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A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY.

"A Candlestick of Pure Gold:
of Beaten Work"

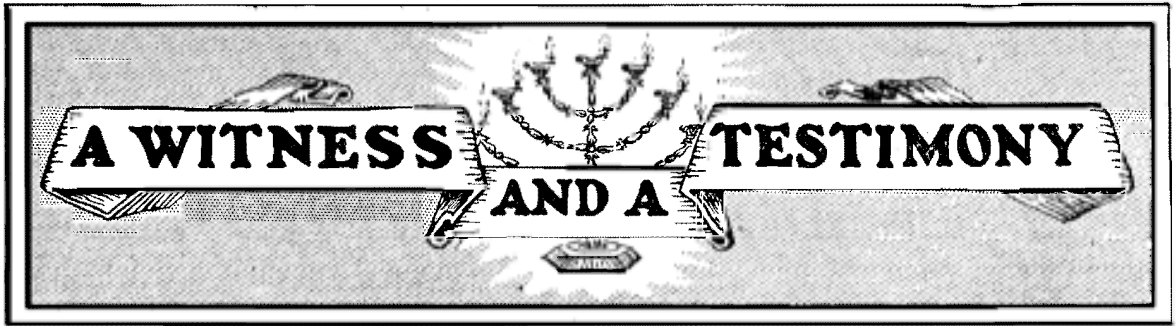
Exodus 25. 31.

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The New Day of the Spirit

IV

SPIRITUAL ISRAEL

WE are seeking to see what came in with the day of Pentecost, that is, the deeper and fuller meaning of what was introduced into this world on that day. We have been saying that it did mark a new day in this world's history. When we say 'day' we mean 'age,' a 'dispensation.' That is a big and difficult word: it simply means the order of things obtaining at any given time—that is a dispensation. What is the order and nature of things which was introduced on the day of Pentecost, as different from all other ages in the past, and as represented by the book which goes by the title of "The Acts"? Let me say again, that title was never given to it by its writer. Many, many years after the book was written someone gave it the title of "The Acts of the Apostles," but Luke, who wrote it, did not call it that. It is a very handy title, but it can be rather misleading, because it tends to confine attention to the things done, without an adequate recognition of the nature of what was happening, which is the important thing. That is what we are concerned with—the nature of things brought in to characterise this new age.

Now just another word. We have said before that this book of The Acts was not written until after all the letters of the Apostle Paul were written and in circulation. That is interesting, and has a meaning. If you were to arrange the New Testament in the order in

which the books were written, you would have to change the common order completely and put Paul's letters before The Acts. That means something. It means this very thing that we are seeking to show—that all that is in the book of The Acts has spiritual meaning, is explained in the letters of Paul, and in other letters in the New Testament; and it would be very interesting if you could take the letters first and read them, never having looked at Acts—read them carefully until you knew what was in them, and then for the first time pick up the book called Acts and begin to read it. What would be the value of that? I think it would be this. When you came upon certain things in Acts, right from the beginning, you would say: 'Oh, I understand what that means now—that means what Paul has said here and here in his epistles. I can see that it is not just something that has happened, but it has a meaning and I can see what that meaning is.' That would be the value of it; and I take it that that was the value to those who got the book of Acts afterwards. They had the epistles and were able in the light of them to say: 'We see the fuller meaning of all that took place at the beginning now, we know what that meant.'

Before we proceed further with that let us say a word to explain why the books of the New Testament are arranged as they are. We say that men decided to put the books of the Bible in their present order, but there is surely another factor to be allowed for. I think the Holy Spirit was behind that. Why, then, is

the book called Acts where it is, near the beginning? For this greatest and most impressive of all reasons—that you must have the Person before you can have the doctrine, because all the doctrine comes out of the Person and points to the Person and comes back to the Person. You see, it is the Lord Jesus Who is in full view when you begin to read the book of the Acts—the Lord Jesus risen, ascended, exalted, glorified—and everything has to be seen in the light of Him, as belonging to Him, as revealing Him, as explaining Him. The Person first; everything comes from the Person. And that is why this book is where it is, and we would all agree that the Holy Spirit had a hand in that arrangement. He is always concerned with bringing the Lord Jesus personally into the first place.

Now let us go on to a further opening up of this that is before us. We took at the outset a fragment from one of Paul's letters—I Cor. xv. 46—as our key to this whole matter, and we again note that this was written before the Acts. It was written and it was known wherever that letter to the Corinthians may have gone or wherever what was in that letter may have been made known. It was already known that this was said—"That is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; then that which is spiritual." Now can you not see how, in the light of that, what I have just been saying would be very true? It had been said "first . . . that which is natural." That belongs to all that is passed, all that has been. God made a material and natural creation—that is first. "Then that which is spiritual"—now a new creation which is spiritual. God did numerous things which could be seen and handled, but He did them with another thought in them which was not always seen. The first creation was in the natural realm. Now it is all in the spiritual realm—"then that which is spiritual"—and if these people who had had the letters picked up this book of The Acts and read it in the light of the letters they would see at once that it expressed that 'afterward'—that God is not doing things now as He did them in past days. He is doing them in a new realm, on a new principle, on a new basis. It is spiritual now; the Holy Spirit has come, and everything is of a spiritual value and significance.

In our previous meditation we got to the point of the spiritual seed of Abraham. In the early chapters of Acts, Abraham has quite a large place, and all that is said of him must be read in the light of the letters. But what is being said in the letters in relation to Abraham is that the true seed of Abraham is not

that which is his natural seed, but that which is his seed spiritually by faith. What God is doing in this dispensation is to get a spiritual race. We said before that the seed of Abraham means a new race of people, a race of people taken by God and separated to be a peculiar people unto Himself. We have pointed out that this age sees that natural seed of Abraham set aside so far as concerns what God is immediately doing, but a spiritual seed is brought in, that is, a new race of which Christ (Who is not only the natural seed but also the spiritual seed of Abraham) is the Head, the first. I will not stay with that. I have to say that because it links at once with the next fragment.

Israel a Royal Nation

You will notice here with the introduction of this book of The Acts that another phrase is used—"Ye men of Israel." That is the word of Peter on the day of Pentecost. Israel comes into the picture; not only Abraham, the seed of Abraham, but Israel. We said before—and this is what we are going to open up a little more fully now—that there is a difference between the seed of Abraham and the children of Israel in this sense, that the seed of Abraham is racial; the term relates to a race; and, while the children of Israel are of that race, the term "the children of Israel" belongs essentially to a nation. In the race sense, the seed of Abraham is Isaac. "In Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Gen. xxi. 12), and Isaac in type stands for the man of resurrection. By a miracle in a very true sense, Abraham received Isaac back as from the dead, and Isaac stands for resurrection. Now then, Peter says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (I Pet. i. 3). You see, resurrection is a begetting, we are the children of God on the ground of resurrection union with Christ. That makes a race begotten in resurrection. That has to do with the term "the seed."

But when you come to "the children of Israel" you advance upon that; the term is not racial, it is national, and is connected with Jacob; not with Isaac, but with Jacob now, for it was Jacob whose name was changed to Israel, which name was taken over and given to this nation—"the children of Israel." But what is the particular significance? It is not birth, it is not just race that is involved. Israel is a prince with God. "Thou . . . hast prevailed," said the angel to Jacob on that night of Jabbok and Peniel. 'Thou hast prevailed as a prince

with God'—that is the meaning of Israel. So this nation which includes the seed, which is the seed, means a corporate people—not so many individuals all born of one father but a collective people brought together in nationhood, who stand upon the ground of God's determination that they shall be the people who govern, who rule, who are in dominion. The prophecy concerning them was—"The Lord will make thee the head, and not the tail" (Deut. xxviii. 13), and, while they were in right relationship with God, there was no nation on the earth that could stand before them. The mightiest nation of the then-known world and the mightiest king—Egypt and Pharaoh—simply went down because of God's destiny bound up with these people. No nation could stand before them. They were a royal nation in principle—that was God's thought. The children of Israel, sons of a prince with God who has prevailed—that was God's thought concerning Israel. It meant ascendancy above all the nations.

The Tragedy of a Lost Position

Well now, we do not find it like that in the beginning of the book of the Acts. Although it is—"Ye men of Israel"—there is the tragedy of a lost position and influence, lost spiritual life and power; but the Holy Spirit is come, and with Pentecost a new age is brought in, and with that new age a new house of Israel, a spiritual house of Israel. I am not saying that the Church is a spiritualised Israel. There is a great difference between a spiritualised Israel and the Church. I am not going to take time to explain that difference, but I mention it in case it should be thought that I am implying that. The Church is something unique. In the eternal thought and counsels of God it stands supreme, far above Israel after the flesh. There is, in one sense, no comparison between the Church and Israel. Even in the days of its restoration and glory which are to come, Israel will be but an earthly people; the Church will be something far above that. But what I am saying is this, that God has ever done His works, whatever they have been, with spiritual principles governing; and when He chose Israel after the flesh and constituted Israel a nation, He did so with spiritual principles and thoughts in mind, and it was because Israel never recognised those spiritual principles that the tragedy of their present setting aside took place. That is exactly what the Apostle is saying in the letter to the Hebrews. "Wherefore I was displeased with this generation" (that is, Israel in the wilderness), "and said, They do alway err in their heart: but they

did not know my ways." They had not an inner perception of God's meaning, of what He was after, why He was doing this and that. They did not see the spiritual meaning of their deliverance from Egypt, they did not see God's meaning in the passage of the Red Sea, and in His manifold dealings with them in the wilderness. "They did not know my ways." All they were doing was simply moving in a kind of mechanical way: 'Well, the order to-day is to march so we march; the order to-morrow is to stop so we stop. Circumstances to-day are such-and-such; we do not like them, we do not want them. . . . Now things are a little better; we like this; let us have as much of this as we can.' They were governed by how things affected them outwardly, moving according to a programme imposed upon them, with no intelligence, no understanding, no enquiry or perception as to what God meant by it all. "They did not know my ways," they erred in their hearts. That is the statement about their history through those forty years.

Now, God had a meaning, God had thoughts in it all. We have come to see something of those thoughts. It is not my intention to take up all the history of Israel in its typology. I am after one thing—that is, by all these means to try to bring home to you, with the Lord's help, this one fact—that in the day in which you and I live, because the Holy Spirit is the predominant factor, God is after a spiritual state of things in His people, He is after a spiritual people; not just a religious people but a spiritual people. I want to try and show you what that means.

Recovery Possible through the Grace of God

Well, the children of Israel were, as we know, firstly an elect nation. That word "elect" is used by Peter and by Paul of the Church. ". . . elect . . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (I Pet. 1. 1-2); "Put on therefore, as God's elect . . ." (Col. iii. 12). "Elect"—something which exists by the sovereign act of God and in the sovereign grace of God. That is a truth which lies behind Israel's history, but it is missed. It lies behind the Church which, in this dispensation, takes the place of Israel and (because it is a spiritual thing) far transcends the natural Israel. An "elect"—something chosen in the sovereign grace of God. That is the foundation of things. We shall never be allowed to get away from this fact: it will be brought home to us increasingly as we go on in the Christian life: however long we may stay here on this earth, however much we may come to know of the Lord and His things, however

large may be our spiritual measure, the one thing which God will make us know more and more is that we have our standing with Him on the basis of pure grace; that even after fifty, sixty, or seventy years of the Christian life, it is a poor look-out for us, but for the sovereign grace of God. We are so slow really to get the significance of that. He has given us Israel's history by way of impressing us with this spiritual truth. Israel never saw it, they erred in their hearts in this matter. If they had seen it, they would have been a broken people, but they were a proud, stiff-necked people because they never saw the grace of God in their existence; but the Lord has preserved their history for us. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Rom. xv. 4). I do not know how you feel when you read the Old Testament. Read the story, the different accounts of the forty years in the wilderness, and then read the prophets. Do you find very much pleasure in reading through the prophets? Do you enjoy Jeremiah? I cannot say that, just reading it as a record, I find very much delight in it. Then Ezekiel; then what are called the Minor Prophets. There is so much there that is not very pleasant to read. It is an awful story. Think of Hosea; there are beautiful things there, but, taking it as a story, an account of Israel's condition, how terrible! It is the most awful unveiling of human nature—the persistence, the inveteracy of human pride and self-will and rebellion. And God has never for one moment sought to cover it up and say, These are my people, hide all that, do not let it be known, it is such a disgrace. He has opened it all up; there it is all gathered up. Stephen recounted to the rulers of Israel the whole course of things from the appearing of the God of glory to Abraham. He went through the history and brought it right up to the slaying of Jesus Christ. He summed it all up in this—"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye" (Acts vii. 51). That has been the story all the way through; and yet what beautiful things come out in the midst of that story, especially in that little book of Hosea! The broken heart of God which is never going to give this people up! "I have loved . . ." "I have loved . . .": and that is all there is to be said. 'My love is an everlasting love, when I love it does not matter what happens; I love, I go on loving.' Israel's is an awful story right up to the death of Christ, and it is a tragic story since. We need not romance about it, it still goes on. But there is a day still for Israel in the purpose of

God, because He has loved; and love is only grace in action. I say often to myself; If the Lord will bear with so and so, if the Lord will hold on to that, there is hope for me yet! I find that comforting. We may be as bad as Israel; we could hardly be worse. If the Lord can go as far as He has with them He can go even to our length! It is the grace of God. Remember that.

Grace Basic to Spirituality

And it has always got to be like that, the full consciousness that the grace of God is basic to everything; and that is the very essence of spirituality. Do you want to find a truly spiritual person? You will not find him proud, arrogant, self-sufficient, assertive. If you want to see the grace of God, you will see it in a Barnabas; and the name of Barnabas comes out particularly in connection with his letting everything go for his Lord's sake. "Having a field, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts iv. 37). Everything has gone for his Lord's sake; he is holding nothing for himself. Grace is humility, selflessness. It is the result in our hearts of the realisation of how great is God's love, and of how much we owe to His grace—that we have nothing to stand upon but the grace of God. That is true spirituality; we begin there.

It is the great thing about the children of Israel. How will they really come into ascendancy? This is the point. Who is a prince with God? What is the true spiritual house of Israel, to prevail with God? It is that which consciously rests wholly and solely upon the grace of God. Do you want spiritual power and influence? Do you want real spiritual ascendancy? Do you know how it will come about? It will come about by your breaking, as with Jacob. It will come about by your self-emptying. The weakness of so many is their strength; they are not broken, they are not utterly conscious of their dependence upon God for everything. That is the secret of spiritual prevailing. That is very simple, but it is very important. So the Lord would lead spiritual people through very deep ways, emptying and breaking and weakening and undoing, and turning them upside down and inside out so that they do not know where or what they are. All that they can say is—Well, the Lord is gracious, the Lord is faithful, I believe God, and that is my only ground of hope. People who get there are in the way of knowing the power of God resting upon them. This true spiritual Israelite, who had been a natural Israelite—Paul—said, "Most gladly

therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me . . . for when I am weak, then am I strong" (II Cor. xii. 9-10). That is Jacob translated into spiritual terms. It is important. You feel the Lord is undoing you, breaking you, emptying you. Do not think, as the enemy would have you think, that He is against you; He is for you, He is seeking to do something to lead you on. The way down is the way up, under the hand of God. Elect according to grace, His sovereign grace.

The Power of the Name of Jesus

In that connection, do you not think it is rather remarkable that in the Holy Spirit's governing of the arrangement of this record in the book of The Acts, so quickly—in the third chapter—we come upon the lame man lying at the door of the Temple? He had been lame from his birth and had been lying at the door for many years. Why at the door? Well, you say, people going in and out would see and take compassion. I suppose that was the strategy of those who put him there; but there is something else in it. The man was a parable. No lame man was allowed to enter into the privileges of priestly service in the house of God, according to the law of Moses (Lev. xxi. 16-21). He was under an embargo; he must stay outside. I think it is very wonderful that we come on that so soon, because the appeal is to "ye men of Israel"—that princely people who were called to the position of highest privilege with God; and how are the men of Israel after the flesh, naturally, at the time when those words are addressed to them and when these things are taking place in the midst of them? Oh, they are in the position of that poor man. They may not believe it; they may be thinking very much otherwise about themselves; but actually and truly their position before God is that of a poor lame thing, unable to stand up before God and enter into His presence. Outside—that is their condition. Here is this poor lame man, who is said to be more than forty years old (Acts iv. 22), representing Israel still crippled despite their forty years in the wilderness, unable really to walk straight, or to walk in the Spirit at all, helpless, living a life of impotence, spiritual incompetency, still outside. A great psalm was sung when they came out of Egypt, including a reference to entering into God's holy habitation. He had brought them out to bring them in to His holy mountain (Ex. xv. 1-18). After long years they are not in yet; they are still outside the door of His holy habitation.

Now it is a new day, but it is a *spiritual*

Israel, and so Peter and John proclaimed the name of Jesus to this man, and then taking him by the hand, said to him, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Have you got it? The spiritual Israel is that which stands in the authority of the name of Jesus, stands into all the power and virtue of that name. That is where your prince with God is, that is the Israel—one who prevails in the Name. Everything is in that name. We have a lot to learn about the virtue of the name of the Lord Jesus.

