In a word, he was characterised by the fact that he preached not merely the incarnation and the crucifixion, but the resurrection; and this, too, in all its mighty moral bearings — its bearing upon man in his individual state and destiny; its bearing upon the world as a whole, in its history in the past, its moral condition in the present, and its certain doom in the future; in its bearing upon the believer, proving his absolute, complete and eternal justification before God, and his thorough deliverance from this present evil world.

We have to bear in mind that in apostolic preaching the resurrection was not presented as a mere doctrine, but as a living, telling, mighty moral fact — a fact, the magnitude of which is beyond all power of human utterance or thought. The apostles, in carrying out "the great commission" of their Lord, pressed the stupendous fact that God had raised Jesus from the dead — had raised the Man who was nailed to the cross and buried in the grave. In short, they preached a resurrection gospel. Their preaching was governed by these words, "It was necessary that Christ should suffer, and rise from the dead the third day."

We shall now turn for a moment to the Epistles, and see the wondrous way in which the Holy Ghost unfolds and applies the fact of resurrection. But ere doing so we would call the reader's attention to a passage which is sadly misunderstood and misapplied. The apostle, in writing to the Corinthians, says, "We preach Christ crucified." These words are continually quoted for the purpose of casting a damper on those who earnestly desire to advance in the knowledge of divine things. But a moment's serious attention to the context would be sufficient to show the true meaning of the apostle. Did he confine himself to the fact of the crucifixion? The bare idea, in the face of the body of Scripture which we have quoted, is simply absurd. The fact is, the glorious truth of resurrection shines out in all his discourses.

What, then, does the apostle mean when he declares, "We preach Christ crucified"? Simply this, that the Christ whom he preached was the One whom the world crucified. He was a rejected, outcast Christ — one assigned by the world to a malefactor's gibbet. What a fact for the poor Corinthians, so full of vanity and love for this world's wisdom! A crucified Christ was the one whom Paul preached, "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but to those that are called, 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."

Remarkable words! words divinely suited to people prone to boast themselves in the so-called wisdom and greatness of this world — the vain reasonings and imaginations of the poor human mind, which all perish in a moment. All the wisdom of God, all His power, all:

His greatness, all His glory, all that He is, in short, comes out in a crucified Christ. The cross confounds the world, vanquishes Satan and all the powers of darkness, saves all who believe, and forms the solid foundation of the everlasting and universal glory of God.

We shall now turn for a moment to a very beautiful passage in Rom. 4, in which the inspired writer sets forth the subject of resurrection in a most edifying way for us. Speaking of Abraham, he says, "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb; he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief," — which is always sure to stagger, — "but was strong in faith, giving glory to God" — as faith always does; "and being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness."

And then, lest any should say that all this applied only to Abraham, who was such a devoted, holy, remarkable man, the inspiring Spirit adds, with singular grace and sweetness, "Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him, but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that" — what? Gave His Son? Bruised His Son on the cross? Not merely this, but "that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead."

Here lies the grand point of the apostle's blessed and powerful argument. We must, if we would have settled peace, believe in God as the One who raised up Jesus from the dead, and who in so doing proved Himself

friendly to us, and proved too His infinite satisfaction in the work of the cross. Jesus having been "delivered for our offences,' could not be where He now is if a single one of these offences remained unatoned for. But blessed forever be the God of all grace, He raised from among the dead the One who had been delivered for our offences; and to all who believe in Him righteousness shall be reckoned. "It behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day." See how this glorious theme, the basis of the great commission, expands under our gaze as we pursue our study of it!

One more brief quotation shall close this paper. In Heb. 13 we read, "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant."

This is uncommonly fine. The God of judgment met the Sin-bearer at the cross, and there, with Him, entered thoroughly into and definitively settled the question of sin. Then, in glorious proof that all was done — sin atoned for — guilt put away — Satan silenced — God glorified — all divinely accomplished — "the God of peace" entered the scene, and raised from the dead our Lord Jesus, that "great Shepherd of the sheep."

Beloved reader, how glorious is all this! How enfranchising to all who simply believe! Jesus is risen. His sufferings are over forever. God has exalted Him. Eternal Justice has wreathed His blessed brow with a diadem of glory; and, wondrous fact, that very diadem is the eternal demonstration that all who believe are justified from all things, and accepted in a risen and

glorified Christ. Eternal and universal hallelujahs to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost!

Part 7

We are now called to consider the deeply important subject of the authority on which the great commission proceeds. This we have presented to us in that one commanding and most comprehensive sentence, "It is written" — a sentence which ought to be engraved in characters deep and broad on the tablet of every Christian's heart.

Nothing can possibly be more interesting or edifying than to note the way in which our blessed Lord on all occasions and under all circumstances exalts the Holy Scriptures. He, though God over all, blessed forever, and as such the Author of all Scripture, yet, having taken His place as man on the earth, He plainly sets forth what is the bounden duty of every man, and that is to be absolutely, completely and abidingly governed by the authority of Scripture. See Him in conflict with Satan! How does He meet him? Simply as each one of us should meet him — by the written Word. It could be no example to us had our Lord vanquished him by the putting forth of divine power. Of course He could, there and then, have consigned him to the bottomless pit or the lake of fire, but that would have been no example for us, inasmuch as we could not so overcome. But on the other hand, when we find the blessed One referring to Holy Scripture, when we find Him appealing again and again to that divine authority, when we find Him putting the adversary to flight simply by the written Word, we learn in the most impressive manner the place, the value and the authority of the Holy Scriptures.

Is it not of the very last possible importance to have this great lesson impressed upon us at the present moment? Unquestionably it is. If ever there was a moment in the history of the Church of God when it behoved Christians to bow down their whole moral being to this very lesson, it is the moment through which we are just now passing. On all hands the divine authority, integrity, plenary inspiration and all-sufficiency of Holy Scripture are called in question. The Word of God is openly insulted and flung aside. Its integrity is called in question, and that too in quarters where we should least expect it. At our colleges and universities our young men are continually assailed by infidel attacks upon the blessed Word of God. Men who are in total spiritual blindness, and who therefore cannot possibly know anything whatever about divine things, and are utterly incompetent to give an opinion on the subject of Holy Scripture, have the cool audacity to insult the sacred volume, to pronounce the five books of Moses an imposture, to assert that Moses never wrote them at all!

What is the opinion of such men worth? Not worth the weight of a feather. Who would think of going to a man who was born in a coal mine, and had never see the sun, to get his judgment as to the properties of light, or the effect of the sun's beams upon the human constitution? Who would think of going to one who was born blind to get his opinion upon colours, or the effect of light and shade? Surely no one in his senses. Well, then, with how much more moral force, may we not ask, who would think of going to an unconverted man — a man dead in trespasses and sins — a man spiritually blind, wholly ignorant of things divine, spiritual, and heavenly — who would think for a moment of going to such a one for a

judgment on the weighty question of Holy Scripture? And if such a one were audacious enough, in ignorant self-confidence, to offer an opinion on such a subject, what man in his sober senses would think of giving the slightest heed?

It will perhaps be said, "The illustration does not apply." Why not? We admit it fails in force, but most certainly not in its moral application. Is it not a commonly received axiom amongst us that no man has any right to give an opinion on a subject of which he is totally ignorant? No doubt. Well, what does the blessed apostle say as to the unconverted man? We quote the whole context for the reader. It is morally grand, and its interest and value just now are unspeakable.

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith" — mark these words, — "should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect; yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to naught. "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear

heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them to us by His Spirit", — otherwise they could not possibly be known — "for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we" — all true believers, all God's children — "have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" — or, communicating spiritual things through a spiritual medium. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; neither can he know them" — be he ever so wise and learned — "because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2: 1-16).

We dare not offer an apology for giving so lengthened an extract from the Word of God. We deem it invaluable, not only because it proves that it is only by divine teaching that divine things can be understood, but also because it completely withers up all man's pretensions to give judgment as to Scripture. If the natural man cannot know the things of the Spirit of God, then it is perfectly plain that all infidel attacks upon the Word of God are absolutely unworthy of the very smallest attention. In fact, all infidel writers, be they ever so clever, ever so wise, ever so learned, are put out of

court; they are not to be listened to for a moment. The judgment of an unconverted man in reference to the Holy Scriptures is more worthless than the judgment of an uneducated plowman as to the use of the differential calculus, or the truth of the Copernican system. As to each, we have only to say, he knows nothing whatever about the matter. His thoughts are absolutely good for nothing.

But how truly delightful and refreshing to turn from man's worthless notions, and see the way in which our blessed Lord Jesus Christ prized and used the Holy Scriptures! In His conflict with Satan, He appeals three times over to the book of Deuteronomy. "It is written" is His one simple and unanswerable reply to the suggestions of the enemy. He does not reason. He does not argue or explain. He does not refer to His own personal feelings, evidences, or experiences. He does not argue from the great facts of the opened heavens, the descending Spirit, the voice of the Father — precious and real as all these things were. He simply takes His stand upon the divine and eternal authority of the Holy Scriptures, and of that portion of the Scriptures in particular which modern infidels have audaciously attacked. He uses as His authority that which they are not afraid to pronounce an imposture! How dreadful for them! What will be their end, unless they repent?

Not only did the Son of God — Himself, as God, the Author of every line of Holy Scripture — use the Word of God as His only weapon against the enemy, but He made it also the basis and the material of His public ministry. When His conflict in the wilderness was over, "He returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of Him through all the region

round about. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read" — His custom was to read the Scriptures publicly.

"And there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Esaias." Here He puts His seal upon the prophet Isaiah, as before upon the law of Moses. "And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4).

Let us turn now to that most solemn parable of the rich man and Lazarus, at the close of Luke 16, in which we have a solemn testimony from the Master's own lips to the integrity, value and surpassing importance of "Moses and the Prophets" — the very portions of the divine Word which infidels impiously assail. The rich man in torment — alas, no longer rich, but miserably and eternally poor! — entreats Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his five brethren, lest they also should come into that place of torment. Mark the reply! Mark it, all ye infidels, rationalists, and sceptics! Mark it, all ye who are in danger of being deluded and turned aside by the impudent and blasphemous suggestions of infidelity!

"Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." Yes; "hear them" — hear those very writings which infidels tell us are not divinely inspired at all, but documents palmed upon us by

impostors pretending to inspiration. Assuredly the rich man knew better; indeed, the devil himself knows better. There is no thought of calling in question the genuineness of "Moses and the Prophets;" but perhaps "if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." Hear the weighty rejoinder! "And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

Now we must confess we rejoice exceedingly in the grandeur of this testimony. Nothing can be clearer, nothing higher, nothing more thoroughly confirmatory as to the supreme authority and divine integrity of "Moses and the Prophets." We have the blessed Lord Himself setting His seal to the two grand divisions of Old Testament Scripture; and hence we may with all possible confidence commit our souls to the authority of these holy writings; and not only to Moses and the Prophets, but to the whole canon of inspiration, inasmuch as Moses and the Prophets are so largely and so constantly quoted everywhere, are so intimately, yea, indissolubly, bound up with every part of the New Testament, that all must stand or fall together.

We must pass on, and turn for a moment to the last chapter of Luke — that precious section which contains "the great commission" whereof we speak. We might refer with profit and blessing to those occasions in which our blessed Lord, in His interviews with Pharisees, Sadducees, and lawyers, ever and only appeals to the Holy Scriptures. In short, whether in conflict with men or devils, whether speaking in private or in public, whether for His public ministry or for His private walk, we find the perfect Man, the Lord from Heaven, always putting the very highest honour upon

the writings of Moses and the Prophets, thus commending them to us in all their divine integrity, and giving us the very fullest and most blessed encouragement to commit our souls, for time and eternity, with absolute confidence, to those peerless writings.

We turn to Luke 24, and listen to the glowing words uttered in the ears of the two bewildered travellers to Emmaus — words which are the sure and blessed remedy for all bewilderment — the perfect solution of every honest difficulty — the divine and all-satisfying answer to every upright inquiry. We do not quote the words of the perplexed disciples; but here is the Master's reply. "Then said He unto them, O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!"

Alas! nowadays a man is counted a fool if he does believe all that the prophets have spoken. In many learned circles, yea, and in not a few religious circles likewise, the man who avows — as every true man ought — his hearty belief in every line of Holy Scripture, is almost sure — to be met with a sneer of contempt. It is deemed clever to doubt the genuineness of Scripture — fatal, detestable cleverness, from which may the good Lord deliver us! — cleverness which is sure to lead the soul that is ensnared by it down into the dark and dreary abyss of atheism, and the darker and more dreary abyss of hell. From all such cleverness, we again say, from the profoundest depths of our moral being, may God, in His mercy, deliver us and all our young people!

Have we not much cause to bless the Lord for these words of His addressed to His poor perplexed ones on

their way to Emmaus? They may seem severe; but it is the necessary severity of a pure, a perfect, and a divinely wise love. "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory? And" — mark these words! — "beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." He Himself — all homage to His glorious Person! — is the divine centre of all the things contained in the Scriptures from cover to cover. He is the golden chain that binds into one marvellous and magnificent whole every part of the inspired volume, from Genesis to Revelation.

Hence the man that touches a single section of the sacred canon is guilty of the heinous sin of seeking to overthrow the Word of God; and of such a man even charity itself must say he knows neither the Christ of God nor God Himself. The man who dares to tamper in any way with the Word of God has taken the first step on that inclined plane that leads inevitably down to eternal perdition. Let men beware, then, how they speak against the Scriptures; and if some will speak, let others beware how they listen.

If there were no infidel listeners, there would be few infidel lecturers. How awful to think that there should be either the one or the other in this our highly favoured land! May God have mercy upon them, and open their eyes ere it be too late! Five minutes in hell will quash forever all the infidel theories that ever were propounded in this world. Oh, the egregious folly of infidelity!

We return to our chapter, which furnishes one more proof of the place assigned by our risen Lord to the Holy Scriptures. After having manifested Himself in infinite grace and tranquillising power to His troubled disciples, having shown them His hands and His feet, and assured them of His personal identity by eating in their presence, "He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning Me. Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written."

Here again we have the divine seal put upon all the grand divisions of the Old Testament. This is most comforting and strengthening for all pious lovers of Scripture. To find our Lord Himself on all occasions, and under all circumstances, referring to Scripture, using it at all times and for all purposes, feeding upon it Himself and commending it to others, wielding it as the sword of the Spirit, bowing to its holy authority in all things, appealing to it as the only perfect standard, test and touchstone, the only infallible guide for man in this world, the only unfailing light amid all the surrounding moral gloom — all this is comforting and encouraging in the very highest degree, and it fills our hearts with deepest praise to the Father of mercies who has so provided for us in all our weakness and need.

Here we might close this branch of our subject, but we feel bound to furnish our readers with two more uncommonly fine illustrations of our thesis; one from the Acts, and one from the Epistles. In Acts 24 the apostle Paul, in his address to Felix, thus expresses himself as to

the ground of his faith: "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." So, then, he reverently believed in Moses and the Prophets. He fully accepted the Old Testament Scriptures as the solid foundation of his faith, and as the divine authority for his entire course. Now how did Paul know that the Scriptures were given of God? He knew it in the only way in which any one can know it, namely, by divine teaching.

God alone can give the knowledge that the Holy Scriptures are His own very revelation to man. If He does not give it, no one can; if He does, no one need. If I want human evidence to accredit the Word of God, it is not the Word of God to me. The authority on which I receive it is higher than the Word itself. Supposing I could by reason or human learning work my way to the rational conclusion that the Bible is the Word of God, then my faith would merely stand in the wisdom of man, and not in the power of God. Such a faith is worthless; it does not link me with God, and therefore leaves me unsaved, unblessed, uncertain. It leaves me without God, without Christ, without hope. Saving faith is believing what God says because He says it, and this faith is wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit. Intellectual faith is a cold, lifeless, worthless faith, which only deceives and puffs up; it never can save, sanctify, or satisfy.

We turn now to 2 Tim. 3: 14-17. The aged apostle, at the close of his marvellous career, from his prison at Rome, looking back at the whole of his ministry, looking around at the failure and ruin so sadly apparent on every side,

looking forward to the terrible consummation of the "last days," and looking beyond all to "the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give in that day," thus addresses his beloved son: "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned; and that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect [complete] thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

All this is unspeakably precious to every true lover of the Word of God. The place here assigned, and the virtues here attributed, to the Holy Scriptures are beyond all price. In short, it is utterly impossible to overstate the value and importance of the foregoing quotation. It is deeply touching to find the revered and beloved old veteran, in the full power of the Holy Ghost, recalling Timothy to the days of his childhood, when, at the knees of his pious mother, he drank at the pure fountain of inspiration. How did the dear child know that these holy writings were the Word of God? He knew it just in the same way that the blessed apostle himself knew it, by their divine power and effect upon his heart and conscience through the Holy Ghost.

Did the Holy Scriptures need man's credentials? What an insult to the dignity of Scripture to imagine that any human seal or guarantee is necessary to accredit it to the soul! Do we want the authority of the Church, the judgment of the Fathers, the decrees of councils, the consent of the doctors, the decision of the universities,

to accredit the Word of God? Far away be the thought! Who would think of bringing out a rush light at noon to prove that the sun shines, or to bring home its beams in their genial virtue to the human frame? What son would think of taking his father's letter to an ignorant crossing-sweeper to have it accredited and interpreted to his heart?

These figures are feebleness itself when used to illustrate the egregious folly of submitting the Holy Scriptures to the judgment of any human mind. No, the Word of God speaks for itself. It carries its own powerful credentials with it. Its own internal evidences are amply sufficient for every pious, right-minded, humble child of God. It needs no letter of commendation from men. No doubt external evidences have their value and their interest. Human testimony must go for what it is worth. We may rest assured that the more thoroughly all human evidence is sifted, and the nearer all human testimony approaches to the truth, the more fully and distinctly will all concur in demonstrating the genuineness and integrity of our precious Bible.

Further, we must declare our deep and settled conviction that no infidel theory can hold water for a moment; no infidel argument can pass muster with an honest mind. We invariably find that all infidel assaults upon the Bible recoil upon the heads of those who make them. Infidel writers make fools of themselves, and leave the divine volume just where it always was, and where it always will be, like an impregnable rock, against which the waves of infidel thought dash themselves in contemptible impotency.

There stands the Word of God in its divine majesty, in its heavenly power, in its beautiful simplicity, in its matchless glory, in its unfathomed because unfathomable depths, in its never-failing freshness and power of adaptation, in its marvellous comprehensiveness, in its vastness of scope, its perfect unity, its thorough uniqueness. The Bible stands alone. There is nothing like it in the wide world of literature; and if anything further were needed to prove that that book which we call "The Bible" is in very deed the living and eternal Word of God, it may be found in the ceaseless efforts of the devil to prove that it is not.

"Forever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven." What remains, beloved reader, for thee? Just this: "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee." Thus it stands, blessed be His holy name; and when we have His Word hid in the depths of our hearts, the theories and the arguments, the reasonings or the ravings, the questionings and the conclusions of sceptics, rationalists, and infidels, will be to us of less moment than the pattering of rain upon the window.

Thus much as to the weighty question of the "authority" upon which the great commission proceeds. The immense importance of the subject, and the special character of the moment through which we are passing, must account for the unusual length of this article. We feel profoundly thankful for an opportunity of bearing our feeble testimony to the power, authority, all-sufficiency, and divine glory of "the Holy Scriptures." "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift!"

Part 8

In full keeping with all that has passed in review before us is the sphere of "the great commission," as set forth in that comprehensive clause, "Among all nations."

Such was to be the wide range of those heralds whom the risen Lord was sending forth to preach "repentance and remission of sins." Theirs was emphatically a world-wide mission. In Matt. 10 we find something quite different. There the Lord, in sending forth the twelve apostles, "commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not."

This was to be a mission exclusively to the house of Israel. There was no message for the Gentiles, no word for the poor Samaritans. If these messengers approached a city of the uncircumcised, they were on no account to enter it. The ways of God — His dispensational dealings — demanded a circumscribed sphere for the twelve apostles sent forth by the Messiah in the days of His flesh. "The lost sheep of the house of Israel" were to be the special objects of their ministry.

But in Luke 24 all is changed. The dispensational barriers are no longer to interfere with the messengers of grace. Israel is not to be forgotten, but the Gentiles are to hear the glad tidings. The sun of God's salvation must now pour its living beams over the whole world. Not a soul is to be excluded from the blessed light. Every city, every town, every village, every hamlet, every street, lane and alley, hedge and highway, must be diligently and lovingly searched out and visited, so that "every creature under heaven" might hear the good news of a full and free salvation.

How like our God is all this! How worthy of His large, loving heart! He would have the tide of His salvation flowing from pole to pole, and from the river to the ends of the earth. His righteousness is unto all, and the sweet tale of His pardoning love must be wafted far and wide over a lost and guilty world. Such is His most gracious purpose, however tardy His servants may be in carrying it out.

It is of the greatest importance to have a clear view as to this branch of our subject. It brings out the character of God in a very magnificent light, and it leaves man wholly without excuse. Salvation is sent to the Gentiles. There is absolutely no limit, and no obstacle. Like the sun in the heavens, it shines on all. If a man will persist in hiding himself in a mine or in a tunnel, so that he cannot see the sun, he has none but himself to blame. It is no defect in the sun if all do not enjoy his beams. He shines for all. And in like manner, "the grace of God that bringeth salvation unto all men hath appeared." No one need perish because he is a poor lost sinner, for "God will have all to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." "He willeth not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

And then, that not a single feature might be lacking to set forth with all possible force and fullness the royal grace which breathes in "the great commission," our blessed Lord does not fail to point out to His servants the remarkable spot which was to be the centre of their sphere. He tells them to "begin at Jerusalem." Yes, Jerusalem, where our Lord was crucified; where every indignity that human enmity could invent was heaped upon His divine Person; where a murderer and a robber was preferred to "God manifest in the flesh"; where

human iniquity had reached its culminating point in nailing the Son of God to a malefactor's cross — here the messengers were to begin their blessed work; that was to be the centre of the sphere of their gracious operations; and from thence they were to travel to the utmost bounds of the habitable globe. They were to begin with "Jerusalem sinners" — with the very murderers of the Son of God, and then go forth to publish everywhere the glorious tidings, so that all might know that precious grace of God which was sufficient to meet the crimson guilt of Jerusalem itself.

How glorious is all this! The guilty murderers of the Son of God were the very first to hear the sweet tale of pardoning love, so that all men might see in them a pattern of what the grace of God and the blood of Christ can do. Truly the grace that could pardon Jerusalem sinners can pardon any one; the blood that could cleanse the betrayers and murderers of the Christ of God can cleanse any sinner outside the precincts of hell. These heralds of salvation, as they made their way from nation to nation, could tell their hearers where they had come from; they could tell of that superabounding grace of God which had commenced its operations in the guiltiest spot on the face of the earth, and which was amply sufficient to meet the very vilest of the sons of Adam.

Sovereign grace o'er sin abounding:

Ransomed souls the tidings swell;

'Tis a deep that knows no sounding;

Who its length or breadth can tell?

Precious grace of God! May it be published with increased energy and clearness throughout the divinely

appointed sphere. Alas, that those who know it should be so slow to make it known to others! That slowness is, most surely, not of God. He absolutely delights in the publication of His saving, pardoning grace. He tells us that the feet of the evangelist are beautiful upon the mountains. He assures us that the preaching of the cross is a sweet savour to His heart. Ought not all this to quicken our energies in the blessed work? Ought we not in every possible way to seek to carry out the gracious desire of the heart of God? Why are we so slow? Why so cold and indolent? Why so easily discouraged and repulsed? Why so ready to make excuses for not speaking to people about their souls?

There stands the great commission shining on the eternal page of inspiration in all its moral grandeur — its terms, its basis, its authority, its sphere! The work is not yet done. Nearly nineteen hundred years have rolled past since the risen Saviour sent forth His messengers; and still He waits, in sweet, long-suffering mercy, not willing that any should perish. Why are we not more willing-hearted in carrying out the gracious desire of His heart? It is not by any means necessary that we should be great preachers, or powerful public speakers, in order to carry on the precious work of evangelization. What we want is a heart in communion with the heart of God, the heart of Christ, and that will surely be a heart for souls. We do not, and cannot, believe that one who is not led out in loving desire after the salvation of souls can really be in communion with the mind of Christ. We cannot be in His presence and not think of the souls of those around us. For whoever cared for souls as He did? Mark His marvellous path! — His ceaseless toil as a

teacher and preacher! — His thirst for the salvation and blessing of souls!

And has He not left us an example that we should follow His steps? Are we doing so in this one matter of making known the blessed gospel? Are we seeking to imitate Him in His earnest diligence in seeking the lost? See Him at the well of Sychar! Mark His whole deportment! Listen to His earnest, loving words! Note the joy and refreshment of His spirit as He sees one poor sinner receiving His message! "I have meat to eat that ye know not of;" "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal; that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together."

We would earnestly entreat the Christian reader to consider this great subject in the divine presence. We deeply feel its importance. We cannot but judge that, amid all the writing and reading, all the speaking and hearing, all the coming and going, there is a sad lack of deep-toned, earnest, solemn dealing with individual souls. How often do we rest satisfied with inviting people to come to the preaching, instead of seeking to bring them directly to Christ? How often do we rest content with the periodical preaching, instead of earnestly seeking, all the week through, to persuade souls to flee from the wrath to come? No doubt it is good to preach, and good to invite people to the preaching; but we may rest assured there is something more than all this to be done, and that something must be sought in deeper communion with the heart and mind of Christ.

Some there are who speak disparagingly of the blessed and holy work of evangelization. We tremble for them. We feel persuaded they are not in the current of the Master's mind, and hence we utterly reject their thoughts. It is to be feared that their hearts are cold in reference to an object that engages the heart of God. If so, they would need to humble themselves in His presence, and seek to get their souls restored to a true sense of the magnitude, importance and interest of the grand question before us. At least let them beware of how they seek to discourage and hinder others whose hearts the Lord has moved to care for precious, immortal souls.

The present is most assuredly not the time for raising difficulties, and starting questions which can only prove stumbling-blocks in the pathway of earnest workers. It becomes us to seek in every right way to strengthen the hands of all who are endeavouring, according to their measure, to publish the glad tidings, and make known the unsearchable riches of Christ. Let us see that we do so, so far as in us lies; and above all things, let us never utter a sentence calculated to hinder any one in the blessed work of winning souls to Christ.

There is one more point in our subject which we feel must not be omitted, and that is the power by which "the great commission" was to be carried out. To leave this out would be a great defect, a serious blank indeed; and we are the more anxious to notice it, inasmuch as the special form in which the power was communicated links itself, in a very remarkable way, with that which has been before us. If the sphere was to be "all nations," the power must be adapted thereto; and, blessed be God, so it was.

Our blessed Lord, in closing His commission to His disciples, said, "And ye are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." This promise was fulfilled, this power was communicated on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Ghost came down from the ascended and glorified Man, to qualify His servants for the glorious work for which He had called them. They had to "tarry" until they got the power How could they go without it? Who but the Holy Ghost could speak adequately of the love of God, of the person, work and glory of Christ? Who but He could enable any one to preach repentance and remission of sins? Who but He could properly handle all the weighty subjects comprehended in "the great commission?" In a word, the power of the Holy Ghost is absolutely essential in every branch of Christian service, and all who go to work without it will find it to be barrenness, misery, and desolation.

We must call the reader's special attention to the form in which the Holy Ghost came down on the day of Pentecost. It is full of deepest interest, and lets us into the precious secret of the heart of God in a most touching manner.

Let us turn to Acts 2.

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place" — instructive and suggestive fact! — "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" — He had full possession of their hearts and minds, full sway over their whole moral being — blessed condition! — "And they began to speak with other tongues" (not in the absurd and unintelligible jargon of cunning impostors or deluded fanatics, but) "as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven." Note this fact.

"Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language." — How real — how telling! — "And they were all amazed, and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born?" — not merely wherein we were educated — "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."

What a marvellous occurrence! How marked the coincidence! God so ordered it, in His infinite wisdom and perfect grace, that there should be assembled in the city of Jerusalem, at the exact moment, people from every nation on the face of the whole earth, in order that — even should the twelve apostles fail to carry out their commission — all might hear, in the very dialect in which their mothers first whispered into their infant ears the accents of a mother's love, the precious tidings of God's salvation.

Can anything exceed this in interest? Who can fail to see in the fact here recorded that it was the loving desire of the heart of God to reach every creature under Heaven with the sweet story of His grace? The world had rejected the Son of God, had crucified and slain Him; but no sooner had He taken His seat at the right hand of God than down came the august Witness, God the Spirit, to speak to man — to every man — to speak to him, not in accents of withering denunciation, not in the thundering anathemas of judgment, but in accents of deep and tender love, to tell him of full remission of sins through the blood of the cross.

True, He called on man to judge himself, to repent, to take his only true and proper place. Why not? How could it be otherwise? Repentance is — as we have already fully shown and earnestly insisted upon in these papers — a universal and abiding necessity for man. But the Spirit of God came down to speak face to face with man, to tell him in his own mother tongue of the wonderful works of God. He did not speak to a Hebrew in Latin, or a Roman in Greek; but He spoke to each in the very dialect in which he was born, thus proving to a demonstration — proving in the most affecting manner possible — that it was God's gracious desire to make His way to man's heart in deepest, richest, fullest grace. All homage to His name!

How different it was when the law was to be published from mount Sinai! If all the nations of the earth had been assembled round that fiery mount, they could not have understood one word — unless, indeed, any one happened to know the Hebrew tongue. The law was addressed to one people, it was wrapped up in one language, it was enclosed in the ark. God took no pains

to publish the record of man's duty in every language under Heaven. But when grace was to be published, when the glad tidings of salvation were to be sounded abroad, when testimony was to be borne to a crucified, risen, ascended and coming Saviour and Lord, then, verily, God the Holy Ghost came down, for the purpose of fitting His messengers to speak to every man in a tongue which he could understand.

Facts are powerful arguments, and assuredly the above two facts, in reference to the law and the gospel, must speak to every heart, in a manner the most convincing, of the matchless grace of God. God did not send forth heralds to publish the law to "all nations." No — this was reserved for "the great commission" on which we have been dwelling, and which we now earnestly commend, with all its great subjects, to the serious attention of every reader.

# The Life and Times of Elijah - A

The Life and Times of Elijah.

C. H. Mackintosh.

Introduction

The exercise of prophetic ministry in Israel, of old, was always a proof of the nation's decline. So long as the great national institutions were maintained in their vigour, and the machinery of the Mosaic economy carried out according to its original design, there was no need of anything extraneous, and therefore the voice of a prophet was not heard; but when failure had set in — when those laws and institutions which had been enacted, and set on foot by God Himself, ceased to be candied out in their pristine spirit and power, then there was a demand for something additional, and that something was supplied by the energy of the Spirit in the prophets.

There were no materials in the whole range of Levitical rites and ceremonies for the formation or maintenance of such a ministry as that of Elijah the Tishbite; there was too much of the carnal element in them for that. The message of a prophet could only be delivered in the power of the Holy Ghost, and therefore, so long as the Levitical institutions fulfilled their end, the Spirit had no a; need to put forth any fresh energy.

There was no need of such a minister as Elijah in the days of Solomon's glory and greatness; all was in order then — the whole machinery was in a sound condition — every wheel and every screw worked effectually in its own place — the king on the throne wielded the sceptre

for the maintenance of Israel's civil interest — the priest in the temple discharged in due order his religious functions — the Levites and the singers were all at their respective posts: in a word, all moved on in such a measure of order as to render the voice of a prophet unnecessary.

However, the scene soon changed; the mighty tide of evil soon set in, and swept away the very foundations of Israel's civil and religious system: ungodly men, in process of time, ascended the throne of David, and sacrificed the interests of the people of God at the shrine of their own vile lusts; and to such a height did wickedness rise, that at last the wicked Ahab, with his consort Jezebel, occupied that throne from which Solomon had administered the judgement of God.

Jehovah could no longer forbear; He could not allow the tide of evil to rise any higher, and He therefore sent forth from His quiver a polished shaft to pierce the conscience of Israel, if haply He might bring them back to their place of happy allegiance to Himself. This shaft was none other than Elijah the Tishbite — the bold and uncompromising witness for God who stood in the breach at a moment when every one seemed to have fled from the field of conflict, unable to stem the overwhelming torrent.

But, before we proceed to the consideration of the life and ministry of this remarkable man, it may be well just to make one observation upon the two-fold character of prophetic ministry. We shall find, in considering the ministry of the prophets, that, not only had each prophet a distinct ministry committed to him, but that, also, in one and the same prophet, there was a double purpose

carried out: the Lord dealt with the conscience about present evil, while He pointed the eye of the faithful one to the future glory. The prophet, by the Holy Ghost, brought the light and truth of God to bear upon the heart and conscience — he laid open fully and faithfully the hidden chambers of evil within — he spoke plainly of the people's sad declension and departure from God, and removed the foundations of that false religious system which they were erecting around them.

But the prophet did not stop here; it would have been sad indeed had he been confined to the humiliating story of Israel's failure, and the departure of their ancient glory; he was able, through grace, to add to the solemn announcement, “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself,” the consolatory assurance, “but in Me is thy help”; and herein we have developed to us the two elements which composed the ministry of the prophets, namely, Israel's total failure, and God's triumphant grace — the departure of the glory as connected with, and based upon, the obedience of Israel, and its final return and establishment as connected with, and based upon, the obedience and death of the Son of God.

Truly, we may say, this was ministry of a very elevated and holy character; it was a glorious commission to be told to stand amid the fragments of a crushed and ruined system, and there to point to the time — the happy time — when God would display Himself in the immortal results of His own redeeming grace, to the joy of His ransomed ones in Heaven and on earth.

Part 1

THE PROPHET'S FIRST MESSAGE

The reign of Ahab, the son of Omri, was a dark and dreary time for the house of Israel; iniquity had risen to a fearful height; the sins of Jeroboam were little when compared with the black catalogue of Ahab's transgressions; the wicked Jezebel, the daughter of the uncircumcised king of the Zidonians, was chosen to be the partner of his heart and his throne, and this circumstance alone was enough to secure the oppression of Israel, and the entire subversion of their ancient worship. In a word, the Spirit sums up the whole matter with these words, “Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him” (1 Kings 16: 33). This was saying enough for him. The whole line of kings from Jeroboam down, had done evil in the sight of the Lord; but to do more than all of them, marked a character of no ordinary degree of guilt. Yet such was Ahab — such was the man that occupied the throne of God's ancient people, when Elijah the Tishbite entered upon his course of prophetic testimony.

There is something particularly sorrowful to the spirit in contemplating a scene like that which the reign of Ahab presents. Every light had been extinguished, every voice of testimony hushed; the firmament in which many a brilliant luminary had shone from time to time, had become overcast with dark clouds; death seemed to spread itself over the whole scene, and the devil to carry every thing with a high hand, when, at length, God in His mercy to His poor oppressed and misguided people, raised up a bright and powerful witness for Himself in the person of our prophet. But then it is just at such a time that a real witness for God is likely to produce the most powerful effect, and exert the most extensive

influence. It is after a long drought that a shower is likely to be felt in all its refreshing virtue. The state of things at this time in Israel called for some mighty man of valour to come forth and act in divine energy against the tide of evil.

However, it is instructive to observe that Elijah is presented to us, in common with all his fellow-servants, in circumstances of secret training and exercise ere he appears in public. This is a feature in the history of all the servants of God, not excepting Him who was emphatically the Servant; all have been trained in secret with God previous to their acting in public with man; and, moreover, those who have entered most deeply into the meaning and value of the secret training will be found the most effective and permanent in their public service and testimony. That man has much cause to tremble for his destiny who has arrived at a position in public which exceeds the measure of his secret exercise of soul before. God; he will assuredly come short.

If the superstructure exceed the measure of the foundation below, the building will totter or fall. If a tree shoot forth its branches into the air to a degree exceeding the depth of its roots, it will be unequal to the violence of the storm, and will come to the ground: so is it with the man who enters a place of public service; he must be alone with God; his spirit must be exercised in private; he must pass through the deep waters in his own experience, otherwise he will be but a theorist, and not a witness; his ear must be opened to hear, ere his tongue can be fitted to speak as the learned.

What has become of all those apparently brilliant lights which have suddenly flashed across the path of the

Church of God from time to time, and as suddenly disappeared behind the cloud? Whence came they, and whither have they gone, and why have they been so evanescent? They were but sparks of human kindling; there was no depth, no power of endurance, no reality in them; hence they shone for a time, and speedily vanished away, producing no result save to increase the darkness around, or at least the sad consciousness thereof.

Every true minister of God should be able, in measure, to say with the apostle, “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Cor. 1: 3-4).

1 Kings 17, gives us Elijah's first appearance in public; but the Spirit, in James, has graciously furnished us with the account of a yet earlier stage in his history, and one full of instruction to us, be our sphere of service what it may. The sacred historian introduces our prophet in a way which might seem abrupt. He presents him to us as at once boldly entering upon his sphere of labour, with this grand and solemn announcement, “Thus saith the Lord.”

But he does not tell us, in this place, anything of the prophet's previous exercise; he speaks not of how it was he came to learn how the Lord would have him to speak: of all this, though most important for us to know, the Spirit in the historian says nothing; He simply introduces him to our notice in the holy exercise of a power which he had obtained in secret with God: He

shows us Elijah acting in public, and nothing more. But the apostle lets us into the secret of Elijah's prayer to God, before ever he came out in active service before man. “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months” (James 5: 17).