"Jesus, the name high over all,
In hell, or earth, or sky."

The all-prevailing Name constitutes an Israel after the Spirit indeed in spiritual ascendancy, and so this book of The Acts is just a record of their going forth for the sake of the Name, in the power of the Name. "In what name have ye done this? . . . Be it known unto you all . . . in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. . . ." It was all "in the name." This is the new spiritual Israel—"in the name"; by the grace of God, in all the meaning of that mighty name.

They are the two first steps into the new age—the grace which hath appeared, and the name of Jesus which is above every name. I can imagine those saints at Philippi receiving Luke's record in The Acts and reading these chapters about the Name, and saying, "Well, Paul wrote to us some time ago and said, "God . . . gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow" (Phil. ii. 9-10). Oh yes, we know about that name!"

Deliverance from the Self-Life by the Cross

The spiritual Israel is that which is delivered from its incapacitation through the flesh. It was the flesh predominant in Israel in the wilderness which kept it out of the land. It was the self-life asserting itself in all kinds of ways which simply crippled them. It was living unto their own interests that did it. Believe me, in the measure in which we are actuated at all by personal, natural or worldly considerations, we are spiritually crippled. That is unfortunately the story of the Church to-day. What is called the Church to-day has got very largely into the condition of Israel in the wilderness, and that is why Paul takes that very thing and uses it against the flesh that is in the church at Corinth (I Cor. x. 1-12). There is a warning. It is taken up quite a number of times, as we know, in the letter to the Hebrews. "They failed to enter in . . ." (Heb. iv. 6); the flesh prevailing, the Spirit

was quenched, resisted. The truly spiritual people of God are those who have been delivered from that handicap of a predominant self-life through the Cross of the Lord Jesus; who have passed through the Jordan, baptised into His death and into His resurrection. That is the kind of people that the Lord is after—those who can go up and possess, before whom the forces of evil will give way, a people truly crucified to the flesh, a spiritual Israel indeed. This lame man came into the good of that; he rose up and leaped and walked and entered with them into the Temple, leaping and praising God. What a change! Yes, it was a new day, a new dispensation had arrived for him, a dispensation of Jesus Christ known in the power of the Holy Ghost. When we say the Lord is seeking to-day, in this dispensation, to have a spiritual people, we mean this.

Inward Government by the Spirit

Now, you can be a Christian, you can decide for Christ, you can give your life to Christ, you can say you are going to be His henceforth, and then everything of the Christian life for you may become something outward. A Christian 'goes to Church,' and reads the Bible, and prays; a Christian believes certain things—the inspiration of the Bible, that Jesus is the Son of God, and so on. This is what Christians do, and you may do it all. That is very largely the Christian life for multitudes. It is simply the entering into an already framed and moulded and fixed system of things—what you do or do not do because you are a Christian. That is not what the Lord is after. If you are what the Lord is after, of course you will believe in the inspiration of the Scriptures, and that Jesus is the Son of God, and you will pray and read your Bible; but you will not, by that alone, be what the Lord is seeking. What is He wanting? He is wanting you to have the Holy Spirit dwelling within you as your personal Teacher, to be as real to you as any human adviser or counsellor could be; that you may know in your own heart that the Lord Jesus by the Holy Spirit is telling you this and telling you that, and saying, Yes, to this, and No, to that, and you are increasingly coming to know that the Lord Jesus

is not only a living Person in heaven, but a living Person in your own heart, and you are learning from Him *inside*. He may tell you through His Word, but you know it is more than mere words in a book; there is a living Person Who is saying something to you. You are increasingly coming to understand the mind of that Person, really gaining intelligence about the things of God. That is a spiritual person, and there is all the difference between just being a Christian in the way of things outward, and walking by the knowledge of the Lord in your own heart. I have said that simply for the sake of younger people, but there is not one of us who can do without that reminder. This is the age of the Holy Spirit's government. It is not, What is the thing that is usually done? What is the accepted thing? What do Christians do? What is expected of us? It is not that. Never for a moment are we, in the first place, to take our cue from an established Christian order and system; we have to go to the Lord. If everybody who came into the Church came in on this ground—that every step was something which the Lord Himself had ratified in their own hearts: they had not just taken it and accepted it because they were told they ought to: it was a living issue between themselves and the Lord—what a living Church there would be! That is the heart of what the Lord is trying to bring us to—we live in a spiritual age requiring a spiritual people, which means knowing Christ after the Spirit, by the Spirit, and knowing Him so increasingly.

We leave it there for the time being. The Lord has yet far more light and truth to break forth from His Word than those who know most ever imagined. Do not close yourself up and say that you know all truth, that you have got it all! You do not know anything yet! There is no one on this earth who really knows anything more than the beginnings of what there is to be known of Christ. It is going to take us eternity to know Him in His fulness. But He can give His fuller light to those who are spiritual, who are taught of the Spirit and alive to the Lord for Him to reveal more to them. May we be after this kind, a true spiritual Israel.

T. A-S.

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Wings

The Eagle's Nest

Deut. xxxii. 11.

THE Lord's mind for His people is that they shall have wings, wings that can cope with the elements and master them. He is altogether averse to their remaining unduly in soft lined nests, being fed, and dependent upon what comes from no exercise of their own.

I. While it remains fully true that "in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing," and "apart from me ye can do nothing," with all that is meant by such words as to the utter inability of man *by nature* to produce or achieve anything for God's satisfaction, it is equally true that, by new birth, we inherit a new set of spiritual faculties, capacities, and potentialities. In that which is imparted by this work of the Spirit of God there are therefore inherent—though, at first, largely latent—powers and possibilities, as in all infancy. These inherent potentialities must be developed, and here begins the discipline which involves us in all those struggles and conflicts and perplexities of the soul which have marked *one side* of the life of every one who has ever come to be of real account to God. See Hebrews v. 12-14.

II. The development of these faculties and powers will take place in a realm which spells disaster and death, but for the Lord. That expanse of emptiness, that abyss, into which the eaglets are hurled or forced by the mother eagle is undoubtedly, apart from her, the realm of their undoing and end. There is no doubt about it, that, leaving all foolhardiness (sometimes misnamed faith) on our part aside, the ways of Divine demand are often those which spell our complete undoing if left to ourselves. Paul could speak of "deaths oft," and having "the sentence that it was death." But as the eaglets, through many a so-to-speak last minute intervention on the part of loving concern, learned what that strange way of love was intended to teach, they gradually turned that which—in *itself*—would have been their destruction to be their servant. Their wings mastered and used the air, the wind, the storm, and made these serve their purpose. "The things which happened . . . have fallen out . . . unto progress . . ." So the Lord would teach

us, and bring us to a spiritual state so that the very works of evil and Satan are taken hold of and made to serve spiritual ends. Paul says "all things are yours," and in the catalogue he includes "death." "Death is yours"; by which—in keeping with the other things mentioned—he can only mean that death is to be our servant, not our tyrant. Nothing could be more an enemy than death, but it can be made to serve very great interests. It depends upon how we view and handle it.

III. In our training to master the elements we learn one lesson amongst many. It is that there is Divine providence and love that intervenes when things have got beyond a certain point. The fact is that many times we thought that the end had come; that, now, at length we were going out or under. We saw nothing beyond and "despaired of life." But, equally, the fact is that we have not yet gone under, and are still going on. Resurrection has taken place many times. We do not know just how it is, but here we are, and that after many years in which not a few experiences of imminent disaster have been ours. Well, He spread His wings under us and bore us up again, and He "who delivered us . . . will deliver . . . will also still deliver us."

IV. What is it all about? Yes, it is to develop capacity and ascendancy in us, and to make us spiritually responsible, competent, and assured; but in that process the Lord is seeking to get established in us faith in His Divine wisdom. The terrifying experiences are really meant to issue in our confession that the Lord knew what He was doing and did the only thing by which—despite our questioning and doubting—His end could be reached. Thus do we come to know that wisdom lies within enshrouding mystery.

V. The last word is that this education is progressive. The mother eagle knows when wisdom dictates that a respite is called for. The Lord is no less wise, and spreads our training over an extended and graduated course. The beginners could not stand what those further on are called upon to accept, and it would be sacrificing value for the Lord to let us go back to the easier conditions of earlier stages.

T. A-S.

My God and Your Need

"And my God shall fulfil every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." (Phil. iv. 19).

WE can be very familiar with this promise without observing the important contrast in the possessive pronouns: "*My God shall supply your need.*" Of course there must be a personal pronoun, for this is not a general statement concerning God's attitude to all mankind, but a covenant promise to those who are His. God, as God, may graciously remember man and may even answer his prayers, but only when through Jesus Christ we can claim Him as *our* God is there the guarantee that He will fulfil our every need.

The question arises, however, as to why the apostle associated his own name with the God Who undertook to provide for the Philippians. Why did he not write, "*And your God . . .*" instead of "*My God*"? The reason, I think, is that he wished to convey the promise in the light of the rest of the epistle. The previous chapters explain to us something of the nature of the One Whom Paul could call his God. The Philippian letter is autobiographical in a more intimate way than any other. It says little of the actual experiences of the apostle, but discloses some of his most intimate convictions and aspirations. The rest of the letter which leads up to this verse gives a very clear conception of what Paul meant when he said "*My God.*"

The God of the Sovereignty

Chapter I speaks of the absolute sovereign power of God. Viewed from the human standpoint chapter IV. 19 is almost ludicrous. A man in prison, hated and despised, is assuring an equally poor and persecuted group of friends that their every need will be richly met by his God. 'What sort of a God is this', men may well ask, 'who lets His servants fall into such shameful distress?' Chapter I sets out to answer that question.

The facts are clear. The apostle had found his whole course interrupted, his love rejected, his expectations disappointed and his character maligned. The God Who had sent him into all the world to preach the Gospel now let him languish in a Roman jail. His fellow-countrymen, whose salvation had ever been his most sacrificial concern, had refused to hear him and counted him anathema. The very Christians who should have loved him as a brother were seeking to add affliction to his bonds by their envy and strife. These were

the facts, and they could not be gainsaid. When a man has handed his whole life over to the Lord he hardly expects such an outcome. It seemed that his great work for God had been ruined, for this imprisonment was not just a painful incident, like the one at Philippi, but a dark, satanic plot to ensure that he should never be a successful and popular missionary, but only a broken and discredited failure. Injustice, malice and hatred had forged the bonds that held him, and as the years passed God did nothing to break those bonds. Add to the physical suffering, perplexity of soul and bitter anguish of spirit, and you begin to appreciate something of the calamities which had befallen Paul. Moreover the Philippians were in no better plight. They were suffering the very same conflict which they had seen Paul endure at Philippi, and now heard that he was bearing at Rome. Paul might have been tempted to doubt if God could fulfil any need of theirs, if indeed there was a God!

Yet the attitude breathed throughout this chapter is one of serene assurance. The apostle was "confident" about himself (v. 25), and about them (v. 6), so much so that he communicated this confidence to all around him (v. 14). He was constantly thanking his God. He affirmed, "I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." To him there seemed to be no mystery and no bitterness. Nothing was wrong; everything was gloriously right. If there can be no question as to the facts there can equally be no doubt as to the triumphant spirit in which Paul faced them.

This was no facile optimism, nor was it a stoical attitude of indifference. It sprang from a deeper source. The apostle had come to a definite and final conviction as to the absolute sovereignty of the Lord. Christ was magnified in Paul because He was first of all magnified to him. He had come to see that his God was complete Master of every circumstance and person. Evil, for Paul, had no power at all except God permitted it, and then the permission ensured its being positive gain to Christ. With God's servant every working of wickedness was contributing its quota to the Divine end of glorifying Christ ". . . the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel." Christ is greater than all the adversaries, therefore we must rejoice and be confident in every trial, for if we complain or lose heart we are diminishing, not magnifying, Christ. The Jews are

not greater than Christ. The Roman authorities, the unjust rulers, the false brethren; all these are less, far less than Christ, and consequently are forced into submission to Him. Paul, then, does not wait for release from prison to serve the Lord, he serves Him in prison; he does not strain and strive to be somewhere else in order to magnify Christ, but does it right there where he is! And he does not commiserate with the Philippians, but rather assures them that suffering on behalf of Christ, as much as believing on Him, has been granted to them as a high privilege. Confidence is the watchword, confidence in the complete sovereignty of God in every realm. And that is the God, says Paul, Who will fulfil every need of yours.

The God of the Cross

In Chapter II Paul proceeds to unfold a further characteristic of his God. It is that His abiding principle for reaching fulness is by means of the Cross and Resurrection. Such a principle demands a certain attitude on the part of man, a 'mind' which is in fact "this mind . . . which was also in Christ Jesus." This chapter gives a striking description of the heart attitude of the Crucified. It says little about the outward sufferings of the Cross, but reveals in a few vivid phrases the inward disposition of heart which led the Lord Jesus to Calvary. The apostle is not at this time speaking of the atoning aspect of Christ's sufferings, but pointing out how the perfect Man went the way of the Cross because He delighted in the will of God in all things.

There are four main statements as to the 'mind' which pleases God. The first, in verse 6, is that He 'let go,' He did not grasp at that which was His by right. Not to grasp at our own rights, not to keep hold of anything for ourselves even though it may be argued that God may be served thereby, to relinquish every personal advantage in thought and prayer as well as in action, this indeed means a very real experience of the Cross for us all. It is the first feature of the mind of Christ—He let go. Yet we must beware of a mystical interpretation of this attitude, for there was nothing unpractical in our Lord's walk. He did not neglect any responsibility. He fulfilled His duty. Nevertheless in a world where men were everywhere striving for personal advantage and seizing upon all that they could hold, He Who might justly have insisted on His equality with God grasped at nothing. He let go.

Next we read that He "emptied himself" (verse 7). It was thus that He became the

repository of all the Divine fulness. God meets every need of ours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. How did Christ obtain this glorious fulness? By emptying Himself. We are always longing for the fulness; do we realize that the way to it is by self-emptying? Many voices will cry out to us—as they did to Him—that we must not take that way, but rather let us be something in ourselves that we may thus serve God and others. People need what we have and are, and we must use it for the work of the Lord! What a pity it seems to the natural mind that One Who could do so much good and have such widespread influence should empty Himself! Many were stumbled as they saw the Lord Jesus pursuing His God-appointed path, for they felt that He was throwing away all His opportunities of helpful service, and losing His position of favour with men. He did not heed them: He emptied Himself. Their folly is now manifest, for it is clearly seen that this very fact has exalted Him to the place of usefulness and value infinitely transcending all that could have been possible otherwise; He has "riches in glory" to dispense. And so, in our small measure, shall we if—and that is the condition—if we are prepared to be emptied for the Lord.

The third expression is that He "humbled himself" (verse 8). The entire Gospel story reveals the outworking of His meek and lowly heart. He accepted willingly the humbling experiences which the Father permitted Him to pass through, from Bethlehem's manger onwards. We may desire to be humble, while wishing to work it out in our own way by choosing the particular expression of humility which appeals to us. When God appoints us a lowly place, or when He permits others to despise or neglect us (as He certainly will if we mean business with Him) our immediate reaction is of resentment or complaint. Christ did not choose nor did He complain. He humbled Himself to accept a life of poverty, and of increasing unpopularity; He was willing to serve as a bondman, and to do so cheerfully for the glory of the Father. He sought no high office, no recognition, no concession to His self-esteem, but humbled Himself.

Lastly we read that He was obedient (verse 8), and that He carried this obedience to its extreme limit, even to the death of the Cross. Obedience is an unpopular word in modern times. It seems, somehow, to imply inferiority and so wounds our pride. The Son of God gloried in being obedient, showing that He at least, indeed He alone, was free from the satanic canker of pride which is eating the

heart out of mankind. The God Who fulfils our every need is He Who expects obedience in all who claim to be Christ's, for Jesus Christ Himself was obedient in every matter.

The God of the Heavenly Glory

Philippians III reveals a further aspect of Paul's experience of God in that he had found Him to be the God of heavenly glory. The writer's life story, as depicted in this chapter, describes two different men, Saul of Tarsus and Paul the apostle. They both had a God, Who in reality was the same Jehovah, but their whole conception of and attitude towards Him were in such violent contrast that we may almost say that they had two different Gods. Saul's God was earthly (even though presumed to dwell in heaven), whereas Paul's was utterly heavenly (even though His servants were here on the earth).

The realm of Saul's religious life was altogether of the earth. Everything depended upon who you were, where you belonged, what you achieved and who approved of you. In each of these matters Saul had reason to feel quite satisfied with himself. For him the glory of God was entirely bound up with earthly localities and standards. For this reason he hated the Christians so bitterly, for he understood their position to be a menace to his whole earthly religious system, as indeed it was. He "persecuted the church" because he felt that it was a part of his service to God to suppress all that might break the religious tie which binds men to earth. In due course Saul was born from above and so moved into another realm in Christ. His citizenship was in heaven. Earthly position and attainments did not count there; in that community men's approval and opinions were not considered, for Christ was all and in all. Paul's God had provided a heavenly sphere of spiritual fellowship where His people were all to be at home, even though in point of fact they still walked on earth, all the prizes offered to such a people being heavenly.

Now Saul of Tarsus believed that his God had many prizes to offer, and devoted all his energies to obtaining them, but they were visible and immediate, they belonged to this earth. Let us make no mistake about it, ambition for earthly prizes can be just as great among religious people as among others. Saul regarded success, popularity and fame as being rewards given by his God to those who served faithfully, and consequently regarded lowliness and persecution as sure signs of God's displeasure. But the things which were gains to him he counted as loss for Christ, not be-

cause they were in themselves wrong, but because he now sought to gain Christ, the heavenly Prize. Paul's God had surpassingly rich rewards to offer, but these were not such as the natural man could appreciate—"The excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." He did not even regard soul-winning in itself as the prize, though he was a great winner of souls. Saul of Tarsus delighted to make proselytes, for it added to his own fame. Paul, although ever concerned for the unsaved, did not seek the reputation of a soul winner, he only sought the glory of Christ. This is indeed a heavenly position, which leads surely on to heavenly glory.

It does not appear that Saul of Tarsus had any clear goal beyond this earth. His ambitions were really only leading to the grave. To die an honoured leader of the Jewish religion and to attain a prominent place among the nation's great men was the highest hope he had. How different from the ardent hope of Paul the apostle that he might win the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus! This is a surpassing prize, to have a place at God's right hand in the eternal glory. No wonder he waited for the Saviour from heaven (verse 20)!

This waiting attitude provides a very searching test of heavenliness. In any given matter is it true that we wait for a Saviour from heaven, or would it be a disappointing intrusion if He suddenly came? In how many aspects of life, even of our work for the Lord, do we want more time to realize our own cherished projects? For the Lord to come suddenly from heaven would spoil our plans; we want Him to come, but not yet. We would rather He postponed His coming for a while that we might achieve some earthly goal. True heavenliness means that the Lord Jesus is welcome at any time, indeed that while we are active in any matter our heart attitude is that we wait for a Saviour from heaven, for His coming would speedily accomplish the very end which we seek. It is this principle which governs the Lord's meeting of our needs; He is keeping the heavenly end in view, though we are tempted at times to wish that He would pay more attention to what is immediately pressing.

A Practical Lesson

In closing, we do well to notice the very practical implications of the promise as it is worded. Paul's letters usually close with a number of practical exhortations, and this is no exception, though it may not be quite so evident at first sight. He is really assuring

the Philippians that God will reward them for their faithful care of His servant. There was a reciprocal ministry, the Philippians fulfilling the apostle's need and he assuring them that his God would duly fulfil every need of theirs. The practical lesson to be gathered from the Philippians' attitude which evoked this assurance is that they were not worrying about their own needs, but rather forgetting themselves in devoted concern for the Lord's needy servant. We do not find the Lord providing for us while we are concentrating on our own affairs, praying and striving that our needs may be met. From the very first days of their new life in Christ the Philippians set themselves to

minister to the Lord's needs in His people. They forgot themselves and out of "deep poverty," even "beyond their power," they gave sacrificially to the Lord by caring for His servants. Their attitude was outwards to the needs of others and not inwards in self pre-occupation. To such a people the promise was given that the Lord Whose interests they served in their ministry to His servants would in His turn take full responsibility for every need of theirs. If the servants of God find their needs met through us, we may rest assured that their God will fulfil every need of ours.

H.F.

Four Greatnesses of Divine Revelation

VIII

THE GREATNESS OF THE CHURCH

Reading: I Chron. xxviii. 2-7, 11-13, 19; xxix. 3-5; II Chron. ii. 1-2; Eph. i. 4-6, 11, 12, 17-23; ii. 7, 19-22; iii. 10-11, 20-21; iv. 1, 4-5, 13-15; Eph. v. 25-27.

SO we come to the third of those greatnesses of Divine revelation—the greatness of the Church, a greatness which, it is regrettable to think, so very few of the people of God have seen. There is a painful slowness amongst Christians to apprehend the great purpose and intent of their salvation, to know and to understand the nature of their high calling; and it is in this connection that there is a great divide between the people of God. Christianity at its best has very largely become a general thing, a matter of being saved and of going on in a general way as Christians, but not recognizing that in God's mind we are saved with a mighty purpose—not just to be saved and then to be occupied with getting others saved, and stopping there. Both of those things are good; they are fundamental and essential, but they are only the beginning. From that point, something quite different begins—what Paul refers to here when he says, "I . . . beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called"; and around that phrase—"the calling wherewith ye were called"—he gathers all these immense things about the Church; these immense things which, as to the backward aspect, reach far back over the ages; as to the upward aspect—"in the heavenlies," with a vocation which is now heavenly; and then the onward aspect—"the ages to come." These are phrases which indicate the calling wherewith we are called, but how few of us have really apprehended it!

We could say very much about the tragedy of the loss of that vision, the loss of that Divine revelation, and of the building up of something which has made it well nigh impossible for multitudes now to move into that calling, bound hand and foot as they are by a tradition and by a system of things which leaves responsible people not free, too much involved—too much involved for their very livelihood—to move into God's full thought. We shall not pursue that line. It is better for us to keep to this positive presentation of the thought of God, and use our time in seeking to approach—for it will hardly be more than to approach—this matter of the greatness of the Church.

We have been thinking about the greatness of Christ. We spent hours in contemplating that greatness; and then the greatness of the Cross—the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the range and the content. When we come to consider the greatness of the Church, that greatness is because the Church takes up those other two greatnesses; that is, the greatness of the Church is the greatness of Christ and the greatness of His Cross. They give the Church its real character. We took the type with its magnificence and fulness of presentation, its redundancy of wealth—Solomon as bringing Christ into view typically, remembering the Lord's own word, "a greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. xii. 42). But we need to remember also that Solomon came forward and into view in relation to the house of God. That was really what brought him to light; that was the reason, the occasion, of Solomon's prominence. David had it in his heart that a house should be built. That was a Divine thought. "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart" (I Kings viii. 18), said the Lord

to David. It was in his heart from the Lord, so much so that the Lord entrusted him with a revelation in fulness, completeness and detail, of that house. There is a remarkable statement; David said, "All this have I been made to understand in writing from the hand of the Lord" (I Chron. xxviii 19). You cannot explain that. It was clearly a Divine intention, and it was out of that Divine implanting and Divine unfolding that Solomon came on the scene at all. He was to be the one to whom it was entrusted for fulfilment. His glory was intended to be a related glory, his greatness a related greatness. In other words, the house which he would build would be the embodiment and presentation of his own glory and splendour. What Solomon gathered, what he was given by the Lord in every way, would come and find its central embodiment and manifestation in the house which he would build.

Of course, we at once leap over to that superlative utterance of the Apostle—" . . . unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever" (Eph. iii. 21). This letter to the Ephesians is the counterpart of this narrative in Chronicles in showing that the Church, as the Body of Christ, is the vessel chosen of God, appointed and revealed by God, to be the embodiment of the glory and greatness of Christ—the vessel, the vehicle, by which all that Christ is will be made known through the ages of the ages; and there is a true sense in which the revelation of Jesus Christ and the bringing of Him into view by God is a related thing. The reason for it is to get this elect, fore-known and fore-ordained company in which God in Christ would be made known to a wondering universe. ". . . now unto the principalities and powers . . . through the church . . ." (Eph. iii. 10). So, as the house was the manifestation of Solomon's greatness, so the Church is conceived by God to be the manifestation of the greatness of Christ.

Having said that as giving just a glimpse of this greatness (and of course for anything like an adequate appreciation it requires all that we have been saying about the greatness of Christ) we remember also the greatness of the altar and the sacrifice which came into view with Solomon—the immensity of the offering made to God at that time. The greatness of the work of Christ in His Cross indicates how great the Church must be. If Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it—and if that was a sacrifice, an offering, compared with which the tens of thousands of bullocks and sheep offered by Solomon are as nothing, a sacrifice

so great that the type pales in comparison—if the work of the Cross of the Lord Jesus is so great, is not that a further indication of how great the Church must be? It has, by His own parable, been called a "pearl of great price" (Matt. xiii. 46), and to secure it He, the Divine Merchantman, let go all that He had—and He had an 'all' which no merchantman in the history of this world has ever possessed, a wealth and a fulness, a glory which He had with God before the world was, something indestructible, great and wonderful. Seeking goodly pearls, when He had found one of great price He sold all to get it. We cannot understand that, it is beyond us, but there it is; it is Divine revelation. And the Cross was the price of the Church. For some unspeakable reason, the Church stands related to God in value like that. Christ loved the Church, the Church of God which He purchased with His own blood. It is evidently a very great and wonderful thing.

Features of Christ Taken Up in the Church

Now we must look at some of those features of Christ which are taken up in the Church, in order that we may know what this Church is that we are talking about. What is it? Well, if it takes up the things which are true of Christ, then what is true of Him is, in the mind of God, to be true of the Church; and it is true of the Church which is in God's eye.

(a) His Eternal Being

And the first feature of Christ upon which we dwelt when we were considering Him was His eternal being, the eternal conception. We need not go again over the ground of the eternal Sonship of Christ. All we need say about that is that He was before the world was, He was before the order of time was instituted in the establishment of those heavenly bodies by the government of which time exists—years and months, day and night, summer and winter. These are all governed by heavenly bodies, and these are time factors. Before they were, He was, for He created all things. This word 'eternal' in our usage simply means that going back and going on beyond time, beyond marked periods, beyond history. That is true of Christ. But this letter to the Ephesians says that that is true of the Church. "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world . . . having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself" (Eph. i. 4-5). As we have before pointed out, this letter to the Ephesians is not set in time; it will have its effect upon time matters, the practical matters of everyday life,

of our walk and conduct here on this earth; but it is set in the timeless realm. It goes back, and it goes on; it bridges all time in the Divine conception. That is where this letter is set, and, until we recognise the implications of that, we have no real apprehension of the Church; and when we do recognise that, what nonsense all this 'churchianity' becomes, how small and petty, and how we feel that from God's standpoint we are just playing at some game of churches when we make so much of what has traditionally come to be called 'the Church.' One real Divine glimpse of the Church, and all that other becomes paltry, petty, foolish, and a mighty emancipation takes place inside of us—but it requires revelation. We are coming to that in a moment.

Eternity—what does that say with regard to the Church? Well, exactly what we said concerning Christ's eternal Sonship. He called Himself the I AM, and the Jews at least were shrewd enough to grasp what He meant. "... he . . . called God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (John v. 18). So He did. Of course, they did not believe it and would not have it, but they saw what He meant. "Before Abraham was born, I am" (John viii. 58). We said in that connection that Christ as the foundation, as the rock, as the basis of everything, is founded, planted and rooted in eternity, and nothing that time can bring can affect that. He is outside of it all, He is over it all, He is beyond it all. Nothing that can come in, even with Adam's fall and all its consequences through history, can interfere with that. The Church takes that feature of the absolute stability of Christ. It is something outside of time, before the world was, chosen in Him. The stability of the true Church according to God's mind is the stability of Christ Himself. This thing, on God's basis, in God's realm, is an immovable and indestructible thing. That is not true of anything else. Oh, the stability of being there in God's thought! Survival is certain, and more than survival. We sing the old hymn sometimes—

"Crowns and thrones may perish,
Kingdoms rise and wane;
But the Church of Jesus
Constant will remain.
Gates of hell can never
'Gainst that Church prevail."

"I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. xvi. 18). That is saying of the Church what He said of Himself—"I am . . . the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive

unto the ages of the ages, and I have the keys of death and of Hades" (Rev. i. 18). The Church embodies the eternity and indestructibility of His very life.

(b) The Mystery of His Heavenlyness

Next we spoke of Christ in His heavenlyness. "I came down from heaven" (John vi. 38). Again you need to gather up that constantly reiterated statement which He made about His heavenly origin. Here in this letter the Church is set forth so strongly, with such emphasis, as being like that. "Raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenlies, in Christ Jesus" (Eph. ii. 6). We spoke about Christ's word to Pilate—"My kingdom is not of this world" (John xviii. 36). I was struck by the last few words of I Chron. xxviii. 5—"He hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel." It was not the kingdom of Israel; it was the Kingdom of God over Israel, God's Kingdom over Israel. "My kingdom is not of this world." In other words, My Kingdom is God's Kingdom—much bigger than this and beyond this: not of this world, that is, not natural. We sought to point out the perfect 'other-ness' of Christ from everyone else in this race. How utterly other He was and is, as out from another realm altogether! And that is true of the Church, it is quite other, something altogether different from what we are familiar with. Our word about Christ is true of the true Church—that He passed through this world unrecognised, unknown, and making the positive affirmation that "no one knoweth the Son, save the Father" (Matt. xi. 27). There is a mystery here. That word 'mystery' used so much by the Apostle, particularly in this letter, is a most difficult word to explain. We have to resort to a paradox whenever we try to explain it, for mystery, 'mysterium,' simply means manifestation in a hidden way. That is a contradiction, that is a paradox, but that is the essence of the word. God is manifested, but in a hidden way. "No one knoweth the Son, save the Father," and yet, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." He is manifested as God in Christ, but in such a hidden way that it demands an act of God in specific revelation to see Jesus Christ. You cannot see Who Jesus Christ is truly unless God acts sovereignly and opens the eyes of your heart. That has been demonstrated by His whole life here on this earth. When one Apostle was able in a moment of revelation to say, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," the rejoinder was, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for

flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father" (Matt. xvi. 17). But it passed, it was but for a moment, for not long afterward the man who had had the revelation was found denying that One with oaths and with curses, and that three times. If the revelation had been an abiding one, how could he have done that? It was a moment of Divine, sovereign action when the mystery was disclosed and he saw. God was no longer manifested in a hidden way while that instant lasted; but then the veil fell again, and the mystery continued.

And what is true of Christ is true of the Church. It is heavenly, it is unrecognised, unknown, unless God reveals it. I want you really to grasp this. I know in what a realm of helplessness it places us on the one side—and rightly so, it is as well that it is so; and therefore what it makes necessary on the other side—that God should have a Church which exists on the basis of His own sovereign act of revelation. The purity of it demands that. If everybody could see and understand and comprehend, and the Church could be brought right down to the limited compass of human apprehension, what sort of Church would it be? That is exactly what the Devil has sought to do—to bring the Church within the compass of anybody's range of comprehension so that anybody can be in it, or think they are in it. What havoc the devil has made by getting rid of this great fact! They have done it with Christ, and made Him the Jesus of History, with unspeakable loss. Very largely Christianity is in its appalling state to-day because of this mishandling of the Person of Christ, trying to constitute everything upon the basis of the Jesus of History. The great reaction from Paul back to Christ is simply to try to bring things down to this earthly, human level which everybody can understand and grasp. 'We cannot follow Paul, he is so mysterious, other-worldly, remote; let us get back to the simple Jesus of History, the Jesus of the Gospels!' It is simply jettisoning the thing which is essential for bringing to God what His heart is set upon. "No man can come unto me, except it be given unto him of the Father" (John vi. 65), said the Lord Jesus. "No man can come unto me." It demands a Divine, a sovereign, act on God's part to bring any man or woman really to Christ. You cannot come just by choice, you cannot decide to come. It is not with anybody to say that they are going to be a Christian. God has to do something in every case, it is His own sovereign act. Do not cheapen the Gospel. If we do, we shall open the door so wide that we shall be glad

after a time to get rid of that which has come in. The Church, in its heavenly character taken from Christ, is something that can only be entered by revelation, because it can only be known by revelation. "No one knoweth . . ." We can only state these facts. No teaching can accomplish it; we are powerless in the matter. All that is given to us is to state Divine facts; it is for God to reveal. But, thanks be unto God, He has revealed and He does reveal; and some of us can say He has shined into our hearts in this matter, and the revelation of Christ and of the Church has made an immense difference in every way.

(c) Manifesting the Features of the Divine Person

The revelation of God in Christ is carried on in the Church in exactly the same way as with Him, in this sense—that God has revealed Himself Person-wise. The letter to the Hebrews opens with—"God . . . hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in a Son"—Son-wise; that is only another way of saying Person-wise. The only adequate revelation of God is personal. God cannot be really known by the things which He says, however many they may be. There is such a difference between mental, intellectual apprehension and conception of God, and living, heart-transforming apprehension. God must come to us Himself in a living, personal way if we are to know Him livingly, actually. You may read a biography or an autobiography, and you may afterward say that you thereby know the person concerned; but how often it is true that, when you actually meet that person, there is something that was not there in the book, and which makes all the difference. You were not really changed and transformed by reading the book. You had impressions, but they did not make any difference to you actually in your very life and nature; but you meet the person and the impact of the person makes a deep impression, and has a great effect. That is so often the case; but that is a poor illustration. God's revelation unto life has had to be Person-wise. He has come in the Person of His Son, incarnate, and if you really touch the reality of Christ in the Spirit there is a tremendous result. You know how this is borne out in the accounts in the Gospels. There were times when crowds thronged Him, pressed upon Him in closest touch, but nothing happened to the crowds. But in the crowd there was an individual in deep and desperate need, who had faith and said "If I do but touch his garment, I shall be made whole" (Matt. ix. 21). There was some spiritual link between that one

and Him which did not exist between Him and the rest of the crowd thronging Him, and that one by the touch found, not the Jesus of History, but the Christ of God; found not merely the Man of Galilee, but the real Divine Person. It is difficult to explain and define, but you can see there is a difference. That is the only sufficient revelation of God—Person-wise.