Now, if the Holy Ghost had not informed us about this important fact, by the pen of James, we should have lacked a very powerful incentive to prayer; but Scripture is perfect — divinely perfect, lacking nothing that it ought to have, and having nothing that it ought to lack; hence it is that James tells us of Elijah's secret moments of prayer and wrestling, and shows him to us in the retirement of the mountains of Gilead, where he had, no doubt, mourned over the lamentable state of things in Israel, and also fortified his spirit for the part he was about to act.

This circumstance in the life of our prophet teaches us a truly profitable lesson. We live in a time of more than usual barrenness and spiritual dearth. The state of the Church may well remind us of Ezekiel's valley of dry bones. We have not merely to cope with evils which have characterised by-gone ages, but also with the matured corruption of a time wherein the varied evils of the Gentile world have become connected with, and covered by, the cloak of the Christian profession.

And when we turn to the state of those whose knowledge of truth and high profession might naturally encourage the expectation of more healthy and vigorous Christian action, we find alas! in many that the knowledge is but cold and uninfluential theory, and the

profession but superficial, having no power over the feelings and affections of the inward man. Amongst persons of this class it will also be found that the truth of God possesses little or no interest, or attractive power; they know so much in the intellect that nothing can be presented to them with which they are not already acquainted: hence the lifelessness with which they harken to every statement of truth.

In such a condition of things, what is the resource of the faithful one? To what should he betake himself? Prayer; patient, persevering prayer; secret communion with God; deep and real exercise of soul in His presence, where alone we can arrive at a true estimate of ourselves, and things around us: and not only so, but also obtain spiritual power to act for God amongst our brethren, or toward the world without.

“Elias was a man of like passions with us;” and he found himself in the midst of dark apostasy, and wide-spread alienation of heart from God. He beheld the faithful failing from amongst the children of men; he saw the tide of evil rising around him, and the light of truth fast fading away: the altar of Baal had displaced the altar of Jehovah, and the cries of the priests of Baal had drowned the sacred songs of the Levites; in a word, the whole thing was one vast mass of ruin before his view. He felt it; he wept over it; he did more — “he prayed earnestly.”

Here was the resource — the sure unfailing resource of the grieved prophet; he retreated into the presence of God; he poured out his spirit there, and wept over the ruin and sorrow of his beloved people; he was really engaged about the sad condition of things around him,

and therefore prayed about it — prayed as he ought, not coldly, formally, or occasionally, but “earnestly,” and perseveringly.

This is a blessed example for us. Never was there a time when fervent prayer was so much needed in the Church of God as at this moment. The devil seems to be exerting all his malignant power to crush the spirits and hinder the activities of the people of God; with some, he makes use of their public engagements; with others, their domestic trials; and with others, personal sorrow and conflict; in a word, “There are many adversaries,” and nothing but the mighty power of God can enable us to cope with them and come off victorious.

But Elijah was not merely called to pass unscathed, as an individual, through the evil; he was called to exert an influence upon others: he was called to act for God in a degenerate age; he had to make an effort to bring his nation back to the God of their fathers; how much more, therefore, did he need to seek the Lord in private; to gather up spiritual strength in the presence of God, whereby alone he could not only escape himself, but be made an instrument of blessing to others also. Elijah felt all this, and therefore “he prayed earnestly that it might not rain.”

Thus it was he brought God into the scene, nor did he fail of his object. “It rained not.” God will never refuse to act when faith addresses Him on the ground of His own glory, and we know it was simply upon this ground that the prophet addressed Him. It could afford him no pleasure to see the land turned into a parched and sterile wilderness, or his brethren wasted by famine and all its attendant horrors. No; it was simply to turn the

hearts of the children to the fathers — to bring the nation back to its early faith — to eradicate those principles of error which had taken fast hold of the minds of the people: for such ends as these did our prophet pray earnestly that it might not rain, and God darkened and heard, because the prayer was the offspring of His Spirit in the soul of His dear servant.

Truly we may say, it is good to wait upon God: it not only leads to happy results as seen in God's answer to it, but there is also much sweetness and comfort in the exercise itself. How truly happy it is for the tried and tempted believer to find himself along with God! how blessed to allow his spirit to flow out, and his affections to ascend to Him who alone is able to lift him above the depressing power of present things into the calmness and light of His own most blessed presence! May we all be found, then, waiting more upon God — making the very difficulties of our day an occasion for drawing near to the mercy-seat, and then we shall not only exert a salutary influence in our respective spheres, but our own heart will be comforted and encouraged by private waiting upon our Father, for the promise has never yet failed, “They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength!” Precious promise! May we make full proof of it!

Thus, Elijah the Tishbite entered upon his path of service; he came forth armed from the sanctuary of God with divine power to deal with, and act upon, his fellow-men. There is much power in the words, “as the Lord God of Israel liveth before whom I stand”; they bring before us in a very special way the basis on which the soul of this eminent servant of God was resting, as also the principle which sustained him in his course of

service. He stood before “the Lord God of Israel,” and so standing, he could speak with a measure of power and authority.

But how very little did Ahab know of the secret exercises of Elijah's soul, ere he had thus come forth to speak to his conscience! He knew not that Elijah had been on his knees in secret before he presented himself in public. He knew nothing of all this, but Elijah did, and hence he could boldly confront the very head of the evil; he could speak to king Ahab himself, and announce to him the judgements of an offended God. In this, our prophet may be viewed as a fine model for all who are called upon to speak in the name of the Lord.

All who are so called should feel themselves, in virtue of their divine commission, entirely lifted above the influence of human opinion. How often does it happen that men who can speak with a measure of power and liberty in the presence of some, are before others cramped, and, it may be, altogether hindered! This we know would not be the case did they but realize with distinctness, not only that they had received their commission from on high, but also that they executed it in the presence of the living God. The messenger of the Lord should never be affected by those to whom he delivers his message; he should be above them, while at the same time he takes the humble place of a servant. His language should be, “But with me it is a very small matter that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgement” (anthropines hemeras).

This was pre-eminently the case with our blessed Master. How little was He affected by the thoughts or judgements of those to whom He spoke! They might

thwart, oppose, and reject, but that never led Him for a moment to lose sight of the fact that He was sent of God. He carried with Him, throughout His entire course, the holy, soul-sustaining assurance expressed in the synagogue of Nazareth, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor,” etc. (Luke 4: 18). Here was the basis of His ministry as Son of man. It was “in the power of the Spirit,” and hence He ever felt Himself to be the minister of God, and as such raised quite above the influence of those with whom He had to do. “My doctrine is not Mine,” said He, “but His that sent Me.” He could truly say, “The Lord God of Israel, before whom I stand:” He was ever “the Lord's messenger,” speaking “in the Lord's message unto the people” (Hag. 1: 13).

And should not all who fill the place of servants or messengers of the Lord, seek to know more of this holy elevation of mind above men and circumstances? Should they not aim at being less under the power of human thoughts and feelings? What have we to do with the thoughts of men about us? Nothing. Whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear; whether they will accept, or whether they will reject; whether we shall be highly esteemed for our work's sake, or made of no reputation — still let it be our aim, our constant aim, to “approve ourselves as the ministers of God.”

But observe further, the power and authority with which our prophet speaks, “There shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word.” He felt such perfect assurance in the fact that he was standing in the Lord's presence, and speaking the Lord's words, yea, that he was thoroughly identified with Him, that he could say, “according to my word.”

Such was the privilege of the Lord's messenger, when delivering the Lord's message. Such are the wondrous results of secret prayer. “Elias was a man of like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.” May it prove a powerful incentive to all those who desire to act for God in this day of weakness! We want to be more in the presence of God, in the real sense of our need; if we felt our need more, we should have more of the spirit of prayer. And it is the spirit of prayer we want — that spirit which puts God in His own proper place of giver, and us into our proper place of receivers.

But how often are we deceived by the mere form of prayer — with the formal utterance of words which have no reality in them! There are many who make a kind of god of prayer — many who let their very prayers get between their souls and the God of prayer. This is a great snare. We should always take care that our prayers are the natural outflow of the Spirit within us, and not of the mere superstitious performance of what we think ought to be done.

[I would offer a few words here on the subject of united prayer among Christians, an exercise which seems so sadly neglected by us at a time when it is so specially needed. It will be generally found that collective life and energy. service and testimony, will be in proportion to the measure of collective waiting upon God. Where there are not public prayer-meetings. there is sure to be a lack of service and testimony; the interests of the Church of God are not realized, and, as a consequence. the things of earth occupy a place of undue prominence in the minds of Christians. If we felt our collective

weakness, there would be a collective utterance of that weakness, and, moreover, a renewal of our collective strength. Now I think it will be found that all important movements among the people of God have been the result of united heartfelt prayer. And surely we may say it is natural that it should be so. We are not to expect that God will pour forth His reviving grace on those who rest satisfied with their deadness and coldness. The word is, “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” If we will not open our mouths, how can they be filled? If we are satisfied with what we have, how can we expect to get more? Let it be, therefore, the aim of the Christian reader to stir up his fellow-Christians around him to seek the Lord in united prayer, and, he may be assured of it, the happy results evils speedily be seen.]

Part 2

## THE PROPHET IN RETIREMENT

Hardly had our prophet delivered his testimony when he was again called away from public observation into retirement and solitude. “And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.”

These words are full of deep instruction. Elijah had taken a very prominent place in the presence of Israel, and though his having done so was the result of previous retirement and exercise of soul in the presence of God, yet did the faithful One for whom he was acting see it needful to have him away again into privacy, that so he might not only occupy a high place in the presence of his brethren, but also a low place in the presence of God. All this is full of teaching for us. We must be kept low. Flesh

must be crushed. Our time of training in secret, must far exceed our time of acting in public. Elijah stood, as it were, for a brief moment, in public testimony, and that too, after having been alone with God, and he must at once be led away into seclusion for three years and a half.

Oh! how little can man be trusted — how badly can we bear to be set in a place of honour! How soon we forget ourselves and God! We shall see presently, how much our honoured prophet needed to be thus kept in retirement. The Lord knew his temperament and tendencies, and dealt with him accordingly. It is truly humiliating to think how little we can be trusted in the way of public testimony for Christ; we are so full of self; we vainly imagine that we are something, and that God will do much by us hence it is that we need, like our prophet, to be told to “hide ourselves,” to get away from public view, that we may learn, in the holy calmness of our Father's presence, our own proper nothingness.

And the spiritual mind can at once see the importance of all this. It would never do to be always before the eye of man; no creature could stand it: the Son of God Himself constantly sought the solitary place, apart from the din and bustle of the city, where He might enjoy a quiet retreat for prayer, and of secret communion with God. “Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives.” “Rising up a great while before day, He departed into a solitary place and there prayed.”

But it was not because He needed to hide Himself, for His entire path on earth was, blessed be His name, a hiding of self. The spirit of His ministry is brought out in these words, “My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent

Me.” Would that all the Lord's servants knew more of this! We all want to hide self more — much more than we do.

The devil acts so on our poor silly hearts; our thoughts so revolve round ourselves; yea, we so often make our very service, and the truth of God, a pedestal on which to show forth our own glory. No marvel, therefore, that we are not much used: how could the Lord make use of agents who will not give Him the glory? How can the Lord use Israel, when Israel is ever prone to vaunt himself? Let us then pray to be made more truly humble, more self-abased, more willing to be looked upon as “a dead dog, or a flea,” or “the off-scouring of all things,” or nothing at all, for the name of our gracious Master.

In His lonely retreat by the brook Cherith, Elijah was called to sojourn many days; not, however, without a precious promise from the Lord God of Israel in reference to his needed provision, for he went accompanied by the gracious assurance, “I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.” The Lord would take care of His dear servant while hidden from public view, and minister to his necessities, even though it should be by the instrumentality of ravens. What a strange provision! What a continual exercise of faith was there involved in being called to look out for the daily visits of birds that would naturally desire to devour the prophet's meal! But was it upon the ravens that Elijah lived? Surely not. His soul reposed in the precious words, “I have commanded.” It was God, and not the ravens, for him. He had the God of Israel with him in his hiding place — he lived by faith. And how truly blessed for the spirit thus to cling, in unaffected simplicity, to the promise of God!

How happy to be lifted above the power of circumstances, in the apprehension of God's presence and care! Elijah was hiding himself from man, while God was showing Himself to Elijah. This will ever be so. Let us only set self aside, and we may be assured that God will reveal Himself in power to our souls. If Elijah had persisted in occupying a prominent and a public place, he would have been left unprovided for. He must be hidden, for the streams of divine provision and refreshment only flowed for him in the place of retirement and self-abasement. “I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.” If the prophet were anywhere else but “there” he would have gotten nothing at all from God.

What teaching for us in all this! Why are our souls so lean and barren? Why do we so little drink of the streams of divinely provided refreshment? Because we are not hiding self sufficiently. We cannot expect that God will strengthen and refresh us for the purpose of earthly display. He will strengthen us for Himself. If we could but realize more that we are “not our own,” we should enjoy more spiritual power.

But there is also much meaning in the little word “there.” Elijah should be “there” and nowhere else, in order to enjoy God's supplies; and just so is it with the believer now; he must know where God would have him to be, and there abide. We have no right to choose our place, for the Lord “orders the bounds of our habitation,” and happy for us is it to know this, and submit to His wise and gracious ordering. It was at the brook Cherith, and there alone, that the ravens were commanded to convey bread and flesh to the prophet; he might wish to sojourn elsewhere, but, if he had done so

he should have provided for himself: how much happier to allow God to provide for him! So Elijah felt, and therefore he went to Cherith, for the Lord had “commanded the ravens to feed him there.” The divinely appointed provision is alone to be had in the divinely appointed place.

Thus was Elijah conveyed from solitude to solitude. He had come from the mountains of Gilead, with a message from the Lord God of Israel to Israel's king, and having delivered that message, he was again conducted, by the hand of God, into unbroken solitude, there to have his spirit exercised, and his strength renewed in the presence of God.

And who would be without those sweet and holy lessons learnt in secret? Who would lack the training of a Father's hand? Who would not long to be led away from beneath the eye of man, and above the influence of things earthly and natural, into the pure light of the Divine Presence, where self and all around are viewed and estimated according to the judgement of the sanctuary? In a word, who would not desire to be alone with God? — alone, not as a merely sentimental expression, but really, practically, and experimentally alone; alone like Moses at the mount of God; alone, like Aaron in the holiest of all; alone, like our prophet at the brook Cherith; alone, like John in the island of Patmos; and above all, alone, like Jesus on the mount.

And here, let us inquire what it is to be alone with God. It is to have self and the world set aside; to have the spirit impressed with thoughts of God and His perfections and excellencies; to allow all His goodness to pass before us; to see Him as the great Actor for us,

and in us; to get above flesh and its reasonings, earth and its ways, Satan and his accusations; and, above all, to feel that we have been introduced into this holy solitude, simply and exclusively through the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

These are some of the results of our being alone with God. But, in truth, it is a term which one can hardly explain to another, for each spiritually-minded saint will have his own feelings on the subject, and will best understand what it means in his own case. This, at least, we may well crave, to be truly found in the secret of our Father's presence; to be done with the weariness and wretchedness of endeavouring to maintain our character, and to know the joy, the liberty, the peace, and unaffected simplicity of the sanctuary, where God in all His varied attributes and perfections rises before our souls and fills us with bliss ineffable.

To find my place within the veil,

To know that God is mine

Are springs of joy that will not fail,

Unspeakable, divine.

But, though Elijah was thus happily alone by the brook Cherith, he was not exempt from the deep exercise of soul consequent upon a life of faith. The ravens, it is true, in obedience to the divine command, paid him their daily visits, and Cherith flowed on in its tranquil and uninterrupted course, so that the prophet's bread was given him, and his water was sure, and thus, as far as he was personally concerned, he might forget that the rod of judgement was stretched out over the land.

But faith must be put to the test. The man of faith cannot be allowed to settle on his lees; he must be emptied from vessel to vessel; the child of God must pass from form to form in the school of Christ, and having mastered, through grace, the difficulties of one, he must be called to grapple with those of another. It was, therefore, needful that the soul of the prophet should be tried in order that it might be seen whether he was depending upon Cherith, or upon the Lord God of Israel; hence, “it came to pass, after awhile, that the brook dried up.”

We are ever in danger, through the infirmity of our flesh, of having our faith propped up by circumstances, and when these are favourable, we think our faith is strong, and vice versa. But faith never looks at circumstances; it looks straight to God — it has to do exclusively with Him and His promises. Thus it was with Elijah; it mattered little to him whether Cherith continued to flow or not; he could say:

In vain the creature streams are dry,

I have a fountain still.

God was his fountain, his unfailing exhaustless fountain. The brook might yield to the influence of the prevailing drought, but no drought could affect God, and the prophet knew this; he knew that the Word of the Lord was as certain a portion, and as sure a basis in the drying up of Cherith, as it had been during the time of his sojourn upon its banks; and so it was, for “the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there; behold I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.”

Elijah's faith must still rest upon the same immutable basis. “I have commanded.” How truly blessed is this! Circumstances change; human things fail; creature streams are dried up, but God and His Word are the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. Nor does the prophet seem to have been the least disturbed by this fresh order from on high. No; for, like Israel of old, he had learned to pitch and strike his tent according to the movement of Jehovah's cloud. The camp, of old, was called to watch attentively the wheels of that heavenly chariot which rolled onward toward the land of rest, and here and there halted in the wilderness to find them out a resting-place; and just so was it with Elijah; he would take up his solitary post by the banks of Cherith, or tread his weary way to Zarephath of Zidon in undeviating obedience to “the word of the Lord.”

Israel of old were not allowed to have any plans of their own; Jehovah planned and arranged everything for them. He told them when and where they were to move and halt; at various intervals He signified His sovereign pleasure to them by the movement of the cloud above their heads. “Whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not; but when it was taken up they journeyed. At the commandment of the Lord they rested in their tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed” (Num. 9: 22-23).

Such was the happy condition of the Lord's redeemed, while passing from Egypt to Canaan. They never could have their own way, as regards their movements. If an Israelite had refused to move when the cloud moved, or to halt when it halted, he would have been left to starve

in the wilderness. The rock and the manna followed them while they followed Jehovah; in other words, food and refreshment were alone to be found in the path of simple obedience. Just so was is with Elijah; he was not permitted to have a will of his own; he could not fix the time of his sojourn at Cherith, nor the time for his removal to Zarephath; “the word of the Lord” settled all for him, and when he obeyed it he found sustenance.

What a lesson for the Christian in all this! The path of obedience is alone the path of happiness. If we were more successful in doing violence to self, our spiritual condition would be far more vigorous and healthy than it is. Nothing so ministers to health and vigour of soul as undeviating obedience; there is strength gained by the very effort to obey. This is true in the case of all, but specially so as regards those who stand in the capacity of ministers of the Lord. Such must walk in obedience if they would be used in ministry.

How could Elijah have said, as he afterwards did, upon mount Carmel, “If the Lord be God, follow Him, “ if his own private path had exhibited a wilful and rebellious spirit? Impossible. The path of a servant must be the path of obedience, otherwise he ceases to be a servant. The word servant is as inseparably linked with obedience, as is work with workman. “A servant,” as another has observed, “must move when the bell rings.”

Would that we were all more alive to the sound of our Master's bell, and more ready to run in the direction in which it summons us. “Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.” Here is our proper language. Whether the Word of the Lord summons us from our retirement into the midst of our brethren, or from thence into

retirement again, may our language ever be, “Speak, Lord for Thy servant heareth.” The Word of the Lord, and the attentive ear of a servant, are all we need to carry us safely and happily onward.

Now, this path of obedience is by no means an easy one; it involves the constant abandonment of self, and can only be pursued as the eye is steadily kept on God, and the conscience kept under the action of His truth. True, there is a rich reward in every act of obedience, yet flesh and blood must be set aside, and this is no easy work. Witness the path of our prophet. He was first called to take his place by the brook Cherith, to be fed by ravens! How could flesh and blood understand this?

Then again, when the brook failed, he is called away to a distant city of Zidon, there to be nourished by a destitute widow who seemed to be at the very point of dying of starvation! Here was the command: “Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.”

And what confirmation did Elijah derive from appearances, upon his arrival at this place? None whatever; but everything to fill him with doubts and fears had he been looking at circumstances in the matter. “So he arose, and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks; and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal

in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die."

This was the scene that presented itself to the eye of the prophet when he had arrived at his divinely appointed destination. Truly a gloomy and depressing one to flesh and blood. But Elijah conferred not with flesh and blood; his spirit was sustained by the immutable Word of Jehovah; his confidence was based upon the faithfulness of God, and he needed no aid from things around him. The horizon might look dark and heavy to mortal vision, but the eye of faith could pierce the clouds, and see beyond them all "the firm foundation which is laid for faith in Jehovah's excellent word."

How precious, then, is the Word of God! Well might the psalmist say, "Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever." Precious heritage! Pure, incorruptible, immortal truth! How should we bless our God for having made it our inalienable portion — a portion which, when all sublunary things shall have vanished from view, when the world shall have passed away and the lust thereof, when all flesh shall have been consumed as withered grass, shall prove to the faithful a real, an eternal, an enduring substance. "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift."

But what were the circumstances which met the prophet's eye upon his approach to Zarephath? A widow and her son starving, two sticks, and a handful of meal! And yet the word was, "I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee." How trying, how deeply mysterious, was all this!

Elijah, however, staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. He knew that it was the Most High and Almighty God, the possessor of Heaven and earth, that was to meet his necessities; hence, though there had been neither oil nor meal, it would have made no matter to him, for he looked beyond circumstances to the God of circumstances. He saw not the widow, but God. He looked not at the handful of meal, but at the divine command; therefore his spirit was perfectly calm and unruffled in the midst of circumstances which would have crushed the spirit of one walking by sight, and he was able, without a shadow of doubt, to say “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.”

Here we have the reply of faith to the language of unbelief. “Thus saith the Lord” settles everything. The moment the spirit apprehends God's promise, there is an end to the reasonings of unbelief. Unbelief puts circumstances between the soul and God; faith puts God between the soul and circumstances. This is a very important difference. May we walk in the power and energy of faith, to the praise of Him whom faith ever honours!

But there is another point in this lovely scene to be particularly noticed: it is the way in which death ever hovers around the spirit of one not walking by faith. “That we may eat it and die” is the language of the widow. Death and unbelief are inseparably linked together. The spirit can only be conducted along the path of life by the energy of faith: hence if faith be not in energy, there is no life, no power, no elevation.

Thus was it with this poor widow: her hope of life was based upon the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil: beyond these she saw no springs of life, no hope of continuance. Her soul knew not as yet the real blessedness of communion with the living God to whom alone belong the issues from death. She was not yet able against hope to believe in hope. Alas, what a poor, frail, tottering thing is that hope which rests only on a cruse of oil and a barrel of meal! How scanty must be those expectations which only rest on the creature!

And are we not all but too prone to lean upon something quite as mean and paltry in God's view as a handful of meal? Truly we are; and it must be so where God is not apprehended by the soul. To faith it is either God or nothing. A handful of meal will afford, in the hand of God and to the view of faith, as efficient materials as the cattle upon a thousand hills. “We have here but five loaves and two small fishes; but what are these amongst so many?" This is the language of the human heart; but faith never says what are these amongst so many? but what is God among so many? Unbelief says we are not able; faith says, but God is well able.

And would it not be well, ere we turn from this interesting point in our subject, to apply these principles to the poor, conscience-smitten sinner? How often is such an one found clinging to some vain resource for the pardon of his sins, rather than to the accomplished work of Christ upon the cross, which has forever satisfied the claims of divine justice, and ought therefore, surely, to satisfy the cravings of his guilty conscience.

“I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth

down before me." Such is the language of one who had not as yet learned to look beyond all human aid, straight to Jesus. "I have no man," says the poor, guilty, unbelieving sinner: but I have Jesus, says the believer; and he may add, Thus saith the Lord, The cleansing efficacy of the blood shall not fail, nor its preciousness diminish, until the time that the Lord shall have safely housed His ransomed forever in His own heavenly mansions.

Hence, if these pages should meet the eye of any poor, halting, trembling, fearful sinner, I would invite him to take comfort from the precious truth that God has, in His infinite grace, set the cross of Jesus between him and his sins, if only he will believe the divine testimony. The great difference between a believer and an unbeliever is this: the former has Christ between him and his sins; the latter has his sins between him and Christ.

Now, with the former, Christ is the all-engrossing object: he looks not at the enormity of his sin, but at the value of the blood and the preciousness of the person of Christ: he knows that God is not now on the judgement-seat, but on the mercy-seat: if He were on the former, His thoughts would be simply occupied about the question of sin, but being on the latter, His thoughts are, blessed be His name, as purely occupied about the blood. Oh for more simple and abiding communion with the mind of Heaven, and more complete abstraction from the things and thoughts of earth! The Lord grant more of both to all His saints!

It has been already observed that the man of faith must be emptied from vessel to vessel; each successive scene

and stage of the believer's life is but his entrance upon a new form in the school of Christ, where he has to learn some fresh and, of course, more difficult lesson.

But, it may be asked, what more trying circumstances had Elijah to grapple with at Zarephath than at Cherith? Was it not better to be cast upon human sympathies than to have ravens as his channel of supply? And further, was it not more pleasing to the spirit to be domesticated with human beings than to dwell in the loneliness and solitude of the brook Cherith? All this might have been so, no doubt; yet solitude has its sweets, and association its trials. There are selfish interests which work amongst men, and hinder that refined and exquisite enjoyment which human society ought to yield, and which it will yield, when humanity stands forth in its divinely-imparted perfections.

Our prophet heard no such words as “me and my son” when he took up his abode by the brook. There was there no selfish interest acting as a barrier to his sustenance and enjoyment. No, but the moment he passed from his retirement into human society, then he was called to feel that the human heart does not like to have its own objects in the least interfered with; he was called to enter into the deep meaning of the words “me and my son,” which unfold the hidden springs of selfishness, which actuate humanity in its fallen condition.

But it will doubtless be observed that it was natural for the widow's heart to entertain thoughts of herself and her son in preference to any one else, and surely it was natural; it is what nature ever does. Harken to the following words of a genuine child of nature: “Shall I

then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?" (1 Sam. 25: 11)

Nature will ever seek its own first; nor does it come within the compass of this perishing world so to fill the human soul as to make it overflow for the benefit of others. It is the province of God alone to do this. It is utterly in vain to try to expand the heart of man by any instrumentality save the abundant grace of God. This it is which will cause him to open wide the door of his affections to every needy applicant. Human benevolence may do much where abundant resources prevent the possibility of personal privation, but grace alone will enable a man to trample personal interests under foot to meet the claims of another. "Men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself." This is the world's principle, and nothing can make us unlearn it but the knowledge of the fact that God has done well for us, and, moreover, that it is our best interest to let Him continue to do so unto the end.

Now it was the knowledge of this divine principle that enabled our prophet to say, "Make me thereof a little cake first and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and thy son." Elijah was, in his address, simply putting in the divine claim upon the widow's resources; and, as we know, the result of a true and ready response to that claim will be a rich harvest of blessing to the soul. There was, however, a demand upon the widow's faith in all this. she was called to act a trying and difficult part, in the energy of faith in a divine promise, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth."

And is it not thus with every believer? Undoubtedly it is; we must act in faith. The promise of God must ever constitute the great moving principle in the soul of the Christian. There would have been no room for the exercise of faith on the part of the widow had the barrel been full; but when it was exhausted, when she was reduced to her last handful, to be told to give of that handful to a stranger first, was surely a large demand, to which nothing but faith could have enabled her to respond.

But the Lord often deals with His people as He dealt with His disciples in the matter of feeding the multitude. "This He said to prove them, for He Himself knew what He would do." He frequently tells us to take a step involving considerable trial, and in the very act of taking it we not only see the reason of it, but also get strength to proceed. In fact, all the divine claims upon us for action are based upon the principle involved in the command to the children of Israel of old, "Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward."

Whither were they to go? Through the sea. Strange path! Yet behind this trying command we see grace providing the ability to execute it in the word to Moses, "But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thy hand over the sea, and divide it; and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea" (Ex. 14: 16). Faith enables a man, being called, to go out not knowing whither he goes.

But there is more than the mere principle of obedience to be learned from this truly interesting scene between Elijah and the widow of Zarephath: we learn, also, that nothing but the superior power of divine grace can lift

the human mind above the freezing atmosphere of selfishness in which fallen man lives, and moves, and has his being. The effulgence of God's benevolence shining in upon the soul disperses those mists in which the world is enveloped, and enables a man to think and act upon higher and nobler principles than those which actuate the moving mass around him. This poor widow had left her house influenced by no higher motive than self-interest and self-preservation, and having no more brilliant object before her mind than death.

And is it in any wise different with multitudes around us? Yea, is it a whit better in the case of any unregenerate man on earth? Not a whit. The most illustrious, the most intellectual, the most learned — in a word, every man upon whose spirit the light of divine grace has never shone, will be found, in God's estimation, like this poor widow, influenced by motives of self-interest and self-preservation, and having no brighter prospect before him than death.

The truth of God, however, speedily alters the aspect of things. In the case of the widow it acted most powerfully: it sent her back to her house occupied about and interested for another, and with her soul filled with cheering thoughts of life. And so will it ever be. Let but the soul get into communion with the truth and grace of God, and it is at once delivered from this present evil world, it is turned aside out of the current which is rapidly hurrying millions away upon its surface. It becomes actuated by heavenly motives, and animated by heavenly objects.

Grace teaches a man to live and act for others. The more our souls taste the sweetness of redeeming love, the

more earnest will be our desire to serve others. Oh that we all felt more deeply and abidingly the constraining power of the love of Christ, in this day of lamentable coldness and indifference! Would to God we could all live and act in the remembrance that we are not our own, but bought with a price!

The widow of Zarephath was taught this truth. The Lord not only put His claim to the handful of meal and the cruse of oil, but also laid His hand upon her son — the cherished object of her affections. Death visits the house in which the Lord's prophet, in company with the widow and her son, were feeding together on the precious fruits of divine benevolence. “It came to pass, after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore that there was no breath left in him.”

Now this son, as we know, had, in common with herself, stood in her way in the matter of her ready response to the divine claim as put forward by Elijah; hence there is solemn instruction for the saint in the death of this child. So surely as we allow any object, whether it be parent or child, husband or wife, brother or sister, to obstruct us in our path of simple obedience and devotedness to Christ, we may rest assured that object will be removed. This widow had given her son a higher place in her thoughts than the Lord's prophet, and the son was taken from her that she might learn that it was not merely, “the handful of meal” that should be held in subjection to the Lord and in readiness for Him, but also her dearest earthly object.

It needs no small measure of the spirit of Christ to hold everything in mere stewardship for God. We are so

prone to look upon things as ours, instead of remembering that all we have, and all we are, belongs to the Lord, and should ever be given up at His call. Nor is this a mere matter of rightful obedience; it is for our lasting benefit and happiness.

The widow responded to God's claim on her handful of meal; and what follows? She and her house are sustained for years! Again the Lord lays His hand upon her son; and what follows? Her son is raised from the dead by the mighty power of God, thus teaching her that the Lord could not only sustain life, but impart it. Resurrection-power is brought to bear upon her circumstances, and she receives her son now, as she had received her supplies before, directly from the hand of the Lord God of Israel.

How happy to be a dependent upon such bounty! How happy to go to our barrel of meal, or our cruse of oil, and find it daily replenished by our Father's generous hand! How happy to hold the dearest object of our affections in the power of resurrection ties! Such are the privileges of the weakest believer in Jesus.

Before, however, I turn from this branch of our subject, I would observe that the effect which the divine visitation produced upon this widow was to awaken a solemn inquiry in her conscience as to her sin. “Art thou come to call my sin to remembrance?” When the Lord comes near to us, there will always be observed a divine quickness and sensitiveness of conscience which are most earnestly to be sought after.

One may often pass on from day to day in the ordinary routine of life, in the enjoyment, too, of a replenished barrel and cruse, without much deep exercise of

conscience before God. The latter will only be found where there is really close walking with God, or some special visitation of His hand. Had the Lord merely met the poor widow's need from day to day, there might never have been a question of “sin” raised in her mind; but when death entered, conscience began to work, for death is the wages of sin.

There is a twofold action in all the divine dealings with us, namely, an action of truth, and an action of grace. The former discovers the evil, the latter puts it away; that unfolds what man is, this what God is; that brings out into the light the hidden workings of evil in the heart of man, this brings out, in contrast, the rich and exhaustless springs of grace in the heart of God. Now, both are needful: truth, for the maintenance of God's glory; grace, for the establishment of our blessing; that, for the vindication of the divine character and attributes, this for the perfect repose of the sinner's heart and conscience.

How blessed to know that both “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” The divine dealings with the widow of Zarephath would not have been complete had they not elicited from her the confession contained in the last verse of our chapter, “By this I know thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.” She had learnt grace in the marvellous supply of her need; she learnt truth in the death of her son.

And if we were only more spiritually sensitive and quick-sighted, we should at all times perceive these two features in our Father's mode of dealing with us. We are the constant recipients of His grace, and again and again we get examples of His truth in the dealings of His

hand which are more particularly designed to bring out the evil from the hidden chambers of the heart, in order that we may judge and put it away. While we see our barrel and cruse replenished, conscience is apt to slumber, but when Jehovah knocks at the door of our hearts by some chastening dispensation, forthwith it wakes up and enters with vigour upon the seasonable work of self-judgement.

Now, while we cannot too strongly deprecate that form of self-examination which frequently genders doubt as to the fact of the soul's acceptance, yet we must remember that self must be judged or we shall break down altogether. The believer is not told to examine himself with any such idea as that the examination may issue in the discovery that he is not in the faith. This idea is often based upon an unsound interpretation of 2 Cor. 13: 5, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith,” etc.

Now, the idea in the mind of the apostle was the very reverse of what is sought to be deduced from his words, as may at once be seen by a little attention to the context. It would seem that the assembly at Corinth had given a place amongst them to certain false apostles who presumed to call in question the ministry of the Apostle Paul, thus rendering it necessary for the latter to enter upon a defence of his apostleship, which he does, first, by a reference to his general course of service and testimony; and secondly, by a touching appeal to the Corinthian saints. “Since,” says he, “ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me… examine yourselves.”

The most powerful and, to them at least affecting proof of the divine authority of his; apostleship was to be

deduced from the fact that they were in the faith. It cannot therefore for a moment be supposed that he would have told them to examine themselves in order to prove his heavenly mission if that examination were to issue in the discovery, that they were not in the faith at all: on the contrary, it was because he had a well-grounded assurance that they were “sanctified in Christ Jesus,” that he could confidently appeal to them as an evidence that his mission was from above.

There is, however, considerable difference between what is called “self-examination” and self-judgement; not so much in the abstract things themselves as in the ideas which we attach to them. It is a most blessed exercise to judge nature — honestly, solemnly and rigidly to judge that evil nature which we carry about with us, and which ever clogs and hinders us in running the race set before us. The Lord grant us all more spiritual power to exercise this judgement continually. But then we must take great care that our examination of self does not savour of mistrusting God. It is upon the ground of God's grace and faithfulness that I judge myself if God be not God, there is an end of everything.

But there was also a voice in this visitation for Elijah. He had presented himself to the widow in the character of a man of God, and he therefore needed to establish his claims to that character. This Jehovah graciously did for him by the resurrection of the child. “By this I know,” said she, “that thou art a man of God.” It was resurrection that vindicated his claim upon her confidence.

There must be the exhibition of a measure of resurrection power in the life of the man of God ere his

claim to that character can be fully established. This power will show itself in the form of victory over self in all its odious workings. The believer is risen with Christ — he is made a partaker of the divine nature, but he is still in the world, and bears about with him a body of humiliation; and if he does not deny himself, he will soon find his character as a man of God called in question.

It would, however, be but a miserable object merely to seek self-vindication. The prophet had a higher and nobler aim, namely, to establish the truth of the Word of the Lord in his mouth. This is the proper object of the man of God. His own character and reputation should be matters of small moment with him, save as they stand connected with the Word of the Lord in his mouth. It was simply for the purpose of maintaining the divine origin of the gospel which he preached that the Apostle Paul entered upon the defence of his apostleship in his Epistles to the Galatians and Corinthians. It mattered little to him what they thought of Paul, but it mattered much what they thought of Paul's gospel. Hence, for their sakes, he was anxious to prove that the Word of the Lord in his mouth was truth.

How important, then, was it for the prophet to have such a testimony to the divine origin of his ministry before entering upon the scenes in which he is seen moving in 1 Kings 18! He gained thus much at least by his retirement at Zarephath; and surely it was not a little. His spirit was blessedly confirmed; he received a divine seal to his ministry; he approved himself to the conscience of one with whom he had sojourned for a long period, and was enabled to start afresh upon his public career with the happy assurance that he was a

man of God, and that the Word of the Lord in his mouth was truth.