That is taken up in the Church; that is the real meaning of this definition of the Church—"the church which is his body." "Gave him to be head over all things"—not 'of the church,' though that is true—but 'to the church.' The Church, coming under that Headship, into that living, vital relationship with Him as Head, comes into the 'all things' that are in Christ, and, as His Body, it embodies Him.

Now, the greatness of the Church is here, that God has ordained and appointed that the Church now, in this dispensation, should be as the living Person of the Lord, where He can be found, where He can be met, where He can be touched, where He makes self-manifestation. Rome has the 'truth' regarding this, but has dragged it down on to a temporal, worldly level; but nevertheless the fact remains—He is found there, in the Church, and only in the Church. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. xviii. 20). God can be met, found, touched, there; there is the vehicle of His manifestation. So the Church is called to be here in this dispensation, and in the ages to come, the very Body through which God in Christ manifests Himself, makes Himself known. Is that the Church that we know, that is commonly called the Church? Oh no! But that is God's thought—and how different! I have been reading a book by Adolph Keller, a man who travelled all over the world to visit all churches, to see what could be done along the line of church union. I came on something like this in his book—"I must admit," he says, "that oftentimes when I sat in magnificent church buildings, with their stained-glass windows and carved organs, I was less conscious of being in the Church of Christ than when, for instance, I was in one of those Ukrainian peasant-rooms crowded with men and women who had come barefoot from afar to hear the Word of God. These poor little congregations and churches widely scattered in the hills of Jugoslavia, in the lonely villages of Wolhynia, in the coal-mining districts of Belgium, in the taverns and barns of Czechoslovakia—these churches truly humble us, because they show us again

and again the true poverty and the true riches of Christ, and that in a way impossible in the securely established, self-sufficient church that we know to-day." Then he makes this statement—"The entire Church no longer represents its nature as originally intended, neither is it able to do so." How different from the Church of God's thought! The true Church is nothing less, in the intention of God, than Christ Himself present and going on with His work, now without those earthly limitations of His life before His death and resurrection. The Christ risen, ascended and exalted in all the fulness which God has put in, is now in the true Church, and that Church exists. I say, you cannot identify it; you can only see where two or three are gathered. You cannot say of this or that or some other thing called 'the Church' that that is the Church. No, the true Church is still this mysterious thing. It is Christ in active expression. How great is the Church if it is Christ! I say, we can only state the facts. There they are. What we have to do next is to pray to the Lord: O Lord, reveal the true Church and save me from the caricature!

(d) A Vocation for a Day to Come

There is one last word just now. It concerns that always-present and always-governing factor about Christ which is not taken sufficient account of, I think, in its meaning. You notice that when Christ was here His aspect was always the forward one. He was always thinking and talking of a time to come. That is a governing factor and feature of Christ. "*In that day . . .*" (Matt. vii. 22, etc.). He is looking on, talking about a coming day. All the time His eyes are upon the distant horizon and He speaks of what will then be—then you shall know, then you shall see, then all will be manifested, then all that has been so hidden and mysterious will be perfectly clear. When you pass into the Epistles you find the same thing dominant in the case of the Church. Mighty things now, big possibilities now, big issues and responsibilities now; the Church is now, even now, unto principalities and powers an instrument of the revelation of the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. iii. 10). But the onward look is prominent, governing everything. ". . . that we should be unto the praise of his glory" (Eph. i. 12); "that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. ii. 7); ". . . unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations of the age of the ages" (Eph. iii. 21). I am

only bringing that in here at this moment with this object—to remind you of the tremendous end to which the Church is called. How great the Church is in the light of the vocation which it is to fulfil! What a great vocation! We might spend much time considering what the calling of the Church is, or is going to be, in the coming ages; but we must be satisfied for the present with making this one observation. It is one thing to be a citizen, and a blessed citizen, of a noble country and of a noble king. There may be many blessings in that for which to be grateful, but it is an infinitely greater thing to be a member of the king's household and family, a member of the reigning house. And that is the calling of the Church—not only to be inhabitants of the land, but to be members of the reigning family. We are called with that calling, to be in that inner circle. "The nations . . . shall walk in the light of it" (Rev. xxi. 24) is a way of putting it. The Church is this specific company, elect from all eternity to all eternity, not just to be something in itself, to know satisfaction and grati-

fication, but to be instrumental in the hands of God in serving Him in His universe throughout all the coming ages, in close relationship with His Throne. How great the Church is! Well might the Apostle, in seeing far more than we have ever seen, say, "I . . . beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all lowliness and meekness" (Eph. iv. 1-2). Then he brings that walk into touch with common things of everyday life, and he says: If you are a true member of the Church and have a true apprehension of it, you will not be a bad father or mother, a bad husband or wife; you will not be a bad master or mistress or servant. All this will be affected by your spiritual apprehension. How practical it is! There are so many people who have high doctrine, and they are poor Christians; who have all the truth, but they are bad employers. That is not the Church. May the Lord Himself open our hearts and give us that touch of sovereign grace, that we may see the truth and be conformed to it.

T.A.-S.

For Boys and Girls

Gospel Messages from the Antarctic (No. 7)

"Ye have not, because ye ask not" (James iv. 2).

"Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John xvi. 24).

BEFORE going any further, will you please read the thrilling story in Acts xii. 1-19? I want you to notice especially verses 12 and 5:—

v. 12. "Many were gathered together and were praying."

v. 5. "Prayer was made earnestly (or, without ceasing)."

There are many mysteries in connection with prayer, and the above verses suggest two of them:—

1. Why did the Christians in Acts xii—and why do we—need to *gather together* to pray? Is it not sufficient if we each pray alone?
2. Why did they—and why do we—need to *keep on* praying about a matter? Why does not God answer at once?

Now I am not going to attempt to give you direct answers to these questions, but if I tell you an Antarctic story I think you will be able to *feel* the answers even if you cannot really explain them in words.

When Captain Scott and his party sailed

South from New Zealand they at last reached a point where the sea was largely covered with thick ice, and the ship could go no further. There she lay alongside a large sheet of ice, just like a ship alongside the quay in a harbour. Some of the men disembarked and walked on the ice, one of them having his camera with him to photograph anything of special interest. Suddenly he saw in the water close to the ship a number of creatures known as killer whales—great sea monsters about 30 feet long, with enormous heads and mouths, and possessing what is said to be the most terrible and fearsome set of teeth in the world. These whales live in large numbers in the Antarctic seas, and go about in packs up to at least a hundred strong. They feed upon other creatures such as seals and penguins. One bite from those awful teeth and that would be the end of any poor victim. The photographer saw the whales swimming in the sea and noticed that from time to time they lifted their heads out of the water as if to take a good look round about. He became tremendously interested and was very busy preparing his camera to take a photograph of them, when, all at once, as if acting upon a word of command, all the whales disappeared. There was a moment's pause, and then came a series of terrific bumps under the ice on which the ex-

plorer was standing. Bump, bump, bump! Bang, bang, bang! The men on the ship could hear the booming noise as the whales rose and struck the ice with their backs. All at once the sheet of ice began to break into pieces, and up from the water that separated the pieces appeared here and there the cruel head of a whale, with mouth open ready to devour anything within reach. The photographer waited no longer, but fled for his life, and managed to get back to the ship; and the whales, being disappointed of the meal they had hoped for, departed.

The writer of our book says: "The facts that the whales could display such deliberate cunning, that they were able to break ice of such thickness (at least 2½ feet), and that they could act in unison, were a revelation to us. It is clear that they are endowed with singular intelligence . . ." Yes, indeed—the whales seem to be wiser in their world than we do in ours. I am quite sure that the same result would not have been obtained if first one and then another whale had come along and struck the ice once or twice and then turned away because nothing happened. They knew the secrets of successful attack and can teach us a great deal, especially about prayer. There are some very important differences between the whales' knocking on the ice and our praying to our Father Who is in heaven, but we will not deal with those now. What we want is to see how the story helps us to answer the questions which we asked at the beginning.

Firstly; why come together to pray? The whales show us the value of acting 'corporately'—that is, all together, as a team, as one body. There is a wonderful strength gained from acting together. We know this is true in ordinary matters of life and it is very specially true in spiritual things. We greatly need one another, and any Christian who thinks he can get along very well on his own is making a great mistake. We read in Deut. xxxii. 30 that "one shall chase a thousand, but two shall put ten thousand to flight." Is there not something wrong with the arithmetic of that? Should not twice as many chasers mean twice the number put to flight? But this verse says that two together shall chase ten times as many enemies as one acting alone. It is exactly like that, not only in prayer but in all spiritual things. If you don't believe it, try it! Have you been praying about something and seemed to get no answer? Well, have you a brother or sister or friend who loves the Lord? If so, ask them to pray with you about that matter, and it will be a surprise if something does not happen. Something happened for Peter in

Acts xii when the believers gathered together to pray! "If two of you shall agree . . . as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. xviii. 19).

Then secondly; why keep on praying? The whales show us the value of continuing steadfastly in prayer. We so easily grow tired of praying because the answer seems long in coming. Well—the whales kept on until the ice broke; and the Lord Jesus told us that "men ought always to pray and not to faint" (Luke xviii. 1). You see, we must not think that prayer is merely a means of persuading God to do things for us. He would swiftly answer if that were all. But He wants us to grow in faith and has valuable lessons for us to learn, one of which is that in the spiritual world, which we touch when we really pray, there are strong resisting forces that must be overcome, and that do not readily yield. Every fresh blow of the whales did something to weaken the ice until at last its resistance was broken; and in our case every fresh blow in prayer brings nearer the moment when our 'ice' will break and God can give us the desire of our hearts. Have you given up praying for something or for someone, because you have decided that prayer is useless? Will you not begin again and ask God to give you grace to pray daily until the final blow 'breaks the ice'?

But perhaps you feel that the prayers of a boy or girl are not very important, because you are only young and cannot pray very well? Don't you think it likely that there may have been some young whales on the scene in our story? If there were, I am sure they joined in—and every blow they gave would have helped towards the breaking of the ice, if only by a little. In the matter of prayer, though, there is a very big difference to be noted. One of the most wonderful things about prayer is this, that when even the feeblest person truly prays to God, *it is the power of God Himself* that comes into action—not the power of the one who prays. The Lord Jesus said: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and *it shall be done unto you*" (John xv. 7). So even if you are only young and weak, you can be one of those who ask and it shall be done, even unto you. We have already quoted Matt. xviii. 19—"If two of you shall agree . . . as touching anything that they shall ask, *it shall be done for them of my Father*, which is in heaven." "Done for them of (that is, by) my Father"! What can He not do? There is nothing too hard for Him! The prayer of the smallest

and least among us, if it is really a prayer from the heart to our heavenly Father, can bring the power of God into action. Isn't prayer wonderful? Why don't we practise it much more than we do?

The boy or girl who prays most will certainly be the first to reach the 'South Pole'! But we must not think of travelling there *alone*. When Captain Scott went to the Pole he had three companions with him—he certainly could

not have arrived there without their help. We must travel *together*, in company with others who are pressing on in the same way; and, perhaps more than anything else, praying together will help us to the goal.

I believe God answers prayer,
I am sure God answers prayer,
I have proved God answers prayer,
Glory to His Name.

G.P.

“ God Hath Spoken ”

No. VI

“ SOME BETTER THING ”

IN our last chapter we came to the matter of “completeness” as the governing object of the faith of all those mentioned in Hebrews xi. “Apart from us they should not be made perfect (complete).” Now we take that up in relation to the clause which precedes it. “God having provided (foreseen) some better thing concerning us.” We pointed out that this being “made perfect” or complete had to do with justification or righteousness by faith. “All . . . had witness borne to them through their faith”, (“Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness”, “Wherefore . . . it was reckoned unto him for righteousness”; Rom. iv. 3, 22, etc.) thus making them “just men” (Heb. xii. 23) first potentially through faith, and then actually when the object of faith, the Christ, had come and made the work of righteousness perfect. We now have to carry that faith further as to its results.

In an earlier chapter we have dealt with ‘sonship’ as the supreme Divine revelation, brought out so much in this letter to the Hebrews. We have to return to that for a little while in our present connection. It is tremendously impressive how much referred to in Chapter xi directly relates to Christ in type and figure, and then how large a place sonship has there.

No one will dispute the typical factor of Abel, as to the virtue of the blood of Christ (xii. 24); of Isaac, as he that was raised from the dead; of Joseph, as he who was exalted to “the right hand of the Majesty on high”—three stages in the course of Christ. But sonship lies either patent or latent in so much. We shall not take this up in detail, but instances are clear in the case of Abraham and Isaac; of Jacob and Joseph; of the birth of Moses, etc. The point, however, is that sonship and spiritual fulness are the same thing,

and that is what this letter is all about. Faith is shown to be the basis of spiritual completeness and therefore it leads to sonship.

To indicate something of the nature of this sonship we take one person out of Chapter xi—David. No doubt David's faith is there connected with “obtaining promises” (v. 33). See II Samuel vii. 11, 12; I Chron. xxii. 9, etc. These promises had to do with a son, one Divinely marked out from among many sons (I Chron. xxviii. 5). This son was going to be the fullest example in type of God's thoughts as to sonship that the Bible contains. But there was a point of transition in David's life. After many years of chastening—child-training—numerous and varied experiences of suffering and trial and proving the Lord's faithfulness, the point was reached where the one passion of his life came immediately into view. For this he had prayed, longed, and planned. For this he had been in quest, and it had so possessed him as to make him determine not to go up into his bed, nor give sleep to his eyes until his quest was successful. We might truly say that for David to live was that house for God. And now, at long last, he divulges to Nathan the prophet what was in his heart. Nathan, knowing that God was with David, gave him instant encouragement to do all that was in his heart, only to have to go back a little later at the Lord's command and withdraw that encouragement and tell David that he was not to be allowed to fulfil his desire nor carry out his life ambition *for the Lord*. What a blow! What a shattering disappointment! What an opportunity for being offended with the Lord! And what an occasion for faith to freeze, and for despair to overwhelm him! Not he, but his son, should build the house. If this whole matter had been a personal interest, if it had been for his own gratification, well might he have been embittered and spent his closing days in brooding over and nursing his disappointment. But no! He is too big a man for that.

So long as the Lord gets the house it matters not who builds it, nor whether David is allowed to have any hand in it. Moreover, he will give his own treasure to help it forward. What a magnificent triumph over the smallness of man!

David Passes to Sonship

So David passes from the child-training through faith's ultimate test into sonship; and no one, after all, ever thinks of David without that grand issue of his life—the Temple and its service; and no one ever thinks of Solomon without remembering that he was the son of David. And more, how often is Christ referred to as "son of David."

Thus we can see something of the nature of sonship; it is spiritual stature, measure, greatness. It is fulness born out of discipline. Carry this back into Hebrews xi and xii. Spiritual stature is determined very largely by disinterested devotion to the Lord's interests, by how little we come into the picture, and by how much we are ready to serve the Lord's ends without any gratification to ourselves, without having our hand in it. "By faith . . . David . . . obtained promises."

What we have said above forms a fitting setting for what we have as the application of the message as found in verses 1-3 of Chapter xii.

The Race, the Runners, the Witnesses, the Captain

Before we can proceed we must correct a possible doctrinal error. The Apostle truly employs a common spectacle as his illustration. The stadium, the course, the runners, the onlookers, and the captain. But he would not have us to think that he means that the "cloud of witnesses" are those "with Christ" who are all conscious of and interested in our lives here in this world. There is nothing in the Scriptures to support this idea, and we can only believe that it would *not* be "far better" if they knew all about our wavering faith and impersistent progress. Put yourself in their place! Rather would the Apostle have us think of them as having borne witness in their lives, and in some way linked with us in the way of faith, so that their ultimate interests and ours are one. But *conscious* observers of our course—No! They do say that, in all ages, not only in this age, faith has been the law and governing factor. Faith links all ages in one goal—fulness. Well then, this is a course to be run, and everything that makes for weakness in the running must be repudiated.

We have already pointed out that in the context of the whole letter the "weight" is the legal system. "They bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders" (Matt. xxiii. 4). This refers to the endless definitions and interpretations of the Law made by the scribes or lawyers, which just keep men bound to burdens of legal impositions. No one can move freely in legalism, Jewish or Christian. The "sin which doth so easily beset" we have seen may represent the formalism which is lifeless, and to which religion is so persistently and easily susceptible.

But it may be of wider application. Weights may be anything which has the effect of bearing us down. Seeing that it is the *spirit* that is the object of fulness, the weight would be whatever hangs heavily upon our spirit. There are many things of spiritual anxiety and strain for which God has provided a remedy, and this letter refers to some of them. All-inclusively union with Christ is to find "rest unto your souls." "My burden is light." "There is . . . no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made . . . free from the law of sin and of death." "We who have believed do enter into . . . rest." What burdens your spirit so that you cannot run? There is something somewhere in God's Word that will relieve you of that.

"The sin which doth so easily beset." I find that these last five words are what is required in English to express one Greek word. That word means "standing round about." Linked with the race course it may refer to people or things which are not really a part of the race, but just stand around and—because they are not in the business—get in the way of those who are. They are "sins" in the sense that they would weaken faith and slow down spiritual progress. What is there in our lives, having an influence upon our spiritual progress, which really does not belong to this business? We must each answer that question as to our own case. The Lord's word is "lay aside every weight" and thrust away the unrelated hindrances, like a runner brushing aside the obstructing people on or around the course. Do not be put off or put back. Faith is the test of all. What effect has this or that on faith? That will decide what is to be done with it.

The Captain

When the Apostle bids his readers to look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of (our) faith, he really says more and other than our translations convey.

Firstly, it is "looking *beyond* or *onward* unto Jesus." In xi. 26 Moses is said to have looked 'beyond' (same preposition) unto the recompense of reward.

Then it is "unto *Jesus*." This is the title of the incarnation and earthly life, and its use here indicates—as the next words show—that this faith course was taken up and completed in one Who was "in all points tempted like as we, sin apart." A Man in utter dependence upon God, never employing His deity for His own support, has compassed the whole course of faith triumphantly; and inasmuch as He did it by the same Eternal Spirit as is given to us—no more, no less—it shows that *it can be done*, and there is no *need* for failure.

"The author and perfecter of faith." There is no "our" in the original text. Literally it is "the foremost leader of faith." This word is the same as in ii. 10—"to make the foremost leader of their salvation perfect through sufferings." "Perfect through sufferings." Now we are back to our word "perfect" (=complete), and He Who has been

made complete along the same way of faith as we are called to traverse is our "perfecter," i.e., the One Who makes complete. In Him this faith way was initiated, and in Him it is completed.

Now then, the exhortation, so full of doctrine. If we look at the way, or the difficulties, or at ourselves, and become occupied with them, we shall not finish the course; and even if we do, it will be slow and jerky. The focal point of faith here is to link ourselves by it with the triumphant Lord, with His perfected work, and reckon His triumph ours. It is not abstract and merely psychological, but there is a definite Divine Object—a Living Person—Whose work the Holy Spirit is ready to make good in us. When the Apostle comes to his benediction in xiii. 20 he will use the phrase "Make *you* perfect (complete) in every good thing." We leave that for the moment, with but this remark—faith fastened upon Jesus and His embodiment of a perfect work is the basis upon which "the God of peace" makes *us* perfect.

T.A.-S.

The Way

"But Saul, yet breathing threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and asked of him letters to Damascus unto the synagogues, that if he found any that were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem" (Acts ix. 1-2).

"But when some were hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them" (Acts xix. 9).

"And about that time there arose no small stir concerning the Way" (Acts xix. 23).

"I persecuted this Way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women" (Acts xxii. 4).

"But this I confess unto thee, that after the Way which they call a sect, so serve I the God of our fathers, believing all things which are according to the law, and which are written in the prophets" (Acts xxiv. 14).

"But Felix, having more exact knowledge concerning the Way, deferred . . ." (Acts xxiv. 22).

"The same following after Paul and us cried out, saying, These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim unto you the way of salvation" (Acts xvi. 17).

"This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he

spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, knowing only the baptism of John, and he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more accurately" (Acts xviii. 25-26).

"Enter ye in by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth unto destruction, and many are they that enter in thereby. For narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it" (Matt. vii. 13-14).

It is very interesting, to say the least of it, to recognise that in New Testament times the Christian life and walk became resolved into a term like this, to be spoken of as "the Way." It would seem strange in our ears, no doubt, if we heard people talking about us as "the people of the Way," but that is evidently how it was then, and it would be interesting to know just how that came about; and I think we shall not be very far wrong if we come to an opinion about it. Evidently people in those days were very much like people to-day. They were given to summing things up in a terse, brief manner, and affixing labels.

You see, the very word "Christian" was their way of summing it all up. At times we have that word mentioned. "The disciples

were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts xi. 26). Then the Apostle says, "If a man suffer as a Christian . . ." (1 Pet. iv. 16). Clearly, it was outsiders who gave believers that name, and, as we know, it simply means 'Christ-ones,' and it was shortened into Christians; it was the world who coined that title for believers in the Lord Jesus. 'They are Christ-ians!'

Evidently it was something like that that resulted in Christianity becoming known as the Way, but it was apparently the result of something they were always saying. They, or at least the chief men among the Apostles at the beginning—Peter, James, John—had heard the Lord Jesus say, "I am the way . . . no one cometh unto the Father but by me" (John xiv. 6); and they had gone out preaching to the world and proclaiming that Jesus was the Way and that there was no other way. So people had taken it up and said, These are the people of the Way. What an admission! Whether or not they meant it as a slight and said it with a sneer, what a lot there is in it for truth! 'These Christ-ones are the people of the Way.' And in both cases, whether it is Christ-ones or the Way, the result is that it is all bound up with, and inseparable from, the Lord Jesus. If we are right in surmising that that is where the phrase comes from—"I am the way," and these men had preached Jesus as the Way—then it comes right back to that—Christ-ones, people of Him Who is the Way; that is, not people who just have a way of their own, who take a way different from others, but people of a Person Who is the Way. It is the Person Who gives character to the Way. It is the Person Who makes the Way, it is the Person Who has pioneered that Way and blazed that trail. They are in the Way of the Person.

And do you not think that is probably why the Devil hated it so much? It is strange how many ways people can take with seeming success and without very much trouble. Think of all the ways that people take to-day, even religiously. You cannot cope with all the fantastic courses that people adopt. They go all their strange, peculiar ways—ways that you think no commonsense person would ever look at—but they go and they get crowds to follow them; and nobody bothers to oppose them. But here it is different. We come to that in a minute.

We are not going to say a great deal about the Way—what it came to mean so far as the Church and believers were concerned. We just look right on the surface of it, at one or two things that are very simple.

An Exclusive Way

First of all, seeing that it was the Way which was that of a Person, and not just a system of truth and doctrine, it was a very exclusive Way. There is a sense in which we can use that word safely and rightly. I think it was to that that the Lord referred when He said, "Narrow is the gate, and straitened the way; that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it." It is a very exclusive way. The Lord has an illustration for that, the illustration of the camel and the needle's eye, the name for the little gate at the side of the main entrance to the city. A merchant has arrived with his camel after sundown, and the gates are closed always at dusk. Somehow he has to get in with his camel, and so, after a good deal of argument, the porter says, Well, if you can get your camel through that lych gate, you may come in, but I must not open the main gate. So the man strips his camel of everything—everything comes off and is left outside. Then he tells his camel to go down, and the man tugs and squeezes the camel through. The camel is stripped of everything and he is right down as low as he can get. Here the illustration about the Way means this. There are a lot of things that cannot come in, and you will never get in if you try to bring those things with you. You will be stripped of everything of your old world and your old life if you are coming into the Way. Was it not that that caused the offence to the man known as the rich young ruler? "Go, sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me" (Matt. xix. 21). He went away grieved, for he had great possessions. It was simply the test of the "needle's eye," and he could not stand up to it. It is an exclusive way, and the Lord never hid the fact from anybody who was coming after Him. Except this and that and that, He said, ye cannot be My disciples. Yes, it is narrow. Well, that is only the world's view of it. That is what the world says about the Christian way, the Christian life—it is "narrow." That is how it is viewed from outside. They call Christians narrow-minded. Have we found the life narrow? Well, yes, lots of things have gone, but when you have got inside, what have you found? It is only narrow from that outside standpoint. It ought not to be narrow inside. We have missed something if the Christian life is a narrow, mean, poor, thin thing. We have missed its meaning. Oh, what a vastness, what a wealth, what a fulness we have entered into!

An Inclusive Way

Yes, it is exclusive in a sense, but it is inclusive in the Divine sense, from heaven's standpoint. It is tremendous for those who really become children of the Way. While it was exclusive at a certain point, the entering of the gate, it has become inclusive when you are inside. The Lord really is not a debtor to any man. "Every one that hath left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold" (Matt. xix. 29). I ask you, with all that it means on the side of difficulty and trial to be in the Way, would you go back to the other way, would you leave this Way? If you really would, well, I do not know what has happened to you. You really have not come to know the meaning of being in the Way, for it is a large, a full, a wealthy place. Oh yes, we do know all the testing, we do know what a lot has had to go; but oh, we would think more than twice before exchanging our present lot for the lot of those outside of the Way. Have we not had to sit down sometimes when things were getting a bit too much for us and the pressure was tempting us to think back—have we not sat down and said, Can I go back? Can I exchange this for the old life that I left? And every time it has been No, oh no! We cannot do it, it is unthinkable. There is in the Way, after all, a wonderful fulness. It is not all loss, there is a great deal of gain. The Thessalonians were people of the Way, they suffered the loss of all things; but read again the opening chapters of the two letters, and hear the Apostle speaking about the overflowing joy and the overflowing love which was amongst them. They suffered joyfully the spoiling of their goods. Why? Well, not just for the pleasure of being very Spartan, and enduring a lot of suffering for the sake of showing what tremendous grit they had. No! They found in the Way a greater compensation for all their loss.

A Contested Way

But, saying that, there is no doubt about it, it is a contested way. Strangely, all the passages in which the phrase occurs are passages relating to opposition. Paul is saying that he persecuted the Way, and the first mention of the Way is in connexion with his persecuting. "... that if he found any that were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." He did not carry it out in Damascus, but he says later that he used to do that (Acts xxii. 4)—he threw men and women, bound, into prisons (note the plural). He had been on some other expedi-

tions wherever he could track the Way. Several passages speak of how the Way was contested—as we said earlier, not simply because it was a new doctrine but because of Who the Way was. You can be a Christian of sorts, you can bear the name of a Christian, you can have a kind of profession of Christianity and not know any of the persecution. It is the temptation of many to try and be Christians but to avoid the persecution bound up with it, and there are to-day a lot of Christians, so-called, who are not in the fight of the Way. They are evading it by some means, they are hiding what they are, they are not coming out into the open with it; but here you notice it was when the Way was out in the open it was so challenged, antagonised, contested. They were proclaiming Jesus as the Way, and so they met the antagonism of the prince of this world through his subjects; and if we are really going to be true to the Way, which is only saying to be true to the Lord—to be loyal to our Master, not to hide where we stand, let it be out in the open—well, we are going to meet the conflict. We had better make up our minds about it. But there is our opportunity, and there is the Lord's opportunity, and it works good all round. It makes for tremendous spiritual increase and growth. You look for the people who have grown spiritually and become strong and you find that they are the people who have let it be known Whose they are and Whom they serve, and they have accepted the consequences of open and positive antagonism. They are the people who have grown. Look for the people who are small and weak spiritually, and you will find they are the people who are not right out in the open with their testimony. It works for our own spiritual increase and strengthening—the Lord sees to that. Then it gives the Lord the opportunity of finding out where there are those who are wanting the Way. There are a lot wanting the Way, but they will not find it until there is a lamp that shows the Way; and "Ye are the light of the world" (Matt. v. 14). If the Lord has us in a clear, open place, it gives Him the opportunity of discovering and getting hold of those who will come into the Way. That is gain. So it is so necessary for us to be right out in the open, letting it be known that we are of the Way—taking the consequences, but to very great gain all round. Yes, it is a contested way.

The Entrance to the Way

What is the entrance to the Way? How do we get into the Way? What is the gateway? It is the Cross and what the Cross means. It

is there that the laying down of our lives with Christ takes place; it is there that the stripping of this world from us takes place; it is there that the all-inclusive meaning of the Way is faced and accepted. The Cross stands there and no one gets into the Way except by that Cross and what it means. If we want not only to get into the Way but to make good progress in the Way—not all the time to be coming to a halt, then getting on a little and another halt, making very jerky and irregular progress which is most unsatisfactory—if we want not only to get in but to go on and keep on going on, then let us recognise the fulness of the meaning of that Cross, that in that Way all questions are settled as to who is going to be Master and Lord. This is what the Lord was suggesting in principle when He said that if the Master treads the way, the servant must tread it too (John xv. 20). We have it in a hymn—"It is the way the Master went, should not the servant tread it still?" But He introduced that suggestion. 'I have gone this way, the way of an utterness of letting go. Satan offered me all the kingdoms of this world and the glory thereof as a gift outright, and I said, No!' Satan will never offer that to you, he will only offer it to you in bits, fragments; he offered the whole to Christ. The Lord said, No, not a bit of it on your terms! He accepted the way of the Cross wholly and utterly. Well, you see what happened. It was not at all necessary for Him, for Himself, to go to the Cross. He was glorified on the Mount of

Transfiguration. For Himself He could have gone right through at once. He only went through the Cross for us, not for Himself. The Cross means that this world is ruled out, set aside, and all its prizes, and its tinsel, its so-called glories, have nothing for us, we are utterly for the Lord. We are here on this earth, in this world, for the Lord, cost what it may in this life. Well, that is both the way in and the way on. If we are pausing, to count the cost and to discuss the terms: if we are like those disciples before they came to the place where the Cross to them was not the loss of all things but the gaining of all things: if we are saying, as one did, "Lo, we have left all, and followed thee; what then shall we have?" (Matt. xix. 27): if there is anything of that we shall not get on very far. "What shall we have?" Rather must it be, when we have done all—"We are unprofitable servants" (Luke xvii. 10). Really, the Lord has not got very much out of us when we have done all. Well, the gate is the Cross, and it is just in the measure in which we accept what the Cross represents that we shall go on in the Way—and that is only saying in figurative language that only in that measure shall we come to the appreciation of the fulness of Christ, make spiritual progress and be of real value to Him as pioneers in the Way for others to come on. "Those of the Way." Well, with all the cost and with all the contesting, may the Lord give us that glorying in our hearts—after all, we are people of the Way.