[I may just add a word here on the subject of self-vindication. It is truly sorrowful when the servant of God is obliged to vindicate himself; it shows there must be something wrong either in himself or in those who have rendered it needful for him thus to act. When, however, such a course becomes necessary, there is one grand object to be kept clearly before the mind, namely, the glory of Christ, and the purity of the truth committed to his trust. It too frequently happens that when any charge is brought either against our ministry or our personal character, the pride of our hearts is drawn out, and we are quick to stand up in self-defence. Now, we should remember that, apart from our connection with Christ and His saints, we are but vile atoms of the dust, utterly unworthy of a thought or word; it should therefore be far from our thoughts to seek the establishment of our own reputation. We have been constituted the depositaries, to a certain extent, of the reputation of Christ; and provided we preserve that unsullied, we need not be careful about self. The Lord grant us all grace to walk in the abiding consciousness of our high dignities and holy responsibilities as the “epistle of Christ, known and read of all men”!]

We have now arrived at the close of a very important stage of Elijah's history, embracing a period of three years and a half, during which he was hidden from the view of Israel. We have been occupied simply with the consideration of those principles of truth which lie on the surface of Elijah's personal history. But may we not draw instruction from his course viewed in a mystic sense? I believe we may. The reference of Christ Himself

to the prophet's mission to the Gentile widow may justly lead us to see therein the blessed foreshadowing of the gathering of the Gentiles into the Church of God.

“But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Zidon, unto a woman that was a widow” (Luke 4:25-6). The Lord Jesus had presented Himself to Israel as the prophet of God, but found no response; the daughter of Zion refused to hear the voice of her Lord. “The gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth” were answered by the carnal inquiry, “Is not this Joseph's son?” He therefore finds relief for His spirit, in the view of Israel's scorn and rejection, in the happy reflection that there were objects beyond Jewish bounds to whom the divine grace of which He was the channel could flow out in all its richness and purity.

The grace of God is such that if it be stopped by the pride, unbelief, or hardness of heart of some, it will only flow more copiously to others, and so, “Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and My God shall be My strength. And He said, It is a light thing that Thou shouldst be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isa. 49: 5-6).

The precious truth of the call of the Gentiles is largely taught in Scripture, both by type and precept, and it might be serviceable at another time to enter fully upon

the consideration of it in its various ramifications; but my object, in this paper, is rather to consider the life and ministry of our prophet in a simple and practical way, with the hope that the Lord would be graciously pleased to acknowledge such simple reflections for the comfort and edification of His people of every name and denomination.

Part 3

THE HOUSE OF AHAB

We must now leave our prophet, for a season, and turn our attention to the sad condition of things in Israel during the time that he was hidden with God. Terrible indeed must be the condition of things on earth when “the heaven is shut up.” Sterile and dreary must be the aspect of this lower world when Heaven withholds its refreshing showers, and specially of that land which was to “drink water of the rain of heaven.” Egypt might not have regarded much the shutting up of Heaven, seeing she had never been wont to look thither for her supplies. She had her resources in herself. “My river is mine own,” was her independent language.

But such was not the case with the Lord's land — “the land of hills and valleys.” If Heaven yielded not its supplies, all was parched and sterile. Israel could not say, “My river is mine own.” No; they were ever taught to look up; their eyes were always to be upon the Lord, as the Lord's eyes were ever upon them. Hence, when anything arose to hinder the intercourse between Heaven and earth, the land of Canaan was made to feel it with painful intensity.

Thus it was “in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine

was throughout all the land." Israel was made to feel the dreadful consequences of departure from their only source of real blessing. "There was sore famine in Samaria, and Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks; peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. So they divided the land between them, to pass throughout it; Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself."

Israel had sinned, and Israel must feel the rod of Jehovah's righteous anger. What a humbling picture of God's ancient people, to see their king going forth to look for grass! What a contrast between all this and the rich abundance and glory of Solomon's day! But God had been grossly dishonoured, and His truth rejected. Jezebel had sent forth the pestilential influence of her principles by the instrumentality of her wicked prophets — Baal's altar had superseded the altar of God; hence the Heaven above was iron, and the earth beneath brass; the physical aspect of things was but the expression of Israel's hardness of heart and low moral condition.

Now there is not so much as a word about God in Ahab's directions to his servants — not a syllable about the sin that had called down the heavy displeasure and judgement of God upon the land. No; the word is, "Go unto all fountains and brooks." Such was Ahab's thought, his poor grovelling thought; his heart turned not, in true humility, to Jehovah; he cried not to Him in the hour of his need; hence his word is, "peradventure we may find grass. " God is shut out, and self is the all-engrossing object. Provided he could find grass, he

cared not about finding God He could have enjoyed himself in the midst of Jezebel's idolatrous prophets, had not the horrors of famine driven him forth: and then, instead of searching out the cause of the famine, in true self-judgement and humility, and seeking for pardon and restoration at the hand of God, he goes forth, in impenitent selfishness, to look for grass. Alas! he had sold himself to work wickedness; he had become the slave of Jezebel; his palace had become a cage of every unclean bird; Baal's prophets, like so many vultures, hovered around his throne, and from thence spread the leaven of idolatry over the whole land.

Oh, it is a truly awful thing to allow the heart to depart from the Lord. One cannot tell where it may end. Ahab was an Israelite, but he had allowed himself to be ensnared by a false religious system, at the head of which was Jezebel his wife; he had made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, and was driven headlong into the most abandoned wickedness. There is no one so bad as the man who turns aside from the ways of God. Such an one is sure to plunge into more profound depths of wickedness than even the ordinary victims of sin and Satan. The devil seems to take special delight in making such an one an instrument in carrying out his malignant designs against the truth of God.

If you have ever been taught to value the ways of truth and holiness, if you have ever taken delight in God and His ways, be watchful; “keep thy heart with all diligence;” beware of false religious influence; you are moving through a scene in which the very atmosphere you breathe is noxious, and destructive of spiritual life. The enemy has with hellish sagacity — a sagacity sharpened by well-nigh six thousand years' acquaintance

with the constitution of the human mind — laid his snares on all sides of you, and nothing but permanent communion with your heavenly Father will avail to preserve your soul. Remember Ahab, and pray continually to be kept from temptation.

The following passage of Scripture may well be used, in connection with Ahab, as a solemn and seasonable warning: “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited” (Jer. 17: 5-6).

Such was the wretched Ahab — wretched though favoured with a diadem and a sceptre. He cared neither for God nor his people. In his sayings and doings, on the melancholy occasion to which we are referring, we find as little about Israel as about God. There is not one word about the people that had been committed to his care, and who ought, after God, to have been his great object. His earthly mind seems to have been unable to reach beyond “the horses and mules.” Such were the objects of Ahab's anxious solicitude in the day of Israel's direful calamity.

Alas, what a contrast between all this low and grovelling selfishness and the noble spirit of the man after God's own heart, who, when the land was trembling beneath the heavy stroke of Jehovah's chastening rod, could say, “Is it not I that have commanded the people to be numbered: even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? let Thy hand, I pray Thee, O Lord my God, be on me, and on

my father's house; but not on Thy people, that they should be plagued" (1 Chr. 21: 17).

Here was the true spirit of a king. David, in the spirit of his blessed Master, would expose his own bosom to the stroke, in order that the sheep might escape; he would "stand between them and the foe"; he would turn the sceptre into a shepherd's crook; he thought not of his "horses and mules"; yea, he thought not of himself or his father's house, but of the people of God's pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Happy, ineffably happy, will it be for Israel's scattered tribes to find themselves again under the tender care of the true David.

It might be profitable to follow out a little more fully the history of Ahab; to dwell upon his unprincipled treatment of the righteous Naboth; of the alluring influence exerted by him over the mind of the good king Jehoshaphat, and of many other circumstances in his unhappy reign; but all this would lead us too far from our subject. We shall therefore advert for a few moments to the character of an important member of Ahab's household, and then return to Elijah.

Obadiah, the governor of Ahab's house, was one who, in the secret of his own spirit, feared the Lord, but who was planted in a most unhallowed atmosphere. The house of the wicked Ahab, and his still more wicked consort, must have been a painful school for the righteous soul of Obadiah; and so he found it. He was hindered in service and testimony. What he did for the Lord was done by stealth. He was afraid to act openly and decidedly; yet he did quite enough to show what he would have done had he been planted in a more congenial soil, and cherished by a more healthful

atmosphere. “He took a hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.” This was a most precious token of devotedness of heart to the Lord — a blessed triumph of divine principle over the most untoward circumstances.

Thus it was with Jonathan in the house of Saul. He, too, was sadly hindered in his service to God and to Israel. He should have stood forth in more entire separation from the evil in which his father lived, and moved; his place at Saul's table should have been vacant as well as David's: the cave of Adullam would have been his proper place, where, in holy companionship with the rejected David and his despised band of followers, he might have found a wider and more suited range in which to manifest his affectionate devotedness to God and His anointed.

Human expediency, however, might, and doubtless would, have recommended Jonathan to remain in Saul's house, and Obadiah to remain in Ahab's house, as being “the sphere in which Providence had placed them”; but expediency is not faith, nor will it aid a man in his path of service, whatever it may be. Faith will ever lead a man to break through the freezing rules of human expediency, in order that it may express itself in a way not to be mistaken.

Jonathan felt constrained at times to leave the table of Saul in order that he might embrace David: but he should have abandoned it altogether; he should have cast in his lot entirely with David; he ought not to have rested satisfied with speaking for his brother, he should have identified himself with him. But he did not do so, and therefore he fell on Mount Gilboa, by the hand of

the uncircumcised. Thus, in his life he was harassed and hindered by the unrighteous principle of rule which Saul had set up to entangle and bind the consciences of the faithful, and in his death he was ingloriously mingled with the uncircumcised.

Just so it was with Obadiah. It was his lot to stand in connection with the man who occupied the lowest step of that ladder of apostasy whereby the kings of Israel had descended from original principles. Hence he was obliged to act stealthily for God and His servants; he was afraid of Ahab and Jezebel; he lacked boldness and energy to stand out in decided testimony against all abominations; he had no room for the development of his renewed energies or affections; his soul was withered by the noxious vapours around him, and he could therefore exert but little influence on his day and generation.

Hence, while Elijah was boldly confronting Ahab, and openly serving the Lord, Obadiah was openly serving Ahab, and stealthily serving the Lord. While Elijah was breathing the holy atmosphere of Jehovah's presence, Obadiah was breathing the polluted atmosphere of Ahab's wicked court. While Elijah was receiving his daily supplies from the hand of the God of Israel, Obadiah was ranging the country in search of grass for Ahab's horses.

Truly a most striking contrast! And is there not at this moment many an Obadiah similarly occupied? Is there not many a God-fearing man sharing, in common with the children of this world, its death and misery, and labouring in co-operation with them to avert its impending ruin? Doubtless there is. And is this fit work for such? Should “the mules and horses of an ungodly

world engross the thoughts and energies of the Christian instead of the interests of the Church of God? Ah no! it should not be so. The Christian should have a nobler end in view — a higher and more heavenly sphere in which to use his energies. God, and not Ahab, demands and deserves our devotion.

This is a very wide question, and there are few amongst us that may not learn a lesson from it. Let us ask ourselves honestly, as before the Searcher of hearts, what are we doing? What object are we carrying out? What end have we in view? Are we sowing to the flesh? Are we working for merely earthly objects? Have we no higher end in view than self or this present world?

Oh these are searching questions, when rightly put! The tendency of the human heart and affections is ever downward — ever toward earth and the things of earth. The palace of Ahab holds out far more powerful attractions to our fallen nature than the lonely banks of Cherith or the house of the starving widow of Zarephath. But ah, let us think of the end! The end alone is the true criterion by which to judge in such matters. “Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end “ (Ps. 73: 17).

Elijah knew, by being in the sanctuary, that Ahab stood in a slippery place; that his house would speedily crumble in the dust; that all his pomp and glory was about to end in the lonely tomb, and his immortal spirit to be summoned to render its final account. These things the holy man of God thoroughly understood, and he was therefore well content to stand apart from it all. His leathern girdle, his homely fare, his lonely path, were far better, he felt, than all the pleasures of Ahab's court.

Such was his judgement, and we shall see, ere we close this paper, that his judgement was sound.

“The world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.” Would that all who love the name of Jesus were more uncompromising and energetic in their testimony for Him! The time is rapidly approaching when we would give worlds that we had been more true and real in our ways here below. We are too lukewarm, too much inclined to make terms with the world and the flesh, too ready to exchange the leathern girdle for the robe in which Ahab and Jezebel are most willing to array us.

May the Lord give all His people grace to testify against this world that the deeds thereof are evil, and to stand apart from its ways, it maxims and principles; in a word, from everything which properly belongs to it. “The night is far spent, and the day is at hand.” Let us then cast off the works of darkness and stand clothed in the armour of light; let us, as those that are risen with Christ, set our affection on things above, and not on things on the earth; having “our citizenship in heaven,” let us, with unceasing eagerness, “look for the Saviour from thence, who shall change the body of our humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”

Part 4

## THE PROPHET ON MOUNT CARMEL

In the opening verse of 1 Kings 18 a new order is issued to our prophet. “And it came to pass, after many days, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third

year, saying, Go show thyself unto Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth."

Here Elijah is summoned away from his retirement at Zarephath, to make his appearance in public and stand again before king Ahab. To one occupying the position, and exhibiting the spirit, of a true servant, it matters not what summons he receives. Whether it be "Go hide thyself," or "Go show thyself," he is ready, through grace, to obey. The Lord had been training His servant for three years and a half in secret. At Cherith and Zarephath He had taught him many important lessons; and when the time was come for his showing unto Israel, he was called to leave the desert and appear again as the public witness of Jehovah.

Nor did he hesitate. No, not for a moment, however much he might have preferred retirement to the stormy scenes and harassing vicissitudes of public life. Elijah was a servant, and that was enough. He was as ready to confront the angry Ahab, and all the prophets of Baal, as he had been to seclude himself for three years and a half. Truly we may well covet the spirit of a servant — a humble, obedient servant. Such a spirit will carry us through many difficulties; will save us from much contention; will send us along the path of service while others are disputing about it. If only we be willing to obey, and to serve, we shall never lack opportunity, nor be at a loss as to the path we should pursue.

[In every age the servant character is marked by the Holy Ghost as one of special value. It is, in fact, the only thing that will stand in times of general declension. Of this we have numerous examples in Scripture. When the house of Eli was about to fall before the divine

judgement, Samuel occupied the position of a servant whose ear was opened to hear. His word was, “Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.” When all Israel had fled from the face of the Philistine champion, the servant character again stood prominently forth. “Thy servant will go and fight,” etc. The Lord Jesus Himself had the title of Servant applied to Him by Jehovah, in the words of the prophet, “Behold My Servant,“ etc. Furthermore, when the Church had failed, and had become “the great house,” “the servant of the Lord” was told how he ought to carry himself. And lastly, it is mentioned as one of the special features of the heavenly Jerusalem, that “His servants shall serve Him.” The Lord grant us more of this spirit!.]

We have already had occasion to notice the prophet's unhesitating obedience to the Word of the Lord. Such obedience will ever involve the abandonment of self. To be told, for example, to leave one's sweet retreat in order to appear before an angry tyrant who, with his wicked queen, led on to the contest a host of idolatrous prophets, called for no small measure of self-renunciation. But Elijah, through grace, was ready. He felt he was not his own. He was a servant, and as such ever stood with girded loins and open ears to attend his Master's summons, whatever it might be. Blessed attitude! May there be many found therein!

Elijah, therefore, goes to meet king Ahab, and we are called to follow him now into one of the most important scenes of his life.

Before, however, he comes in contact with Ahab, he crosses the path of Obadiah, and his meeting with him is perfectly characteristic. Obadiah certainly does not meet

the prophet with that affectionate cordiality which ought to appear in the bearing of one brother towards another, but rather in the cold formality of one who had been moving much in the world's society. “Art thou that my lord Elijah?”

Now, though all this might have been occasioned by the overawing solemnity of Elijah's appearance and manner, still the thought forces itself upon one that there ought to have been more holy familiarity between two servants of the Lord. Elijah, too, seems to maintain this distance. “I am,” said he; “go tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here.” Elijah felt himself to be the depositary of the secret of the Lord, of which secret his brother knew nothing.

And how could he? Ahab's house was not the place to obtain an entrance into the divine counsels. Obadiah was out on a mission perfectly in keeping with the place from whence he had come, and with the person who had sent him; and so was Elijah. The former had as his immediate object grass — if peradventure he might find it; and as his ultimate object, the preservation of Ahab's horses and mules; the latter had as his immediate object the announcement of Jehovah's indubitable purpose concerning rain; and as his ultimate object, the bringing back of the nation to its early faith and devotedness.

True they were both men of God; and, moreover, it may be said by some that Obadiah was as much in his place as Elijah, seeing he was serving his master. No doubt he was serving his master; but should Ahab have been his master? I believe not. I believe his service to Ahab was not the result of communion with God. True it did not rob him of his name and character as one that feared the Lord greatly, for the Holy Ghost has graciously

recorded this concerning him; but truly it was a miserable thing for one that feared the Lord greatly to own as his master the worst of Israel's apostate kings. Elijah would not have done so. We cannot think of him as going forth on such a mission as that which was commanding the energies of his more worldly brother. Elijah would not own Ahab as his master, though he was bound to own him as his King.

There is a great difference between being a subject and one in a position under a monarch. People argue thus: “The powers that be are ordained of God,” therefore it is right to hold office under them. But those who argue thus seem to lose sight of the manifest distinction between subject to and co-operating with the powers that be: the former is a sound and scriptural service — an act of positive obedience to God; the latter is an unsound and unscriptural assumption of worldly authority, for the wielding of which we have no direction, and which, moreover, will be found a sad obstruction in the path of the servant of God We would not enter into judgement upon those who feel they can enlist their energies in the government of this world; but this much we would say — they will find themselves in an extremely awkward position in reference to the service of their heavenly Master. The principles of this world are diametrically opposed to those of God, and it is therefore hard to conceive how a man can be carrying out both at the same time.

Obadiah is a remarkable example of this. Had he been more openly on the Lord's side, he would have had no need to say, “Was it not told my lord what I did?” His hiding the prophets seems, in his estimation, to have been such a remarkable thing that he wondered if all

had not heard it. Elijah had no need to ask such a question; it was well known “what he did.” His acts of service to God were no phenomena in his history. And why? Because he was not trammelled by the arrangements of Ahab's house. He was free, and could therefore act for God without reference to the thoughts of Ahab or Jezebel.

In acting thus, however, he had to lie under the charge of troubling Israel. “Art thou he that troubleth Israel?” The more faithful one is to God and His truth, the more exposed he is to this charge. If all be allowed to sleep “in dead supineness,” the god of this world will be well pleased, and his domain untroubled; but only let some faithful one make his appearance, and he is sure to be regarded as a troubler, and an intruder upon peace and good order.

But it is well to have that peace and order broken up which stand connected with the open denial of the Lord's truth and name. The hearts of the earthly-minded may only be occupied with the question, “Is it peace?” utterly regardless as to whether that peace is procured at the expense of truth and holiness. Nature loves ease, and may often be found, even amongst Christians, pleading for peace and quietness, where faithfulness to Christ and His principles would call for plain dealing with unsound doctrine or evil practice.

The tendency of the age is to hold all religious questions in abeyance. The things pertaining to the world and the flesh are of far too much importance, in the estimate of this generation, to have them interfered with for a moment by questions of eternal importance. Elijah, however, thought not so. He seems to have felt that the

peaceful slumber of sin must be interrupted at all cost. He beheld the nation wrapped in the deep sleep of idolatry, and he thought it well to be the instrument of raising a storm around them.

So it was, and so it is. The storm of controversy is always preferable to the calm of sin and worldliness. Truly happy is it when there is no need of raising such a storm; but when it is needed — when the enemy would stretch forth over the people of God “the leaden sceptre” of unholy repose — it is a matter of thankfulness to find that there is life enough even to break in upon such repose. Had there been no Elijah in Israel in the days of Ahab and Jezebel, had all been like Obadiah or the seven thousand, Baal and his prophets might have held undisputed sway over the minds of the people.

But God raised up a man who cared not about his own ease; no, nor about the nation's ease, if that ease were to be purchased at the expense of God's honour and Israel's early principles. He feared not, in the strength of the Lord, to face a terrific array of eight hundred and fifty prophets, whose living depended upon the nation's delusion, headed, as they were, by a furious woman who could turn her weak-minded lord whithersoever she would.

All this, surely, called for no small amount of spiritual vigour and energy. It needed deep and powerful convictions of the reality of divine truth, and a very clear insight into Israel's low and degraded condition, to enable a man to leave his quiet retreat at Zarephath and burst into the midst of Baal's votaries, thus to bring upon himself a fierce storm of opposition from every

quarter. Elijah might, to speak after the manner of men, have remained in quiet retirement, in undisturbed repose, had he been satisfied to let Baal alone, and to allow the strongholds of idolatry to remain untouched. But this he could not do, and therefore he comes forth and meets the angry Ahab with these solemn and heart-searching words, “I have not troubled Israel; but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast served Baalim.”

This was tracing the evil up to its right source. It was departure from God and His holy commandments that had brought all this trouble upon them. Men are ever prone to forget the sin that has occasioned trouble, and think only of the trouble; but true wisdom will ever lead us to look from the trouble to the procuring cause.

Thus, too, when unsound doctrine has insidiously crept in, and gained power over many minds — if some faithful one should feel called to make a firm and decided stand against it, he must count upon being regarded as a troubler, and as being the cause of all the commotion consequent upon such acting; whereas the intelligent and reflecting mind will at once trace the matter, not to the faithful one who has made a stand for truth against error, but to him who may have introduced the error, and to those who have received and entertained it.

True, the defender of truth will need to watch his spirit and temper, lest, while he attacks error in doctrine, he fall into evil in practice. Many who have set out in real sincerity of heart to vindicate some neglected or disputed truth have failed in this particular, and have thus, in a great degree, nullified their valuable

testimony; for their sagacious enemy is always ready to act upon the narrow-mindedness and unreasonableness of men by leading them to fasten upon the petty infirmities of temper, and lose sight of the important principle advocated.

But our prophet entered the arena well equipped; he had come from “the secret place of the Most High”; he had been learning, in solitude, those lessons of self-judgement and self-subjugation which could alone qualify him for the momentous scenes on which he was about to enter. Elijah was no angry or stormy controversialist; he had been too much in the secret of the divine presence for that; he had been blessedly solemnized in his spirit ere he was called to confront Baal's host of prophets. Hence he stands before them in all the calm elevation and holy dignity which ever marked his bearing. We see no haste about him, no perturbation, no hesitancy. He was before God, and therefore he was self-possessed and tranquil.

Now it is in such circumstances that a man's spirit is really tested. Nothing but the mighty power of God could have maintained Elijah in his extraordinary position on mount Carmel. “He was a man of like passions with us;” and being the only one of his day who possessed sufficient moral courage and spiritual power to make a public stand for God against the power of idolatry, the enemy might readily suggest to his poor heart, “What a great man you are to stand forth thus as the solitary champion of Israel's ancient faith!” But God held up His dear servant so far. He carried him through this very trying scene, because he was His witness, and His servant.

And so it will ever be. The Lord will ever stand by those that stand by Him. Had Obadiah only made a stand against Ahab and Jezebel, the Lord would have owned him and carried him through, so that instead of being the servant of Ahab, he might have been the yokefellow of Elijah in his great reformation. But this was not the case, and therefore, like Lot of old, “his righteous soul was vexed” by the errors and evils of an idolatrous house.

O dear Christian reader, let us aim at something beyond this! Let us not be chained down to earth by deliberate connection with this world's systems or plans. Heaven is our home; there, too, our hope is; we are not of the world; Jesus has purchased us, and delivered us from it, in order that we might shine as lights and walk as heavenly men while passing onward to our heavenly rest.

However, it was not merely in his deportment and manner that Elijah acquitted himself as a servant of God; he also showed himself to be one taught of God in reference to those principles on which the needed reformation should be based. Personal deportment and manner would avail but little if soundness in the faith were lacking. It would be an easy thing to put on a leathern girdle, and assume a solemn and dignified manner; but nothing save a spiritual apprehension of divine principles will enable any one to exert a reforming influence on the men of his age.

But Elijah possessed all those needed qualifications. Both his appearance and his faith were such as, in an eminent degree, suited a thorough reformer. Conscious, therefore, that he was in possession of a secret which

would deliver the spirits of his brethren from the unhallowed thraldom of Baal, he says to Ahab, “Now, therefore, send and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table.”

He is determined to bring Baal and the God of Israel face to face, in the view of the nation. He felt that matters should be brought to a test. His brethren must no longer be left to ”halt between two opinions.” What strength there is in the prophet's words as he stands before the assembled thousands of Israel! “How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.”

This was very simple. The prophets of Baal could not gainsay nor resist it. The prophet only asked for decision of character. There could be nothing gained on either side by vacillating ways. “I would ye were either cold or hot.” We know from the Lord's own words to Elijah, in the next chapter, that there were seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal, and who, we may suppose, were only waiting for some vigorous hand to plant the standard of truth in order that they might rally round it. No one amongst them would seem to have had power for such a bold step, but they would no doubt rejoice in Elijah's boldness and ability to do so.

This has often been the case in the history of the people of God. In times of greatest darkness there have always been those whose spirits mourned in secret over the widespread evil and apostasy, who longed for the bursting in of spiritual light, and were ready with joy to welcome its earliest beams. God has never left Himself

without a witness; and although it is only here and there we can perceive a star of sufficient magnitude and brilliancy to pierce through the clouds of night and enlighten the benighted Church in the wilderness, yet we know, blessed be God, that let the clouds be ever so dark and gloomy, the stars have been there in every age, though their twinkling has been but little seen.

Thus it was in the days of Elias; there were seven thousand such stars whose light was obscured by the thick clouds of idolatry — who would not yield to the darkness themselves, though they lacked power to enlighten others; yet was there but one star of sufficient power and brightness to dispel the mists and create a sphere in which others might shine. This was Elijah the Tishbite, whom we now behold, in heavenly power and light, breaking into the very stronghold of Baal, upsetting Jezebel's table, [False religion has always sought the sunshine of this world's favour, whereas true religion has always been more pure and genuine when the world has frowned upon it. “The prophets of the groves eat at Jezebel's table. “ If Jezebel had had no table, she would have had no prophets either; it was her table, and not her souls, they sought.] writing folly upon the whole system of Baal's worship, and in fact, by God's grace, effecting a mighty moral change in the nation — bringing the many thousands of Israel down into the dust in real self-abasement, and mingling the blood of Baal's prophets with the waters of Kishon.

How gracious of the Lord to raise up such a deliverer for His deluded people! And what a death-blow to the prophets of Baal! We may safely assert they never offered a more unwilling sacrifice to their idol than that which our prophet suggested. It was the sure precursor

of his downfall, and of theirs also. What a sad aspect they present, “crying and cutting themselves with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out,” and crying out, with unavailing earnestness, “O Baal, hear us!” Alas, Baal could not hear nor answer them!

The true prophet, conscious in his inmost soul of the sinful folly of the whole scene, mocks them: they cry more earnestly, and leap with frantic zeal upon the altar; but all in vain. They were now to be unmasked in the view of the nation. Their craft was in imminent danger. Those hands which, through their influence, had so often been lifted up in the diabolical worship of a sinful absurdity, were speedily about to seize them and drag them to their merited fate. Well, therefore, might they cry, “O Baal, hear us!”

How solemn, how immutably true, are those words of Jeremiah, “Cursed is the man whose heart departeth from the Lord”! It matters not on whom, or on what, we place our confidence: whether it be a religious system or a religious ordinance, or anything else, it is a departure of the heart from God — a curse follows it, and when the final struggle comes the Baal will be invoked in vain; “there will be neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any to regard.”

How awful is the thought of departure from the living God! How dreadful to find, at the end of our history, that we have been leaning upon a broken reed! O, if you have not found solid and abiding peace for your guilty conscience in the atoning blood of Jesus, if you have a single emotion of fear in your heart at the thought of meeting God, let me put the prophet's question to you, “How long halt ye between two opinions?” Why do you

stand aloof when Jesus calls you to come unto Him and take His yoke upon you? Believe me, the hour is coming when, if you have not fled for refuge to Jesus, a greater than Elijah will mock at your calamity.

Harken to these solemn words: “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all My counsel, and would none of My reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you” (Prov. 1: 24-27).

Awful words! inconceivably awful! How much more awful the reality! Flee to Jesus. Betake yourself to the open fountain, and there find peace and refuge ere the storm of divine wrath and judgement bursts upon your head. “When once the master of the house has risen up and shut to the door,” you are lost, and lost forever. Oh think of this, I implore of you, and let not Satan drag your precious soul into everlasting perdition!

We now turn to another side of the picture. The prophets of Baal were signally defeated. They had leaped, cut themselves, and cried to no purpose. Their whole system had been proved a gross fallacy; the superstructure of error had been trampled to the ground, and it only now remained to rear the magnificent superstructure of truth in the view of those who had been so long enslaved by vanity and lies. “And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto

whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name: and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord."

It is always well to wait patiently, and allow evil and error to find their own level. Time will surely bring the truth to light; and let error array itself ever so carefully in the venerable robes of antiquity, yet will time strip it of these robes, and display it in all its naked deformity. Elijah felt this, and therefore he could stand quietly by and allow all the sands of Baal's glass to run out ere he began to exhibit the pattern of a more excellent way. Now it needs a very real apprehension of divine principles to enable one to adopt this patient course. Had our prophet been shallow-minded, or badly taught, he would have been in much greater haste to display his system and raise a storm of opposition against his antagonists.

But a spirit gifted with true elevation is never in haste, never perturbed; he has found a centre round which to move, and in revolving round that he finds himself carried out of the region of every other influence. Such an one was Elijah, a really elevated, independent, holy man — one who in every scene of his extraordinary career maintained a heavenly dignity which is earnestly to be sought after by all the Lord's servants. When he stood on mount Carmel, beholding the fruitless bodily exercise of Baal's prophets, he presented the appearance of one who was fully conscious of his heavenly mission; and not only in his manner, but also in his principles of acting, he acquitted himself as a prophet of the Lord.

What, then, were those principles on which Elijah acted? They were, in a word, those on which the unity of the nation was based. The first thing he does is to “repair the altar of the Lord that was broken down.” This was Israel's centre, and to this every true reformer directed his attention. Those who seek to carry out a one-sided reformation may rest satisfied with merely throwing down that which is false, without proceeding further to establish a sound basis on which to erect a new superstructure: but such reformation will never stand; it will carry with it too much of the old leaven to admit of its being a testimony. The altar of Baal must not only be thrown down, but the altar of the Lord must be set up.

Some there are who would sacrifice to the Lord on the altar of Baal; in other words, they would retain an evil system, and rest satisfied with giving it a right name. But no; the only centre of unity which God can recognize is the name of Jesus — simply and exclusively that. The people of God must not be looked at as members of a system, but as members of Christ. God sees them as such, and it should be their business to reckon themselves to be what God tells them they are, and manifestly to take that blessed place.

And we may further remark that Elijah in his actings on mount Carmel does not stop short of the recognition of Israel's unbroken unity. He takes twelve stones, according to the number of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the Word of the Lord came, saying “Israel shall be thy name.” This was taking high ground — yea, the very highest. Solomon could have taken no higher. To recognize the twelve tribes of Israel at a time when they were divided, and weakened, and degraded, evidenced

true communion with the mind of God in reference to His people.

Yet this is what the Spirit will ever suggest. “Our twelve tribes” must never be given up. True they may, through their own weakness and folly, become scattered and divided; yet the God of Israel can only think of them in that unbroken unity which they once exhibited, and which, moreover, they will exhibit again when, having been united by the true David, they shall in holy fellowship tread the courts of the Lord forever.

Now the Prophet Elijah, through the Spirit, saw all this. With the eye of faith, he penetrated the long, dreary time of Israel's humiliating bondage, and beheld them in their visible unity, no longer Judah and Israel, but Israel, for the word is, “Israel shall be thy name.” His mind was occupied, not with what Israel was, but with what God had said. This was faith. Unbelief might say, “You are taking too high a stand; it is presumption to talk about twelve tribes when there are but ten; it is folly to speak of unbroken unity when there is nothing but division.” Such will ever be the language of unbelief, which can never grasp the thoughts of God, nor see things as He sees them.

But it is the happy privilege of the man of faith to rest his spirit on the immutable testimony of God, which is not to be nullified by man's sinful folly. “Israel shall be thy name. “ Precious promise! Most precious! Most permanent! Nothing could for a moment interfere with it — neither Rehoboam's childishness nor Jeroboam's cunning policy; no, nor yet Ahab's vileness could hinder Elijah from taking the loftiest position that an Israelite could take, even the position of a worshiper at an altar

built of twelve stones, according to the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Now in Elijah the Tishbite we have an example of the power of faith in the promise of God at a time when everything around him seemed to stand opposed. It enabled him to rise above all the evil and sorrow around him, and to build an altar of twelve stones with as much holy confidence and unclouded assurance as did Joshua when, amid the triumphant hosts of Israel, he erected his trophy on the banks of Jordan.

## The Life and Times of Elijah - B

But I must bring this section to a close, having already extended it further than I had intended. We have seen the principle upon which our prophet desired to carry out the reformation. It was a sound one, and God honoured it. The fire from Heaven at once confounded the prophets of Baal, confirmed the prophet's faith, and delivered the people from their sad condition of halting between two opinions. Elijah's faith had given God room to act; he had made a trench and filled it with water; in other words, he had made the difficulty as great as possible in order that the divine triumph might be complete: and truly it was so.

God will always respond to the appeal of simple faith. “Hear me,” said the prophet, “O Lord, hear me; that this people may know that Thou art the Lord God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again.”

This is intelligent prayer. The prophet is engaged solely about God and His people. He does not say, “Hear me, that this people may know that I am a true prophet.” No; his only object was to bring the people back to the God of their fathers, and to have the claims of God established in their consciences, in opposition to the claims of Baal. And God darkened and heard; for no sooner had he concluded his prayer than “the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is the God.”

Truth triumphs! The prophets are confounded! The prophet, in holy indignation, mingles their blood with the waters of the Kishon, and thus, evil being judged, there remains no further hindrance to the communication of the divine blessing, which Elijah announces to Ahab in these words, “Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain.” How do these words convey to us Ahab's true character! “Eat and drink.” This was all he knew, or cared to know. He had come forth to look for grass, and nothing more; and the prophet conveyed to him that intelligence which he knew he desired. He could not ask him to come and join him in thanksgiving to God for this glorious triumph over evil, for he knew well he would meet with no response.

And yet they were both Israelites: but one was in communion with God, and the other was the slave of sin; hence, while Ahab found his enjoyment in getting up to “eat and drink,” Elijah sought his in retirement with God. Blessed, holy, heavenly enjoyment!

But mark the difference between Elijah's bearing in the presence of man and in the presence of God. He had met Obadiah, a saint in wrong circumstances, with an air of dignity and elevation; he had met Ahab in righteous sternness; he had stood amid the thousands of his deluded and erring brethren with the firmness and grace of a true reformer; and lastly, he had met the wicked prophets of Baal with mocking, and then with the sword of vengeance. Thus had he carried himself in the presence of man.

But how did he meet God? “He cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees.” Thus he

carried himself before God. All this is lovely. Our prophet knew his place both before God and man. In the presence of man he acted in the wisdom of the Spirit, as the case demanded; in the presence of God he prostrated himself in unfeigned and reverent humility. Thus may all the Lord's servants know how to walk in all their complicated relations here below.

We must now accompany our prophet to widely different scenes.

Part 5

THE PROPHET ON MOUNT HOREB

There are few who have taken a prominent place in the history of the Church of God whose course has not been marked, in a special manner, by vicissitude: of such, as of “those that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters,” it may be said, “They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths; their soul is melted because of trouble.” They are sometimes seen on the mount, sometimes in the valley; at one time basking in the sunshine, at another beaten by the storm.

Nor is this the case merely with prominent characters; almost every Christian, be his path ever so retired and noiseless, knows something of this vicissitude. Indeed, it would seem as if no one could run the race which is marked out for the man of faith without finding inequalities in his way. The path through the desert must be rough, and it is well that is so; for there is no right-minded person who would not rather be set in a rough than in a “slippery” way. The Lord sees our need of being exercised by roughness and hardness, not only that we may find the rest at the end sweeter, but also

that we may be the more effectually trained and fitted for the place we are yet to occupy.

True we shall have no need for trials in the kingdom, but we shall have need of those graces and habits of soul which were formed amid the trials and sorrows of the wilderness. We shall yet be constrained to acknowledge that our path here below was not a whit too rough, but that on the contrary we could not have done without a single exercise of all those that had fallen to our lot. We now see things indistinctly, and are often unable to see the needs-be for many of our trials and sorrows: moreover our impatient nature may often feel disposed to murmur and rebel; but only let us be patient and we shall be able without hesitation, and with the full assent of every thought and feeling, to say, “He led us forth by a right way, that He might bring us to a city of habitation. “

The above train of thought is suggested by the circumstances of our prophet in 1 Kings 19. He seems to have had little anticipation of the terrific storm which was about to burst upon him: he had come from the top of mount Carmel, and in the energy of the Spirit outstripped Ahab in his chariot to the entrance of Jezreel; but there he was destined to receive a check, and that, too, from one who had hitherto kept herself in the background. This was the wicked Jezebel. I say, she had kept herself in the background; but she had not been idle there. She had no doubt influenced her weak-minded lord, and used his power for her wicked ends. She had opened her house and spread a table for the prophets of Baal. These things she had done in furtherance of her master's interests.

Jezebel is not to be looked at merely as an individual: she stands before the spiritual mind as the representative of a class — yea, more, as the impersonation of a principle which has from age to age been working in hostility to the truth of God, and which appears in its full maturity in the person of the great whore spoken of in the Apocalypse. The spirit of Jezebel is a persecuting spirit — a spirit that will carry its own point in opposition to everything — an active, energetic, persevering spirit, in which satanic vigour appears very manifestly.

Very different is the Ahab spirit. In Ahab we see one who, provided he could attain the gratification of his carnal and worldly desires, cared but little about religion. He troubled himself but little to decide between the claims of Jehovah and those of Baal. To him they were all alike. Now it was such an one that Jezebel could wield according to her mind. She took care to have his desires gratified while she actively and sagaciously used his power in opposition to the truth of God. The Ahabs are always found to be fit instruments for the Jezebels; hence, in the Apocalypse, where all those principles which have been, are now, or are yet to be, at work, are seen in their full maturity, we find the woman riding the beast: that is, corrupt religion wielding the secular power, or the full-grown Jezebel-spirit making use of the full-grown Ahab-spirit.

All this has a solemn voice for the present generation; and those that have ears to hear, let them hear. Men are becoming increasingly heedless as to the interests and destinies of the truth of God in the earth. Christ and Belial are all alike, provided the wheels of the vast machine of utilitarianism be not clogged in their

movement. You may hold what principles you please provided you hold them in the background; and thus men of the most conflicting principles can unite and hold those principles in abeyance while with ardour and energy they pursue the phantom of worldliness.

Such is the spirit and tendency of the age, and all that is needed is that a Jezebel-spirit should arise and lead men on along the path upon which they have manifestly entered — a path which will most assuredly end in the blackness of darkness forever. Solemn, most solemn thought! Again I say, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

But we have said it was from Jezebel that the prophet Elijah received the check which seems so to have overwhelmed his spirit. “And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword.” Observe, “Ahab told Jezebel”; he had neither sufficient interest in the matter to lead him to take an active part himself, nor, even if he had the interest, did he possess sufficient energy. To him, perhaps, the abundance of rain seemed to stand connected with the death of the prophets, and therefore he could quietly stand by and see them put to death.

What was Baal to him, or Jehovah either? Nothing. Let Ahab and all of that school get enough to “eat and drink,” and all questions of truth and religion will be but lightly regarded. Gross and unmeaning abomination! Miserable, infatuated sensualism! Ye children of this world, whose sentiments are expressed in the words “let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,” think of Ahab; remember his terrible end — the end of his eating and

drinking. What was it? “The dogs licked his blood.” And as to his soul — ah, eternity will unfold its destinies!

But in Jezebel we see one who lacked neither interest nor energy. To her the controversy was one of the deepest moment, and she was determined to act with decision. “Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time.”

Here then the prophet was called to endure the storm of persecution. He had been on mount Carmel, where he had stood against all the prophets of Baal; his course had hitherto been a triumphant one, the result of communion with God; but now his sun seemed, in his view, to be about to go down, and his horizon to become dark and gloomy.

“And when he saw that, he arose and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.”

Elijah's spirit sinks altogether; he looks at everything through the dark cloud in which he was enveloped; all his labour seems, in his view, to have been for nought and in vain, and he has only to lie down and die. His spirit, harassed by what he deemed fruitless efforts to bring the nation back to its faith, longed to enter into rest.

Now, in all this we perceive the workings of impatience and unbelief. Elijah said nothing about longing to depart

when he stood on mount Carmel. No; there all was triumph; there he seemed to be achieving something — he seemed to be of some use, and therefore he thought not of his departure. But the Lord would show His servant not only what he “must do,” but also what he “must suffer.” The former we like well enough, the latter we are not so well prepared for. And yet the Lord is as much glorified in a patient sufferer as in an active servant. The graces that are developed by one who is enabled to endure protracted suffering are as fragrant in their perfume as all the fruits of active service. This our prophet should have borne in mind. But ah, the heart can well understand and sympathise with him in his gloom and despondency.

There are few of the Lord's servants who have not, at some time or other, eagerly desired to put off their harness and cease from the toils of conflict, particularly at times when all their labour and testimony would seem to be in vain, and when they are disposed to look upon themselves as mere cumberers of the ground. Yet we must wait God's time, and until then seek to pursue our way in patient, uncomplaining service. There is a vast difference between longing to get away from trial and sorrow, and longing to be at home in our Father's house.

No doubt the thought of rest is sweet, ineffably sweet, to the labouring man. It is sweet to think of the time when our own gracious God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, sweet to think of those green pastures and living fountains to which the Lamb will lead His flock throughout the coming ages of glory. In a word, the whole prospect presented to the view of faith is sweet and cheering; yet we have no right to say, “O Lord, take

away my life.” Nothing but an impatient spirit could ever dictate such language.

How different is the spirit breathed in the following words of the apostle Paul! “For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all, for your furtherance and joy of faith”(Phil. 1: 23-25).

These words exhibit a truly Christian spirit. The servant of the Church should seek the Church's good, and not his own advantage. If Paul had considered himself, he would not have tarried a moment on earth; but when he considered the Church, he desired to abide and continue for the purpose of furthering its joy and faith. This should have been Elijah's desire too: he should have desired to remain for the benefit of the nation. But here he failed. He had fled into the wilderness under the influence of unbelief, and for the purpose of saving his life, and then desired that his life might be taken away simply to escape from the trials which his position involved.

In all this we may learn a most profitable lesson. Unbelief is sure to drive us from the place of testimony and service. So long as Elijah walked by faith, so long he occupied the place of a servant and a witness; but the moment his faith gave way, he abandoned both and fled into the wilderness. Unbelief ever unfits us for the place of service, and renders us useless. We never can act for God save in the energy of faith. We should remember this at a time like the present, when so many are giving up and turning aside. I suppose we may lay it down as a

fixed principle of truth, that whenever a man abandons any distinctive position of testimony, it is from positive unbelief in the truth which led him into it.

Thus, for example, at the present day we see many who at one time took up a very distinct and prominent position from having learnt (as they stated) that great truth, the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church. Now, when this truth is really learnt, and held in power, it delivers from man's authority in matters of faith, and leads Christians out of those systems where such authority is acknowledged and defended.

If the Holy Ghost rules in the Church, then man has no right to interfere, no right to decree and institute ceremonies; for in doing so he is most presumptuously interfering with the divine prerogative. If therefore a man sincerely believe this important truth, his belief will certainly influence his conduct so far that he will feel himself called upon to bear testimony against every system in which this truth is practically denied; by separating from it.

It is not a question of what or whom he will attach himself to. No; this is another, and an after, consideration. A man's first business is to “cease to do evil,” and after that to “learn to do well.”

However, many who once professed to see this truth, and to act upon it, have since lost confidence in it, and as a consequence have retired from their distinct position, and gone back to those systems from which they had emerged. Like Elijah, they have not realized all their expectations; the results which they looked for have not appeared, therefore they have fled from the

scene, and doubtless many have felt disposed to say, “It is enough."

Yes, many a heart which once cherished high and fond expectations respecting the Church is now bowed down with sorrow and disappointment. Those who professed to see and act upon the truth of the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church, and other collateral truths, have, to say the least, failed to carry them into practice, and not only failed, but in many instances have made a most humiliating exhibition of themselves; and the enemy has not been backward in making his own use of all this. He has used it especially to discourage the hearts of those who, no doubt, desired to stand in testimony for Christ, but who, seeing the failure of everything like corporate testimony on the earth, have given up in despair.

However, let Christians observe this: it was unbelief that made Elijah fly into the wilderness, and it is unbelief which causes any one to give up that position of testimony into which the truth of the Holy Ghost's presence in the Church would necessarily lead him.

Those who thus retreat prove that it was not with God and His eternal truth, but with man and his circumstances, that they had to do. If God's truth be the basis of our acting, we shall not be affected by man's mutability and failure. Man may, and assuredly will, fail in his very best and purest efforts to carry out the truth of God; but shall man's failure make the truth of God of none effect? “God forbid; yea, let God be true and every man a liar.”

If those who profess to hold the blessed doctrine of the unity of the Church should split into parties; if those who hold the doctrine of the Spirit's presence in the

Church for the purpose of rule and ministry should nevertheless practically lean upon man's authority; if those who profess to be looking for the personal appearance and reign of the Son of man should be found grasping with eagerness after the things of this present world, shall these things nullify those heavenly principles? Certainly not. Thank God, truth will be truth to the end. God will be God, though man should prove himself a thousandfold more imperfect than he is. Wherefore, instead of giving up in despair because men have failed to make a right use of God's truth, we should rather hold fast that truth as the only stay of our souls amid universal ruin and shipwreck.

Had Elijah held fast the truth which filled his soul when he stood on mount Carmel, he would never have been found beneath the juniper tree, nor would he have given utterance to such words as “Take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers.”

Yet the Lord can graciously meet his poor servant even asleep under a juniper tree. “He knoweth our frame, He remembers that we are dust,” and therefore, instead of granting the petulant request of His harassed and disappointed servant, He rather seeks to feed and strengthen him for further exertion. This is not “the manner of man,” but it is, blessed forever be His name, the manner of God, whose ways and thoughts are not as ours. Man would often deal roughly and harshly with his fellow, making no allowance for him, but acting towards him in haste and severity. Not so God. He ever deals in the deepest pity and tenderness. He understood Elijah, and He remembered the stand he had recently made for His name and truth, and therefore He would minister to him in the season of his depression.

“And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God” (1 Kings 19: 5, 8).

The Lord knows better than we do the demands that may be made on us, and He graciously strengthens us according to His estimate of those demands. The prophet wished to sleep for sorrow, but the Lord wished to strengthen and nerve him for future service. Like the disciples in the garden, who, overwhelmed with deep sorrow at the apparent failure of all their fondly cherished hopes, allowed themselves to sink into profound slumber while their blessed Master would have had them girding up their loins and nerving their arms for the trying scenes on which they were about to enter.

But Elijah did eat and drink; and being thus strengthened, he proceeded to mount Horeb. Here again we have to trace the sorrowful actings of an impatient spirit. Elijah seems determined to retire from his place of service and testimony altogether. If he cannot sleep under the juniper tree, he will hide himself in a cave. “He came thither unto a cave, and lodged there.”

When once a man allows himself to slip aside from the position in which faith would keep him, there is no accounting for the extremes into which he may run.

Nothing but abiding faith in the Word of God can maintain any one in the path of service, because faith makes a man satisfied to wait for the end, whereas unbelief, looking only at surrounding circumstances, sinks into complete despondency.

The Christian must make up his mind to meet with nothing but trial and disappointment here. We may often dream of rest and satisfaction in some condition or other here; but it is only a dream. Elijah had no doubt hoped to see a mighty moral change brought about by his instrumentality; and instead of that, his life was threatened. But he ought to have been prepared for this.

The man who had fearlessly faced Ahab and all the prophets of Baal ought surely to have been able to bear a message from a woman. Yet no; his faith had given way. When a man's faith gives way, his own shadow will deter him. In contemplating the prophet's position on mount Horeb, one is disposed to ask, Can it be the same man whom we saw so recently standing on mount Carmel, at an altar of twelve stones, and there so blessedly vindicating the God of Israel in the presence of his brethren?

Alas! what a powerless creature man is when not sustained by simple faith in the testimony of God! David could, at one time, meet Goliath in the power of faith, and afterwards say, “I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.” Faith gets above circumstances and looks at God; unbelief loses sight of God, and looks only at circumstances. Unbelief says, “We were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so were we in their sight;” faith says, “We are well able to overcome them.”

However, the Lord does not leave His servant in the cave; He still follows him, and seeks to bring him again and again back to that post which he had abandoned in his impatience and unbelief. “And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?” What a reproof! Why did Elijah thus bury himself in a cave? Why had he retreated from the honourable post of testimony? Because of Jezebel's message, and because his ministry had not been as fully owned as he expected. He thought to have reaped a more cheering harvest from all his labour than a threatening message and apparent desertion, and therefore he had sought the retirement of a mountain cave, as a place suited to indulge his feelings.

Now, it must be admitted that there was much — very much to wound the prophet's spirit; he had come from his quiet retreat at Zarephath to face the whole nation, headed by Jezebel and a host of wicked priests and prophets. He had confounded the latter, through God's grace; God had sent down fire from Heaven in answer to his prayer; all Israel had seemed to acknowledge the truth as proclaimed by him. All these things must have raised his expectations to no ordinary height; yet, after all, his life is threatened, he sees no one to stand by him, he is enveloped in a thick cloud, he abandons the field of conflict, and hides himself in a cave.

It is much easier to censure another than to act aright, and we must be exceedingly slow in pronouncing judgement upon the actions of so honoured a servant as Elijah the Tishbite. But though we should not deal much in censure, we may, at least, draw instruction and warning from this section of our prophet's history. We may learn a lesson of which we stand very much in need.

“What doest thou here?” is a question which might justly be put to many of us from time to time, when, in impatience or unbelief, we leave our proper place of service amongst our brethren, to sleep under a juniper tree, or hide ourselves in a cave.

Are there not many at this moment who, aforetime, were powerful advocates of the principles connected with the unity and worship of the people of God, to be found either asleep or hidden in caves? that is, they are doing nothing for the furtherance of those truths which they once advocated. This is a truly sorrowful reflection. To such the question, “What doest thou here?” should come with special force. Yes, what are such doing? or rather, what are they not doing in the way of positive mischief to the sheep of Christ? A man who thus retires is not merely harmless, he is noxious; he is really injuring his brethren.

It would be far better never to have appeared as the advocates of important truth, than having done so to retire; to call special attention to some leading principles of divine truth, and then to abandon them, is most culpable. “If many man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.” We can pity ignorance, or endeavour to instruct it; but the man, who, having professed to see truth, afterwards abandons it, can neither be looked upon as an object of pity, nor a subject for instruction.

But it is not merely unbelief and disappointment in reference to certain truths that drive men into unhappy isolation; apparent failure in ministry has the same effect. The latter was, perhaps, what more especially affected Elijah. The triumph on mount Carmel had, doubtless, led to much elation of spirit in reference to

the results of his ministry, and he was not prepared for the sad reverse.

Now, the sovereign remedy for both these maladies, that is, for unbelief in important truth and disappointment as regards our ministry, is to keep the eye simply and steadily fixed on Jesus.

If, for example, we see men professing those two grand and all-important truths — the unity of the Church, and the abiding presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church — professing, I say, to see these things, and yet failing most sadly in carrying them out, shall we turn aside, and say there is no unity, and no abiding presence of the Holy Ghost? God forbid. This would be to make God's truth dependent upon man's faithfulness, which cannot be endured for a moment by the spiritual mind. No, let us rather look into the precious Word of God, and see the Church as the body of Christ, each member thereof written in God's book from everlasting to everlasting.

And, in like manner when we see Jesus at God's right hand in the Heavens, we see the unfailing ground of the Spirit's presence in the Church. Thank God for the blessed stability of all this. “The gifts and calling of God are without repentance.”

Finally, if any be tried in the matter of their ministry, if the enemy would endeavour to make them give up in chagrin or disappointment, let them try to keep their eyes more simply on Jesus, remembering that, however depressing the aspect of things here may be, the time is speedily approaching when all who have served the Lord simply, from love to Him, shall reap a full reward. We must take care, however, that we allow not our ministry, or the fruits thereof, to get between our souls and

Christ. There is great danger of this. A man may set out in unaffected devotedness to his Master, and yet, through the craft of the enemy, and the weakness of his own heart, he may, ere long, give his work a more prominent place in his thoughts than Christ Himself. Had Elijah kept the God of Israel more before him, he would not have given up in despair.

But we learn the real state of the prophet's soul from his reply to the divine challenge: “I have been very jealous,” said he, “for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword: and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away.” How different is this language from that which dropped from his lips on mount Carmel! There he vindicated God, — here he vindicates himself; there he endeavoured to convert his brethren by presenting before them the truth of God, — here he accuses his brethren, and recounts their sins before God.

[It is instructive to observe the order in which Elijah recounts the sins of Israel: 1 — “they have forsaken Thy covenant;” 2 — “they have thrown down Thine altars;” 3 — “they have slain Thy prophets with the sword,” The ground of all this evil was their having forsaken the covenant of God, the natural consequence of which was the throwing down of God's altars, and the abandonment of His worship, which latter was followed out by killing the prophets. We can understand this order.]

“I have been very jealous;” but “they have forsaken,” etc. This was the strain in which the disappointed prophet spoke from his cave on mount Horeb. He seems to have looked upon himself as the only one that had

done, or was doing, anything for God. “I only am left, and they seek my life to take it away.” Now all this was the natural consequence of his position.

The moment a man retires from his place of testimony and service among his brethren, he must begin to extol himself, and accuse them; yea, his very act expresses at once the assumption of his faithfulness, and their failure. But to all who thus separate from, and accuse their brethren, the searching question is, “What doest thou here?” “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

Our prophet, however, is called forth from his isolated place. “Go forth,” said Jehovah, “and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice."

The Lord, by these solemn and varied exhibitions of Himself and His wondrous actings, would teach His servant most impressively that He was not to be confined to one agent in carrying out His designs. The wind was an agent, and a powerful one, yet it did not accomplish the end; and the same might be said of the earthquake and the fire. They, by their very terribleness, served but to pave the way for the last, and apparently the weakest agent, namely, the still small voice.

Thus the prophet was taught that he must be satisfied to be an agent, and one of many. He might have thought that all the work was to have been done by him. Coming, as he did, with all the terrible vehemence of the mighty

wind, he supposed he should have carried off every obstacle, and brought the nation back to its place of happy allegiance to God. But ah! how little does even the most elevated instrument apprehend his own insignificance! The most devoted, the most gifted and the most elevated are but stones in the superstructure, screws in the vast machine; and whoever supposes he is the instrument, will find himself much mistaken.

“Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God giveth the increase.” And so Elijah had to learn that the Lord was not confined to him. He had other shafts in His quiver, which He would discharge in due time. The wind, the earthquake, and the fire must all do their work, and then the still small voice could be heard distinctly and effectually. It is the sole province of God to make Himself heard, even though He speak in “a still small voice.” Elijah remained in the cave until this voice reached his ear, and then “he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave.”

It is only “before the Lord” that we get into our right position. We may conceive high thoughts of ourselves and our ministry, until we are brought into the divine presence, and then we learn to wrap our face in a mantle; in other words, we learn, in reality, to hide ourselves. When Moses found himself in the divine presence “he trembled, and durst not behold.” When Job found himself there, “he abhorred himself, and repented in dust and ashes”; and so has it been with every one who has ever gotten a view of himself in the light of God's presence; he has learned his own thorough nothingness, he has been led to see that God could do without him.

The Lord is ever ready to acknowledge the smallest act of service done to Him, but the moment a man makes a centre of his service, the Lord will teach him that He wants him no longer. Thus it was with Elijah. He had retired from the field of labour and conflict, and earnestly desired to be gone: he thought himself a solitary witness, a forsaken and disappointed servant, and Jehovah makes him stand forth before Him, and there, as it were, give up his commission, and hear the names of his successors in the field of labour.

“The Lord said unto him, Go, return, on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: and Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat, of Abel-meholah, shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay; and him that escapeth the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I have left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.”

This statement must have thrown much light on the prophet's mind. Seven thousand! although he had thought himself left alone. Jehovah will never be at a loss for instruments. If the wind will not do, He has the earthquake; and if the earthquake will not do, He has the fire; and last of all, He has “the still small voice.”

And so Elijah was taught that Israel had to be acted upon by other ministry besides his: Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha had yet to appear on the scene, and as the still small voice had proved effectual in drawing him forth from his mountain cave, so would the gracious ministry

of Elisha prove effectual in drawing forth from their lurking-places the thousands of faithful ones whom he had altogether overlooked. Elijah was not to do all. He was but one agent. “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.”

Such, I believe, was the important lesson taught to our prophet by the impressive scenes on mount Horeb. He had gone up thither full of thoughts of himself alone; he stood there filled with the idea that he was the witness, the only witness; he went down from thence with the humbling yet wholesome consciousness that he was but one of seven thousand. A very different view of the case indeed. None can teach like God. When He desires to teach a lesson He can teach it effectually, blessed be His name. He had so taught Elijah his own insignificance that he was satisfied to retrace his steps, to come forth from his cave and down from the mount, to lay aside all his complaints and accusations, and humbly, silently, obediently, and willingly cast his prophetic mantle over the shoulders of another.

All this is most instructive. The silence of Elijah, after he hears of the seven thousand is most remarkable. He had learnt a lesson which mount Carmel could not teach him — a lesson which neither Zarephath nor Cherith had taught him. In these places he had learnt much about God and His truth, but on Horeb he had learnt his own littleness, and as the result of that learning he comes down from the mount and gives up his office to another; and not merely this, but in so doing he says “What have I done?”

In a word, we see in this dear servant the most complete renunciation of self from the moment he learnt that he was but one of many. He delivers a message to Ahab in the vineyard of Naboth; a message to Ahaziah in his sick chamber; then he takes his departure from earth, leaving the work which he had begun to be finished by other hands. Like John the Baptist, who, as we know, came in the spirit and power of Elias, he was satisfied to usher in another and then retire.

Oh that we all knew more of this humble self-renouncing spirit — the spirit which leads a man to do the work and think nothing of it; or if it should be so, to see the work done by others and rejoice therein. The Baptist had to learn this as well as the Tishbite; he had to learn to be content to end his brilliant career in the gloom of a prison while another was doing the work. John too thought it strange that it should be thus with him, and sent a message to Christ to inquire, “Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?” As if he had said, Can it be possible that He to whom I have borne witness is indeed the Christ and yet I am left to perish, neglected, in Herod's dungeon?

Thus it was, and John had to learn to be content. He had said at the commencement of his ministerial course, “He must increase, but I must decrease”; but it may be he had not just counted upon such a mode of decreasing: yet such was the divine counsel concerning this honoured servant. How different are God's thoughts from those of man! John, after having fulfilled a most important mission, even the mission of ushering in the Son of God, was destined to have his head cut off at the will of a wicked woman, and lest an ungodly tyrant should break his oath.

Just so was it with Elijah the Tishbite. His course, no doubt, had been a most brilliant one; he had passed before the eyes of Israel in all the dignity and majesty of a heavenly man — a heavenly messenger. Divine truth had fallen from his lips, and God had abundantly honoured him in his work; yet the moment he began to think of himself as anything; the moment he began to say, “I have been very jealous, and I only am left.” the Lord taught him his mistake, and told him to appoint his successor.

May we learn from all this to be very humble and self-renouncing in our service, whatever it be. Let us not presume to survey ourselves as if we were anything, or our service as if we had achieved some great thing. And even though our ministry should be unproductive, and we ourselves despised and rejected, may we be able to look forward to the end, when everything shall be made manifest. This was what our blessed Master did. He kept His eye fixed on “the joy that was set before Him,” and regarded not the thoughts of men as He passed along. Nor did He complain of or accuse those who rejected, despised, and crucified Him. No; His dying words were, “Father, forgive them.” Blessed Master, impart unto us more of Thy meek, loving, gracious and forgiving spirit! May we be like Thee, and tread in Thy steps across this dreary world!

Part 6

THE PROPHET'S RAPTURE

From the moment that Elijah had cast his mantle upon the shoulders of Elisha we may consider his prophetic career as almost ended. He delivered a message or two, as has already been noticed; but as regards his

ministerial connection with Israel, it may be looked upon as closed from the moment that Elisha the son of Shaphat, of Abel-meholah, was anointed to be prophet in his room. Indeed, he abandoned the work himself. “He arose, and fled for his life;” so that it was, to speak after the manner of men, high time to think of appointing a successor.

But we must not confine our thoughts to Elijah's ministerial character when reflecting upon his life and times. We must not only look at him as a prophet, but also as a man; not only as a servant, but also a child; not only officially, but also personally. As a prophet, the steady continuance and successful termination of his course would depend, in a great measure, on his own faithfulness. Hence, when he allowed himself to be carried away by a spirit inconsistent with the character of a genuine servant, he had to resign his office into the hands of another.

[It may be needful just to notice an objection which may be made to the view I have taken of the prophet's actings. It may be said that he was raised up at a special era of Israel's history, and for a special purpose, and that when that purpose had been effected another kind of instrument was needed. All this is most true. Yet we can have no difficulty in perceiving the haste and impatience of Elijah in desiring to resign his post because things had not turned out as he had expected. God's counsels and man's acting are very distinct. The ministry of Elijah had filled its proper place in the nation's history, no doubt; and moreover, another kind of instrument might be needed; yet this leaves quite untouched the question of his spirit and actings in the matter. Joshua might be needed to succeed Moses; and yet it was for hastiness of

spirit that Moses was refused permission to go over Jordan.}

There were, however, better things in store for Elijah. He might be hasty; he might hide himself in a cave, and from thence make intercession against Israel; he might impatiently long to depart from the trying scene in which he had been called to move; he might do all this, and in consequence thereof be called to resign his place: still the blessed God had thoughts of grace about him which never could have entered into his heart.

How truly blessed to allow God to adopt His own manner in dealing with us! We are sure to sustain loss when we interfere with the divine method of proceeding; and yet it has ever been man's tendency thus to interfere. Man will not allow God to adopt His own method of justifying him, but will ever be intruding into the wondrous plan of redemption: and even when he has submitted himself, through the operation of the Holy Ghost, to God's righteousness, he will again and again, notwithstanding repeated experience of God's superior wisdom, seek to interfere with the divine method of training and leading him; as if he could make better arrangements for himself than God! Presumptuous folly! — the fruits of which, to some, will be eternal perdition; to others, present forfeiture of blessing in the way of enlarged knowledge and experience of God's character and ways.

Had Elijah received his request, how much he would have lost! How much better to be carried up to Heaven in a chariot of fire, than to be taken away in a fit of impatience! Elijah asked for the latter, but God gave him the former. “And it came to pass, when the Lord would

take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal" (2 Kings 2: 1).

It would be foreign to my present design to dwell upon the circumstances of Elisha's introduction into the prophetic office, his slowness at first in accompanying Elijah, and his unwillingness afterward to leave him. We find him in this chapter accompanying Elijah from Gilgal to Bethel, and from Bethel to Jericho, and from Jericho to Jordan. All these places were famous in Israel's history. Bethel, or the house of God, was the spot where Jacob of old had seen the mystic ladder stretching from earth to Heaven, the apt expression of God's future purposes concerning the heavenly and earthly families. To this same place did Jacob return, by the express command of God, after he had cleansed himself from the defilement of Shechem (Gen. 35: 1).

Bethel, therefore, was a spot of deep interest to the heart of an Israelite. But alas, it had become polluted! Jeroboam's calf had effectually obliterated the sacred principles of truth taught by Jacob's ladder. The latter conducted the spirit from earth to Heaven — it led upward and onward; upward to God's eternal purpose of grace; onward to the display of that purpose in glory. The former, on the contrary, bound the heart down to a degrading system of political religion — a system in which the names of things heavenly were used to secure for self the things earthly.

Jeroboam made use of the house of God to secure for himself the kingdom of Israel. He was well content to remain at the bottom of the ladder, and cared not to look upward. His earthly heart desired not to scale those sublime heights to which Jacob's ladder led — earth and

its glory were all he wanted; and provided he obtained these, he cared not whether he worshipped before Baal's calf at Bethel, or Jehovah's altar at Jerusalem. What was it to him? Jerusalem, Bethel, or Dan, was but a name in the estimate of this politico-religious man — yea, and in the estimate of every other such man.

Religion is but an instrument in the hands of the children of this world — an instrument by which they dig into the bowels of the earth; not a ladder by which they mount from earth to Heaven. Man pollutes everything sacred. Place in his hands the purest, the most heavenly truth, and ere long he will defile it: commit to his guardianship the most precious, the most impressive ordinance, and he will ere long convert it into a lifeless form, and lose therein the principles sought to be conveyed. So was it with Bethel. So was it with everything sacred that man had anything to do with.

Then as to Gilgal, the place from whence the two prophets started: it too was a place of interest. It was there the Lord rolled away the reproach of Egypt from His people; there Israel kept their first Passover in the land of Canaan, and were refreshed by the old corn of the land. Gilgal was the rallying point for Joshua and his men of war; from thence they went forth in the strength of the Lord to obtain glorious triumphs over the uncircumcised, and thither they returned to enjoy the spoils.

Thus was Gilgal a place round which the affections of a Jew might well entwine themselves — a place of many hallowed recollections. Yet it too had lost all its reality. The reproach of Egypt had rolled back upon Israel. the principles which once stood connected with Gilgal had

lost their sway over the hearts of God's professing people. Bochim (the place of weepers) had long since taken the place of Gilgal in reference to Israel, and Gilgal had become an empty form — ancient, no doubt, but powerless, for Israel had ceased to walk in the power of the truth taught at Gilgal.

Again, as to Jericho, There it was that the hosts of the Lord, under their mighty Captain, gained their first victory in the land of promise, and exhibited the power of faith.

And lastly, at Jordan it was that Israel had had such an impressive manifestation of Jehovah's power in connection with the ark of His presence. Jordan was the place where death had been, in type, overcome by the power of life; and in its midst, and on its banks, it presented the trophies of victory over the foe.

Thus were these varied places — namely, Bethel, Gilgal, Jericho, and Jordan — deeply interesting to the heart of a true child of Abraham; but their power and meaning were lost: Bethel had ceased to be the house of God save in name; Gilgal was no longer valued as the place where the reproach of Egypt had been rolled away. The walls of Jericho which had been destroyed by faith were built again. Jordan was no longer viewed as the scene of Jehovah's power.

In a word, all these things had become mere form without power, and the Lord might, even in Elijah's time, have to speak to the house of Israel concerning them in the following impressive words: “Thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, Seek ye Me, and ye shall live: but seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba: for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity,

and Bethel shall come to naught. Seek the Lord, and ye shall live" (Amos 5: 4-6). Here is an important truth for all those whose hearts are prone to cling to ancient forms.

We are taught by this striking passage, that nothing but the divine reality of personal communion with God will stand. Men may plead, in defence of forms, their great antiquity, but where can we find greater antiquity than that which Bethel and Gilgal could boast? Yet they failed and came to naught, and the faithful were admonished to abandon them all and look up in simple faith to the living God.

Through all the above places, then, our prophet passed in the energy and elevation of a heavenly man. His destination lay beyond and above them all. He would seek to leave Elisha behind him while he pressed onward along his heavenward path; but the latter clings to him, and accompanies him as it were to the very portals of Heaven, and checks the busy intrusion of his less intelligent brethren by the words, "Hold ye your peace."

But Elijah moves on in the power of his heavenly mission. "The Lord hath sent me," says he; and in obedience to the divine command he passes through Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho, and on to Jordan; leaving far behind him all those ancient forms and sacred localities which might engage the affections of any who were not, like Elijah the Tishbite, carried forward by a heavenly hope.

The sons of the prophets might tarry amid those things, and perhaps, too, have many a hallowed recollection awakened by them; but to one whose spirit was filled

with the thought of his rapture to Heaven, things of earth be they ever so sacred, ever so venerable, could present no attraction. Heaven was his object, not Bethel or Gilgal. He was about to take his departure from earth and all its harassing scenes; he was about to leave Ahab and Jezebel behind to meet their terrible doom; to pass beyond the region of broken covenants, ruined altars, and slain prophets — in a word, to pass beyond the gloom and sorrow, trial and disappointment of this stormy world; and that not by the agency of death, but by a heavenly chariot.

Death was to possess no power against this heavenly man. No doubt his body was changed in the twinkling of an eye, for “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption”; but death can have no power over him; he rather stepped like a conqueror into his triumphal chariot, and thus passed away into his rest.

Happy man! his conflict was over, his race run, his victory secure. He had been a stranger here — unlike the men of this world; yea, unlike many of the children of the kingdom. He had come forth from the mountains of Gilead as the girded witness, and the stern intruder upon the course of a professing world. He had no home or resting-place here below, but as a stranger and pilgrim pressed onward toward his heavenly rest.

Elijah's path from first to last was a unique one. Like John the Baptist, he was a voice “crying in the wilderness,” away from the haunts of men; and whenever he did make his appearance, he was like some heavenly meteor, the origin and destiny of which were alike beyond the reach of human conception. The man

with the leathern girdle was only known as the witness against evil — the bearer of the truth of God. He had no fellowship with man as such, but in all his ways maintained an elevation which at once repulsed all intrusion and secured reverence and respect. There was so much of the sacred solemnity of the sanctuary about him that vanity or folly could not live in his presence. He was not, like his successor Elisha, a social man; his path was solitary.

“He came neither eating nor drinking.” In a word, he was peculiar in everything; peculiar in his entrance upon his prophetic career, peculiar in his passage out of it. He was an exception, and a marked one. The very fact of his not being called to pass through the gates of the grave would be quite sufficient to draw special attention to him.

But let us observe the path pursued by our prophet as he journeyed toward the scene of his rapture. He retraced the path of the camp of old. Israel had journeyed from Jordan to Jericho, but Elijah journeyed from Jericho to Jordan. In other words, as Jordan was that which separated the wilderness from the land, the prophet crossed it, thus leaving Canaan behind him. His chariot met him, not in the Land, but in the wilderness. The land was polluted, and was speedily to be cleansed of those who had introduced the pollution the glory was soon to take its departure from even the most favoured spot. Ichabod might be written upon it all; wherefore the prophet leaves it and passes into the wilderness, thus pointing out to the spiritual mind that nothing remained for heavenly men but the wilderness and the rest above.

Earth was no longer to be the resting-place, or portion, of the man of God it was polluted. The Jordan had been divided to allow Israel to pass from the wilderness to Canaan; it was now to be divided to allow a heavenly man to pass from Canaan to the wilderness where his chariot awaited him, ready to convey him from earth to Heaven.

Earthly things and earthly hopes had passed away from the mind of Elijah, he had learnt the thorough vanity of everything here below, and nothing now remained for him but to look beyond it all. He had toiled amid Israel's broken altars; he had laboured and testified for years among a disobedient and gainsaying people; he had longed to depart and be at rest; and now he was about to do so in a way worthy of God — Jehovah Himself was about to place His everlasting arms around and underneath His servant to shield him from the power of death. In his case death was to have no sting and the grave no victory.

Elijah was privileged, as he stood upon the sand of the wilderness, to look right upward and, unimpeded by the humiliating circumstances of sickness and death, see Heaven open to receive him. Not one of the circumstances of fallen humanity fell to the lot of our prophet in the matter of his exit from earth. He exchanged his prophet's mantle for a chariot of fire. He could cheerfully let his mantle drop to earth while he ascended to Heaven. To him earth was but a perishable and polluted speck in God's creation, and most happy was he to lay aside everything which marked his connection with it.

What a position! And yet it is only the position which every heavenly man should occupy. Nature and earth have no longer any claims on the man who believes in Jesus. The Cross has broken all the chains which once bound him to earth. As Jordan separated Elijah from Canaan, and brought him into the wilderness to meet Jehovah's chariot, so the Cross has introduced the believer into new ground; it has brought him into purely wilderness circumstances; it has placed him, too, at the other side of death, with no other object before him than his rapture to meet the Lord in the air.

Such is the real, unquestionable portion of every saint, be he ever so weak, ever so ignorant. The happy experience thereof is, of course, a very different thing. To attain to this we need to be much alone with God, and much in the exercise of a spirit of self-judgement. Flesh and blood can never be brought to understand the rapture of a heavenly man.

Indeed, we find that the sons of the prophets did not understand it either, for they say to Elisha, “Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men: let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master, lest, peradventure, the Spirit of the Lord hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley.” Here was their highest thought about the prophet's rapture — “The Spirit of the Lord hath cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley.” They could not conceive such a thing as his being carried up to Heaven in a chariot of fire.

[It has been observed by another that the little children who came out of Bethel, and said to Elisha, “Go up, thou bald head,” were mocking the idea of rapture. If this be

so, they afford a sample of the world in their thoughts about the rapture of the Church.]

They still tarried amid the things of earth, and had not their spiritual senses sufficiently exercised to perceive and appreciate a truth so glorious. Elisha yielded to their importunity, but they learnt the folly of their thoughts by the fruitless toil of their messengers. Fifty strong men could nowhere find the raptured prophet. He was gone; and it required other strength than that of nature to travel the same road. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” Those who walk in the Spirit will best understand the prophet's privilege in being delivered from the claims of mortality, and being introduced in a manner so glorious into his heavenly rest.

Such, then, was the end of our prophet's course. A glorious end! Who would not say, “Let my last end be like this”? Blessed be the love that so arranged it that a man should be thus honoured! Blessed be the grace that led the Son of God — the Prince of life — to stoop from His glory in the heavens and submit to a shameful death upon the cross, by virtue of which, even though yet only in prospect, the prophet Elijah was exempted from the penalty of sin, permitted to pass into the regions of light and immortality without the smell of death having passed upon him!

How we should adore this love, dear Christian reader! Yes; while we trace the footsteps of the remarkable man whose history we have been dwelling upon; while we follow him from Gilead to Cherith, from Cherith to Zarephath, from Zarephath to Carmel, from Carmel to

Horeb, and from Horeb to Heaven, we must feel constrained to cry out, “Oh, the matchless love of God!” Who could conceive that mortal man could tread such a course? Who but God could bring about such things?