T. A-S.

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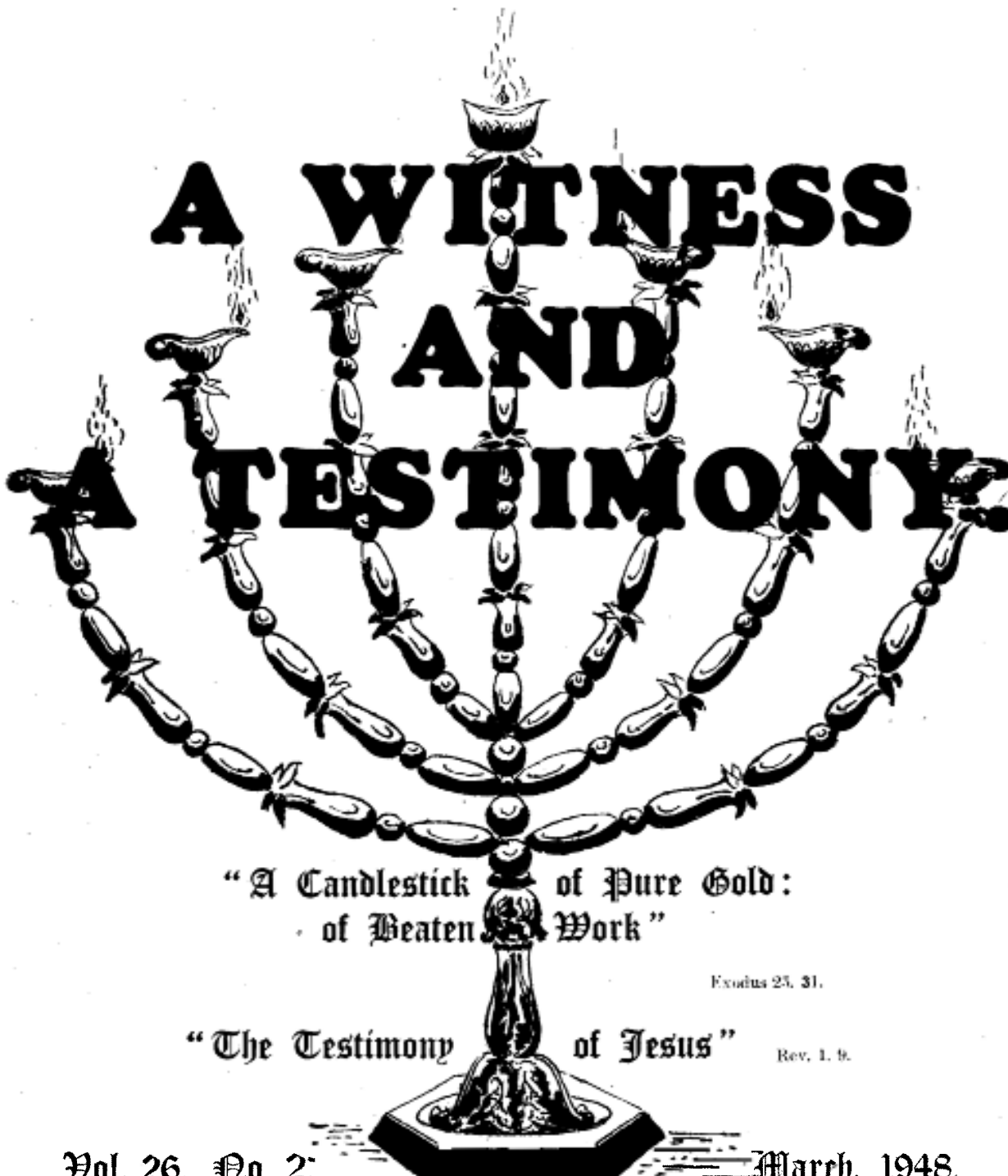
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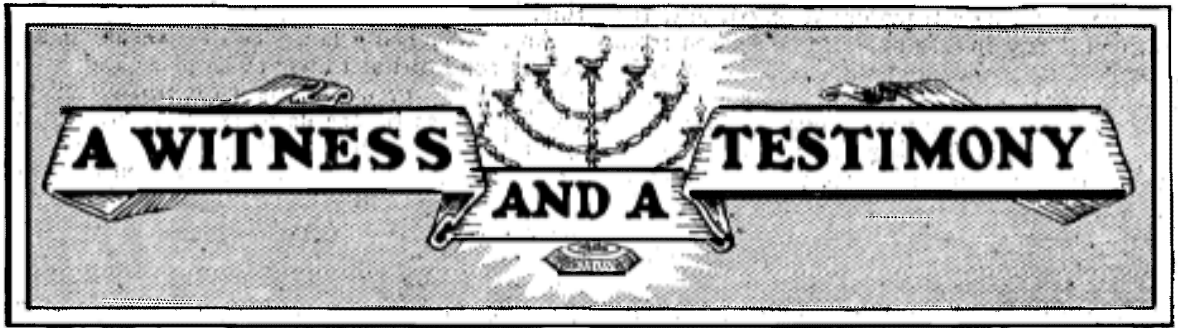
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Editor's Letter

Honor Oak,
London, England.

Beloved of God,

You will see by this letter that we have arrived back here from our visit to the United States and Canada. Our return has been with mixed feelings; on the one hand, feelings of gratitude for all the help that we have received from the Lord, the wonderful kindness from His people everywhere, and the living spiritual fellowship which has been such a help in the ministry; on the other hand, regrets that we were not able to go further and do more. Many friends and places were in our hearts when we set out, and a large number of these have had to be left unvisited on this occasion. Our time was limited and we found that very much just could not be touched. We return with some big questions to hold before the Lord about that great need and any further use we may be to Him in meeting it more fully. Let me say to disappointed friends that I truly share your disappointment, and I really sorrow over not seeing you. We travelled nearly sixteen thousand miles, addressed seventy gatherings apart from many personal and private interviews and conferences, etc. Our journeys took us to many places on three sides of a square—from New Jersey up to Toronto, then across to Vancouver, B.C., and down to Los Angeles, with a dip down to Minnesota on the return. I think that it is true to say that, in every place, without exception, it was the desire of those concerned that we should prolong our stay, or, failing that, return as soon as

possible.

The Lord was certainly gracious to us in enabling to fulfil this ministry in life and fulness. What was especially gratifying to us was the great confirmation as to the rightness of the way by which we have been led through these years. We *did* wonder how the ministry would be received, but we were not left long in doubt. What the Lord has shown, given, and taught us was everywhere received with open heart, and acknowledged to be the very need of His people. The gatherings usually increased in numbers and strength as we went on. No one would or could attribute this to any attraction but the Lord Himself, for our one determined and concentrated aim was to magnify Him, and "to know nothing . . . save Jesus Christ and him crucified," and to present Him without any human or worldly features for attraction. It was just a solid getting down to the significance of Christ. As we have been carried through on a veritable tide of prayer, and so many in various parts of the world have contributed to this, may I here say how very much we valued this. We were constantly standing into your prayers and thanking the Lord for them. Please accept our very deeply grateful thanks.

If we were asked what we feel to be the greatest need of the time, in the light of our far-flung travels this year—first as far East as India, and then over U.S.A. and Canada—we should say with strength, the greatest need of the times is a movement of God to bring His people to know the fulness of Christ! Only as the Church is brought into the good of that

will the world be adequately touched, and the spiritual forces in this universe be shaken from their hold upon men and things. The evangelism of our times needs much more behind it than it has. The Church is very busy but very ineffective. It is fighting to have itself recognised, but it has little impact upon the powers of darkness, *therefore* little also upon the world.

We have often pointed out that the things which have become the greatest evangelical and missionary forces have always been movements or ministries which brought God's own people, or new converts, into a far greater measure of Christ and spiritual life than is usual and fairly general. We could easily prove this by mentioning names, but it is not necessary. Our grief is that, in so many of these cases, the enemy has succeeded in making them other than they were at their beginnings. This is the present need, and nothing but this will counter the vitiating, dissipating, diluting, and cheapening course of things in these days, and make the Church able to complete her testimony on the earth in power and triumph. It is time for all who have spiritual responsibility to get down—as far as possible together—to consider the spiritual state of the Church, and, whatever it costs, to be willing to take the way by which the lost fulness of Christ may be recovered! There is no doubt that a situation exists to-day which corresponds to that which is found in the book of Esther; and the need is for an intercessory instrument coming to the Kingdom "for such a time as

this."

And now, being home again, we are much before the Lord as to what His place and measure may be for us in this great need. There are big issues before us to be decided, and a great battle over this ministry. The situation in Britain calls for sovereign interventions of God if we are to meet the demands which press upon us. The many of God's people who desire to come to us here for the ministry, with our Conference Centre so largely destroyed in the war and the persistent refusal of the authorities to allow any repairs to be done, is one aspect of this requirement. The new paper shortage (*for the work of God*) which stands over against the tremendously increased demand for the "Witness and Testimony" and all the other of our literature is another aspect. There are other equally difficult factors, but we are confident that the Lord will move for the accomplishment of His own intentions. Nevertheless we say with Paul, "I know that . . . through your supplication and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ . . ." So pray much with us, for we seek that those who receive this ministry will not only appreciate the ministry, but share it in constant prayer co-operation.

Remember us as to any further ministry abroad in His will, and in the strengthening of things at home.

With warmest greetings,

Yours in the bonds of Jesus Christ,

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.

Four Greatnesses of Divine Revelation

IX

The Greatness of the Word of God

Reading: John i. 1, 14; Rev. xix. 13;

John vi. 63; viii. 47; xiv. 10.

WE come to the fourth of those four greatnesses of Divine revelation—the greatness of the Word of God. Let me say at once that it is not my intention to argue that the Word of God is great. We might gather all kinds of evidences to try and build up an argument for the place of the Word of God, but what we are concerned about just now is the nature of the greatness.

By way of introduction let me say that in this matter, as in the other three which have engaged our hearts, there is tremendous need for a new understanding. I do not think we get very far in real spiritual value when we

launch out in arguments for the inspiration of Scripture. To be taken up with a 'fundamental' movement simply to seek to prove that the Bible is the Word of God from cover to cover, that it is inspired (whether it be verbal or plenary) does not get us very far spiritually. It does not mean that we make little of that, but the important thing is that by the Word of God we should be brought into all the mind and purpose of God; and that is not done by theories, or interpretations of inspiration. That can only be as we really know what the Word of God is, the Word of God being much more than something written.

The Identity Between the Divine Person and the Divine Word

Having said that, we find ourselves immediately at the point which gives the indication of

what is the greatness of the Word of God, and it is found inside that very first statement in the Gospel by John. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." As you know, a particular Greek word is used there. Another word is used in the other passage—"The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life" (John vi. 63). And in between those two statements we put this—"He that is of God heareth the words of God: for this cause ye hear them not, because ye are not of God" (John viii. 47); and yet the Lord was speaking these very words in the hearing of those concerned. They heard just as much as anybody His actual words and statements, but He said they did not hear. He said more—they *could* not hear (John viii. 43). Here we have the identity between the Divine Person and the Divine Word. In that matter, the same is true of the Word of God as we have seen to be true of Christ Himself and of the Church. Christ we have seen to be a complete mystery to the natural man, to this world as He passed up and down in the midst of men—men of ordinary intelligence and men of unusual intelligence, men of no learning and men of great learning, men who naturally may have had great sagacity and natural understanding and good judgment and perception; He moved amongst them continually and they knew Him not. As we have said, God passed incognito through this world, unrecognised. "No one knoweth the Son save the Father" (Matt. xi. 27)—the mystery of God incarnate.

In our previous meditation we passed that on to the Church. The true Church according to God's mind, according to revelation, is not a thing that you can recognise, identify, here on this earth. The true Church is something hidden, something heavenly, a mystery; even while here on the earth, it is a mystery. Its true nature and identity are hidden even from the wise and prudent, hidden from the best faculties and brains and intelligence of men. To try to make the Church to be recognised, to bring it within the apprehension and understanding and knowledge of men ordinarily, is to rob it of its essential Divine nature and to bring it down to a level where it will be stripped and shorn of its power. Upon that fact hangs a great deal of history, and it explains much of the weakness and futility to-day in what is called 'the Church.'

Now, what is true of Christ and of the Church is true of the Word of God. It is a mystery. God manifest in a hidden way—a contradiction, a paradox; but that is the meaning of mystery.

The Word of God the Unique Language of God

The Word of God is firstly God's language. That is not the Hebrew language, nor the Greek language, nor any language known to us on this earth. It is *God's* language. It is a language which no one knows, and no one can learn with any human faculty at all. In what is being now said you are hearing a lot of things which I trust are true—and I trust they are the truths of God—but you will go away and you will pass some kind of judgment upon what has been said and that is all there will be to it unless something else happens in and through the hearing, and deeper and further back than the mere listening with your natural ears. Something must come to you as from God Himself. Unless that happens, whatever you have heard will remain for just a few hours or a few days—it will fail altogether, and leave you with your own verdict and judgment upon what has been said. The Word of God is something very much other than what I am saying about it and about Him, though I am, I trust, speaking the truth. The Word of God is a mystery, it is God's language, and you have to have some kind of God-given faculty for understanding God's language. It is outside this world and outside all the nations and languages and tongues of this world; it is something different and something other, and you have to receive a heavenly faculty, by a new birth from heaven, and to learn an entirely new language from the very alphabet, the A.B.C. of heaven. You can know the Bible from cover to cover, and not know a word of God's language. Yes, God's language may be inside the Bible, and it is; but it is not that which is in the actual letters and words—it is something beyond that, it is the deeper language of God. You may read this Book with all its sacredness and preciousness, and not hear God speaking at all. To hear God's language a sovereign act of God is necessary. As we said before about the recognition, the identification, of the Son of God in Jesus Christ, it had to be so. "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father" (Matt. xvi. 17). So He Who is the Word, demands for identification this sovereign act of Divine revelation as the Word. The perception may be but for an instant, as with Peter on the occasion cited above, and then depart until something permanent has been done inside the recipient, as with him also. The fact that it is God's act does not remove man's responsibility, for we *can* control our prejudices. Preparedness and eagerness to

hear and receive is an essential factor in the Divine communication and quickening.

You see, the essence of the Word of God is its spirituality, its spiritual nature, and not its naturalness. The Jesus of History will never save you; only the Christ risen, ascended, coming in the power of the Holy Spirit, will effect anything. The Word as an historical document will never save you, never accomplish anything. It has to come in the power of the life of the risen Lord, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to effect its purpose. The spiritual is the real Word of God. "The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life." They may be spoken, but apart from an act of God you will not hear them; all will be in vain. Hence it is possible to preach Christ and the Cross and make them of none effect because preached in the wisdom of men.

The Impact of God Through the Word

Further, we have seen that Christ is the personal impact of God. When Christ really does touch, or is really touched, in a spiritual way, God is found. We sought to show this in our previous meditation by indicating that even when the multitude thronged and pressed Him, hemming Him in on every side, they did not register anything; He was to them but as any other man in a crowd. But one woman was in a different realm altogether from the multitude; one woman who had faith, the essential link with God, said, "If I touch but his garments I shall be made whole" (Mark v. 28). And she pressed her way through and touched, and was made whole that very moment, and found that in that One from Whom the multitude were deriving nothing, though in closest proximity, she met God. Her's was a testimony which stood in contrast to that of the whole multitude. They had all seen Him, all heard Him, He had been with them all, but one alone made the discovery, that is, only one met the impact of God.

And what is true of Him personally is true of Him as the Word, and true of the Word of God. The Word of God is the impact of God—again, not the outward form of letter, but that inner reality, God Himself.

God's Word His Act

You see, God's Word is always an act. Do not forget that. The Bible as written is not always an act. How many times do you read your Bible and come away with nothing? Many tell me 'I do not know the Bible as really alive; I read it, but I do not seem to get anything.' Is that not a common experience? Ah, yes. The Word of God is

something that is more inward than the framework, than its channel; and the real Word of God is God's act. "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast" (Psa. xxxiii. 9). "By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God" (Heb. xi. 3). Did you notice in that fragment we read from John xiv—"The words that I say unto you I speak not from myself; but the Father abiding in me doeth his works." You would expect Him to keep His full statement on the same line, and make the second half correspond to the first—"The words that I say unto you I speak not from myself; but the Father abiding in me speaketh the words." But He did not say so. 'Words'—'works'; and the works of the Lord Jesus were largely done by His Word. There was an utterance and something happened. "I say unto you . . ." God's word is an act.

The Bible, if we knew it aright, is not a book at all, it is a Person. It is not a collection of truths and doctrines and laws and commandments and technicalities; it is just a Person, and the Bible is comparatively useless unless it is all the time bringing us into touch with the Person—and that Person is the Lord Jesus Christ. There is only one system in the whole Bible, and that is a personal one—Christ. You may not quite grasp that, but think about it. If the Word of God is not the impact of God in Christ upon us, then it is not, in its truest sense, the Word of God. The Word of God is creative; something happens, something results.

God's Word is Spirit

Let me try to get at it in this way. What is the object of God's speaking? What is the object of all Divine revelation? What is the object of the Word of God? Only one; it is to bring back the lost relationship with Himself. From beginning to end, the one object of the Word of God is to recover, to restore, to secure again a relationship with Himself personally which has been lost. How is that done? How can that be done by human language, by words? That can only be done in a personal way. It is a relationship with a Person, a living Person. But how can man have a living relationship with the living God? As man is, that is utterly impossible. God is a Spirit and only spirit can have a vital relationship with God. If, then, the object of the Word of God is to recover relatedness with God, something spiritual has got to come about in the persons concerned to link them with God Who is a Spirit; and the Word of God, the Word which Christ has spoken, is spirit and is

life. Then the effect of the Word of God must ever and always be to quicken our spirits and make us live by Divine life, and that is what the Word of God is.

If this is true, I am sure you agree with my opening statement that a new understanding of the Word of God is very necessary to-day, and the failure to understand this about the Word of God accounts for so much weakness and loss. We can be fundamental to the utmost limit, arguing for the authority and inspiration of the Scriptures, and still be spiritually dead and ineffective. The Word of God is something more than that.

Now you see, in order to destroy the Word of God, you have to destroy the Person of Jesus Christ, and so also the other way round. That is exactly what the Devil has sought to do. You cannot separate these two; they go together. If Christ is the Son of God, if He is God incarnate, then the Word of God stands supreme. Now, to get rid of the authority and the supremacy of the Word of God, you have to undermine the Person of Jesus Christ, and you notice that in Modernism that is exactly what is happening. Why does the Devil seek to take away from Christ His essential Deity and make Him the Jesus of History? It is in order to get rid of this mighty impact of His as the Word of God for the quickening and making alive of others. So the Word goes with the Person, always. Modernism must logically follow up the reducing of Christ to the level of a great man by reducing the Word of God to the word of man. They stand or fall together.