The path of Elijah the Tishbite magnifies exceedingly the grace of God, and confounds the wisdom of the enemy. The rapture of a saint to Heaven is one of the richest fruits and most magnificent results of redemption. To save a soul from hell is in itself a glorious achievement, a splendid triumph; to raise up the body of a sleeping saint is even a more marked display of divine grace and power; but to take a living man, in the freshness and energy of his natural existence, and carry him from earth to Heaven, is a finer display of the power of God and the value of redemption than anything we can conceive.

Thus it was with Elijah. It was not merely the salvation of his soul, nor the resurrection of his body; but it was the rapture of his person — “body, soul, and spirit.” He was taken away from the midst of all the turmoil and confusion around him. The tide of evil might yet have to flow onward; men and principles might continue to work and show themselves. The measure of Israel's iniquities might still have to be filled up and the proud Assyrian enter the scene as the rod of Jehovah's anger to chastise them; but what was all this to the raptured prophet? Nothing. Heaven had opened upon him as he stood a homeless wanderer in the wilderness. He was now to be done with the land of Canaan, with its defilement and degradation, and to take his place above, there to await those momentous scenes in which he was, and is yet, to take a part.

Having thus seen our prophet go into Heaven, our reflections on his life and times might naturally close. Yet there is one scene in particular in which he appears in the New Testament; and did we not dwell for a little upon it, our sketch of him would be incomplete. I allude to the mount of transfiguration, where Moses and Elias appeared in glory, and spoke with the Lord Jesus Christ of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.

The Lord Jesus had taken with Him Peter, James, and John, and brought them up into a high mountain, apart, in order to exhibit in their view a sample of His future glory, that thus their spirits might be fortified against the trying scenes through which both He and they had yet to pass.

What a company! The Son of God, in white and glistering raiment: Moses, type of those who sleep in Jesus; Elias, type of the raptured saints; and Peter, James, and John, who have been styled the pillars of the New Testament Church! Now it is evident that our Lord designed to prepare His apostles for the scene of His sufferings by showing them a specimen of the glory that should follow. He saw the cross, with all its accompanying horrors, in the distance before Him.

Shortly before His transfiguration He said to them, “The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day”: but previous to His entering into all this, He would show them something of His glory. The cross is in reality the basis of everything. The future glory of Christ and His saints, the joy of restored Israel in the land of Canaan, and the

deliverance of creation from the bondage of corruption, all hang upon the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. His sorrows and sufferings have secured the Church's glory, Israel's restoration, and the blessing of the whole creation.

No marvel, therefore, that the cross should form the subject of discourse between Christ and His glorious visitors. “They spoke of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.” Everything hung upon this. The past, the present and the future all rested on the cross as upon an immortal basis. Moses could see and acknowledge in the cross that which superseded the law, with all its shadowy rites and ceremonies; Elijah could see and acknowledge in it that which could give efficacy to all prophetic testimony. The law and the prophets pointed to the cross as the foundation of the glory which lay beyond it.

How profoundly interesting, therefore was the subject of converse upon the mount of transfiguration, in the midst of the excellent glory! It was interesting to earth, interesting to Heaven, interesting to the wide creation of God. It forms the centre of all the divine purposes and counsels; it harmonises all the divine attributes; it secures upon immutable principles the glory of God and the sinner's peace; on it may be inscribed in indelible characters “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

No marvel, therefore, again I say, that Moses and Elias could appear in glory and talk of such a momentous subject. They were about to return to their rest, while their blessed Master had to descend again into the arena of conflict to meet the cross in all its tremendous

reality; but they knew full well that He and they would yet meet in the midst of a glory which shall never be overshadowed by a cloud — a glory of which He, the Lamb, was to be the source and the centre forever — a glory which shall shine with everlasting brilliancy when all human and earthly glories shall be overcast by the shadows of an eternal night.

But what of the disciples during all this wondrous converse? How were they employed? They were asleep! Asleep while Moses and Elias conversed with the Son of God concerning His cross and passion! Marvellous insensibility! Nature can sleep in the very presence of the excellent glory.

[At is not a little remarkable that we find these same disciples asleep during the season of our Lord's agony in the garden. They slept In the view of the glory, and also in the view of the cross. Nature can as little enter into the one as the other. And yet the blessed Master does not rebuke them in either case, save to say to the most prominent and self-confident among them, “Couldst thou not watch with Me one hour?” He knew whom He had to do with: He knew that “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak “ Gracious Master, Thou wast ever ready to make allowance for Thy poor people, and didst say, “Ye are they who have continued with Me in My temptation,” to those who had slept on the mount, slept in the garden, and who were about to deny and desert Thee In the hour of Thy deepest need!]

“And when they were awake they saw His glory, and the two men that stood with Him. And it came to pass, as they departed from Him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three

tabernacles — one for Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias — not knowing what he said."

No doubt it was good to be there — far better than to go down from their elevation and glory to meet all the contradiction and trying obloquy of man. When Peter saw the glory, and Moses and Elias, it instantly occurred to his Jewish mind that there was no hindrance to the celebration of the feast of tabernacles. He had been asleep while they spoke of "the decease"; he had been indulging nature whilst his Master's sufferings had formed the subject of discourse; and when he awoke, he would fain pitch his tent in the midst of that scene of peace and glory, beneath the open heavens. But ah, he knew not what he said. It was but a passing moment.

The heavenly strangers were soon to depart; the Lord Jesus was to be delivered into the hands of men. He was to pass from the mount of glory to the place of suffering; Peter himself, too, had yet to be sifted by Satan — to be deeply humbled and broken under a sense of his shameful fall — to be girded by another, and carried whither he would not; a long and a dreary season, a dark night of sorrow and tribulation, was in store for the Church; the armies of Rome were yet to trample the holy city in the dust, and lay waste her bulwarks; the thunders of war and political revolution were yet to roll, with terrible vehemence, over the whole civilised world; — all these things, and many more, were to come to pass, ere the fond thought of poor Peter's heart could be realized on earth. The prophet Elijah must visit the earth again "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4: 5). "Elias must first come and restore all things."

How long, O Lord? May this be the continual inquiry of our hearts as we pass along to that rest and glory which lie before us. “Time is short,” and eternity, with all its divine and glorious realities, is at hand. May we live in the light of it! May we ever be able, by the eye of faith, to see the bright beams of the millennial morning — the morning without clouds — irradiating the distance hills!

Everything points to this; every event that happens, every voice that reaches the ear, tells of the speedy approach of the kingdom: the sea and the waves may be heard roaring — nations are convulsed, thrones overturned; — all these things have a voice for the circumcised ear, and the voice is, “Look up!”

Those who have received the Holy Ghost have received the earnest of the future inheritance; and the earnest, as we know, is part of the thing to be received. They have been on the mount; and although the cloud may overshadow them too — although they too may have to come down from the mount to meet the trial and sorrow below — yet they have a foretaste of the joy and blessedness which shall be theirs forever; and they can unfeignedly thank God, as they journey on from day to day, that their hopes are not bounded by this world's gloomy horizon, but that they have a home beyond it all.

Oh wondrous grace, oh love divine,

To give us such a home!

Let us the present things resign,

And seek this rest to come.

And gazing on our Saviour's cross,

Esteem all else but dung and dross;

Press forward till the race be run,

Fight till the crown of life be won.

CONCLUSION

Although, in the character of his ministry, Elijah the Tishbite much resembled John the Baptist, as has been already observed, yet looking at him personally, and considering his unearthly and pilgrim path, and specially his rapture to Heaven, he stands before us as a remarkable illustration of the Church, or heavenly family. Taking this view of him, I think a few observations on the important doctrine of the Church will not be considered out of place as a conclusion to the foregoing sketch of his life and times.

It is of the utmost importance that the Christian reader should understand the doctrine of the Church's heavenly character. It will be found to be the only preservative against the varied forms of evil and unsound doctrine which prevail around us. To be soundly instructed in the heavenly origin, heavenly position, and heavenly destiny of the Church, is the most effectual safeguard against worldliness in the Christian's present path, and also against false teaching in reference to his future hopes.

Every system of doctrine or discipline which would connect the Church with the world, either in her present condition or her future prospects, must be wrong, and must exert an unhallowed influence. The Church is not of the world. Her life, her position, her hopes, are all heavenly in the very highest sense of that word. The calling and existence of the Church are, humanly speaking, consequent upon the present rejection of Israel and the world.

The garden of Eden and the land of Canaan were successively the scenes of divine operation; but sin, as we have often heard marred them both, and now all who believe the gospel of the grace of God, preached to them in the name of a crucified, risen and ascended Saviour, are constituted living members of the body of Christ, and are called upon to abandon every earthly hope. Being quickened by the voice of Him who has passed into the heavens, and not only so, but being united to Him by the Holy Ghost, they are called to occupy the place of strangers and pilgrims on earth.

The position of Elijah the Tishbite as he stood on the wilderness side of Jordan waiting for his rapture to Heaven, aptly represents the condition of the Church collectively or the believer individually. [When I say the wilderness side of Jordan, I only speak of Jordan in reference to the prophet's path. If we look at it in reference to the path of Israel from Egypt to Canaan, we learn a different truth. The spiritual reader will understand both.] The Church, properly so called, finds (as another has said) “the termini of her existence to be the cross and the coming of the Lord”; and surely, we may say, earth has no place between these sacred bounds. To think of the Church as a worldly corporation, be it ever so sound and scriptural, is to sink far below the divine thought about it.

The doctrine of the Church's heavenly character was developed in all its power and beauty by the Holy Ghost in the apostle Paul. Up to his time, and even during the early stages of his ministry, the divine purpose was to deal with Israel. There had been all along a chain of witnesses, the object of whose mission was exclusively the house of Israel.

The prophets, as has been already observed in the opening of this paper, bore witness to Israel, not only concerning their complete failure, but also the future establishment of the kingdom agreeably to the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac Jacob, and David. They spoke not of the Church as the body of Christ. How could they, when the thing was a profound mystery, “not revealed to the sons of men”?

The thought of a Church composed of Jew and Gentile, “seated together in the heavenlies,” lay far beyond the range of prophetic testimony. Isaiah, no doubt, speaks in very elevated strains of Jerusalem's glory in the latter day; he speaks of Gentiles coming to her light, and kings to the brightness of her rising; but he never rises higher than the kingdom, and as a consequence never brings out anything beyond the covenant made with Abraham, which secures everlasting blessedness to his seed, and through them to the Gentiles. We may range through the inspired pages of the law and the prophets, from one end to the other, and find nothing concerning “the great mystery” of the Church.

Then, again, in the ministry of John the Baptist we observe the same thing. We have the sum and substance of his testimony in these words: “Repent, for the kingdom is at hand.” He came as the great precursor of the Messiah, and sought to produce moral order amongst all ranks. He told the people what they were to do in that transition state into which his ministry was designed to conduct them, and pointed to Him that was to come. Have we anything of the Church in all this? Not a syllable. The kingdom is still the very highest thought. John led his disciples to the waters of Jordan — the place of confession in view of the kingdom; but it was not yet

that character of repentance produced in them who are made members of the body of Christ.

The Lord Jesus Himself then took up the chain of testimony. The prophets had been stoned; John had been beheaded; and now “the Faithful Witness” entered the scene, and not only declared that the kingdom was at hand, but presented Himself to the daughter of Zion as her King. He too was rejected, and, like every previous witness, sealed His testimony with His blood. Israel would not have God's King, and God would not give Israel the kingdom.

Next came the twelve apostles, and took up the chain of testimony. Immediately after the resurrection they inquired of the Lord, “Wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” Their minds were filled with the thought of the kingdom. “We trusted,” said the two disciples going to Emmaus, “that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel.” And so it was. The question was, when? The Lord does not rebuke the disciples for entertaining the thought of the kingdom; He simply tells them, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power. But ye shall receive power, after that 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” (Acts 1: 7-8).

Agreeably to this, the Apostle Peter, in his address to Israel, offers them the kingdom. “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, and the times of refreshing shall come from the presence (apo prosopon) of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ which before was preached unto 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."

Have we here the development of the Church? No. The time had not yet arrived for this. The revelation of the Church was yet to be, as it were, forced out as something quite extraordinary — something quite out of the regular course of things. The Church as seen in the opening of the Acts exhibits but a sample of lovely grace and order, exquisite indeed in its way, but not anything beyond what man could take cognisance of and value. In a word, it was still the kingdom, and not the great mystery of the Church. Those who think that the opening chapters of Acts present the Church in its essential aspect have by no means reached the divine thought on the subject.

Peter's vision in Acts 10 is decidedly a step in advance of his preaching in Acts 3. Still, however, the grand truth of the heavenly mystery was not yet unfolded. In the council held at Jerusalem for the purpose of considering the question that had arisen in reference to the Gentiles, we find the apostles all agreeing with James in the following conclusion: "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; that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom My name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things" (Acts 15: 14-17).

Here we are taught that the Gentiles, as such, are to have a place with the Jews in the kingdom.

But did the council at Jerusalem apprehend the truth of the Church, of Jews and Gentiles so truly formed in “one body” that they are no more Jew nor Gentile? I believe not. A few members might have heard it from Paul (see Gal. 2: 12), but as a whole they do not seem to have understood it as yet.

We infer, therefore, that the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles by the mouth of Peter was not the development of the great mystery of the Church, but simply the opening of the kingdom, agreeable to the words of the prophets, and also to Peter's commission in Matt. 16: “And I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Mark, it is “the kingdom,” and not the Church. Peter received the keys of the kingdom, and he used those keys, first to open the kingdom to the Jew, and then to the Gentile. But Peter never received a commission to unfold the mystery of the Church. Even in his Epistles we find nothing of it. He views believers on earth; as strangers, no doubt, but yet on earth; having their hope in Heaven and being on their way thither, but never as the body of Christ seated there in Him.

It was reserved for the great apostle of the Gentiles to bring out, in the energy and power of the Holy Ghost, the mystery of which we speak. He was raised up,

however, as he himself tells us, before the time. “Last of all, He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.” Things were not sufficiently matured for the development of the new revelation of which he was made the peculiar minister, and hence he styles himself one born before the time; for such is the real force of the original word. And how was he before the time? Because Israel had not as yet been finally set aside. The Lord was still lingering over His beloved city, unwilling to enter into judgement; for, as another has said, “Whenever the Lord leaves a place of mercy, or enters a place of judgement, He moves with a slow and measured pace.”

This is most true; and hence, although the apostle of the Gentiles had been raised up and constituted the depositary of a truth which was designed to carry all who should receive it far away beyond the bounds of Jewish things, yet did he make the house of Israel his primary object; and in so doing he worked in company with the twelve, although not a debtor to them in any one way. “It was necessary,” says he to the Jews, “that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13: 46).

Why was it necessary? Because of God's long-suffering and grace. Paul was not only the depositary of the divine counsels, but also of divine affections. As the former, he should act upon his peculiar commission; as the latter, he would linger over “his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh”: as the former, he was called upon to lead the Church into the knowledge of “a mystery which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men”; as the latter, he would, like his Master,

with “a slow and measured step,” turn his back upon the devoted city and the infatuated nation.

In a word, as the gospel with which he was entrusted could only be proclaimed upon the ground of the total abandonment of earth, the earthly city, and the earthly nation, and as Paul's heart yearned over that nation and city, therefore it was that he was so slow to make known publicly the gospel which he preached. He delayed for fourteen years, as he himself informs us. “Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain” (Gal. 2: 1-2).

This is a very important passage on the question now before us. Paul had been raised up quite out of the regular course of things; his ministry was totally divested of the earthly, human and Jewish element; so much so indeed as to give rise to numerous questions as to its divine origin.

{There have not been wanting modern teachers who have laboured to deprive Paul's ministry of its peculiarly heavenly character by placing him among the regular college of apostles, whose aspect and bearing were manifestly Jewish. This they do by calling in question the election of Matthias. But to all those who need more than the exercise of spiritual judgement to guide them in this matter it may be sufficient to say that the Holy Ghost raised no question as to the validity of Mattias's election, for He fell upon him in common with his fellow-apostles. However, we can well understand why those

who feel themselves called upon to uphold human systems should labour so diligently to reduce our apostle s ministry to a human, or earthly level.}

To him was committed what he emphatically styles his gospel. But, as has been remarked, it was a question whether things were ripe as regards the divine counsels respecting Israel, for the public development of this gospel. The apostle felt this to be a momentous question: hence his caution in communicating it severally to a few. He could not, even in the midst of the Church at Jerusalem, speak openly on this grand question, because he feared that the full time had not come, and that, should he develop it prematurely, few had sufficient spiritual intelligence or largeness of mind to understand or enter into it. His fears, as we know, were well grounded. There were few at Jerusalem who were at all prepared for Paul's gospel.

Even some years later we find James, who seems to have taken a very prominent place in the Church of Jerusalem, inducing Paul to purify himself and shave his head. And what was this for? Just to prevent a break-up of the earthly thing.

“Thou seest, brother,” said James, “how many thousands 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. 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; and all may know that those things whereof they were informed concerning thee are nothing, but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law" (Acts 21: 20-24). Here, then, we have abundant proof of the fact that the great mystery was not understood and would not be received by the Church at Jerusalem.

[The circumstance to which allusion is made in the above quotation occurred some years later than the visit to which Paul refers in Gal. 2. The latter would seem to have been occasioned by the controversy respecting the Gentiles. This fact gives additional force to the expression "Severally to them which were of reputation." Paul could not communicate his gospel to them en masse.]

Now, one can well understand how the spirit of James would have shrunk from the terrible break-up which must have resulted from the public declaration of Paul's gospel amongst those whose hearts still clung to the earthly thing. True, it was the privilege of believing Jews to breathe a purer atmosphere than that of an earthly sanctuary, yet they were not prepared for the strong meat of Paul's gospel, and moreover the heart would cling with peculiar fondness to the thought that Jerusalem was to be a great focus of Christian light and testimony from whence the rays of gospel truth should emanate to enlighten all around. But if the mystery which Paul had communicated to them privately were to be made known to the multitude, "the many thousands of Jews" would not receive it, and thus the great centre of light would have become the centre of division.

Moreover, the very same motive which had actuated Paul on the occasion of his former visit to Jerusalem, when he communicated his gospel only to a few, lest he should run in vain if things were not ripe for the revelation — the same motive, we say, might have led him at a later period to hold his gospel in abeyance, and accommodate himself to the thoughts and feelings of those who had not as yet got beyond the earthly order of things.

Every affection of Paul's heart as a man and a Jew would have led him to linger at Jerusalem, and also to hesitate in the development of a doctrine which would cast Jerusalem and all earthly things into the shade, and raise the thoughts and affections into a far higher and purer region than had yet been realized. Paul knew full well the vanity and emptiness of vows and purifications. He saw nothing in the temple and its splendid ceremonies save a vast system of shadows of which the substance was in Heaven.

Yet his affectionate heart yearned over his brethren who were still captivated by it all, and therefore he hesitated to let the full blaze of the light which had been communicated to him shine upon them, lest it should dazzle them, habituated as they were to the shadows of bygone days.

If this be a sound view of the conduct of our apostle in the matter of the vow, etc., it places him before us in a most truly interesting point of view, and also brings out very distinctly the two features of his character, namely, as the participator in the divine affections towards Israel, and also as the depositary of the divine counsels respecting the Church. Both these are lovely in their

way. His fervent affection for Israel and his faithfulness to his own peculiar commission are both exquisite. Some may think he allowed the former to interfere at times with the latter, as in the matter of the vow; but it was an interference which we can well understand and account for.

His heart, however, led him to tarry in Jerusalem; yea, to tarry until the Lord had to compel him to leave it. His commission was to the Gentiles; and yet, again and again he betakes himself to Jerusalem, and in his unwillingness to depart from it reminds us of the “slow and measured steps” with which the glory as seen by Ezekiel had departed from the temple.

But the Lord would insist upon His servant's leaving Jerusalem. “Make haste,” said He, “and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem; for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me.” Paul's Jewish heart still lingers. He replies, “They know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee; and when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I was also standing by and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.”

What pleading is here! “Their unbelief is all my fault; my vileness acts as the great barrier to their reception of the testimony — only let me remain.” Impossible! “Depart: for I will send thee far hence, to the Gentiles.” Yes; the truth must be brought out; the divine counsels must be fulfilled; the time was come, and it was in vain for James to seek to stem the mighty current of events, or for Paul to linger or hesitate any longer: the crisis had arrived, and if Paul will after all this return to Jerusalem

again, he must be carried away from it in bonds! He does return again.

The passage we have just quoted is Paul's own account of what the Lord had said to him on a former occasion, to which we have no allusion till now. Thus, although he had been expressly told to depart from Jerusalem because they would not receive his testimony, he goes thither again; and we know the result of this visit. It was his last.

The very thing that James dreaded and sought to avoid came upon them: an uproar was raised, and Paul was delivered over into the hands of the Gentiles. The Lord was determined to send him to the Gentiles. If he would not go as a free man, he must go as “an ambassador in bonds.” He could say, however, that it was for “the hope of Israel that he was bound with this chain.” If his heart had not longed so after Israel, he might have escaped the bonds. He left Israel without excuse, but he himself became a prisoner and a martyr.

Thus then, at length, Paul took leave of Jerusalem. He had visited it again and again, and would have tarried there; but it was not his place. Jerusalem had been for ages the object of divine regard and the centre of divine operation, but it was speedily about to be trodden down of the Gentiles; its temple was about to be laid in ruins, and the flock of Christ that had been gathered there was about to be scattered abroad; a few short years, and that spot which had stood so long connected with all God's thoughts about earth would be laid low, even with the dust, beneath the rude foot of the Roman.

Now Paul's departure may be looked upon as the immediate precursor of all this. The peculiar truth of

which he was the depositary could only be brought out in all its fullness and power in connection with the abandonment of earth as the manifested scene of divine operation. Hence Paul's journey from Jerusalem to Rome must be viewed with deepest interest by the intelligent and reflecting Christian.

[It is a thought full of interest, in connection with the subject before us, that Paul's voyage to Rome gives us the history of the Church as regards its earthly destinies. The vessel sets out in due order, as a compact and well regulated thing, framed to endure the violence of the stormy ocean over which it had to pass. After a time the apostle offers a certain suggestion, which, being rejected, the ship is dashed to pieces by the waves. There was, however, an important distinction between the vessel and the individuals on board: the former was lost, the latter were all saved. Let us apply all this to the history of the Church in its earthly path. The testimony, as we know, emanated from Jerusalem, whence Paul started on his way to Rome. Apostolic testimony was designed to guide the Church in its earthly course, and preserve it from shipwreck: but this being rejected, failure and ruin were the consequences. But, in the progress of the failure, we perceive the distinction between the preservation of the Church's corporate testimony and individual faithfulness and salvation. “He that hath ears to hear” will always find a word of instruction and guidance for him in times of thickest darkness. The waves may dash in pieces the corporate thing — everything connected with earth may vanish away, “but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.” The above picture might be traced far more

minutely by those who feel they have intelligence and warrant to do so.]

But we may ask, did our apostle, when he turned his back upon Jerusalem, take leave also of Israel? No; he did not yet despair. True they had not received his testimony at Jerusalem, but perhaps they might receive it at Rome: they had not given him a place in the East, perhaps they would in the West. At all events he would try. He would not abandon Israel, though Israel had rejected him.

Hence we read that “after three days [from the time of his arrival at Rome] Paul called the chief of the Jews together; and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.... For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you; because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.... And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets, from morning till evening” (Acts 28: 17, 20, 23).

Here, then, we have this blessed “ambassador in bonds” still seeking out “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” and offering them, in the first place, “the salvation of God.” But “they agreed not among themselves,” and at last Paul is constrained to say, “Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and not

understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive; for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted and I should heal them. BE IT KNOWN THEREFORE UNTO YOU, THAT THE SALVATION OF GOD IS SENT UNTO THE GENTILES, AND THAT THEY WILL HEAR IT. “

There was now no more hope. Every effort that love could make had been made, but to no purpose; and our apostle, with a reluctant heart, shuts them up under the power of that judicial blindness which was the natural result of their rejection of the salvation of God. Thus every obstacle to the clear and full development of Paul's gospel was removed. He found himself in the midst of the wide Gentile world — a prisoner at Rome and rejected of Israel. He had done his utmost to tarry among them; his affectionate heart led him to delay as long as possible ere he would reiterate the prophet's verdict; but now all was over — every expectation was blasted — all human institutions and associations present to his view nothing but ruin and disappointment; he must therefore set himself to bring out that holy and heavenly mystery which had been hid in God from ages and generations — the mystery of the Church as the body of Christ united to its living Head by the Holy Ghost.

Thus closes the Acts of the Apostles, which, like the Gospels, is more or less connected with the testimony to Israel. So long as Israel could be regarded as the object of testimony, so long the testimony continued; but when they were shut up to judicial blindness, they ceased to

come within the range of testimony, wherefore the testimony ceased.

And now let us see what this “mystery,” this “gospel,” this “salvation,” really was, and wherein its peculiarity consisted. To understand this is of the utmost importance. What, therefore, was Paul's gospel? Was it a different method of justifying a sinner from that preached by the other apostles? No; by no means. Paul preached both to the Jews and also to the Gentiles “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” This was the substance of his preaching.

The peculiarity of the gospel preached by Paul had not so much reference to God's way of dealing with the sinner as with the saint; it was not so much how God justified a sinner as what He did with him when justified. Yes — it was the place into which Paul's gospel conducted the saint that marked its peculiarity. As regards the justification of a sinner, there could be but one way, namely, through faith in the one offering of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But there could be numerous degrees of elevation as regards the standing of the saint. For example, a saint in the opening of Acts had higher privileges than a saint under the law. Moses, the prophets, John, our Lord in His personal ministry, and the twelve, all brought out varied aspects of the believer's position before God. But Paul's gospel went far beyond them all. It was not the kingdom offered to Israel on the ground of repentance, as by John the Baptist and our Lord; nor was it the kingdom opened to Jew and Gentile by Peter in Acts 3 and Acts 10; but it was the heavenly calling of the Church of God composed of Jew and Gentile, in one

body, united to a glorified Christ by the presence of the Holy Ghost.

The Epistle to the Ephesians fully develops the mystery of the will of God concerning this. There we find ample instruction as to our heavenly standing, heavenly hopes, and heavenly conflict. The apostle does not contemplate the Church as a pilgrim on earth, (which, we need not say, is most true,) but as sitting in Heaven: not as toiling here, but resting there. “He hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” It is not that He will do this, but “He hath” done it. When Christ was raised from the dead, all the members of His body were raised also; when He ascended into Heaven they ascended also; when He sat down, they sat down also; that is, in the counsel of God, and to be actualised in process of time by the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven.

Such was the thought and purpose of the divine mind concerning them. Believers did not know this at the first; it was not unfolded by the ministry of the twelve, as seen in the Acts of the Apostles, because the testimony to Israel was still going on; and so long as earth was the manifested scene of divine operation, and so long as there was any ground of hope in connection with Israel, the heavenly mystery was held back; but when earth had been abandoned and Israel set aside, the apostle of the Gentiles, from his prison at Rome, writes to the Church, and opens out all the glorious privileges connected with its place in the Heavens with Christ. When Paul arrived at Rome as a prisoner he had, as it were, arrived at the end of all human things. He no longer thought of the Church as exhibiting anything like a perfect testimony on earth. He knew how things would turn out as regards

the Church's earthly path; he knew that it would fare with it even as it had fared with the vessel in which he had sailed from Jerusalem to Rome; but his spirit was buoyed up by the happy assurance that nothing could touch the unity of the body of Christ, because it was a unity infallibly maintained by God Himself.

[I believe it is of the deepest moment that the believer should avoid all looseness of thought, or indifference, in reference to the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church and the unity of the body of Christ. The man who holds the former will assuredly seek the latter.]

This was the spring of Paul's joy as he lay a despised and neglected prisoner in the dungeon of Nero. He was not ashamed, for he knew that the Church, though broken in pieces here, was nevertheless held in the everlasting grasp of the Son of God, and that He was able to keep it until the happy moment of its rapture to meet Him in the air.

[A letter has been put into my hand. from a dear and valued servant of Christ. from which I extract the following statements which are well worthy of attention: “The Holy Ghost came down from heaven to form one body on the earth 'for by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body.' This is the unity we are responsible to maintain — the unity of the Spirit, the other, final one, God secures infallibly. If God set in the Church 'healings,' it certainly is not in heaven. One has only to read 1 Cor. 10 - 11 to learn that the unity of the Church on earth is a fundamental, essential, divine institution — the cardinal truth which will distinguish, I believe, those who have faith to walk devotedly in these last days, and without which the expectation of Christ will be only

personal deliverance, and not 'The Spirit and the Bride say, Come.'"]

But it may be asked: How can believers be said to be seated in heavenly places when they are yet in the world, struggling with its difficulties, its sorrows and temptations? The same question may be asked in reference to the important doctrine of Rom. 6: How can believers be represented as dead to sin when they find sin working in them continually? The answer to both is one and the same.

God sees the believer as dead with Christ, and He also sees the Church as raised with and seated in Christ; but it is the province of faith to lead the soul into the reality of both. “Reckon yourselves to be” what God tells you you are. The believer's power to subdue indwelling corruption consists in his reckoning himself to be dead to it; and his power of separation from the world consists in his reckoning himself to be raised with Christ and seated in Him. The Church, according to God's estimation, has as little to do with sin and the world as Christ has; but God's thoughts and our apprehensions are very different things.

We must never forget that every tendency of the human mind not only falls short of but stands actually opposed to all this divine truth about the Church. We have seen how long it was ere man could take hold of it — how it was forced out, as it were, and pressed upon him; and we have only to glance at the history of the Church for the last eighteen centuries to see how feebly it was held and how speedily it was let go. The heart naturally clings to earth, and the thought of an earthly corporation is attractive to it.

Hence we may expect that the truth of the Church's heavenly character will only be apprehended and carried out by a very small and feeble minority.

It is not to be supposed that the Protestant reformers exercised their thoughts on this momentous subject. They were made instrumental in bringing out the precious doctrine of justification by faith from amid the rubbish of Romish superstition, and also in letting in upon the human conscience the light of inspiration in opposition to the false and ensnaring dogmas of human tradition.

This was doing not a little: yet it must be admitted the position and hopes of the Church engaged not their attention. It would have been a bold step from the church of Rome to the Church of God; and yet it will be found in the end that there is not distinct neutral ground between the two; for every church, or, to speak more accurately, every religious corporation, reared up and carried on by the wisdom and resources of man, be its principle ever so pure and ever so hostile to Catholicism, will be found, when judged by the Spirit, and in the light of Heaven, to partake more or less of the element of the Romish system.

The heart clings to earth, and will with difficulty be led to believe that the only time wherein God ceases to be manifestly occupied about earth — that the only unnoticed interval in the history of time — is just the period wherein He, by the Holy Ghost, is gathering out the Church to form the body of Christ; and moreover, that when God was dealing publicly with earth, the Church, properly so called, was not contemplated; and that when He shall resume His public dealings with the

earth and with Israel, the Church will be out of the scene.

To understand all this requires a larger measure of spirituality than is to be found with many Christians.* The question naturally arises in the mind of the inquirer after truth, “What is the most scriptural form of Church government?” To what body of Christians should I attach myself?” The answer to such questions is, “Attach yourself to those who are 'endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'

{*The reader will, I trust, understand the distinction between God's public actings and His secret operations by His providence. The former ceased when Israel was set aside, and will be resumed when Israel comes again into notice; the latter are going on now. God controls the wheels of government and the counsels of kings to bring about His own great designs.

Deep in unfathomable mines

Of never-failing skill,

He treasures up His bright designs,

And works His sovereign will.}

Sects are not the Church, nor religious parties the body of Christ. Hence, to be attached to the sects is to find ourselves in some of those numerous tributary streams which are rapidly flowing onward into the terrible vortex of which we read in Rev. 17 and 18. Let us not be deceived — principles will work, and systems will find their proper level. Prejudice will operate, and hinder the carrying out of those heavenly principles of which we speak.

Those who will maintain Paul's gospel will find themselves, like him, deserted and despised amid the splendid pomp and glitter of the world. The clashing of ecclesiastical systems, the jarring of sects, and the din of religious controversy, will surely drown the feeble voices of those who would speak of the heavenly calling and rapture of the Church.

But let the spiritual man who finds himself in the midst of all this sad and heart-sickening confusion remember the following simple principle: Every system of ecclesiastical discipline, and every system of prophetic interpretation, which would connect the Church, in any one way, with the world, or things of the world, must be contrary to the spirit and principles of the great mystery developed by the Holy Ghost in the apostle of the Gentiles.

The Church stands in no need of the world's aid in the matter of order or discipline. The Holy Ghost dwells in the Church, broken and scattered though it be, notwithstanding all man's unbelief about it; and if there be any introduction of the earthly or human element, it can only have the sad effect of grieving Him whose presence is the very light of believers and the spring and power of ministry and discipline.

And then, as to the Church's hope, “we look for the Saviour,” and not for the accomplishment of any earthly event. Thank God, believers are not taught to wait for the revelation of Antichrist, but for the appearing of the blessed Son of God, who loved them and gave Himself for them. Christians should understand that they have nothing to look for save their rapture into the air to meet the Lord. The world may ridicule the idea, and

false teachers may build up systems hostile to it, for the purpose of shaking the faith of the simple-minded; but through grace we will continue to “comfort one another” with the assurance that “the days are at hand, and the effect of every vision.”

I must now close this paper. I am deeply conscious of how feebly and incoherently I have developed what I have in my mind concerning the doctrine of the Church; but I have no doubt of its real importance, and feel assured that as the time draws near much light will be communicated to believers about it. At present, it is to be feared, few really enter into it.

If it were understood, there would be far less effort to attain a name and a place on earth. Paul, the great witness of the Church's heavenly calling, must have exhibited a poor spectacle in the view of the children of this world, and so will all who maintain his principles and walk in his steps; but he comforted his spirit with the thought that “the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His”; and he also knew that in the very darkest time there would be a few who would “call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” May our lot be cast among such, in the midst of this sorrowful scene, until we shall see Jesus as He is, and be made like Him forever!

# Glad Tidings

Glad Tidings

C. H. Mackintosh.

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. John 3: 16.

There are some passages in Holy Scripture which seem to contain in a line or two, an entire volume of most precious truth. The verse which we have just penned is one of such. It is part of our Lords memorable discourse with Nicodemus, and it embodies, in a condensed form, a very full statement of Gospel truth — a statement which may well be termed “Glad Tidings.”

It should ever be born in mind, both by preachers, and those to whom they preach, that one grand object of the gospel is to bring God and the sinner together in such a way as to secure the sinners eternal salvation. It reveals a Saviour God to a lost man. In other words it presents God to the sinner in the very character that the sinner needs. A Saviour is precisely what suits the lost, just as a lifeboat suits a drowning man, or a physician a sick man, or bread a hungry man. They are fitted the one for the other, and when God as a Saviour, and man as a lost sinner, meet together, the whole question is settled for ever. The sinner is saved, because God is a Saviour. He is saved according to the perfection which belongs to God, in every character He wears, in every office He fills, in every relationship He sustains. To raise a question as to the full and everlasting salvation of a believing soul, is to deny that God is a Saviour. So it is in

reference to justification. God has revealed Himself ass a Justifier, and hence the believer is justified according to the perfection which attaches to God in that character. If a single flaw could be detected in the title of the very weakest believer, it would be a dishonour to God as a Justifier. Grant me but this, that God is my Justifier, and I argue, in the face of every opposer and every accuser, that I am, and must be, perfectly justified.

And, on the same principle, grant me but this, that God has revealed Himself as a Saviour, and I argue, with unclouded confidence and holy boldness, that I am, and must be, perfectly saved. It does not rest upon aught in me, but simply and entirely upon God's revelation of Himself. I know He is perfect in everything; and, therefore, perfect as my Saviour. Hence, I am perfectly saved, inasmuch as the glory of God is involved in my salvation. "There is no God else beside Me: a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside Me." What then? "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else" (Isa. 45: 21-22). One believing look from a lost sinner to a just God and a Saviour, secures eternal salvation. "Look!" How simple! It is not “Work” — "Do" — "Pray" — "Feel" — no; it is simply "Look." And what then? Salvation — everlasting life. It must be so, because God is a Saviour; and the precious little word "look" fully implies all this, inasmuch as it expresses the fact that the salvation which I want is found in the One to whom I look. It is all there, ready for me, and one look secures it — secures it forever — secures it for me. It is not a thing of to-day or to-morrow; it is an eternal reality. The bulwarks of salvation behind which the believer retreats have been erected by God Himself — the Saviour-God, on the sure

foundation of Christ's atoning work; and no power of earth or hell can ever shake them. "Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief Corner-stone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded" (Isa. 28: 16; 1 Peter 2: 6).

But let us now turn directly to the profound and comprehensive passage which forms the special subject of this paper. In it, most assuredly, we listen to the voice of a Saviour-God — the voice of Him who came down from Heaven to reveal God in such a way as He had never been revealed before. It is a marvellously blessed fact that God has been fully revealed in this world — revealed, so that we — the writer and the reader of these lines — may know Him, in all the reality of what He is — know Him, each for himself, with the utmost possible certainty, and have to do with Him, in all the blessed intimacy of personal communion.

Think of this! Think, we beseech you, of this amazing privilege. You may know God for yourself, as your Saviour, your Father, your own very God. You may have to do with Him; you may lean upon Him, cling to Him, walk with Him, live and move and have your being in His own most blessed presence, in the bright sunshine of His loving countenance, under His own immediate eye.

This is life and peace. It is far more than mere theology or systematic divinity. These things have their value, but, be it remembered, a man may be a profound theologian, an able divine, and yet live and die without God and perish eternally. Solemn, awful, overwhelming thought! A man may go down to hell, into the blackness and darkness of an eternal night, with all the dogmas of theology at his fingers' ends. A man may sit in the

professor's chair, stand in the pulpit and at the desk; he may be looked up to as a great teacher and an eloquent preacher: hundreds may sit at his feet and learn, thousands may hang on his lips and be enraptured, and, after all, he himself may descend into the pit, and spend a dismal, miserable eternity in company with the most profane and immoral.

Not so, however, with one who knows God as He is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. Such a one has gotten life eternal. "This," says Christ, "is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent" (John 17: 3). It is not life eternal to know theology or divinity. A man may sit down to the study of these, as he would to study law or medicine, astronomy or geology, and all the while know nothing of God, and therefore be without divine life, and perish in the end.

So also as to mere religiousness. A man may be the greatest devotee in the world. He may most diligently discharge all the offices, and sedulously attend upon all the ordinances of systematic religion; he may fast and pray; hear sermons and say prayers; be most devout and exemplary; and all the while know nothing of God in Christ; yea, he may live and die without God, and sink into hell forever. Look at Nicodemus. Where could you find a better sample of religious human nature than in him? A man of the Pharisees, a ruler, of the Jews, a master in Israel; one, moreover, who seemed to discern in the miracles of our Lord the clear proofs of His divine mission; and yet the word to him was, "Ye must be born again." We have no need, surely, to go farther than this to prove that a man may be not only religious, but

actually a guide and a teacher of others, and yet not have divine life in his soul.

But it is not so with one who knows God in Christ. Such a one has life and an object. He has God Himself for his priceless portion. This is divine. It lies at the very foundation of personal Christianity and true religion. It is above and beyond everything. It is not, we repeat, mere theology, divinity, or religiousness; it is God Himself, known, trusted, and enjoyed. It is a grand, unmistakable reality. It is the soul of theology, the groundwork of divinity, the life of true religion. There is nothing in all this world like it. It is something which must be felt in order to be known. It is acquaintance with God, confidence in Him, and enjoyment of Him.

Now, it may be that the reader is disposed to ask, "How can I possess this priceless treasure? How can I know God for myself, in this living, saving, powerful manner? If it be true that without this personal knowledge of God I must perish eternally, then how am I to obtain it? What am I to do, what am I to be, in order to know God?" The answer is, God has revealed Himself. If He had not, we may say with decision that nothing that we could do, nothing that we could be, nothing in us or of us, could possibly make us acquainted with God. If God had not manifested Himself, we should have remained forever in ignorance of Him and perished in our ignorance. But, seeing that He has come forth from the thick darkness and showed Himself, we may know Him according to the truth of His own revelation, and find, in that knowledge, everlasting life, and a spring of blessedness at which our ransomed souls shall drink throughout the golden ages of eternity.

We know of nothing which so clearly and forcibly proves man's utter incompetency to do aught towards procuring life, as the fact that the possession of that life is based upon the knowledge of God: and this knowledge of God must rest upon the revelation of God. In a word, to know God is life, to be ignorant of Him is death.

But where is He to be known? This is, in very deed, a grave question. Many a one has had to cry out, with Job, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him." Where is God to be found? Am I to look for Him in creation? Doubtless, His hand is visible there; but ah! that will not do for me. A Creator-God will not suit a lost sinner. The hand of power will not avail for a poor, guilty wretch like me. I want a heart of Love. Yes, I want a heart that can love me in all my guilt and misery. Where can I find this? Shall I look into the wide domain of providence — the widely extended sphere of God's government? Has God revealed Himself there in such a way as to meet me, a poor lost one? Will providence and government avail for one who knows himself to be a hell-deserving sinner? Clearly not. If I look at these things, I may see what will perplex and confound me. I am short-sighted and ignorant, and wholly unable to explain the ins and outs, the bearings and issues, the why and the wherefore, of a single event in my own life, or in the history of this world. Am I able to explain all about the loss of The London? Can I account for the fact that a most valuable life is suddenly cut short, and an apparently useless one prolonged? There is a husband and the father of a large family; he seems perfectly indispensable to his domestic circle and yet, all in a moment, he is cut down, and they are left in sorrow and destitution; while, on the other hand, yonder lies a poor bed-ridden creature, who has

outlived all her relations, and is dependent on the parish, or on individual benevolence. She has lain there for years, a burden to some, no use to any. Can I account for this? Am I competent to interpret the voice of Providence in this deeply mysterious dispensation? Certainly not. I have nothing in or of myself wherewith to thread my way through the mazes of the labyrinth of what is called providence. I cannot find a Saviour-God there.

Well, then, shall I turn to the law — to the Mosaic economy — the Levitical ceremonial? Shall I find what I want there? Will a Lawgiver, on the top of a fiery mount, wrapped in clouds and thick darkness, sending forth thunders and lightnings, or hidden behind a veil — will such a One avail for me? Alas! I cannot meet Him — I cannot answer His demands nor fulfil the conditions. I am told to love Him with all my heart, with all my mind, and with all my strength; but I do not know Him. I am blind and cannot see. I am alienated from the life of God, an enemy by wicked works. Sin has blinded my mind, blunted my conscience, and hardened my heart. The devil has completely perverted my moral being, and led me into a state of positive rebellion against God. I want to be renewed in the very source of my being ere I can do what the law demands. How can I be thus renewed? Only by the knowledge of God. But God is not revealed in the law. Nay, He is hidden — hidden behind an impenetrable cloud, an unrent veil. Hence I cannot know Him there. I am compelled to retire from that fiery mount, and from that unrent veil, and from the whole economy of which these were the characteristic features, the prominent objects, still crying out, "Oh! that I knew where I might find Him." In a word, then,

neither in creation, nor in providence, nor in the law, is God revealed as "a just God and a Saviour." I see a God of power in creation: a God of wisdom in providence; a God of justice in the law; a God of love only in the face of Jesus Christ. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5: 19).

To this stupendous fact we call the reader's earnest attention; that is, if he be one who does not yet know the Lord. It is of the very last possible importance that he be clear as to this. Without it there can be nothing right. To know God is the first step. It is not merely knowing some things about God. It is not unrenewed nature turning religious, trying to do better, endeavouring to keep the law. No; it is none of these things. It is God, known in the face of Jesus Christ. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." This is the deep and blessed secret of the whole matter. The reader, so far as his natural condition is concerned, is in a state of darkness. There is not so much as a single ray of spiritual light. He is, spiritually and morally, just what creation was physically before that sublime and commanding utterance fell from the lips of the Almighty Creator, "Let there be light." All is dark and chaotic, for the "god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Cor. 4: 4-6).

Here are two things; namely, the god of this world blinding the mind, and seeking to hinder the inshining of the precious, life-giving beams of the light of God's glory; and, on the other hand, God, in His marvellous

grace, shining in the heart, to give the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Thus all hinges upon the grand reality of the knowledge of God. Is there light? It is because God is known. Is there darkness? It is because God is not known. No doubt there are various measures in the experience and exhibition of this light: but there is light, because there is the knowledge of God. So also there may be various forms of darkness; some more hideous than others; but there is darkness because God is not known. The knowledge of God is light and life. Ignorance of God is darkness and death. A man may enrich himself with all the treasures of science and literature; but if he does not know God, he is in the darkness of primeval night. But, on the other hand, a man may be profoundly ignorant of all human learning; but if he knows God, he walks in broad day-light.

In the passage of Scripture which is engaging our attention, namely, John 3: 16, we have a very remarkable illustration of the character of the entire Gospel of John, and especially the opening chapters. It is impossible to meditate upon it without seizing this interesting fact. In it we are introduced to God Himself, in that wondrous aspect of His character and nature, as loving the world and giving His Son. In it, too, we find, not only the "world" as a whole, but the individual sinner, under that most satisfactory title of "whosoever." Thus God and the sinner are together — God, loving and giving; and the sinner, believing and having. It is not God judging and exacting; but God loving and giving. The former was law; the latter, grace; that was Judaism; this, Christianity. In the one, we see God demanding obedience in order to have life; in the other, we see God

giving life as the only basis of obedience. In the one, we see man struggling for life, but never obtaining it; in the other, we see man receiving life as a free gift, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Such is the contrast between the two systems — a contrast which cannot be too deeply pondered. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1: 17).

But let us mark the way in which this is unfolded in our text. "God so loved the world." Here we have the wide aspect of the love of God. It is not confined to any particular nation, tribe, caste, or family. It embraces the whole world. God is love; and, being so, it is not a question of the fitness or worthiness of the object of His love. It is what He is. He is love, and He cannot deny Himself. It is the very energy and activity of His nature. The heart may have many a question, many an exercise as to its state and condition before God, and very right it should have them. The Spirit Himself may produce such exercises and raise such questions; but, after all, the grand truth shines forth in all its lustre, "God is love." Whatever we are, whatever the world is, that is what God is; and we know that the truth as to God forms the deep and rich substratum which underlies the whole system of Christianity. The soul may pass through deep and sore conflict, under the sense of its own wretchedness; there may be many doubts say, and fears; many dark and heavy clouds; weeks, months, or years may be spent under the law, in one's inward self-consciousness, and that, moreover, long after the mere intellect has yielded its assent to the principles and doctrines of evangelical truth. But, after all, we must be brought into direct personal contact with God Himself — with what He is — with His nature and character, as He

has revealed Himself in the gospel. We have to acquaint ourselves with Him, and He is love.

Observe, it does not say merely that God is loving, but that He is love. It is not only that love is an attribute of His character, but it is the very activity of His nature. We do not read that God is justice, or holiness; He is just and He is holy; but it would not express the full and blessed truth to say that God is loving; He is much more, He is love itself. Hence, when the sinner — "whosoever" he be, it matters not — is brought to see his own total and absolute ruin, his hopeless wretchedness, his guilt and misery, the utter vanity and worthlessness of all within and around him, (and there is nothing in the whole world that can satisfy his heart, and nothing in his heart that can satisfy God, or satisfy even his own conscience) when these things are opened in any measure to his view, then is he met by this grand substantial truth that "God is love," and that He so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son.

Here is life and rest for the soul. Here is salvation, full, free, and everlasting, for the poor, needy, guilty, lost one; — salvation resting not upon anything in man or of man, upon aught that he is or can be, aught that he has done or can do, but simply upon what God is and has done. God loves and gives, and the sinner believes and has. This is far beyond creation, government, or law. In creation, God spake and it was done. He called worlds into existence by the word of His mouth. But we hear nothing, throughout the entire record of creation, of God loving and giving.

So as to government, we see God ruling in unsearchable wisdom, amid the armies of Heaven, and among the

children of men: but we cannot comprehend Him. We can only say as to this subject, that:

God moves in a mysterious way,

His wonders to perform;

He plants His footsteps in the sea,

And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines

Of never failing skill,

He treasures up His bright designs,

And works His sovereign will.

Finally, as to the law, it is, from beginning to end, a perfect system of command and prohibition — a system perfect in its action as testing man, and making manifest his entire alienation from God. "The law worketh wrath." And again, "By the law is the knowledge of sin." But what could such a system do in a world of sinners? Could it give life? Impossible. Why? Because man could not fulfil its holy requirements. "If there had been a law given which could have given life, then verily, righteousness should have been by the law." But no; the law was a ministration of death and condemnation. (See 2 Cor. 3.) The only effect of the law, to anyone who is under it, is the pressure of death upon the soul, and of guilt and condemnation upon the conscience. It cannot possibly be otherwise with an honest soul under the law.

What, then, is needed? Simply this, the knowledge of the love of God, and of the precious gift which that love has bestowed. This is the eternal groundwork of all. Love, and the gift of love. For, be it observed and ever remembered, that God's love could never have reached

us save through the medium of that gift. God is holy, and we are sinful. How could we come near Him? How could we dwell in His holy presence? How could sin and holiness ever abide in company? Impossible. Justice demands the condemnation of sin; and if love will save the sinner, it must do so at no less a cost than the gift of the only-begotten Son. Darius loved Daniel, and laboured hard to save him from the lions' den; but his love was powerless because of the unbending law of the Medes and Persians. He spent the night in sorrow and fasting. He could weep at the mouth of the den; but he could not save his friend. His love was not mighty to save. If he had offered himself to the lions instead of his friend, it would have been morally glorious; but he did not. His love told itself forth in unavailing tears and lamentations. The law of the Persian kingdom was more powerful than the love of the Persian king. The law, in its stern majesty, triumphed over an impotent love which had nothing but fruitless tears to bestow upon its object.

But the love of God is not like this — eternal and universal praise to His name! His love is mighty to save. It reigns through righteousness. How is this? Because "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son." The law had declared in words of awful solemnity. "The soul that sinneth it shall die." Was this law less stern less majestic, less stringent, than the law of the Medes and Persians? Surely not. How then, was it to be disposed of? It was to be magnified and made honourable, vindicated and established. Not one jot or tittle of the law could ever be set aside. How, then, was the difficulty to be solved? Three things had to be done: the law had to be magnified; sin condemned; the sinner saved. How could these grand results be reached? We

have the answer in two bold and vivid lines from one of our own poets:

“On Jesus' cross this record's graved,

Let sin be damned, and sinners saved.

Precious record! May many an anxious sinner read and believe it! Such was the amazing love of God, that He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all. His love cost Him nothing less than the Son of His bosom. When it was a question of creating worlds, it cost Him but the word of His mouth: but when it was a question of loving a world of sinners, it cost His only-begotten Son. The love of God is a holy love, a righteous love, a love acting in harmony with all the attributes of His nature, and the claims of His throne. "Grace reigns, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Christ Jesus our Lord." The soul can never be set at liberty till this truth be fully laid hold of. There may be certain vague hopes in the mercy of God, and a measure of confidence in the atoning work of Jesus, all true and real so far as it goes; but true liberty of heart cannot possibly be enjoyed until it is seen and understood that God has glorified Himself in the manner of His love toward us. Conscience could never be tranquillised, nor Satan silenced, if sin had not been perfectly judged and put away. But "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son." What depth and power in the little word "so"!

It may here be needful to meet a difficulty which often occurs to anxious souls, in reference to the question of appropriation. Thousands have been harassed and perplexed by this question, at some stage or other of their spiritual history; and it is not improbable that

many who shall read these pages may be glad of a few words on the subject. Many may feel disposed to ask, "How am I to know that this love, and the gift of love, are intended for me ? What warrant have I for believing that 'everlasting life' is for me? I know the plan of salvation; I believe in the all-sufficiency of the atonement of Christ for the forgiveness and justification of all who truly believe. I am convinced of the truth of all that the Bible declares. I believe we are all sinners, and moreover, that we can do nothing to save ourselves — that we need to be washed in the blood of Jesus, and to be taught and led by the Holy Ghost, ere we can please God here, and dwell with Him hereafter. All this I fully believe, and yet I have no assurance that I am saved, and I want to know on what authority I am to believe that my sins are forgiven and that I have everlasting life."

If the foregoing be, in any measure, the language of the reader — if it be, at all, the expression of his difficulty, we would, in the first place, call his attention to two words which occur in our precious test (John 3:16), namely, "world" and "whosoever." It seems utterly impossible for anyone to refuse the application of these two words. For what, let us ask, is the meaning of the term "world"? What does it embrace? or, rather, what does it not embrace? When our Lord declares that "God so loved the world," on what ground can the reader exclude himself from the range, scope, and application of this divine love? On no other ground whatever, unless he can show that he alone belongs not to the world, but to some other sphere of being. If it were declared that "the world" is hopelessly condemned, could anyone making a part of that world avoid the application of the

sentence! Could he exclude himself from it? Impossible. How then can he — why should he — exclude himself, when it is a question of God's free love, and of salvation by Christ Jesus?

But, further, we would ask, What is the meaning, what is the force of the familiar word, "whosoever"? Assuredly it means "anybody", and if anybody, why not the reader? It is infinitely better, infinitely surer, and more satisfactory to find the word "whosoever" in the gospel than to find my own name there, inasmuch as there may be a thousand persons in the world of the same name; but "whosoever" applies to me as distinctly as though I were the only sinner on the face of the earth.

Thus, then, the very words of the gospel message — the very terms used to set forth the glad tidings, are such as leave no possible ground for a difficulty as to their application. If we listen to our Lord in the days of His flesh, we hear such words as these: "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life." Again, if we listen to Him after His resurrection, we hear these words, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16). And lastly, if we listen to the voice of the Holy Ghost sent from a risen, ascended, and glorified Lord, we hear such words as these: "The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10: 12-13).

In all the above-cited passages we have two terms used, one general, the other particular, and both together so presenting the message of salvation as to leave no room whatever for anyone to refuse its application. If "all the

world" is the scope, and "every creature" is the object of the precious gospel of Christ, then, on what ground can anyone exclude himself? Where is there authority for any sinner out of hell to say that the glad tidings of salvation are not for him? There is none. Salvation is as free as the air we breathe — free as the dewdrops that refresh the earth — free as the sunbeams that shine upon our pathway; and if any attempt to limit its application, they are neither in harmony with the mind of Christ, nor in sympathy with the heart of God.

But it may be that some of our readers would, at this stage of the subject, feel disposed to ask us, "How do you dispose of the question of election?" We reply, "Very simply, by leaving it where God has placed it, namely, as a landmark in the inheritance of the spiritual Israel, and not as a stumbling-block in the pathway of the anxious inquirer." This we believe to be the true way of dealing with the deeply important doctrine of election. The more we ponder the subject, the more thoroughly are we convinced that it is a mistake on the part of the evangelist or preacher of the gospel to qualify his message, hamper his subject, or perplex his hearers, by the doctrine of election or predestination. He has to do with lost sinners in the discharge of his blessed ministry. He meets men where they are, on the broad ground of our common ruin, our common guilt, our common condemnation. He meets them with a message of full, free, present, personal, and eternal salvation — a message which comes fresh, fervent, and glowing from the very bosom of God. His ministry is, as the Holy Ghost declares in 2 Cor. 5, "a ministry of reconciliation," the glorious characteristics of which are these, "God in Christ"... "reconciling the world unto Himself"... "not

imputing their trespasses"; and the marvellous foundation of which is, that God has made Jesus who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Does this trench, in the smallest degree, upon the blessed and clearly established truth of election? By no means. It leaves it, in all its integrity and in its full value, as a grand fundamental truth of Holy Scripture exactly where God has placed it; not as a preliminary question to be settled ere the sinner comes to Jesus, but as a most precious consolation and encouragement to him when he has come. This makes all the difference. If the sinner be called upon to settle beforehand the question of his election, how is he to set about it? Whither is he to turn for a solution? Where shall he find a divine warrant for believing that he is one of the elect? Can he find a single line of Scripture on which to base his faith as to his election? He cannot. He can find scores of passages declaring him to be lost, guilty and undone — scores of passages to assure him of his total inability to do aught in the matter of his own salvation — hundreds of passages unfolding the free love of God, the value and efficacy of the atonement of Christ, and assuring him of a hearty welcome to come Just as he is, and make God's blessed salvation his own. But if it be needed for him to settle the prior question of his predestination and election, then is his case hopeless, and he must, in so far as he is in earnest, be plunged in black despair.

And is it not thus with thousands at this moment through the misapplication of the doctrine of election? We fully believe it is, and hence our anxiety to help our readers by setting the matter in what we judge to be the true light before their minds. We believe it to be of the

utmost importance for the anxious inquirer to know that the standpoint from which he is called to view the cross of Christ is not the standpoint of election, but of conscious ruin. The grace of God meets him as a lost, dead, guilty sinner; not as an elect one. This is an unspeakable mercy, inasmuch as he knows he is the former, but cannot know that he is the latter until the gospel has come to him in power. "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." How did he know it? "Because our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance" (1 Thess. 1: 4-5). Paul preached to the Thessalonians as lost sinners; and when the gospel had laid hold of them as lost, he could write to them as elect.

This puts election in its right place. If the reader will turn for a moment to Acts 17, he will there see how Paul discharged his business as an evangelist amongst the Thessalonians: "Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus whom I preach unto you is Christ." So, also, in that passage at the opening of 1 Cor. 15: "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and

that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures" (ver. 1-4).

From this passage, and many others which might be quoted, we learn that the apostle preached not merely a doctrine, but a person. He did not preach election. He taught it to saints, but never preached it to sinners. This should be the evangelist's model at all times. We never once find the apostles preaching election. They preached Christ — they unfolded the goodness of God — His loving-kindness — His tender mercy — His pardoning love — His gracious readiness to receive all who come in their true character and condition as lost sinners. Such was their mode of preaching, or, rather, such was the mode of the Holy Ghost in them; and such, too, was the mode of the blessed Master Himself. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (Matt. 11; John 6-7).

Here are no stumbling-blocks in the way of anxious inquirers — no preliminary questions to be settled — no conditions to be fulfilled — no theological difficulties to be solved. No, the sinner is met on his own ground — met as he is — met just now. There is rest for the weary, drink for the thirsty, life for the dead, pardon for the guilty, salvation for the lost. Do these free invitations touch the doctrine of election? Assuredly not. And what is more, the doctrine of election does not touch them. In other words, a full and free gospel leaves perfectly untouched the grand and all-important truth of election; and the truth of election, in its proper place, leaves the gospel of the grace of God on its own broad and blessed base, and in all its divine length, breadth, and fullness.

The gospel meets us as lost, and saves us; and then, when we know ourselves as saved, the precious doctrine of election comes in to establish us in the fact that we can never be lost. It never was the purpose of God that poor anxious souls should be harassed with theological questions or points of doctrine. No; blessed forever be His name, it is His gracious desire that the healing balm of His pardoning love, and the cleansing efficacy of the atoning blood of Jesus, should be applied to the spiritual wounds of every sin-sick soul. And as to the doctrines of predestination and election, He has unfolded them in His Word to comfort His saints, not to perplex poor sinners. They shine like precious gems on the page of inspiration, but they were never intended to lie as stumbling-blocks in the way of earnest seekers after life and peace. They are deposited in the hand of the teacher to be unfolded in the bosom of the family of God; but they are not intended for the evangelist, whose blessed mission is to the highways and hedges of a lost world. They are designed to feed and comfort the children, not to scare and stumble the sinner. We would say, and that with real earnestness, to all evangelists, Do not hamper your preaching with theological questions of any sort or description. Preach Christ. Unfold the deep and everlasting love of a Saviour-God. Seek to bring the guilty, conscience-smitten sinner into the very presence of a pardoning God. Thunder, if you please, if so led, at the conscience — thunder loud at sin — thunder forth the dread realities of the great white throne, the lake of fire, and everlasting torment; but see that you aim at bringing the guilt-stricken conscience to rest in the atoning virtues of the blood of Christ. Then you can hand over the fruits of your ministry to the divinely qualified, to be instructed in the deeper mysteries of the

faith of Christ. You may rest assured that the faithful discharge of your duty as an evangelist will never lead you to trespass on the domain of sound theology.

And to the anxious inquirer we would say with equal earnestness, Let nothing stand in your way in coming this moment to Jesus. Let theology speak as it may, you are to listen to the voice of Jesus, who says, "Come unto Me." Be assured there is no hindrance, no difficulty, no hitch, no question, no condition. You are a lost sinner, and Jesus is a full Saviour. Put your trust in Him, and you are saved forever. Believe in Him, and you will know your place amongst the "elect of God" who are "predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son." Bring your sins to Jesus and He will pardon them, cancel them by His blood, and clothe you in a spotless robe of divine righteousness. May God's Spirit lead you now to cast yourself simply and entirely upon that precious, all-sufficient Saviour!

We will now notice, very briefly, three distinct evils resulting from a wrong application of the doctrine of election, namely:

1. The discouragement of really earnest souls, who ought to be helped on in every possible way. If such persons are repulsed by the question of election, the result must be disastrous in the extreme. If they are told that the glad tidings of salvation are only for the elect — that Christ died only for such, and hence only such can be saved — that unless they are elect they have no right to apply to themselves the benefits of the death of Christ: if, in short, they are turned from Jesus to theology — from the heart of a loving, pardoning God to the cold and withering dogmas of systematic divinity, it

is impossible to say where they may end; they may take refuge either in superstition on the one hand, or in infidelity on the other. They may end in high church, broad church, or no church at all. What they really want is Christ, the living, loving, precious, all-sufficient Christ of God. He is the true food for anxious souls.

2. But, in the second place, careless souls are rendered more careless still by a false application of the doctrine of election. Such persons, when pressed as to their state and prospects, will fold their arms and say, "You know I cannot believe unless God give me the power. If I am one of the elect, I must be saved; if not, I cannot. I can do nothing, but must wait God's time." All this false and flimsy reasoning should be exposed and demolished. It will not stand for a moment in the light of the judgement-seat of Christ. Each one will learn there that election furnished no excuse whatever, inasmuch as it never was set up by God as a barrier to the sinner's salvation. The word is "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." The very same form of speech and style of language which removes the stumbling-block from the feet of the anxious inquirer snatches the plea from the lips of the careless rejecter. No one is shut out. All are invited. There is neither barrier on the one hand, nor a plea on the other. All are made welcome; and all are responsible. Hence, if any one presumes to excuse himself for refusing God's salvation, which is as clear as a sunbeam, by urging God's decrees, which are entirely hidden, he will find himself fatally mistaken.

3. And now, in the third and last place, we have frequently seen with real sorrow of heart the earnest, loving, large-hearted evangelist damped and crippled by a false application of the truth of election. This should

be most carefully avoided. We hold that it is not the business of the evangelist to preach election. If he is rightly instructed, he will hold it; but if he is rightly directed, he will not preach it.

In a word, then, the precious doctrine of election is not to be a stumbling-block to the anxious — a plea for the careless — a damper to the fervent evangelist. May God's Spirit give us to feel the adjusting power of truth!

Having thus briefly endeavoured to clear away any difficulty arising from the misuse of the precious doctrine of election, and to show the reader, "whosoever" he be, that there is no hindrance whatever to his full and hearty acceptance of God's free gift, even the gift of His only-begotten Son, it now only remains for us to consider the result, in every case, of this acceptance, as set forth in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Here, then, we have the result in the case of every one who believes in Jesus. He shall never perish, but possesses everlasting life. But who can attempt to unfold all that is included in this word "perish"? What mortal tongue can set forth the horrors of the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched"? We believe, assuredly, that none but the One who used the Word, in speaking to Nicodemus, can fully expound it to anyone; but we feel called upon to bear our decided and unequivocal testimony as to what He has taught on the solemn truth of eternal punishment. We have occasionally referred to this subject, but we believe it demands a formal notice;

and inasmuch as the word "perish" occurs in the passage which has been occupying our thoughts, we cannot do better than call the reader's attention to it.

It is a serious and melancholy fact that the enemy of souls and of the truth of God is leading thousands, both in Europe and America, to call in question the momentous fact of the everlasting punishment of the wicked. This he does on various grounds, and by various arguments, adapted to the habits of thought and moral condition and intellectual standpoint of individuals. Some he seeks to persuade that God is too kind to send anyone to a place of torment. It is contrary to His benevolent mind and His beneficent nature to inflict pain on any of His creatures.

Now, to all who stand, or affect to stand, upon this ground of argument, we would suggest the important inquiry, "What is to be done with the sins of those who die impenitent and unbelieving?" Whatever there may be in the idea that God is too kind to send sinners to hell, it is certain that He is too holy to let sin into Heaven. He is "of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look on iniquity" (Hab. 1: 13). God and evil cannot dwell together. This is plain. How, then, is the case to be met? If God cannot let sin into Heaven, what is to be done with the sinner who dies in his sins? He must perish! But what does this mean? Does it mean annihilation — that is, the utter extinction or blotting out of the very existence of body and soul? Nay, this cannot be. Many would like this, no doubt. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," would, alas, suit many thousands of the sons and daughters of pleasure who think only of the present moment, and who roll sin as a sweet morsel under their tongue. There are millions on the surface of

the globe who are bartering their eternal happiness for a few hours of guilty pleasure, and the crafty foe of mankind seeks to persuade such that there is no such place as hell, no such thing as the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; and in order to obtain a footing for this fatal suggestion, he bases it upon the plausible and imposing notions of the kindness of God.

Do not believe the arch-deceiver. Remember, God is holy. He cannot let sin into His presence. If you die in your sins you must perish, and this word "perish" involves, according to the clear testimony of Holy Scripture, eternal misery and torment in hell. Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ saith, in His solemn description of the judgement of the nations: "Then shall the King say also to them on His left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). And while you harken to these awfully solemn accents, remember that the word translated "everlasting" occurs seventy times in the New Testament, and is applied as follows: "Everlasting fire" — "eternal life" — "everlasting punishment" — "eternal damnation" — "everlasting habitations" — "the everlasting God" — "eternal weight of glory" — "everlasting destruction" — "everlasting consolation" — "eternal glory" — "eternal salvation" — "eternal judgement — "eternal redemption" — "the eternal Spirit" — "eternal inheritance" — "everlasting kingdom" — "eternal fire."

Now, we ask any candid, thoughtful person, upon what principle can a word be said to mean eternal when applied to the Holy Ghost or to God, and only temporary when applied to hell-fire or the punishment of the wicked? If it means eternal in the one case, why not also

in the other? We have just glanced at a Greek concordance, and we should like to ask, Would it be right to mark off some half-dozen passages in which the word "everlasting" occurs, and write opposite to each these words: "Everlasting here only means for a time"? The very thought is monstrous. It would be a daring and blasphemous insult offered to the volume of inspiration. No, be assured of it, you cannot touch the word "everlasting" in one case without touching it also in all the seventy cases in which it occurs. It is a dangerous thing to tamper with the Word of the living God. It is infinitely better to bow down under its holy authority. It is worse than useless to seek to avoid the plain meaning and solemn force of that word "perish" as applied to the immortal soul of man. It involves, beyond all question, the awful, the ineffably awful reality of burning forever in the flames of hell. This is what Scripture means by "perishing." The votary of pleasure, or the lover of money, may seek to forget this. They may seek to drown all thought of it in the glass or in the busy mart. The sentimentalist may rave about the divine benevolence; the sceptic may reason about the possibility of eternal fire; but we are intensely anxious that the reader should rise from this paper with the firm and deeply wrought conclusion and hearty belief that the punishment of all who die in their sins will be eternal in hell as surely as the blessedness of all who die in the faith of Christ will be eternal in the heavens. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost would most assuredly have used a different word, when speaking of the former, from that which He applies to the latter. This, we conceive, is beyond all question.

But there is another objection urged against the doctrine of eternal punishment. It is frequently said,

"How can we suppose that God would inflict eternal punishment as a penalty for a few short years of sin?" We reply, It is beginning at the wrong end to argue in this way. It is not a question of time as viewed from man's standpoint, but of the gravity of sin itself as looked at from God's standpoint. And how is this question to be solved? Only by looking at the Cross. If you want to know what sin is in God's sight, you must look at what it cost Him to put it away. It is by the standard of Christ's infinite sacrifice, and by that alone, that you can rightly measure sin. Men may compare their few years with God's eternity; they may compare their short span of life with that boundless eternity that stretches beyond; they may seek to put a few years of sin into one scale, and an eternity of woe and torment into the other, and thus attempt to reach a just conclusion: but it will never do to argue thus. The question is, Did it require an infinite atonement to put away sin? If so, the punishment of sin must be eternal. If nothing short of an infinite sacrifice could deliver from the consequences of sin, those consequences must be eternal.

In a word, then, we must look at sin from God's point of view, and measure it by His standard, else we shall never have a just sense of what it is or what it deserves. It is the height of folly for men to attempt to lay down a rule as to the amount or duration of the punishment due to sin. God alone can settle this. And, after all, what was it that produced all the misery and wretchedness the sickness and sorrow, the death and desolation, of well-nigh six thousand years? Just one act of disobedience — the eating of a forbidden fruit. Can man explain this? Can human reason explain how one act produced such

an overwhelming amount of misery? It cannot. Well, then, if it cannot do this, how can it be trusted when it attempts to decide the question as to what is due to sin? Woe be to all those who commit themselves to its guidance on this most momentous point!

Ah, reader, you must see that God alone can estimate sin and its just deserts, and He alone can tell us all about it. And has He not done so? Yes, verily, He has measured sin in the cross of His Son; and there, too, He has set forth in the most impressive manner what it deserves. What, think you, must that be that caused the bitter cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" If God forsook His only-begotten Son when He was made sin, must He not also forsake all who are found in their sins? But how can they ever get rid of them? We believe the conclusion is unavoidable. We consider that the infinite nature of the atonement proves unanswerably the doctrine of eternal punishment. That peerless and precious sacrifice is at once the foundation of our eternal life and of our deliverance from eternal death. It delivers from eternal wrath and introduces to eternal glory. It saves from the endless misery of hell and procures for us the endless bliss of Heaven. Thus, whatever side of the Cross we look at, or from whatever side we view it, we see eternity stamped upon it. If we view it from the gloomy depths of hell or from the sunny heights of Heaven, we see it to be the same infinite, eternal, divine reality. It is by the Cross we must measure both the blessedness of Heaven and the misery of hell. Those who put their trust in that blessed One who died on the cross obtain everlasting life and felicity. Those who reject Him must sink into endless perdition.

We do not by any means pretend to handle this question theologically, or to adduce all the arguments that might be advanced in defence of the doctrine of eternal punishment; but there is one further consideration which we must suggest to the reader as tending to lead him to a sound conclusion and that is the immortality of the soul. "God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." The fall of man in nowise touched the question of the soul's immortality. If, therefore, the soul is immortal, annihilation is impossible. The soul must live forever. Overwhelming thought! Forever! Forever! Forever! The whole moral being sinks under the awful magnitude of the thought. It surpasses all conception and baffles all mental calculation. Human arithmetic can only deal with the finite. It has no figures by which to represent a never-ending eternity. But the writer and the reader must live throughout eternity either in that bright and blessed world above or in that terrible place where hope can never come.

May God's Spirit impress our hearts more and more with the solemnity of eternity, and of immortal souls going down into hell. We are deplorably deficient in feeling as to these weighty realities. We are daily thrown in contact with people, we buy and sell and carry on intercourse in various ways with those who must live forever, and yet how rarely do we seek occasion to press upon them the awfulness of eternity and the appalling condition of all who die without a personal interest in the blood of Christ!

Let us ask God to make us more earnest, more solemn, more faithful, more zealous in pleading with souls, in warning others to flee from the wrath to come. We want

to live more in the light of eternity, and then we shall be better able to deal with others.

It only remains for us now to ponder the last clause of the fruitful passage of Scripture which has been under consideration (John 3: 16). It sets forth the positive result, in every case, of simple faith in the Son of God. It declares, in the simplest and clearest way, the fact that every one who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ is a possessor of everlasting life. It is not merely that his sins are blotted out; that is blessedly true. Nor is it merely that he is saved from the consequences of his guilt, which is equally true. But there is more. The believer in Jesus has a new life, and that life is in the Son of God. He is placed upon a new footing altogether. He is no longer looked at in the old Adam condition, but in a risen Christ.

This is an immense truth, and one of deepest possible moment. We earnestly pray the reader's calm and prayerful attention while we seek, in some feeble way, to present to him what we believe to be wrapped up in the last clause of John 3: 16.

There is in the minds of many a very imperfect sense of what we get by faith in Christ. Some seem to view the atoning work of Christ merely as a remedial measure for the sins of our old nature — the payment of debts contracted in our old condition. That it is all this we need not say; blessed be God for the precious truth. But it is much more. It is not merely that the sins are atoned for, but the nature which committed them is condemned and set aside by the cross of Christ, and is to be "reckoned" dead by the believer. It is not merely that the debts contracted in the old condition are cancelled, but

the old condition itself is completely ignored by God, and is to be so accounted by the believer.

This great truth is doctrinally unfolded in 2 Cor. 5, where we read, "If any man he in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (ver. 17). The apostle does not say, "If any man be in Christ he is pardoned — his sins are forgiven — his debts paid." All this is divinely true; but the statement just quoted goes very much farther. It declares that a man in Christ is a new creation altogether. It is not the old nature pardoned, but completely set aside, with all its belongings, and a new creation introduced in which there is not a single shred of the old. "All things are become new; and all things are of God."

Now this gives immense relief to the heart. Indeed, we question if any soul can enter into the full liberty of the gospel of Christ until he lay hold, in some measure, of the truth of the "new creation." There may be a looking to Christ for pardon, a vague hope of getting to Heaven at the last, a measure of reliance on the goodness and mercy of God — there may be all this, and yet no just sense of the meaning of "everlasting life," no happy consciousness of being "a new creation" — no understanding of the grand fact that the old Adam nature is entirely set aside, the old condition in which we stood done away in God's sight.

But it is more than probable that some of our readers may be at a loss to know what is meant by such terms as "the old Adam nature" — "the old condition" — "the flesh" — "the old man," and such like. These expressions may fall strangely on the ears of those for whom we

specially write; and we certainly wish to avoid shooting over the heads of our readers. As God is our witness, there is one thing we earnestly desire, one object which we would ever keep before our minds, and that is the instruction and edification of our readers; and therefore we would rather run the risk of being tedious than make use of phrases which convey no clear or intelligible idea to the mind. Such terms as "the old man" — "the flesh," and the like, are used in Scripture in manifold places: for example, in Rom. 6 we read, "Our old man is crucified with Him Christ], that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (ver. 6).