The Word of God the Cause of all Being

Then if this is true—and I verily believe it is true—we are led to this further fact, that the Word of God, being God's language and God's act, is the very occasion and cause and explanation of our being. "By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God." He commanded, He spoke; it was His act. The existence of the world, or the ages, then, is because God spoke, something happened. Dear friends, as the Lord's new creation we are attributable to God's having spoken in this sense of very being. We are begotten again by the Word of God. It is not simply our taking the letter of the Word and trying to give some response to it, and making some decision. Oh, I do not want to be misunderstood or to be thought critical—God knows how we value and appreciate anything and everything that is of Him and that can be used by Him—but we have said before in these meditations that the great

peril of our time in evangelical Christianity is the cheapening of everything, and making it so easy by flinging open the widest door possible for anybody to come in on the easiest lines. While it is not desired to make things difficult, I do think there is a need in this matter to realise that it requires something altogether beyond the natural to bring someone back into that restored relatedness with God. It requires nothing less than this Word-act of God which brings into being, without which there is no existence, so far as relationship with God is concerned. We can only have a being as members of the new creation if God has spoken and it is done. Do not let us deceive ourselves, it must be like that. God, Who *said*, "Let light be," must shine in our hearts (II Cor. iv. 6).

And when it is like that, as we have been saying about Christ and the Church, eternity has broken into time; the advent of eternity has simply swept time out of existence, and we are linked with eternal God. Something has happened. "I give unto them eternal life" (John x. 28). New birth is the activity of the Word which produces a new creation in which there is a new life linking with eternity. What a tremendous thing the Word of God is! It is a matter of very being!

Being Maintained by the Word of God

And it is not only that. The Lord Jesus said things which had to be opened up later on through His Apostles when the Holy Spirit was come. He said "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. iv. 4). Not only is man's being to be attributable to this Word of God of which we are speaking, but his very maintenance is on that basis. The maintenance of that imparted spiritual life, its sustenance throughout, is by the Word of God—that is something more than reading the Bible. Let me ask you again, and let us be quite honest—there is room and need for honesty: I know how I am open to misunderstanding, but I am taking the risk in order to get right to the heart of things and save people from deception and a false position, and honesty is called for here—do you find always and continually that your spiritual life is sustained and nourished and built up and maintained by reading the Bible? Do you always find that you go on and grow spiritually by Bible study? The universities can make doctors of law and philosophers, but they cannot make, in the true sense, doctors of the Word of God. Only the Holy Ghost can do that; it is a spiritual thing. And honesty must

face this. There is a difference between reading the Bible as a book—yes, the greatest of all books, a God-given book—and God coming through it, and causing us to say, ‘Oh, I have read that passage many times, but I never saw *that* in it! God has now spoken to me by a text that I have known from my infancy, by a passage of Scripture with which I am most familiar; God has now spoken, and He has never before spoken to me through that Scripture in *that* way!’ That is what I mean. The Word of God lies behind the very maintenance of our life, in this sense, that something from God is coming from beyond—though it may be coming through this or that channel, along this or that line—it is coming from behind, from beyond, as something extra, something more, and finding us; and when we pass our conclusion upon the matter, we have to say that we have come, not to some new apprehension of the Scripture, but to some new knowledge of the Lord by means of that Word. There is such a thing as Divine sovereignty operating *with* the written word, making it His embodiment.

The Word of God Requires Divine, not Human, Interpretation

Now, this explains one or two things. In the first place, it explains why you can have a number of different institutions which all contradict and exclude one another, and yet all claim to be founded upon the Bible. There is not a sect or denomination which does not claim the Bible as the warrant for its existence and its order, and yet they are mostly mutually exclusive. How do you explain that? And, mark you, in the fact of the existence of all those things there is spiritual limitation. When the particular order and constitution and ecclesiastical position and all that belongs thereto is forgotten for the time being and the Lord’s people come together in any one given place, and are there *only as the Lord’s people*, you will find a great deal more life and fulness and consciousness of the Lord than when all are proceeding along the various lines of their ecclesiastical departmentalism. The Lord is met. Ought this state of things to be?

If we had the Word of God in the sense in which we have just been speaking of it—God coming through in revelation, in quickening, in His act of new creation—while there would be variety, there would be essential oneness and unity and no contradiction. Nature is a great parable of this. It is strange how in nature, despite all the colours that there are, God-given, you never find any real clash. If you tried to wear those colours in a garment, there

would be a clash. But in a garden, where they are all found, there is no clash. In God’s realm there may be endless variety, but there is no contradiction, no clash. The Holy Spirit is One, God is One, and if we get off the ground of human interpretations of the Word of God, man’s mental handling and apprehension of the Scriptures, and get God’s revelation of His meaning, then there will be a oneness, an absolute oneness, and contradiction and exclusive expression will go. You have come on to heavenly ground, you have left the earthly.

So what is true of the Church according to God’s mind as a heavenly thing, altogether other than of this earth, is true of the Word of God. When you really get on to the ground, not of the letter but of the essential nature of the Word of God—the speaking of God, the breathing of God, the working of God—you get on to another level, altogether different from the earthly, and you find that the clash and the contradiction go out. There is tremendous need for the people of God to get on to God’s level of things and away from man’s in all these matters—to get right into the heart of God’s thought and mind. It is costly. As we have said before, Christianity is such a tight system now, that it is well-nigh impossible for many who are in it—especially those who are in it officially—to come into God’s full thought, because it means so much in every way to escape from that system; but oh, where it happens and there is escape: where the price is paid: where there is obedience: where the heavenly vision is and there is no disobedience to it: where God has spoken, and you cannot but hear and know that it is God, and your heart gives the answer back to Him and at all costs you go on: then you come out into a place of tremendous spiritual enlargement, into a realm of fulness.

Faith Must Accompany the Word of God

To sum up then. The essential nature of God’s Word is akin to the essential nature of God Himself—spirit. God’s Word is spirit because God is spirit. And God’s Word as a means of communication defines the essential nature of Christ the living Word; He can only be known after the Spirit. We have said that although He was there before their eyes they saw Him not, they heard Him not, they knew Him not. Essentially, it was what He was spiritually that was His real nature. Paul makes that perfectly clear. “Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more” (II Cor. v. 16). He does not say so positively, but he clearly indicates that our knowledge of Christ now is not that of the

Jesus of History; we know Him now after the Spirit. The real nature of the Word of God is what Christ is essentially, spiritually; so also the essential nature of the Word of God is what the Church is spiritually. God is spirit; the medium or vehicle of God's speaking is Christ known after the Spirit; the vessel receiving the speaking of God—the Church—is spiritual. As the Church, we are tested by this. Do we hear more than the Bible as something written in words of men? Are we, as the Church, hearing through it the more, the extra, which no man can hear unless it is given him of God? Are we hearing that? Where that is truly found, the Church is something of spiritual power and spiritual life and spiritual growth. What is true of the Church, of course, must be true of every part of it; every member of that Body must be a spiritual person, made so by spiritual birth. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John iii. 6). In order really to hear the Word of God continually (though God may in a sovereign act make an unregenerate man know that he is being spoken to through the Scriptures) something must have been done inside us, and that something must be continually maintained. What lies behind everything with God is spiritual. He has bound Himself more with the spiritual than with the natural. I will not pursue that further.

I wonder if you are able to discern even now, by the Lord's help, the great difference, the

great need—what the Word of God really is, what its possibilities and its potentialities are, what is the nature of its greatness? It is not just a verbal statement, it is the impact of God Himself; and that impact is sovereign. Therein is the place of faith in preaching, faith in coming to read the Scriptures. It is possible to preach without God coming through—there is plenty of that—yet God has ordained to come through preaching, and every one who preaches can only preach in faith, declaring the truth of God. He is cast back upon this, that God must act sovereignly and make this one here and that one there recognise that God is speaking—it is not a man only, it is God. Hundreds may be gathered, and yet only one hear God. We are cast upon that sovereignty of God. Blessed be God, it works like that! People are able to say, and we are able to say as we look back over our own spiritual history, 'I knew the Bible well enough, I could quote it, I could analyse it, I could set it forth: but one day God came through it and smote me; from that time, the Scriptures which were so familiar to me became the basis of a new life, an entirely new position.' That is the Word of God coming through. That is what is needed very much to-day—a recovery of the Word of God in its essential, intrinsic greatness, and of the fact that the Word *is* God, with a personal impact upon us. The Lord help us!

T. A-S.

The Significance of Antioch

"It came to pass . . . that the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch" (Acts xi. 26).

EVEN a superficial consideration of the book of the Acts reveals that a new phase of Divine activity began with the introduction of the church at Antioch. The Apostles seem to have recognised this fact for, when they heard the news of what had happened, none of their number went down to Antioch, but they sent Barnabas. It seems clear, moreover, that on his arrival Barnabas perceived that God was doing a new thing, so that, when there was a need for further shaping by the ministry of the Word, he did not return to Jerusalem for any of the Apostles, but went rather to Tarsus to fetch the man whose vision was now being fulfilled. Saul had received the revelation of this new thing of God long before it had happened at Antioch, so that now he seemed the only man adequate to provide the necessary ministry. "It came to pass that the disciples

were called Christians first at Antioch." In other words it had become manifest to all on-lookers that this was a distinctive work of God. It casts no slur on the Apostles and the Jerusalem church to say that, until this time, the casual outside observers had not perceived the distinctiveness of the work of redemption, thinking doubtless that these "Nazarenes" were but one more of the many sects of Judaism.

Not a New Sect

It is true, of course, that the Jews strongly repudiated Jesus Christ from the first, but even a repudiated new sect, if it is nothing more than a sect, will eventually be accepted. The history of Christendom proves that. If it is but a work which is represented by its form and value here on earth it may be resisted but in the end it will take its place as one of the many. Folk saw the Pharisees and Sadducees, the Essenes and the Herodians and the rest, and they thought that the Nazarenes were

going to be added to the list; but at Antioch even the most frivolous observer discovered that this was not to be. This movement was something entirely new, so they gave them the nickname "Christians." The fact that this is recorded in the Word surely suggests that our attention is drawn to the significance of what God wrought at Antioch.

Having regard to the power and glory of the Lord as known at Jerusalem and Samaria, it may sound almost sacrilege to talk of having a new thing only ten years after Pentecost. But God is always having to do new things, and it is no criticism of those who were at Jerusalem that in the case of Antioch He acted apart from them. None of the Apostles founded this church. Believers had moved away from Judæa because of persecution, and in their movement had preached the Gospel to Jews here and there, until at a point some, whose names have never been recorded, for some unknown reason started preaching to non-Jews. The reason is well known to us—it was the Holy Ghost. That is why there was such an immediate, spontaneous and glorious result. Clearly then, Antioch represents something peculiarly marked out as an act of God.

When Barnabas arrived he was not merely impressed by the form of things, the orthodox teaching and the right procedure, but what rejoiced his heart was to see the grace of God in the new converts. These were the men whom the people began to call "Christians," for they could not put any other name to them. It is surely a sign of limitation when a work of the Lord can be classified and pigeon-holed. If we see what Christ is, that lifts us right out of the realm of things here upon earth. So men said, 'This is not another sect to be added to the list, we cannot classify this, it is something new, it is something different.' And the world has reason to thank God for Antioch, for the spiritual effects of what was begun there have been tremendous. The outstanding thing about them was the grace of God, which means that Christ was revealed among them. That is why they were called Christians.

A Fuller Vision of Christ

But, you may say, was not Christ preached at Jerusalem? Was He not preached by the Twelve, and by the scattered disciples as they journeyed abroad? Yes, but Christ is a great deal bigger, in all the implications of His Person and work, than most of us realise—I think bigger than the Twelve realised—so that the Apostle Paul did not introduce a new Christ, but a fuller vision with wider implications. Now it is often said that if the Lord's

servants would only confine themselves to preaching the personal message of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, how widespread would be their ministry, and how acceptable; but if they persist in talking about the Church, that offends people, and so limits the scope and usefulness of their ministry. To judge thus is to fail to see what I take it the Apostle Paul saw from the beginning, namely, that the personal message of Jesus Christ to the unsaved is the first rung of a great ladder which leads to Heaven, for there are vast and eternal implications in Christ as expressed in the corporate life of His people. This begins when the sinner is saved, when, as an individual, he finds his own personal life and sanctification and blessing by faith in Christ. We never want to leave that ground, for it is foundational, but we do want to build on this foundation the House of God, that vast spiritual expression of the eternal, universal, glorious Christ. You see, the danger was that this heavenly body should become earthbound by reason of everything being centralised in Jerusalem. That which was formed at Samaria could easily become a kind of branch of Jerusalem. But God broke in afresh at Antioch, and declared, 'this is not a branch of anything on earth; this is Christ, the living Christ, found among His people.' Thus the people called them "Christians," for they were so distinctive.

Distinctive not Exclusive

Now, dear friends, the Lord preserve our distinctiveness! That does not mean that we should be exclusive, an error into which, alas, so many of God's earnest servants have fallen. They were distinctive at Antioch but most emphatically they were not exclusive. You will find, for instance, that immediately after the verse with which we began it is recorded that believers came down from Jerusalem. They were not despised or rejected by the saints at Antioch. On the contrary they were welcomed, given a place and asked what message they had from the Lord. One of the Jerusalem prophets said, 'We have to tell you, by the Holy Ghost, that the saints in Jerusalem are about to enter a period of great suffering. A famine is coming which will be disastrous enough for all Jews, but especially severe on those who have turned from Judaism to Christ.' The response of the church at Antioch was prompt as it was generous. Everyone according to his ability sent as much as he could to provide for the needy saints of Judæa. That is the spirit; they were distinctive enough, but their hearts and their pockets were open, and they gave of what they had, sending their best men—

Barnabas and Saul—to take their gift up to Jerusalem.

So when we talk of distinctiveness we do not mean being exclusive in spirit or behaviour. We mean that what the Lord has done He has done, and it is for us to recognise it and to seek in His name to express it in every way in which we can.

A Christ-Centred People

Of course, the real meaning of this name of Christian is that they were Christ-centred people. It was just a frivolous nickname at the beginning, and only appears in Scripture with a certain sense of opprobrium, a tag placed upon the people of God. Nevertheless there is many a true word spoken in jest; many a nickname which has a lot of truth behind it; and many a caricature which draws attention to features which exist; so the people of Antioch had reasons for the new name which they coined. As they met the disciples, saw their lives and heard their testimony, there was one thing which always impressed them, namely that Christ was always kept well in view. They were Christ-centred people.

Barnabas encouraged them to this very end. When he came and saw the grace of God among them he exhorted them "that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." That is the sort of ministry which is fruitful; and what he urged they did. They did not call themselves Christians—you notice that. They were not at all self-conscious, they were not trying to be anything special, they were cleaving to Christ. They were not trying to form a group at Antioch which should better express Christ than the church at Jerusalem. They did not call themselves Christians, but the name that was called upon them shows that the whole attitude of their hearts was not toward one another, toward themselves, or toward the place, but toward the Lord. "That with purpose of heart they would cleave *unto the Lord.*"

It is very striking that no mention of any miraculous expression of power is made in relation to Antioch. Did they speak in tongues? We do not know, it is never mentioned. Were there wonderful healings taking place? We do not know; if there were, in the Lord's sight it was not worth mentioning. But we do know that for a whole year Saul (as he was then named) and Barnabas laid themselves out to preach Christ to the people, and that their teaching had most blessed results. It was not spectacular; it was not sensational; it was ding-dong persistent teaching and grounding in Divine truth. In so many movements which

are called revivals that is one of the things that is not popular. There is plenty of noise and excitement, but neither time nor patience to attend to the ministry of the Word. I am told that it was so in parts of Wales forty years ago, with sad and tragic results. But at Antioch the essential work of the ministry and of the gifts that were exercised was to establish the believers into Christ, to enlighten them as to Christ. On the return of Saul and Barnabas from Jerusalem the work of ministry continued, and was shared also by others. Its tendency was all Christward, all seeking to establish a fuller and deeper vision of the Lord among them, until the day came when this ministry of Christ could be sent out into all the world. The guidance came, according to Acts xiii. 1-2, while the servants of the Lord were gathered together ministering to Him. They did not plan a worldwide movement nor did they sit down to formulate a scheme for advancing the Gospel. They "ministered" to the Lord, a word which implies priestly service—surely one more confirmation of the Christ-centredness of the church at Antioch. The chief men made it their chief work to minister to the Lord, Who alone is worthy. Impatient onlookers might have complained, 'What are they doing there? Look at them! Men of gift like Saul and Barnabas and the rest just shut up in Antioch. Why don't they get out and do something?' Read the end of the story: what Paul and Barnabas and others of them did: and see what went out from Antioch! But the first responsibility of the church is not to see what goes out to men but what goes up to the Lord. The Holy Ghost will attend to the sending out. These "Christians" who made so much of Christ were fruitful enough in the end. Thank God for the value to the world of those who make it their first business to minister to Christ. Through the centuries there has been such a people who have made it their first call to minister to the Lord. May we never lose that attitude for it is the key to all true fruitfulness.

A World-wide Outlook

And then this name suggests the worldwide nature of their view and outlook. The idea of Christ, the Messiah, is purely Jewish. The actual word, *Christos*, is the Greek word to describe Him. The particular noun for "Christian" is a Latinised form; so we have Romans, Greeks and Jews all condensed into one name, a nickname. But what a nickname! It expresses the universal range of the significance of God's work at Antioch. And the Holy Ghost said, "separate Me *now* . . ." (Conybeare & Howson). The time has come.