Now what does the apostle mean by the "old man"? We believe he means man as in that Adam nature which we inherited from our first parents. And what does he mean by "the body of sin"? We believe he means the whole system or condition in which we stood in our unregenerate, unrenewed, unconverted state. The old Adam, then, is declared to be crucified — the old condition of sin is said to be destroyed (annulled) — by the death of Christ. Hence the soul that believes on the Lord Jesus Christ is privileged to know that he — his sinful, guilty self — is looked upon by God as dead and set aside completely. He has no more existence as such before God. He is dead and buried.

Observe, it is not merely that our sins are forgiven, our debts paid, our guilt atoned for; but the man in the nature that committed the sins, contracted the debts, and incurred the guilt, is put forever out of God's sight. It is not God's way to forgive us our sins and yet leave us in the same relations in which we committed them. No; He has, in His marvellous grace and vast plan,

condemned and abolished forever, for the believer, the old Adam relationship, with all its belongings, so that it is no longer recognized by Him. We are declared, by the voice of holy Scripture to be "crucified" — "dead" — "buried" — "risen' with Christ. God tells us we are so, and we are to "reckon" ourselves to be so. It is a matter of faith, and not of feeling. If I look at myself from my standpoint, or judge by my feelings, I shall never, can never understand this truth. And why? Because I feel myself to be just the same sinful creature as ever. I feel that there is sin in me; that in my flesh there dwelleth no good thing; that my old nature is in nowise changed or improved; that it has the same evil tendencies as ever, and, if not mortified and kept down by the gracious energy of the Holy Spirit, it will break out in its true character.

And it is just here, we doubt not, that so many sincere souls are perplexed and troubled. They are looking at themselves, and reasoning upon what they see and feel, instead of resting in the truth of God, and reckoning themselves to be what God tells them they are. They find it difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile what they feel in themselves with what they read in the Word of God — to make their inward self-consciousness harmonise with God's revelation. But we must remember that faith takes God at His Word. It ever thinks with Him on all points. It believes what He says because He says it. Hence, if God tells me that my old man is crucified, that He no longer sees me as in the old Adam state, but in a risen Christ, I am to believe, like a little child, what He tells me, and walk in the faith of it from day to day. If I look in at myself for evidences of the truth of what God says, it is not faith at all. Abraham "considered not his own body,

now dead, when he was about an hundred years old; neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb; he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God" (Rom. 4: 19-20).

This is the great principle which underlies the whole Christian system. "Abraham believed God," not something about God, but God Himself. This is faith. It is taking God's thoughts in place of our own. It is, in short allowing God to think for us.

Now, when we apply this to the subject before us, it makes it most simple. He that believeth in the Son of God hath everlasting life. Mark, it is not he that believeth something about the Son of God. No, it is he that believeth in Himself. It is a question of simple faith in the person of Christ; and everyone that has this faith is the actual possessor of everlasting life. This is the direct and positive statement of our Lord in the Gospels. It is repeated over and over again. Nor is this all. Not only does the believer thus possess eternal life, but by the further light which the Epistles throw upon this grand question he may see that his old self — that which he was in nature — that which the apostle designates "the old man" — is accounted by God dead and buried. This may be difficult to understand; but the reader must remember he must believe not because he understands, but because it is written in God's Word. It is not said, "Abraham understood God." No; but he "believed God." It is when the heart believes that light is poured in upon the understanding. If I wait till I understand in order to believe, I am leaning to my own understanding, instead of committing myself in childlike faith to God's Word.

Reader, ponder this! You may say you cannot understand how your sinful self can be looked upon as dead and gone while you feel its workings, its heavings, its tossings, its tendencies, continually within you. We reply, or rather God's eternal Word declares, that if your heart believes in Jesus, then is all this true for you, namely, you have eternal life; you are justified from all things; you are a new creation; old things are passed away; all things are become new; and all things are of God. In a word, you are "in Christ," and "as He is, so are you in this world" (1 John 4: 17).

And is not this a great deal more than the mere pardoning of your sins, the cancelling of your debts, or the salvation of your soul from hell? Assuredly it is. And suppose we were to ask you on what authority you believe in the forgiveness of your sins. Is it because you feel, realize, or understand? Nay; but because it is written, "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10: 43). "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1: 7). Well, then, upon precisely the same authority you are to believe that your old man has been crucified, that you are not in the flesh, not in the old creation, not in the old Adam relation; but that, on the contrary, you are viewed by God as actually in a risen and glorified Christ — that He looks upon you as He looks upon Christ.

True it is — alas, how true! — the flesh is in you, and you are still here, as to the fact of your condition, in this old world, which is under judgement. But then, hear what your Lord saith, when speaking about you to His Father: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the

world." And again, "As Thou hast sent Me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world."

Hence, therefore, if you will just bow to God's Word, if you will reason not about what you see in yourself, and feel in yourself, and think of yourself, but simply believe what God says, you will enter into the blessed peace and holy liberty flowing from the fact that you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit; not in the old creation, but in the new; not under law, but under grace; not of the world, but of God. You have passed clean off the old platform which you occupied as a child of nature and a member of the first Adam, and you have taken your place on a new platform altogether as a child of God and a member of Christ.

All this is vividly prefigured by the deluge and the ark, in the days of Noah. (See Gen. 6 - 8.) "And God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth." Here, then, was, in type, the end of the old creation. All was to pass under the waters of judgement. What then? "Make thee an ark of gopher wood." Here we have set forth a figure of the new thing. That ark, floating peacefully over the dark abyss of waters, was a type of Christ, and the believer in Him. The old world, together with man, was buried beneath the waves of judgement, and the only object that remained was the ark — the vessel of mercy and salvation, riding in safety and triumph over the billows. Thus it is now, in truth and reality. There is nothing before the eye of God but a risen, victorious and glorified Christ, and His people linked with Him. The

end of all flesh has come before God. It is not a question of some very gross forms of "flesh" or of nature, of that merely which is "vile and refuse." No; it is "the end of all." Such is the solemn, sweeping verdict; and then — what? A risen Christ. Nothing else. All in Him are seen by God as He is seen. All out of Him are under judgement. It all hinges upon this one question. "Am I in or out of Christ?" What a question!

Are you in Christ? Do you believe in His name? Have you given Him the confidence of your heart? If so, you have "eternal life" — you are "a new creature" — "old things are passed away." God does not see a single shred of the old thing remaining for you. "All things are become new, and all things are of God." You may say you do not feel that old things are all passed away. We reply, God says they are, and it is your happy privilege to believe what He says, and "reckon" yourself to be what He declares you are. God speaks according to that which is true of you in Christ. He does not see you in the flesh, but in Christ. There is absolutely nothing before the eye of God but Christ: and the very weakest believer is viewed as part of Christ, just as your hand is a part of your body. You have no existence before God apart from Christ — no life — no righteousness - no holiness — no wisdom — no power. Apart from Him, you have nothing, and can be nothing. In Him you have all and are all, He says; you are thoroughly identified with Christ. Marvellous fact! Profound mystery! Most glorious truth! It is not a question of attainment or of progress. It is the settled and absolute standing of the feeblest member of the Church of God. True, there are various measures of intelligence, experience, and devotedness; but there is only one life, one standing, one position before God, and

that is Christ. There is no such thing as a higher or lower Christian life. Christ is the believer's life, and you cannot speak of a higher or a lower Christ. We can understand the higher stages of Christian life; but there is no spiritual intelligence in speaking of a higher Christian life.

This is a grand truth, and we earnestly pray that God the Spirit may open it fully to the mind of the reader. We feel assured that a clearer understanding thereof would chase away a thousand mists, answer a thousand questions, and solve a thousand difficulties. It would not only have the effect of giving settled peace to the soul, but also of determining the believer's position in the most distinct way. If Christ is my life — if I am in Him and identified with Him, then not only do I share in His acceptance with God, but also in His rejection by this present world. The two things go together. They form the two sides of the one grand question. If I am in Christ and as Christ before God, then I am in Christ and as Christ before the world: and it will never do to accept the result of this union before God and refuse the result of it as regards the world. If we have the one, we must have the other likewise.

All this is fully unfolded in John 17. There we read on the one hand, "The glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them as Thou hast loved Me" (ver. 22-23). And, on the other hand, we read, "I have given them Thy Word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of this world, even as I am not of the world" (ver. 14). This is as plain and positive as anything

can be. And be it remembered that, in this wondrous Scripture, our Lord is not speaking merely of the apostles, but, as He says, of "them also who shall believe on Me through their word," that is, of all believers. Hence it follows that all who believe in Jesus are one with Him as accepted above, and one with Him as rejected below. The two things are inseparable. The Head and the members share in one common acceptance in Heaven, and in one common rejection upon earth. Oh that all the Lord's people entered more into the truth and reality of this! Would that we all knew a little more of the meaning of fellowship with a Heaven-accepted, earth-rejected Christ!

# Ministry of Reconciliation

Ministry of Reconciliation

C. H. Mackintosh.

"And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation, to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as God though did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin; that ye might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 Cor. 5: 18-21.)

2 Corinthians 5 takes rank amongst the very weightiest section of inspiration. Its closing lines contain the special thesis of the following pages, but ere we proceed to handle it, we must call the reader's attention to some most interesting and important points presented in the course of the chapter.

And, first of all, let us dwell, for a moment, on the opening sentence, "We know." In it we have the language of Christian certainty. It does not say, "We hope." Still less does it say, "We fear," or "We doubt." No; such language would not express that unclouded certainty and calm assurance which it is the privilege of the very feeblest child of God to possess. And yet, alas ! how few, even of the children of God, enjoy this blessed certainty — this calm assurance! Many there are who look upon it as the height of presumption to say, " We

know." They seem to think that doubts and fears argue a proper condition of soul — that it is impossible for anyone to be sure — that the most we can expect is to cherish a vague hope of reaching heaven when we die.

Now, it must be admitted that if we ourselves had aught to do with the ground of certainty or assurance, then it would indeed be the very height of folly to think of being sure; then assuredly our hope would be a very vague one. But, thanks be to God, it is not so. We having nothing whatever to do with the ground of our certainty; it lies entirely outside of ourselves, and it must be sought only and altogether in the eternal word of God. This renders it so blessedly simple. It makes the whole question hinge upon the truth of God's word. Why am I sure ? Because God's word is true. A shadow of uncertainty or misgiving on my part would argue a want of authority or security in the word of God. It really comes to this. Christian certainty rests on the faithfulness of God. Before you can shake the former, you must shake the latter.

We can understand this simple principle by our dealings with one another. If my fellow man makes a statement to me, and I express the smallest doubt or misgiving, or if I feel it without even expressing it, I am calling in question his truthfulness, or credibility. If he is a faithful competent authority, I have no business to entertain a single doubt. My certainty is linked with his credibility. If he is a competent authority, I may enjoy perfect repose as to the matter concerning which he has spoken. Now, we all know what it is to receive in the most unqualified way the testimony of man, and to repose with calmness therein. It is not a question of feeling, but of receiving, without a single question, a

plain statement, and resting on the authority of a competent witness. Well, then, as we have it in the First Epistle of John, "If we receive the testimony of man, the testimony of God is greater." So also our Lord said to the men of His time, "If I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?" (John 8) Me appeals to the truth of what He says as the reason why, or the ground on which, He expected to be believed.

This, Christian reader, is a very weighty principle, and one which demands special attention on the part of all anxious inquirers, as also on the part of all who undertake to deal with such. There is a strong and constant tendency to look within for the ground of assurance — to build upon certain feelings experiences and exercises, either past or present — to look back at some special process through which we have passed, or to look in at certain impressions or convictions of our own minds, and to find in these the ground of our confidence — the warrant for our faith. This will never do. It is impossible to find settled peace or calm repose in this way. Feelings, however true and real, change and pass away. Experiences, however genuine, may prove defective. Impressions and convictions may prove utterly false. None of these things, therefore, can form a solid ground of Christian certainty. This latter must be sought and found in God's word alone. It is not in feelings, not in experiences, not in impressions or convictions, not in reasonings, not in human traditions or doctrines, but simply in the unchangeable, eternal word of the living God. That word which is settled for ever in heaven, and which God has magnified above all His name, can alone impart peace to the mind and stability to the soul.

True, it is only by the gracious ministry of the Holy Ghost that we can properly grasp and ever hold fast to the word of God; but still it is His word, and that word alone, that forms the ground of Christian certainty, and the true basis and authority for the Christian in the entire range of practical life and action. We cannot be too simple as to this. We can only adopt the opening sentence of our chapter, and say, "We know," when we take God's word as the all-sufficient ground of our personal confidence. It will not do to be, in any wise, propped up by human authority. Thousands of the people of God have been made to taste the bitterness of leaning upon the commandments and doctrines of men. it is sure to end in disappointment and confusion, sooner or later. The edifice which is built upon the sand of human authority must fall at some time or other; whereas that which is founded on the rock of God's eternal truth shall stand for ever. God's word imparts its own stability to the soul that leans upon it. " Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste." (Isa. 28: 16)

As is the foundation, so is the faith that builds thereon. Hence the solemn importance of seeking to lead souls to build only upon God's precious Word. Look at the anxiety of the apostle Paul, in reference to this matter. Hear what he says to the Corinthians who were in such danger of being led away by human headship and human authority. " And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in

weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." (1 Cor. 2: 1-5)

Here is a grand model for all preachers and teachers. Paul declared the " testimony of God," nothing more, nothing less. nothing different. And not only so, but he delivered that testimony in such a way as to connect the souls of his hearers immediately with the living God. Paul did not want the Corinthians to lean upon him; nay, he " trembled" lest they should be tempted to do so. He would have done them a grievous wrong, had he, in anywise, come in between their souls and the true source of all authority — the true foundation of confidence and peace. Had he led them to build upon himself, he would have robbed them of God, and this would have been a wrong indeed. No marvel, therefore, that he was among them " in fear and in much trembling." They were evidently very much prone to set up and follow after human leaders, and thus miss the solid reality of personal communion with, and dependence upon, the living God. Hence the jealous care of the apostle in confining himself to the testimony of God; in delivering unto them only that which he had received of the Lord (see 1 Cor. 11: 23, 1 Cor. 15: 3); lest the pure water should suffer in its passage from its source in God to the souls of the Corinthians — lest he should, in the smallest degree, impart the colour of his own thoughts to the precious truth of God.

We see the same thing in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians. " For this cause also," says the faithful servant of Christ, " thank we God without ceasing,

because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, its it is in truth, tile word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." (1 Thess. 2: 13) Had he been seeking his own things, he would have been glad to obtain influence over the Thessalonians, by linking them on to himself, and leading them to lean upon him. But no; he rejoices in seeing them in living connection — in direct and realised association, with God Himself. This is always the effect of true ministry, as it is ever the object of the true minister. Unless the soul be livingly linked with God, there is really nothing done. If it be merely following men — receiving what they say, because they say it — an attachment to certain preachers or teachers because of something in their style and manner, or because they seem to be very holy, very separated, or very devoted — all this will come to nought. Those human links will soon be snapped asunder. The faith that stands, in any measure, in the wisdom of men will prove hollow and worthless. Nothing will prove permanent — nothing will endure, but that faith which rests on the testimony and in the power of the only true God.

Christian reader, we earnestly invite your attention to this point. We do indeed feel its importance at the present moment. The enemy is seeking diligently to lead souls away from God, away from Christ, away from the holy scriptures. He is seeking to get them to build on something short of the truth. He does not care what it is, provided it is not Christ. It may be reason, tradition, religiousness, human priesthood, fleshy pietism, holiness in the flesh, sectarianism, morality, good works, service so-called, human influence, patronage, philanthropy;

anything short of Christ, short of God's word, short of a lively, personal, direct, faith in the living God Himself.

Now, it is the sense of this pressing home upon the heart that leads us to urge with earnestness upon the reader the necessity of being thoroughly clear as to the ground on which he is, at this moment, standing. We want him to be able to say in the face of all around him, “I know." Nothing less than this will stand. It will not do to say, "I hope." No; there must be certainty. There must be the ability to say, "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." This is the language of faith — the language of a Christian. All is calm, clear, and sure, because all is of God. There may be an "if " with regard to "the earthly house." It may be dissolved it may crumble into dust. All that belongs to this scene may bear the stamp of death; it may change and pass away, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever, and the faith that grasps and rests upon that word partakes of its eternal stability. It enables one to say, “I know that I have." Nought but faith can say this. Reason can only say, "I doubt;" superstition, "I fear;" only faith can say, "I know and am sure."

An infidel teacher once said to a dying woman, whom he had indoctrinated with his infidel notions, "Hold fast, Mary." What was her reply? "I can't hold fast, for you have never given me anything to hold by." Cutting rebuke! He had taught the poor woman to doubt; but he had given her nothing to believe; and then when flesh and heart were failing, when earthly scenes were passing away, and the dread realities of eternity were crowding in upon her soul's vision, infidelity altogether

failed her; its wretched cobwebs could afford no refuge, no covering, in view of death and judgment. How different the condition of the believer — of the one who, in all simplicity of heart and humility of mind, takes his stand on the solid rock of Holy Scripture! Such an one can calmly say, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing." (2 Tim. 4: 6-8)

It is more than probable that some may find it difficult to reconcile the calm certainty expressed in the first verse of our chapter with the groan of verse 2. But the difficulty will vanish the moment we are enabled to see the true reason of the groan. "For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven, if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

Here we see that the very certainty of having a building of God, an house not made with hands eternal in the heavens," makes us groan to possess it The apostle did not groan in doubt or uncertainty. He did not groan under the weight of guilt or fear. Still less did he groan because he could not satisfy the desires of the flesh or of the mind, or because he could not surround himself with this world's perishable possessions. No; he longed for the heavenly building — the divine, the real, the eternal. He felt the heavy burden of the poor crumbling,

tabernacle; it was a grievous hindrance to him. It was the only link with the scene around, and, as such, it was a heavy clog of which he longed to be rid.

But, most clearly he would not and could not have groaned for the heavenly house if he had a single question on his mind with respect to it. Men are never anxious to get rid of the body unless they are sure of possessing something better; nay, they grasp this present life with intense eagerness, and tremble at the thought of the futures which is all darkness and uncertainty to them. They groan at the thought of quitting the body; the apostle groaned because he was in it.

This makes all the difference. Scripture never contemplates such a thing as a Christian groaning under sin, guilt, doubt, or fear; or sighing after the riches, honours, or pleasures of this vain, sin stricken world. Alas! alas! they do thus groan through ignorance of their true position in a risen Christ, and their proper portion in the heavens,. But such is not the ground or character of the groan in the scripture now before us; Paul saw, with distinctness, his house in the heavens; and, on the other hand, he felt the heavy burden of the tabernacle of clay; and he ardently longed to lay aside the latter and be clothed with the former.

Hence, then, there is the fullest harmony between "we know" and "we groan." If we did not know for a certainty that we have a building of God, we should like to hold our earthly house as long as possible. We see this constantly. Men cling to life. They leave nothing untried to keep body and soul together. They have no certainty as to heaven. They cannot say, "we know" that "we have"

anything there. On the other hand, they have a terrible dread of the future, which to their vision is wrapped up in clouds and thick darkness. They have never committed themselves in calm confidence to God and His word; they have never felt the tranquillising power of His love. They have viewed Him as an angry Judge instead of seeing Him as the sinner's Friend — a just God and a Saviour — the righteous Justifier. No marvel, therefore, if they shrink with terror from the thought of meeting Him.

But it is a totally different thing with a man who knows God as his Father — his Saviour — his best Friend; who knows that Jesus died to save him from his sins, and from all the consequences thereof. Such an one can say, —

I have a home above

From sin and sorrow free;

A mansion which eternal Love

Designed and formed for me.

The Father's gracious hand

Has built this blest abode;

From everlasting it was planned

The dwelling-place of God.

The Saviour's precious blood

Has made my title sure;

He passed through death's dark raging flood,

To make my rest secure."

These are the breathings of simple faith, and they perfectly harmonise with the groans of a spirit " that looks beyond its cage and longs to flee away." The believer finds his body of sin and death a heavy burden, and longs to be free from the encumbrance, and to be clothed upon with a body suited to his new and eternal state — a new creation body — a body perfectly free from every trace of mortality. This cannot be until the morning of resurrection, that glorious moment, long looked for, when the dead in Christ shall rise and the living saints be changed, in a moment; when death shall be swallowed up in victory, and mortality shall be swallowed up of life.

It is for this we groan, not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon. The unclothed state is not the object, though we know that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord; and to depart and be with Christ is far better. The Lord Jesus is waiting that glorious consummation, and we wait in sympathy with Him. Meanwhile, " the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only so, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." (Rom. 8: 22-25)

Thus, then, beloved reader, we have before us a very distinct answer to the question, "Why does the believer groan?" He groans, being burdened. He groans in sympathy with a groaning creation, with which he is linked by means of a body of sin and death — a body of

humiliation. He sees around him, day by day, the sad fruits of sin. He cannot pass along the streets of our cities and towns without having before his eyes a thousand proofs of man's sad state. He hears on one side the wail of sorrow; on another, the cry of distress. He sees oppression, violence, corruption, strife, heartless villainy and its victims. He sees the thorn, and the briar. He notes the various disturbing forces which are abroad in the physical, the moral, and the political world. He marks the varied forms of disease and misery around him. The cry of the poor and the needy, the widow and the orphan, falls sadly upon his ear and upon his heart; and what can he do but send up from the deepest depths of his spiritual nature a sympathetic groan, and long for the blissful moment when " the creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the sons of God"? It is impossible for a true Christian to pass through a world like this without groaning. Look at the blessed Master Himself; did not He groan? Yes, verily. Mark Him as He approached the grave of Lazarus, in company with the two weeping sisters. " When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept." (John 11: 33-35)

Whence came those tears and groans? Was He not approaching the grave of His friend as the Prince of Life — the Quickener of the dead — the Conqueror of death — the Spoiler of the grave? Why, then, did He groan? He groaned in sympathy with the objects of His love, and with the whole scene around Him. His tears and groans emanated from the profound depths of a perfect human

heart which felt, according to God, the true condition of the human family and of Israel in particular. He beheld around Him the varied fruits of sin. He felt for man, He felt for Israel. “In all their afflictions he was afflicted." He was a Man of sorrows and acquainted saith grief. He never even cured a person without bearing upon His spirit the reality of that with which He was dealing. He did not, He would not, lightly bid away death, disease, and sorrow. No: He entered into it all, as man; and that, too, according to the infinite perfections of His divine nature. He bore it all upon His spirit, in the reality of it, before God. Though perfectly free from it all, and above it all, yet did he in grace voluntarily enter into it most thoroughly, so as to taste, and prove, and know it all, as none else could know it.

All this is fully expressed in Matthew 8 where we read the following words: "When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils; and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." (Vers. 16, 17)

We have very little idea of what the heart of Jesus felt as He passed through this sorrowful, because sinful, world; and we are far too apt to miss the reality of His sufferings by confining them merely to what He endured on the cross, and also by supposing that because He was God over all, blessed for ever, He did not feel all that a human heart is capable of feeling. This is a sad loss. Indeed we may say it is an incalculable loss. The Lord Jesus, as the Captain of our salvation, was made perfect through sufferings. See Hebrews 2, where the inspired writer distinguishes carefully between "the suffering of

death," and the "sufferings" of the Captain of our salvation. In order to save sinners from wrath, " he tasted death for every man," and having done so, we see Him " crowned with glory and honour." But in order to " bring many sons to glory," He had to be "perfected through sufferings." And now all true believers have the unspeakable privilege of knowing that there is One at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens who, when in this world of sin and woe, tasted every form of suffering and every cup of sorrow which it was possible for any human heart to know. He could say, "Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none." (Ps. 69: 20)

How deeply affecting is all this! But we cannot pursue this subject here. We have merely touched upon it in connection with the question, " Why does the believer groan?" We trust that the reader will see clearly the true answer to this inquiry; and that it will be most evident to his mind that the groans of a Christian proceed from the divine nature which he actually possesses, and cannot therefore, by any possibility, be occasioned by doubts or fears, on the one hand, nor yet by selfish desires or the insatiable cravings of nature, on the other. But that, on the contrary, the very fact of his possessing everlasting life, through faith in Christ, and the blessed assurance of having a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, causes him to long for that blessed, indestructible building, and to groan because of his connection with a groaning creation, as well as in sympathy therewith.

If any further proof were needed, on this deeply interesting question, we have it in verses 5 and 6 of our

chapter (2 Cor. 5), where the apostle goes on to say, "Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident [not doubting or fearing], knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord (for we walk by faith, not by sight), we are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." (Vers. 5-8)

Here we have two grand cardinal truths laid down, namely, first, The believer is God's workmanship; and secondly, God has given him the earnest of the Spirit. Most marvellous — most glorious facts ! Facts which demand the attention of the reader. Everyone who simply and heartily believes on the Lord Jesus Christ is God's workmanship. God has created him anew in Christ Jesus. Clearly, therefore, there can be no possible ground for questioning his acceptance with God, inasmuch as God can never call in question His own work. He will, assuredly, no more do this in His new creation, than He did in the old. When God looked upon His work, in the opening of the Book of Genesis, it was not to judge it or call it in question, but to announce it very good, and express His complacency in it. So now, when God looks upon the very feeblest believer, He sees in him His own workmanship, and most assuredly, He is not going, either here or hereafter, to call in question His own work. God is a rock, His work is perfect, and the believer is God's work; and because he is His work He has sealed him with the Holy Ghost.

The same truth is stated in Ephesians 2, where we read, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that

we should walk in them." This, we may truly say, is a point of the weightiest moment. It claims the grave attention of the reader who desires to be thoroughly established in the truth of God as to what a Christian — what Christianity really is. It is not a ruined, lost, guilty sinner seeking to work himself up into something or other fit for God. It is the very reverse. It is God, in the riches of His grace, on the ground of the atoning death of Christ, taking up a poor, dead, worthless, condemned thing — a guilty, hell deserving sinner, and creating him anew in Christ Jesus. It is, as it were, God beginning de novo — on the new, as we may say — to form man in Christ, to place him on a new footing altogether, not now as an innocent being on a creation basis, but as a justified one, in a risen Christ. It is not man's old condition improved by human effort of any sort or description; but it is God's new workmanship in a risen, ascended, and glorified Christ.

It is not man's own garment pierced or patched by human device in any shape or form whatever; but it is God's new garment introduced in the person of Christ, who having, in infinite grace, gone down into the dust of death, and endured, on man's behalf, the judgment to sin, the righteous wrath of a sin-hating God, was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, and is become the Head of the new creation — " The beginning of the creation of God." (Rev. 3: 14)

Now, it must be perfectly clear to the reader, that if our Lord Jesus Christ be, in very deed "the beginning" of God's creation, then we must begin at the beginning, else we have done absolutely nothing at all. We may labour and toil — we may do our very utmost, and be perfectly sincere in our doing — we may vow and

resolve — we may seek to improve our state, to alter our course, to mend our ways, to live in a different way — but all the while we are in the old creation, which has been completely set aside, and is under the judgment of God; we have not begun at "the beginning" of God's new creation, and, as a necessary consequence, we have gained nothing at all. We have been spending our strength for nought and in vain. We have been putting forth efforts to improve a thing which God has condemned and set aside altogether. We are, to use a very feeble figure indeed, like a man who is spending his time, his pains, and his money in painting and papering a house that has been condemned by the government surveyor, on account of the rottenness of the foundation, and which must be taken down at once.

What should we say to such a man? Should we not deem him very foolish? Doubtless. But if it be folly to paint and paper a condemned house what shall we say to those who are seeking to improve a condemned nature — a condemned world ? We must say this, at least, they are pursuing a course which must, sooner or later, end in disappointment and confusion.

Oh that this were understood and entered into! Would to God that Christians more fully entered into it! Would to God that all Christian writers, preachers, and teachers entered into it, and set it forth distinctly with pen and voice! At the least, we earnestly desire that the reader should thoroughly grasp it. We are most fully persuaded that it is pre-eminently " truth for the times." It is truth to meet the need of thousands of souls — to remove their burdens, relieve their hearts and consciences — solve their difficulties — chase away their clouds. There are, at this moment, throughout the length and breadth

of Christendom, countless multitudes engaged in the fruitless work of painting and papering a condemned house — a house on which God has pronounced judgment, because of the hopelessly ruined condition of its foundations. They are seeking to do little jobs of repairs here and there throughout the house, forgetting, or perhaps not knowing, that the whole building is very shortly to be demolished by order of the divine government. Some are doing this with the utmost sincerity, amid much sore exercise of soul, and many tears, because they cannot succeed in satisfying their own hearts even, much less the claims of God. For God demands a perfect thing not a patched-up ruin. There is no use in seeking to cover with paper and paint old walls tottering on a rotten foundation. God cannot be deceived by surface work, by shallow outside appearances. The foundations are bad, the whole thing must come down, and we must put our whole trust in Him who is "the beginning of the creation of God."

Reader, pause here for a moment's calm and serious reflection. Ask yourself the question, "Am I seeking to patch up a ruin? Am I seeking to improve the old nature? Or have I really found my place in God's new creation, of which a risen Christ is the Head and Beginning?" Remember, we beseech you, that you cannot possibly engage in more fruitless toil than seeking to make yourself better. Your efforts may be sincere, but they must, in the long run, prove worthless. Your paper and paint may be all good and genuine enough, but you are putting them on a condemned ruin. You cannot say of your unrenewed nature that it is "God's workmanship;" and, most assuredly, your doings, your good works, your religious exercises, your efforts

to keep the ten commandments — nothing, in short, that you can do, could possibly be called "God's workmanship." It is yours, and not God's. He cannot acknowledge it. He cannot seal it with His Spirit. It is all false and good for nothing. If you cannot say, "He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God," you have really nothing. You are yet in your sins. You have not begun at God's beginning. You are yet "in the flesh" and the voice of holy scripture declares that "they that are in the flesh cannot please God." (Rom. 8)

This is a solemn and sweeping sentence. A man out of Christ is "in the flesh;" and such a man cannot please God. He may be most religious, most moral, most amiable, most benevolent, a most excellent master, a generous friend, a liberal giver, a genial companion, a patron of the poor, upright and honourable in all his dealings, he may be an eloquent preacher and a popular writer, and all the while not be "in Christ," but "in the flesh," and therefore he "cannot please God."

Can aught be more solemn than this? Only to think of how far a person may go in all that is deemed excellent among men, and yet not be in Christ, but in his sins — in the flesh — in the old creation — in the condemned house. And be it noted that it is not a question of gross sins, of scandalous living, in all its varied, hideous shapes of immorality, in its deeper and darker shades; no, the declaration of hole scripture is, that "they that are in the flesh cannot please God." This, truly, is most soul-subduing, and calls for deep and solemn reflection on the part of every thoughtful and earnest soul.

But it may be that, to the reader's view, difficulties and stumbling blocks still surround this most weighty

subject. He may still be utterly at a loss to know what is meant by the expression, "In the flesh." If so, it will, we fondly hope, help him, not a little, to remember that scripture speaks of two men — "the first man" and "the second man." These two men are presented as the heads of two distinct races. Adam fallen is the head of one race; Christ risen is the Head of the other race. Now, the very fact of there being " a second man" proves that the first man had been set aside: for if the first man had proved faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. This is clear and unquestionable. The first man is a total wreck — an irreparable ruin. The foundations of the old edifice have given way; and albeit, in man's view, the building seems to stand, and to be capable of being repaired, yet, in God's view it is completely set aside, and a second Man — a new edifice set up, on the solid and imperishable ground of redemption.

Hence, we read, in Genesis 3, that God "drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." In other words, the first man was driven out, and every possible way of return was closed against him, as such. He could only get back by "a new and living way," namely, through the rent veil of the Saviour's flesh The flaming sword " turned every way," so that there was positively no way by which the first man could ever get back to his former state. The only hope, now, was through "the seed of the woman" — "the second Man." The flaming sword declared, in symbolic yet impressive language, the truth, which comes out in the New Testament divested of all symbol and shadow, namely, that " they that are in the

flesh cannot please God" — "Ye must be born again." Every unconverted man, woman, and child is part and parcel of the first man, fallen, ruined, set aside, and driven out. He is a member of the first Adam — the old race — a stone in the old condemned building.

Thus it stands if we are to be guided by scripture. The head and his race go together. As is the one so is the other; what is true of the one is true of the other. They are, in God's view, absolutely identical. Was the first Adam fallen when he became the head of a race? Was he driven out? Was he completely set aside? Yes, verily, if we are to believe scripture; then the unconverted — the unregenerated reader of these lines is fallen, driven out, and set aside. As is the head, so is the member — each member in particular — all the members together. They are inseparable, if we are to be taught by divine revelation.

But, further, was every possible way of return finally closed against the fallen head? yes, scripture declares that the flaming sword turned "every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." Then is it utterly impossible that the unconverted — unregenerate reader can improve himself or make himself fit for God. If the fallen head could not get back to the tree of life, neither can the fallen member. "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." That is, they that are on the old footing, in the old creation, members of the first Adam part and parcel of the old edifice, cannot please God. "Ye must be born again." Man must be renewed in the very deepest springs and sources of his being. He must be God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath "before prepared that we should walk in them." He must be able to say, in the language of our

text, "He that has wrought us for the self-same thing is God."

But this leads us to another point. How is anyone to get into this marvellous position? How can any soul take up such language? How can anyone whose eyes have been opened to see his utter and hopeless ruin, as connected with the first man, as standing in the old creation, as a stone in the old edifice — how can such an one ever reach a position in which he can please God? The Lord he praised, scripture gives an answer, full, clear, and distinct, to this serious question. A second Man has appeared upon the scene — the seed of the woman, and, at the same time, God over all, blessed for ever. In Him all begins afresh. He came into this world born of a woman, made under the law, pure and spotless, free from every taint of sin, personally apart from every claim of sin and death, standing in the midst of a ruined world, a guilty race, Himself that pure, untainted grain of wheat. We see Him lying as a babe in the manger. We see Him growing up as a youth beneath the parental roof. We see Him as a man working in a carpenter's shop at Nazareth. We see Him baptised in Jordan, where all the people were baptised confessing their sins — Himself sinless, but fulfilling all righteousness, and, in perfect grace, identifying Himself with the repentant portion of the nation of Israel. We see Him anointed with the Holy Ghost for the work that lay before Him. We see Him in the wilderness faint and hungry, unlike the first man who was placed in the midst of a paradise of creature delights. We see Him tempted of Satan and coming off victorious. We trace Him along the pathway of public ministry — and such a ministry! What incessant toil! What weariness and watching! What

hunger and thirst! What sorrow and travail! Worse off than the fowls and the foxes, the Son of man had not where to lay His head. The contradiction of sinners by day, the mountain-top by night.

Such was the marvellous life of this blessed One. But this was not all. He died! Yes, He died under the weight of the first man's guilt, He died to take away the sin of the world, and alter completely the ground of God's relationship with the world, so that God might deal with man and with the world on the new ground of redemption, instead of the old ground of sin. He died for the nation of Israel. He tasted death for every man. He died the just for the unjust. He suffered for sins. He died and was buried, according to the Scriptures. He went through all — met all — paid all — finished all. He went down into the dust of death, and lay in the dark and silent tomb. He descended into the lower parts of the earth. He went down to the very bottom of everything. He endured the sentence passed on man. He paid the penalty, bore the judgment, drained the cup of wrath, went through every form of human suffering and trial, was tempted in all points, sin excepted. He made an end of everything that stood in the way, and, having finished all. He gave up His spirit into the hand of His Father, and His precious body was laid in a tomb on which the smell of death had never passed.

Nor was this all. He rose! Yes, He rose triumphant over all. He rose as the Head of the new creation — "The beginning of the creation of God" — "The first-begotten from among the dead" — "The first-born among many brethren." And now the Second Man is before God, crowned with glory and honour, not in an earthly paradise, but at the right hand of the Majesty in the

heavens. This Second Man is the last Adam, because there is none to come after Him, we cannot get beyond the last. There is only one Man before God now. The first is set aside. The last is set up. And as the first was the fallen head of a fallen race, so the last is the risen Head of a saved, justified, and accepted race. The Head and His members are inseparably identified — all the members together, and each member in particular. We are accepted in Him. "As He is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4: 17). There is nothing before God but Christ. The Head and the body, the Head and each individual member are indissolubly joined together — inseparably and eternally one. God thinks of the members as He thinks of the Head — loves them as He loves Him. Those members are God's workmanship, incorporated by His Spirit into the body of Christ, and in God's presence, having no other footing, no other rank, position, or station whatsoever but "in Christ." They are no longer "in the flesh, but in the Spirit." They can please God, because they possess His nature, and are sealed by His Spirit, and guided by His Word. "He that hath wrought them is God," and God must ever delight in His own workmanship. He will never find fault with or condemn the work of His own hand. "God is a rock, His work is perfect," and hence the believer, as God's workmanship, must be perfect. He is "in Christ" and that is enough — enough for God — enough for faith — enough for ever.

And, now, if it be asked, "How is all this to be attained?" Scripture replies, "by faith." "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come

into judgment; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5: 24).

The reader who has travelled intelligently with us through the opening lines of our chapter will be in a position to understand something of the solemn and momentous subject to which we now approach, namely, the judgment-seat of Christ. If indeed it be true that the believer is God's workmanship — if he is actually a member of Christ — associated with the second Adam — bound up in the bundle of life with the risen and glorified Lord, if all this be true — and God's Word declares it is — then it must be perfectly evident that the judgment-seat of Christ cannot, by any possibility, touch the Christian's position, or prove, in any wise, unfriendly to him. No doubt it is a most solemn and serious matter, involving the most weighty consequences to every servant of Christ, and designed to exert a most salutary influence upon the heart and conscience of every man. But it will do all this just in proportion as it is viewed from the true standpoint, and no further. It is not to be supposed that anyone can reap the divinely appointed blessing from meditating on the judgment-seat, if he is looking forward to it as the place where the grand question of his eternal salvation is to be settled. And yet how many are thus regarding it! How many of God's true people are there, who, from not seeing the simple truth involved in these words, "He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God," are anticipating the judgment-seat of Christ as something that may, after all, condemn them.

This is greatly to be deplored, both because it dishonours the Lord, and completely destroys the soul's peace and liberty. For how, let us ask, is it possible for

anyone to enjoy peace so long as there is a single question about salvation to be settled? We conceive it is wholly impossible. The peace of the true believer rests on the fact that every possible question has been divinely and eternally settled; and as a consequence, no question can ever arise, either before the judgment-seat of Christ, or at any other time. Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ saith in reference to this great question: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation [or judgment]; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5: 24).

It is important to understand that the word used by our Lord in the above passage is not "condemnation" but “judgment." He assures the believer that he shall never come into judgment; and this, too, be it observed, in immediate connection with the statement that “the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (ver. 22). And, again, "For as the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself; and hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man" (ver. 26-27).

Thus, then, the One to whom all judgment is committed — who alone has authority to execute judgment, by the Father's just decree — this blessed One assures us that if we harken to His Word, and believe on Him that sent Him, we shall never come into judgment at all.

This is clear and conclusive. It must tranquillise the heart completely. It must roll away every cloud and mist, and conduct the soul into a region where no question can ever arise to disturb its deep and eternal repose. If

the One who has all judgment in His hand, and all authority to execute it — if He assures me that I shall never come into judgment, I am perfectly satisfied. I believe His Word, and rest in the happy assurance that whatever the judgment-seat of Christ may prove to others, it cannot prove unfriendly to me. I know that the Word of the Lord endureth for ever, and that the Word tells me I shall never come into judgment.

But it may be that the reader finds it difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile this entire exemption from judgment with the solemn fact stated by our Lord, that "for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." But there is really no difficulty in the matter. If a man has to meet judgment at all, he must give account for every idle word. How awfully solemn the thought! There is no escaping it. Were it possible for a single idle word to be let pass, it would be a dishonour to the judgment-seat. It would be a sign of weakness and incompetency which is utterly impossible. It were blasphemy against the Son of God to suppose that a single stain could escape His scrutinising gaze. If the reader comes into judgment, that judgment must be perfect, and, hence, his condemnation must be inevitable.

We would press this serious matter upon the attention of the unconverted reader. It imperatively demands his immediate and earnest consideration. There is a day rapidly approaching when every idle word, and every foolish thought, and every sinful act, will be brought to light, and he will have to answer for it. Christ, as a Judge, has eyes like unto a flame of fire, and feet like unto fine brass — eyes to detect, and feet to crush the evil. There will be no escape. There will be no mercy

then: all will be stern and unmitigated judgment. "I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God: and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and the grave gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and the grave were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20: 11-15).

Mark here the difference between "the books" and "the book of life." The entire scene sets forth the judgment of the wicked dead — of those who have died in their sins, from first to last. "The book of life" is opened; but there is no judgment for those whose names are written therein by the hand of electing and redeeming love. "The books" are opened — those awful records written in characters deep, broad, and black — those terrible catalogues of the sins of every man, woman, and child, from the beginning to the end of time. There will be no escaping in the crowd. Each one will stand in his own most intense individuality in that appalling moment. The eye of each will be turned in upon himself, and back upon his past history. All will be seen in the light of the great white throne, from which there is no escape.

The sceptic may reason against all this. He may say, "How can these things be? How could all the dead stand before God? How could the countless millions, who have

passed away since the foundation of the world find sufficient space before the judgment-seat?" The answer is very simple to the true believer, whatever it may be to the sceptic; God who made them, will make a place for them to stand for judgment, and a place to lie in everlasting torment. Tremendous thought? "God hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead" (Acts. 17: 31).

And be it remembered that "every man will be judged according to his works." The solemn session of the judgment referred to in Revelation 20 will not be an indiscriminate act. Let none suppose this. There are "books" — rolls — records. "Every man" will be judged. How? "According to his works. Nothing can be more precise and specific. Each one has committed his own sins, and for them he will be judged and punished everlastingly. We are aware that many cherish the notion that people will only be judged for rejecting the gospel. It is a fatal mistake. Scripture teaches the direct contrary. It declares that people will be judged according to their works. What are we to learn from the "many stripes" and the “few stripes" of Luke 12? What is the force of the words "more tolerable" in Matthew 11? Are we not plainly taught by these words that there will be a difference in the degrees of judgment and punishment? And does not the apostle most distinctly teach us in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 that the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience (or unbelief) "because of" certain sins against which he solemnly warns the saints?

No doubt the rejection of the gospel leaves people on the ground of judgment, just as the true belief of the gospel takes people off that ground. But the judgment will be, in every case, according to a man's works. Are we to suppose that the poor ignorant savage, who has lived and died amid the gloomy shades of heathen darkness, will be found in the same "book," or punished with the same severity as a man who has lived and died in the total rejection of the full blaze of gospel light and privilege? Not for a moment, so long as the words "more tolerable" stand on the page of inspiration. The savage will be judged according to his works, and the baptised sinner will be judged according to his works, but assuredly it will be more tolerable for the former than the latter. God knows how to deal with people. He can discriminate, and He declares that He will give to each according to his works.

Think of this, we beseech you. Think deeply, think seriously. If thou art unconverted, think of it for thyself, for, assuredly, it concerns thee. And if thou art converted, think of it for others, as the apostle says, "Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." It is impossible for anyone to reflect upon the great and awful fact of judgment to come, and not be stirred up to warn his fellows. We believe it is of the very last possible importance that the consciences of men should be acted upon by the solemn truth of the judgment-seat of Christ — that they should be made to feel the seriousness of having to do with God as a Judge.

Should the reader, whoever he be, have been led to feel this — if he has been roused by this weighty matter — if he is, even now, asking the question, "What must I do?" the answer is blessedly simple. The gospel declares that

the One who will, ere long, act as a Judge, is now revealed as a Justifier — even a Justifier of the ungodly sinner that believeth in Jesus. This changes the aspect of things entirely. It is not that the thought of the judgment-seat loses a single jot or tittle of its gravity and solemnity. Quite the contrary. It stands in all its weight and magnitude. But the believer looks at it from a totally different point of view. In place of looking at the judgment-seat of Christ as a guilty member of the first Adam, he looks at it as a justified and accepted member of the Second. In place of looking forward to it as the place where the question of his eternal salvation or perdition is to be decided, he looks to it as one who knows that he is God's workmanship, and that he can never come into judgment, inasmuch as he has been taken clean off the ground of guilt, death, and judgment, and placed, through the death and resurrection of Christ, on a new ground altogether, even the ground of life, righteousness, and cloudless favour.

It is most needful to be clear as to this grand fundamental truth. Very many even of the people of God are clouded in reference to it, and hence it is that they are afraid when they think of the judgment-seat. They do not know God as a Justifier. Their faith has not grasped Him as the One who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead. They are looking to Christ to keep God out as a Judge, very much in the same way as the Israelites looked to the blood to keep out the destroyer. See Ex. 12. It is true and real enough, so far as it goes; but it falls very far short of the truth revealed in the New Testament. There is a vast difference between keeping God out as a Destroyer and a Judge, and bringing Him in as a Saviour and a Justifier. An Israelite would have

dreaded, above all things, God's coming in to him. Why? Because God was passing through the land as a Destroyer. The Christian, on the contrary, delights to be in the presence of God. Why? Because He has revealed Himself as a Justifer. How? By raising up Jesus our Lord from the dead.

There are three forms of expression used by the inspired apostle in Rom. 3 and 4 which should be carefully pondered. In Rom. 3: 26, he speaks of "believing in Jesus." In Rom. 4: 5, he speaks of "believing in Him that justifieth the ungodly." And, ver. 24, he speaks of "believing in Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead."

Now, there is no distinction in Scripture without a difference; and when we see a distinction it is our business to inquire as to the difference. What then, is the difference between believing in Jesus, and believing in Him that raised up Jesus? We believe it to be this. We may often find souls who are really looking to Jesus and believing in Him, and yet they have, deep down in their hearts a sort of dread of meeting God. It is not that they doubt their salvation, or that they are not really saved. By no means. They are saved, inasmuch as they are looking to Christ, by faith, and all who so look are saved in Him with an everlasting salvation. All this is most blessedly true: but still there is this latent fear or dread of God, and shrinking from death. They know that Jesus is friendly to them, inasmuch as He died for them; but they do not see so clearly the friendship of God as expressed in the act of His raising up Jesus our Lord from the dead.

Hence it is that we find so many of God's people in uncertainty and spiritual distress. Their faith has not yet laid hold of God as the One who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead. They are not quite sure of how it may go with them. At times they are happy, because by virtue of the new nature, of which they are assuredly the partakers, they get occupied with Christ: but at times they are miserable, because they begin to look at themselves, and they do not see God as their Justifier, and as the One who has condemned sin in the flesh. They are thinking of God as a Judge with whom some question still remains to be settled. They feel as if God's eye were resting on their indwelling sin, and as if they had, in some way or other, to dispose of that question with God.

Thus it is, we feel persuaded, with hundreds of the true saints of God. They do not see God as the Condemner of sin in Christ on the cross, and the Justifier of the believing sinner in Christ rising from the dead. They are looking to Christ on the cross to screen them from God as a Judge, instead of looking to God as a Justifier, in raising up Christ from the dead. Jesus was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification. Our sins are forgiven; our indwelling sin, or evil nature, is condemned and set aside. It has no existence before God. It is in us, but He sees us only in a risen Christ; and we are called to reckon ourselves dead, and by the power of God's Spirit, to mortify our members, to deny and subdue the evil nature which still dwells in us, and will dwell until we are passed out of our present condition and find our place forever with the Lord.

This makes all so blessedly clear. We have already dwelt upon the fact, that "they that are in the flesh cannot

please God;" but the believer is not in the flesh, though the flesh be in him. He is in the body, and on the earth, as to the fact of his existence; but he is neither in the flesh nor of the world, as to the ground or principle of his standing. "Ye," says the Holy Ghost, "are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit" (Rom. 8). "They," says our blessed Lord, "are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17).

What a sweet relief to a heart bowed down under a sense of indwelling sin, and not knowing what to do with it! What solid peace and comfort flow into the soul when I see God condemning my sin in the cross, and justifying me in a risen Christ! Where are my sins? Blotted out. Where is my sin? Condemned and set aside. Where am I? Justified and accepted in a risen Christ. I am brought to God without a single cloud or misgiving. I am not afraid of my Justifier. I confide in Him, love Him, and adore Him. I joy in God, and rejoice in hope of His glory.

Thus, then, we have, in some measure, cleared the way for the believer to approach the subject of the judgment-seat of Christ, as set forth in ver. 10 of our chapter, which we shall here quote at length, in order that the reader may have the subject fully before him in the veritable language of inspiration. "For we must all appear [or rather, be manifested] before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done whether it be good or bad."

Now there is, in reality, no difficulty or ground of perplexity here. All we need is to look at the matter from a divine standpoint, and with a simple mind, in order to see it clearly. This is true in reference to every subject

treated of in the Word of God, and specially so as to the point now before us. We have no doubt whatever that the real secret of the difficulty felt by so many in respect to the question of the judgment-seat of Christ is self-occupation. Hence it is we so often hear such questions as the following, "Can it be possible that all our sins, all our failures, all our infirmities, all our naughty and foolish ways, shall be published, in the presence of assembled myriads, before the judgment-seat of Christ?"

Well, then, in the first place, we have to remark that Scripture says nothing of the kind. The passage before us, which contains the great, broad statement of the truth on this weighty subject, simply declares that "we must all be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ." But how shall we be manifested? Assuredly, as we are. But how is that? As God's workmanship — as perfectly righteous, and perfectly holy, and perfectly accepted in the Person of that very One who shall sit on the judgment-seat, and who Himself bore in His own body on the tree all the judgment due to us, and made a full end of the entire system in which we stood. All that which, as sinners, we had to meet, Christ met in our stead. Our sins He bore; our sin He was condemned for. He stood in our stead and answered all responsibilities which rested upon us as men alive in the flesh, as members of the first man, as standing on the old creation-ground. The Judge Himself is our righteousness. We are in Him. All that we are and all that we have, we owe it to Him and to His perfect work. If we, as sinners, had to meet Christ as a Judge, escape were utterly impossible; but, inasmuch as He is our righteousness, condemnation is utterly impossible. In short, the matter is reversed. The atoning death and

triumphant resurrection of our Divine Substitute have completely changed everything, so that the effect of the judgment-seat of Christ will be to make manifest that there is not, and cannot be, a single stain or spot on that workmanship of God which the saint is declared to be.

But whence this dread of having all our naughtiness exposed at the judgment-seat of Christ? Does not He know all about us? Are we more afraid of being manifested to the gaze of men and angels than to the gaze of our blessed and adorable Lord? If we are manifested to Him, what matters it to whom beside we are known? How far are Peter and David and many others affected by the fact that untold millions have read the record of their sins, and that the record thereof has been stereotyped on the page of inspiration? Will it prevent their sweeping the strings of the golden harp, or casting their crowns before the feet of Him whose precious blood has obliterated for ever all their sins, and brought them, without spot, into the full blaze of the throne of God? Assuredly not. Why then need any be troubled by the thought of their being thoroughly manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ? Will not the Judge of all the earth do right? May we not safely leave all in the hands of Him who has loved us and washed us in His own blood? Cannot we trust ourselves implicitly to the One who loved us with such a love? Will He expose us? Will He — can He, do aught inconsistent with the love that led Him to give His precious life for us? Will the Head expose the body, or any member thereof? Will the Bridegroom expose the bride? Yes, He will, in one sense. But how? He will publicly set forth, in view of all created intelligences, that there is not a speck or a flaw, a spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, to

be seen upon that Church which He loved with a love that many waters could not quench.

Ah! Christian reader, dost thou not see how that nearness to the heart of Christ, as well as the knowledge of His perfect work, would completely roll away the mists which enwrap the subject of the judgment-seat? If thou art washed from thy sins in the blood of Jesus, and loved by God as Jesus is loved, what reason hast thou to fear that judgment-seat, or to shrink from the thought of being manifested before it? None whatever. Nothing can possibly come up there to alter thy standing, to touch thy relationship, to blot thy title, or cloud thy prospect. Indeed we are fully persuaded that the light of the judgment-seat will chase away many of the clouds that have obscured the mercy-seat. Many, when they come to stand before that judgment-seat, will wonder why they ever feared it for themselves. They will see their mistake and adore the grace that has been so much better than all their legal fears. Many who have hardly ever been able to read their title here, will read it there, and rejoice and wonder — they will love and worship. They will then see, in broad daylight, what poor, feeble, shallow, unworthy thoughts they had once entertained of the love of Christ, and of the true character of His work. They will perceive how sadly prone they ever were to measure Him by themselves, and to think and feel as if His thoughts and ways were like their own. All this will be seen in the light of that day, and then the burst of praise — the rapturous hallelujah — will come forth from many a heart that, when down here, had been robbed of its peace and joy by legal and unworthy thoughts of God and His Christ.

But, while it is divinely true that nothing can come out before the judgment-seat of Christ to disturb, in any way, the standing or relationship of the very feeblest member of the body of Christ, or of any member of the family of God, yet is the thought of that judgment most solemn and weighty. Yes, truly, and none will more feel its weight and solemnity than those who can look forward to it with perfect calmness. And be it well remembered, that there are two things indispensably needful in order to enjoy this calmness of spirit. First, we must have a title without a blot; and, secondly, our moral and practical state must be sound. No amount of mere evangelical clearness as to our title will avail unless we are walking in moral integrity before God. It will not do for a man to say that he is not afraid of the judgment-seat of Christ because Christ died for him, while, at the same time, he is walking in a loose, careless, self-indulgent way. This is a most dreadful delusion. It is alarming in the extreme to find persons drawing a plea from evangelical clearness to shrink from the holy responsibility resting upon them as the servants of Christ. Are we to speak idle words because we know we shall never come into judgment? The bare thought is horrible; and yet we may shrink from such a thing when clothed in plain language before us, while, at the same time we allow ourselves to be drawn, through a false application of the doctrines of grace, into most culpable laxity and carelessness as to the claims of holiness.

All this must be sedulously avoided. The grace that has delivered us from judgment should exert a more powerful influence upon our ways than the fear of that judgment. And not only so, but we must remember that while we, as sinners, are delivered from judgment and

wrath, yet, as servants, we must give account of ourselves and our ways. It is not a question of our being exposed here or there to men, angels, or devils. No; "we must give account to God" (Rom. 14: 11-12). This is far more serious, far more weighty, far more influential, than our being exposed in the view of any creature. "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons" (Col. 3: 23-25).

This is most serious and salutary. It may be asked, "When shall we have to give account to God? When shall we receive for the wrong?" We are not told, because that is not the question. The grand object of the Holy Ghost in the passages just quoted is to lead the conscience into holy exercise in the presence of God and of the Lord Christ. This is good and most needful in a day of easy profession, like the present, when there is much said about grace, free salvation justification without works, our standing in Christ. Is it that we want to weaken the sense of these things? Far be the thought. Yea, we would, in every possible way, seek to lead souls into the divine knowledge and enjoyment of those most precious privileges. But then we must remember the adjusting power of truth. There are always two sides to a question, and we find in the pages of the New Testament the clearest and fullest statements of grace, lying side by side with the most solemn and searching statements as to our responsibility. Do the latter obscure the former? Assuredly not. Neither should the former weaken the latter. Both should have their due place, and be allowed

to exert their moulding influence upon our character and ways.

Some professors seem to have a great dislike to the words "duty" and "responsibility"; but we invariably find that those who have the deepest sense of grace have also, and as a necessary consequence, the truest sense of duty and responsibility. We know of no exception. A heart that is duly influenced by divine grace is sure to welcome every reference to the claims of holiness. It is only empty talkers about grace and standing that raise an outcry about duty and responsibility. God deals in moral realities. He is real with us, and He wants us to be real with Him. He is real in His love, and real in His faithfulness; and He would have us real in our dealings with Him, and in our response to His holy claims. It is of little use to say "Lord, Lord" if we live in the neglect of His commandments. It is the merest sham to say "I go sir" if we do not go. God looks for obedience in His children. "He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

May we bear these things in mind, and remember that all must come out before the judgment-seat of Christ. "We must all be manifested" there. This is unmingled joy to a really upright mind. If we do not unfeignedly rejoice at the thought of the judgment-seat of Christ, there must be something wrong somewhere. Either we are not established in grace, or we are walking in some false way. If we know that we are justified and accepted before God in Christ, and if we are walking in moral integrity, as in His presence, the thought of the judgment-seat of Christ will not disturb our hearts. The apostle could say, "We are made manifest to God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences." Was

Paul afraid of the judgment-seat? Not he. But why? Because he knew that he was accepted, as to his person, in a risen Christ; and, as to his ways, he "laboured that whether present or absent he might be acceptable to Him." Thus it was with this holy man of God and devoted servant of Christ. "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men" (Acts 24: 16). Paul knew that he was accepted in Christ, and therefore he laboured to be acceptable to Him in all his ways.

These two things should never be separated, and they never will be in any divinely taught mind or divinely regulated conscience. They will be perfectly joined together, and, in holy harmony, exert their formative power over the soul. It should be our aim to walk, even now, in the light of the judgment-seat. This would prove a wholesome regulator in many ways. It will not, in any wise, lead to legality of spirit. Impossible. Shall we have any legality when we stand before the judgment-seat of Christ? Assuredly not. Well, then, why should the thought of that judgment-seat exert a legal influence now? In point of fact, we feel assured there is, and can be, no greater joy to an honest heart than to know that everything shall come clearly and fully out, in the perfect light of that solemn day that is approaching. We shall see all then as Christ sees it — judge of it as He judges. We shall look back from amid the blaze of divine light shining from the judgment-seat, and see our whole course in this world. We shall see what blunders we have made — how badly we did this, that, and the other work — mixed motives here — an under current there — a false object in something else. All will be seen then in divine truth and light. Is it a question of our being

exposed to the whole universe? By no means. Should we be concerned, whether or no? Certainly not. Will it, can it, touch our acceptance? Nay, we shall shine there in all the perfectness of our risen and glorified Head. The Judge Himself is our righteousness. We stand in Him. He is our all. What can touch us? We shall appear there as the fruit of His perfect work. We shall even be associated with Him in the judgment which He executes over the world.

Is not this enough to settle every question? No doubt. But still we have to think of our individual walk and service. We have to look to it that we bring no wood, hay, and stubble into the light of the coming day, for as surely as we do we shall suffer loss, though we ourselves shall be saved through the fire. We should seek to carry ourselves now as those who are already in the light, and whose one desire is to do what is well pleasing to our adorable Lord, not because of the fear of judgment, but under "the vast constraining influence" of His love. "The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again." This is the true motive spring in all Christian service. It is not the fear of judgment impelling, but the love of Christ constraining us; and we may say, with fullest assurance, that never shall we have so deep a sense of that love as when we stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.

When this passing world is done,

When has sunk yon radiant sun

When I stand with Christ on high

Looking o'er life's history,

Then, Lord, shall I fully know,

Not till then, how much I owe.

There are many other points of interest and value in this marvellous chapter; but we feel we must bring our paper to a conclusion; and, most assuredly, we could not do this more suitably than by unfolding, as God's Spirit may enable us, that theme which has been before us all along, "The Ministry of Reconciliation," to which we shall now direct the reader's attention as briefly as we can.

We may view it under three distinct heads; namely, first, the foundation on which this ministry rests; secondly, the objects toward whom it is exercised; thirdly, the features by which it is characterised.

1 And first, then, as to the foundation on which the ministry of reconciliation rests. This is set before us, in the closing verse of our chapter. "For He [God] hath made Him [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

We have here three parties, namely, God, Christ, and sin. This latter is simply the expression of what we are by nature. There is in "us" naught but "sin," from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, the whole man is sin. The principle of sin pervades the entire system of fallen humanity. The root, trunk, branches, leaves, blossom, fruit — all is sin. It is not only that we have committed sins; we are actually born in sin. True, we have, all of us, our characteristic sins. We have not only, all of us, "gone astray," but "we have turned every one to his own way."

Each has pursued his own specific path of evil and folly; and all this is the fruit of that thing called "sin." The outward life of each is but a stream from the fountain — a branch from the stem; that fountain is sin.

And what, let us ask, is sin? It is the acting of the will in opposition to God. It is doing our own pleasure — doing what we like ourselves. This is the root — this the source of sin. Let it take what shape, or clothe itself in what forms it may; be it gross or be it most refined in its actings, the great root-principle, the parent stem, is self-will, and this is sin. There is no necessity for entering into any detail; all we desire is that the reader should have a clear and thorough sense of what sin is, and not only so, but that he, by nature, is sinful. Where this great and solemn fact takes full possession of the soul, by the power of the Holy Ghost, there can be no settled rest until the soul is brought to lay hold on the truth set forth in 2 Corinthians 5: 21. The question of sin had to be disposed of ere there could be so much as a single thought of reconciliation. God could never be reconciled to sin. But fallen man was a sinner by practice and sinful in nature. The very sources of his being were corrupt and defiled, and God was holy, just, and true. He is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity. Hence, then, between God and sinful humanity there could be no such thing as reconciliation. True it is — most blessedly true — that God is good, and merciful, and gracious. But He is also holy; and holiness and sin could never coalesce.

What was to be done? Hear the answer: "God hath made Christ to be sin." But where? Look well at this. Where was Christ made sin? Was it in His birth? or in Jordan's flood? or in the garden of Gethsemane? Nay; though,

most assuredly, in that garden the shadows were lengthening, the darkness was thickening, the gloom was deepening. But where and when was the holy, spotless, precious Lamb of God made sin? On the cross, and only there! This is a grand cardinal truth — a truth of vital importance — a truth which the enemy of God and His Word is seeking to darken and set aside in every possible way. The devil is seeking, in the most specious manner, to displace the cross. He cares not how he compasses this end. He will make use of anything and everything in order to detract from the glory of the Cross, that great central truth of Christianity round which every other truth circulates, and on which the whole fabric of divine revelation rests as upon an eternal foundation.

"He hath made Him to be sin." Here lies the root of the whole matter. Christ, on the cross, was made sin for us. He died, and was buried. Sin was condemned. It met the just judgment of a holy God who could not pass over a single jot or tittle of sin; nay, He poured out His unmingled wrath upon it in the Person of His Son, when that Son was "made sin." It is a serious error to believe that Christ was bearing the judgment of God during His lifetime, or that aught save the death of Christ could meet the question of sin. He might have become incarnate — He might have lived and laboured on this earth — He might have wrought His countless miracles — He might have healed, and cleansed, and quickened — He might have prayed, and wept, and groaned; but not any of these things, nor yet all of them put together, could blot out a single stain of that dreadful thing "sin." God the Holy Ghost declares that "without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9: 22).

Now, then, if the holy life and labours of the Son of God — if His prayers, tears, and groans could not put away sin; how do you think that your life and labours, your prayers, tears, and groans, your good works, rites, ordinances, and ceremonies could ever put away sin? The fact is, that the life of our blessed Lord only proved man more and more guilty. It laid the topstone upon the superstructure of his guilt, and therefore left the question of sin wholly unsettled.

Nor was this all. Our blessed Lord Himself declares, over and over again, the absolute and indispensable necessity of His death. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12). "Thus it is written, and thus it beloved [or was necessary for] Christ to suffer" (Luke 24: 46). "How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be" (Matt. 26)? In a word, death was the only pathway of life, the only basis of union, the only ground of reconciliation. All who speak of incarnation as being the basis of our union with Christ deny, in the plainest way, the whole range of truth connected with a dead and risen Christ. Many may not see this; but Satan sees it, and he sees too how it will work. He knows what he is about, and surely the servants of Christ ought to know what is involved in the error against which we are warning our readers.

The fact is, the enemy does not want souls to see that, in the death of Christ, sentence was passed on fallen human nature and upon the whole world. This was not the case in incarnation at all. An incarnate Christ put man to the test — a dead Christ put man to death — a risen Christ takes the believer into union with Himself. When Christ came in the flesh, fallen man was still

under probation. When Christ died on the cross, fallen man was wholly condemned. When Christ rose from the dead, He became the head of a new race, each member of which, being quickened by the Holy Ghost, is viewed by God as united to Christ, in life, righteousness, and favour — he is viewed as having been dead, as having passed through judgment, and as being now as free from all condemnation as Christ Himself. "He hath made Him to be sin for us, [He] who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

Now, it must be plain to the reader who bows to Scripture, that incarnation did not, and could not accomplish all this. Incarnation did not put away sin. Need we stop here to dwell upon the glories of the mystery of incarnation? Will anyone imagine that we take away from the value, or mar the integrity of that priceless fundamental truth, because we deny that it puts away sin, or forms the basis of our union with Christ? We trust not. That incarnation was essentially necessary for the accomplishment of redemption is plain to all. Christ had to become a man in order to die. "Without shedding of blood is no remission." He had to give His flesh for the life of the world. But this only goes to prove the absolute necessity of death. It was the giving of His flesh, not the taking of it, that laid the foundation of the whole fabric — life, pardon, peace, righteousness, union, glory, all. Apart from death, there is, and could be, absolutely nothing. Through death we have all.

But we cannot pursue this profound subject any further now. Enough has been said to set forth its connection with our special thesis — the ministry of reconciliation. When we read that "God hath made Christ to be sin for

us," we must see that this involved nothing less than the death of the cross. "Thou," says that blessed One, "hast brought Me into the dust of death" (Ps. 22). What an utterance! Who can fathom the mighty depths of those words — "Thou" — "Me" — and "death"? Who can enter into the question, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Why did a holy, righteous God forsake His only begotten, well-beloved, eternal Son? The answer contains the solid basis of that marvellous ministry whereof we speak. Christ was made sin. He not only bore our sins in His own body on the tree; but He was made sin. He stood charged with the entire question of sin. He was "the Lamb of God bearing away the sin of the world." As such He gloriously vindicated God, in the very scene where He had been dishonoured. He glorified Him in respect to that very thing by which His majesty had been insulted. He took upon Himself the whole matter — placed Himself beneath the weight of the whole burden, and completely cleared the ground on which God could lay the foundations of the new creation. He opened those eternal flood-gates which sin had closed, so that the full tide of divine love might roll down along that channel which His atoning death alone could furnish; so long as sin was in question, reconciliation must be out of the question. But Christ, being made sin, died and put it away forever, and thus changed entirely the ground and character of God's dealing with man and with the world.

The death of Christ, then, as we have seen, is the alone basis of reconciliation. That divine work has opened the way for placing men and things in their right relationship to God, and on their proper footing before Him. And this, be it remembered, is the true sense and

meaning of reconciliation. Sin had alienated "men" from God, and set "things" entirely astray, and hence both men and things needed to be reconciled, or set straight; and the death of Christ has cleared the way for this.

It is well to see clearly the distinction between "atonement" and "reconciliation." They are often confounded, through inattention to Scripture; and the honoured translators of our excellent Authorised Version have not, with sufficient accuracy, marked this distinction. For example, in Rom. 5: 11, they have the word "atonement" where it ought to be rendered "reconciliation" and in Heb. 2: 17, we have the word "reconciliation" where it ought to be "atonement."

Nor is the distinction by any means unimportant. The word "atonement," or "propitiation," occurs, in some one or other of its forms, six times in the Greek New Testament. (See carefully Luke 18: 13; Rom. 3: 25; Heb. 2: 17; 9: 5; 1 John 2: 2; 1 John 4: 10.) The word "reconciliation" occurs, in one or other of its forms, thirteen times in the New Testament. (See Rom. 5: 10-11; Rom. 11: 15; 1 Cor. 7: 11; 2 Cor. 5: 18-20; Eph. 2: 16; Col. 1: 20-21.) If the reader will take the trouble of examining and comparing these passages, he will see that atonement and reconciliation are not the same thing, but that the former is the foundation of the latter. Sin had made man an enemy and thrown things into confusion; and in Col. 1: 20-21, we read, "And, having made peace through the blood of His cross [here is the foundation], by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled, in the body of His flesh, through death, to

present you holy, and unblamable, and unreprovable in His sight." Here we have the death of Christ set forth as the ground of the reconciliation of both men and things.

[If the reader will turn, for a moment, to 1 Cor. 7: 11, he will see the use of the word reconciliation. "But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband." In classical Greek the word is applied to the changing money: the exchanging one thing for another; exchanging prisoners; the changing a person from enmity to friendship. In short, everywhere the distinction is maintained between "atonement," or "propitiation" and "reconciliation." The former is (ilasmos), the latter, (katallage)]

Now this leads to another point of immense importance. We often hear it said that "the death of Christ was necessary in order to reconcile God to man." This is a pious mistake, arising from inattention to the language of the Holy Ghost, and indeed to the plain meaning of the word "reconcile." God never changed — never stepped out of His normal and true position. He abideth faithful. There was, and could be, no derangement, no confusion, no alienation, so far as He was concerned; and hence there could be no need of reconciling Him to us. In fact, it was exactly the contrary. Man had gone astray; he was the enemy, and needed to be reconciled. But this was wholly impossible if sin were not righteously disposed of; and sin could only be disposed of by death — even the death of One, who, as being a man, could die, and being God, could impart all the dignity, value, and glory of His divine Person to the atoning sacrifice which He offered.

Wherefore, then, as might be expected, Scripture never speaks of reconciling God to man. There is no such expression to be found within the covers of the New Testament. "God was in Christ reconciling the world [in its broad aspect — men and things] unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." And again, "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ." In a word, it is God, in His infinite mercy and grace, through the atoning death of Christ, bringing us back to Himself, and placing us not merely in the original place, or on the original footing, or in the original relationship; but, as was due to the work of Christ, giving us back far more than we had lost, and introducing us into the marvellous relationship of sons, and setting us in His presence, in divine and eternal righteousness, and in the infinite favour and acceptableness of His own Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amazing grace! Stupendous and glorious plan! What a ministry! And yet need we wonder when we think of the death of Christ as the foundation of it all? When we remember that "Christ was made sin for us," it seems but the necessary counterpart that "we should be made the righteousness of God in Him." It would have been no adequate result of such a work as Christ accomplished, to have brought men and things back to the Adamic or old creation ground. This would never have satisfied the heart of God in any way, whether as respects Christ's glory or our blessing. It would not have furnished an answer to that omnipotent appeal of John 17: "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me, with Thine own self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (ver. 4-5). Who can

gauge the depth and power of those accents as they fell upon the ear of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ?

But we must not enlarge, much as we should like to do so. Little remains to be said as to the objects of the ministry of reconciliation, inasmuch as we have, in a measure, anticipated them by speaking of "men and things," for these are, in very deed, the objects, and they are included in that comprehensive word "world." "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." We would merely add here, that it is utterly impossible for any creature under heaven to exclude himself from the range of this most precious ministry. Before the reader can shut himself out from the application of all this grace to himself, he must prove that he does not belong to the world. This he cannot do, and hence he must see that God is beseeching him to be reconciled.

But, this leads us to look, for a moment, at the features which characterise this glorious ministry.

First, let us mark God's attitude. He is beseeching sinners. What a thought! It seems too much for the heart to conceive. Only think, reader, of the Most High and Mighty God, the Creator of the ends of the earth — the One who has power to destroy both soul and body in hell — think of Him as beseeching and praying you to be friends with Him! It is not a question of your praying to Him and His hearing you. No: but the very reverse — He is praying you. And for what does He ask you? Is it to do anything or to give anything? Nay; He simply asks you to be friends with Him because He has befriended you at the cost of His own Son. Think of this. He spared not His only begotten and well-beloved Son, but bruised Him in

your stead. He made Him to be sin for you. He judged your sin in the person of His Son, on the cross, in order that He might be able to reconcile you. And now He stretches forth His arms and opens His heart to you, and prays you to be reconciled — to be friends with Him. Surpassing grace! It really seems to us as though human language can only tend to weaken and impoverish this grand reality.

We would only further suggest that the force of ver. 20 is greatly weakened by the word "you," which, as the reader will observe, ought not to be inserted. It makes it appear as though the apostle were beseeching the Corinthian saints to be reconciled, whereas he is only setting forth the terms and the style adopted by all "ambassadors" for Christ wherever they went through the wide world — the language in which they were to address "every creature" under heaven. It is not, "Do this or that" — "Give this or that." It was not command or prohibition; but simply, "Be reconciled."

Then, what encouragement to the poor trembling heart that feels the burden of sin and guilt to be assured that God will not impute, will not reckon, one of his sins! This is another precious feature of the ministry of reconciliation. "Not imputing their trespasses unto them." This must set the heart at rest. If God tells me that He will not count one of my trespasses to me, because He has already counted them to Jesus on the cross, this may well tranquillise my spirit and emancipate my heart. If I believe that God means what He says, perfect peace must be my portion. True, it is only by the Holy Ghost that I can enter into the power of this glorious truth; but what the Holy Ghost leads me to believe and rest in is, that God does not, and will not,

blessed be His name, impute a single sin to me, because He has already imputed all to Christ.

But this leads us to the third feature of the ministry of reconciliation.

If God will not impute my trespasses to me then what will He impute? Righteousness — even the righteousness of God. We cannot attempt to unfold the nature and character of this righteousness. We may do so on another occasion, if the Lord permit; but here we confine ourselves to the statement contained in the passage before us, which declares that God hath made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us who were all sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Most glorious truth! Sin is made an end of, as regards the believer. Christ lives as our subsisting righteousness, before God, and we live in Him. There is not so much as one single entry to our debit in the book of divine justice; but there is a risen and glorified Christ to our credit. Nor is this all. Not only are our sins gone, our guilt cancelled — our old self completely ignored — not only are we made the righteousness of God in Jesus; but we are loved by God as Jesus is loved — accepted in Him — one with Him in all that He is and has, as a risen, victorious, ascended, and glorified Man at God's right hand. Higher than this it is impossible to go.

And now we must close, and we do it reluctantly. We do it with a certain painful consciousness of the feebleness and poverty of our handling of this lofty and comprehensive theme. But all this we must leave in the Master's hand. He knows all about the subject and the treatment thereof — all about the reader and the writer of these lines. To Him we commit all, while we make one

solemn, closing appeal to the unconverted, unawakened reader.

Let us remind you that this glorious ministry will very soon close. The acceptable year, the day of salvation, shall ere long come to an end. The ambassadors shall soon be all called home and their embassy be closed forever. The door shall soon be shut, and the day of vengeance set in in terror and wrath upon a Christ-rejecting world. Let us entreat of you to flee from the wrath to come. Remember that the One who is now praying and beseeching you to be reconciled, has uttered the following awful words, "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out My hand, and no man regarded. But ye have set at nought all My counsel, and would none of My reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh" (Prov. 1: 24-26). May the reader escape the unutterable horrors of the day of wrath and judgment!