There is always a time of the Lord, and I have no doubt that, at least for Saul, it was a long time coming—it often is. They had to wait; and we have to wait. But the day came when the Lord could say, 'Now is the time; separate Me now Barnabas and Saul . . .,' so that from Antioch they went forth, being recommended to the grace of God. Whenever Antioch appears there seems to be a mention of the grace of God. When they returned to Antioch it says "from whence they had been committed to the grace of God" (Acts xiv. 26). After the departure of Barnabas, when Paul and Silas went forth they were commended to the grace of God (Acts xv. 40); and that grace of God had worldwide repercussions. Such an outlook and ministry was their blessed privilege; it was also the occasion of some of their greatest difficulties; but it was their safety.

Their difficulties? Oh, yes, even if they were called Christians they had difficulties at Antioch, and very serious ones too. But what strikes me about the two outstanding incidents of a sad character which occurred there is that even they were far from being petty, but were of large dimensions. That difficulty with Peter over the distinction between Jews and Gentiles, and that quarrel between Paul and Barnabas—at least they were on a big scale; whereas at Corinth, every little person was having a little quarrel with another little person—it was all so small and despicable. That was because the Corinthians were self-centred. The church at Antioch, however, was facing spiritual issues in the light of a vast world situation, and no doubt that explains why they met the full antagonism of the devil. Peter seemed all right at Jerusalem and elsewhere, but at Antioch he became involved in a subtle work of Satan which was too much for him. He had to be rebuked openly, surely a sad occasion for the church. Thank God, though, that grace triumphed in Peter as much as in Paul, but only grace could triumph over such a tremendous onslaught of the devil. Then this other question which arose between Barnabas and Paul. According to your temperament you may take

one side or the other, but I am glad to think that in any case they were quarreling about getting on with the Lord's work, so their motive was right. I am glad, too, that the sovereignty of God so overruled that in the end all was gain. Was Barnabas right about Mark? Well, if he was Mark came into his right place in the end. Was Paul right? If he was, the effect of his rebuke stung Mark into a new position with the Lord. In any case the Lord was glorified. I feel that the real lesson of these conflicts at Antioch is this, that the outward world-wide vision saved the believers from disaster. Though they had the tremendous clash with Peter, it was the big view which delivered them from division. Although it must have been a very sad matter for a sharp contention to arise between two such servants of God as Barnabas and Paul, in any case they were so intent on the Lord's glory that the work of God went on and there was no partition in the church. Barnabas went his way; Paul was sent on his; and the work of God was furthered without any dividing up on the part of the church. There was no such condition in Antioch as was found at Corinth where people said, I am of Paul, I am of Apollos. What caused that condition at Corinth? It was just because they were looking inwards, trying to be something in themselves. How were they saved at Antioch? By looking up, by having a vision and heart burden for the glory of Christ in a universal and eternal way.

Well, the Lord did a new thing at Antioch. Again and again through the ages He has been doing new things. The devil will try to resist this new thing, and when he cannot stop its coming into being he will work all the time to drag it down to earth, making it one more on the list of old things—and there are plenty of them. Only the grace of God can keep us above that which is merely of earth, in the realm of the heavenly Christ. Therefore let us be filled with His grace, and let us heed again the word of the "Son of Consolation" that we too with purpose of heart should cleave unto the Lord.

H. F.

"God hath Spoken"

No. VII

The Approaching Great Shaking

AS the writer of this letter (to the "Hebrews") approaches its conclusion; after repeatedly giving great and terrible warn-

ings as to the peril of failure to apprehend the full purpose and meaning of God in Christ, he gathers all up into a prophetic forecast which is itself the inclusive warning.

"He hath promised, saying, Yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth

only, but also the heaven. And this, *Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain*” (xii. 26-27).

It is necessary for us to be sure that this has still a future application, and was not fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews which was imminent when the letter was written. Undoubtedly it had a partial fulfilment in that terrible event, but, as is so often the case in prophecy, was there not a double aspect, as there unquestionably was in two outstanding instances in the New Testament? One is the case of our Lord quoting Isaiah lxi at Nazareth, and stopping at “the year of the Lord’s favour,” not going on to “the day of vengeance of our God” (Luke iv. 18-19). The other is the quotation from Joel on the Day of Pentecost (Acts ii. 16-21). This prophecy was obviously not wholly fulfilled on that occasion, but only partially so.

If we look at the passage in Haggai (ii. 6) quoted in Hebrews, we shall see ample reason for doubting its already fulfilment.

“Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations; and the precious things of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. . . . The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former.”

Not one part of that prophecy has yet been fulfilled literally. If the apostle employed that prophecy in relation to the *destruction* of the Temple rather than to its filling with glory and peace, there remains much to be desired both as to Biblical usage, interpretation, and fulfilment. A spiritual interpretation of the Day of Pentecost would get nearer to the features—i.e., heaven and earth shaken: the sea and dry land (the multitudes of mankind): the nations; and the nations yielding treasures; the house filled with glory, etc. But even so we are left with the future aspect of the passage in Hebrews xii.

The sense of verse 28 is that we are in process of receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, but this corresponds to verse 5 of Chapter ii:—

“Not unto angels did he subject the inhabited earth to come, whereof we are speaking.”

The whole of this paragraph should be carried over to “the kingdom which cannot be shaken” together with “partners of a

heavenly calling” (iii. 1). It will then be seen that the “once more,” lit. “only once,” in its universal sense must yet lie ahead, and doubtless in relation to the Lord’s coming again.

The last verse of Chapter xii seems to clinch this argument—“for our God is a consuming fire,” and surely it belongs to the events of which Peter wrote:—

“The day of the Lord . . . in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved . . .” (II Pet. iii. 10).

Some of these phrases are very intelligible to us, and we are quite sure that Peter knew nothing about atomic bombs—“elements dissolved with fervent heat”; but the Holy Spirit did, and does! (It is well to read the whole of this chapter from Peter.) Peter’s words in his first letter (iv. 17) are also very relevant to Hebrews xii. 26, where he says that

“The time (is come) for judgment to begin at the house of God.”

Having, then, as we think, good ground for believing that the great shaking still lies ahead, we are able to say something with regard to its object, its need, and its call.

The Object of the Shaking

In the light of this entire letter, and, indeed, in the light of the entire New Testament revelation, the one Object by which everything is ultimately tested and judged is Christ, as being the constitution of everything in a spiritual way. God’s one inclusive purpose is to have everything constituted according to Christ. This must be organic, the very nature and essence of Christ. It cannot be by imitation, duplication, or organisation. It can only be by conception, not observation. This kingdom “cometh not with observation.” Therefore it must be spiritual. It must come from within by ‘inbirth.’ Thus, the measure of Christ as the spiritual life and nature of everything or anything working from within is the basis and standard of all Divine judgments. It will not be sound doctrine, extra truth, devoutness, zeal, many works, etc., but just Christ Himself, known, lived, and expressed, in the power and grace of the Eternal Spirit. In a word, it will be a matter of our true spiritual life as spiritual people in living and growing identification with Christ by the Holy Spirit. God has reduced His whole judgment to this. “He will judge the world by (or in) . . . Jesus Christ,” and this is not just official, but

spiritual—Christ is not only the Judge, but the standard of judgment. This is why the Book of the Revelation, which is a book of judgments, first of the Church, and then of the nations, begins with a full-length presentation of Christ the Living One. Then it shows that judgment is not so much as to *things*, more or less good or bad, but what is Christ or what is inimical to Him constitutionally.

The Need for the Shaking

We have been at pains in our earlier chapters to show that Christianity has become, very largely, another Judaism, an outward system and a historic tradition. But it has become more than this. In its principles, methods, and means, it has largely become conformed to this world or age. Were we wanting to deal with the negative or defective aspect of things, it would not be difficult to write whole chapters on the weaknesses of present-time organised Christianity; but we would rather use our time and space on the positive line. Let us, however, appeal to our brethren in responsibility to think again and seriously before the Lord as to the true nature and origin of much that goes to make up the means of propaganda and publicity of work for God. Let us take account of such things as the prominence given to human honours, glories, titles, reputations, distinctions. That men have gained these or been given them in various spheres of life—politics, philanthropy, industry, adventure, war, sport, entertainment, science, art, or education—may be quite all right in itself, but that these things should be so largely used as the ground of appeal may just imply that Christ is not sufficient as standing on His own merits, but must be surrounded by these natural embellishments (?). Must Christ be recommended or His servants accepted because of some human association of the word "great" in some earthly connection?

Again, let us be very careful, for the same purpose, of the encroachment of the entertainment feature of sacred service. "Lovers of pleasure" is an end-time characteristic, and the age is running headlong thither. Is it necessary to go with the age in order to attract? Is the Gospel dependent upon this "make-up" for its effectiveness and appeal?

Once more: let us watch that we are not carried away by the illusion of bigness. Many a once powerful instrument of God—personal or collective—has lost its spiritual value and impact when it has become big or popular. There is a Satanic snare in bigness, and we may by this illusion lose our very faculty for seeing just where God is doing his deepest

work, and how. Often, God's truest work is hidden. It is becoming difficult, if not impossible, for many servants of God to believe or understand that anything of real account can be done unless it is well known and in the public eye.

When David put the Ark upon a new cart and things went just so far and then came to an ignominious and tragic impasse, it was not due to a lack of sincerity, devotion, zeal, energy, or wholeheartedness, but because he had all unwittingly drawn up from his subconsciousness an idea and method which had originated with the Philistine diviners. Those diviners had once put the Ark upon a new cart to send it back into Israel. David had fled in an hour of weakness to dwell in the land of the Philistines, and had been infected with the methods and means of that world. When God made the breach upon Uzzah that he died before the Lord it would have been too hard and severe, in the light of the zeal for the Lord, if there had not been some extra factor. That factor was the hand of another spiritual system back of "this present evil world" of which the diviners were the representatives and servants, and whom God had already plagued and cursed. (Read the story in I Samuel v, vi, xxvii, II Sam. vi). There was no reason why Uzzah should be spared and the Philistines destroyed if the same factor obtained in both cases. No amount of zeal can save us in the end if the principles are false. But note how subtle it all was. There was not the remotest idea that things were basically wrong. The idea of bringing up the Ark (the Testimony) to its right and full place was right and according to God's mind. The earnestness and utterness left nothing to be desired. The motive and its passion were wholly commendable. But somewhere, somehow, Antichrist (in principle) was hidden in the constitution of things: the energy of the flesh, the soul-life actuated or taken charge of by that which was not the Spirit of God. If the soul, which is the natural side of man's being, is *predominant*, on any or all of its sides—intellectual, emotional, or volitional—then the door is wide open to deception; and deception, being what it is, does not mean that there is no zeal for God, but rather that it is zeal but not according to knowledge. It is only as the child of God lives in and is governed by the Holy Spirit through his renewed spirit—not *firstly* his soul—that he will be made aware of "the things that differ," even in his service for God. David eventually was shown what the Holy Spirit had indicated in the Scriptures as to God's principles of service, and he found by tragic

experience that spiritual principles are more important than zeal and energy, although these latter were no less when the true basis was established. Satan is very subtle and will espouse our zeal for God if by so doing he can eventually bring shame and dishonour into God's testimony.

God sees through it, and would warn us of it. The trouble so largely is that, as in David's case, the drive and abandon associated with a great idea for God just ride rough-shod over quiet waiting upon God and enquiry of Him as to His mind concerning the means and methods to be employed. The point at which disaster will befall very much that is engaged in for God in all sincerity is that which leaves no time for quiet detachment, for unhurried waiting upon God. There may be prayer, but it is prayer with a drive of work behind it, instead of the other way round. The question is, Did you get that method, that means, that programme in the secret place with God, direct from Him? Have you put everything back until all heat and hurry have been subjected to the judgment of the Holy Spirit? Or are you just getting on with it because it is for the Lord?

Do you think that judgment is upon men and things as such? Was there not enough genuine devotion to the Lord in David, Uzzah, and all the others to prevail against that terrible breaking in of God? Would the Lord not be slow to anger if that were all? Oh, why then this severity of God? Why must judgment begin at the house of God? It cannot be because of a greater or lesser degree of Christian goodness or zeal. There must be something more in it than that! Yes, there is, and we have touched upon it. The "eyes of

flame" (Rev. i. 14), "the consuming fire," have beheld an insinuation—in principle or element—of the great Evil One, who will deceive even to the point of simulating Christ or "an angel of light," in order that—sooner or later—the real Christ impact shall be neutralised.

This is all so relevant to our consideration in these chapters, and is undoubtedly behind the terrible nature of the warnings in this letter. We could never over-emphasise or exaggerate the terrible consequences to Christians and Christian work of failure to take sufficient account of the significance in verse 12 of Chapter iv linked with verse 9 (last part) of chapter xii.

But when all has been said both there and here, *will* you stop, *can* you stop, to get a sure place in the Spirit, or are you so involved, committed, driven, that the "still small voice" of the Spirit has no chance of being heard? It is in this whole realm of things that the great shaking will have its *first* effect. I was recently told in America on very good authority that fifty per cent. of the missionaries who go to the mission field never return there after their first furlough, they cannot stand up to it. If that proportion were only half the truth it would be a startling—though small—sample of what the great shaking will mean in the matter of discovering how much there really is of Christ back of all early enthusiasm and well-meaning intentions. Not less zeal, devotion, and energy, but more depth, spiritual measure, and Divine understanding lies behind the appeal of this letter—"Let us go on to full growth."

With that appeal we shall deal particularly in our next chapter.

T. A-S.

For Boys and Girls

Gospel Messages from the Antarctic (No. 8)

"*Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?*" (Matt. viii. 26).

"*Fear not, only believe*" (Mark v. 36).

CREVASSES were a continual trouble to our explorers. A crevasse is a crack in the surface of the ice. Sometimes it may be only a few inches wide and deep, so that it really is not a serious danger at all. But sometimes it may be yards wide, and so deep that you cannot see to the bottom of it. If a man fell into such a crack he would almost certainly never be brought up again alive.

But the worst crevasses are not the ones that can be seen. After all, with a certain amount of trouble you could probably avoid those. But very many cannot be seen. In the Antarctic, where snow very often falls, it is quite a common thing for a layer of frozen snow gradually to settle over the top of a crevasse—even a big one—completely hiding it. If you were to walk over the bridge of snow it might bear your weight and you would get safely over without knowing that you had crossed a crevasse; but if the bridge gave way, down you would suddenly go. Happy for you if it were not a deep crevasse, so that you could scramble, or be pulled, out again!

Nowadays, explorers in the Antarctic do most of their journeys by aeroplane, so that crevasses do not trouble them very greatly. But in Capt. Scott's day aeroplanes had scarcely been thought of, and every yard that he and his men travelled had to be on foot. Literally thousands of miles were covered over the ice, the explorers taking their provisions with them on sledges which were pulled either by the men themselves or by ponies or dogs. They often covered the same routes, and learned after a time in which areas the crevasses were worst, and they of course avoided those areas as much as possible. But even in what they thought were safe areas they often stumbled into one. They could never assume that there were none, and needed to be always watchful. But some areas, even though known to be badly crevassed, simply had to be crossed again and again as there was no other way forward, and either the explorers must go on and take the risk or turn round and admit defeat and go home.

On one occasion a team of dogs, harnessed one behind the other and drawing a sledge, were running steadily forward without any particular danger apparent, when suddenly they disappeared one by one, just like dogs following one another down a hole after some animal. They had fallen into a crevasse, and if the explorers had not acted very quickly the whole party—dogs, men and sledge—might have been lost. On another occasion one man fell into crevasses eight times in 25 minutes! Happily his companions were able to rescue him each time. How would you like travelling over such ground? Would you go restfully forward without being afraid, or even anxious, or would you be too nervous to venture at all?

For an explorer to arrive home and have to say, "I did not make any discoveries because I was afraid to go forward in case I fell into a crevasse" would have been a poor confession to make, and most people would call him a coward. Not one of Capt. Scott's men was like that; but I am not so sure about us Christians. Are we not very often afraid to go on?

Afraid of what? Why, that if we do what we know God wants us to do we may find ourselves in trouble. And Satan is only too ready to make us afraid. He whispers all kinds of doubt into our hearts, trying by any means to convince us that it is not safe to trust God. Shame on us that we listen so readily to his voice! Do you remember how the children of Israel listened to that voice when their spies came back and reported what they had seen in the land of Canaan? The spies said that it was truly a good land but that they had seen

giants there; and then they said, "We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we" (Num. xiii. 31). Caleb and Joshua—men who were ready to trust God—said, "Let us go up at once and possess . . . for we are well able to overcome . . . If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it unto us" (xiii. 30; xiv. 8). But the fainthearts won, and made the rest of the people afraid so that they refused to go forward, and they all died in the wilderness as a result. What terrible consequences may follow if we are afraid to trust God!

You will remember another scene—a great Philistine giant defying all the armed men of Israel, who, when they saw him, "fled from him and were sore afraid" (1 Sam. xvii. 24). And there was a young shepherd lad standing by, named David, who said to the King, "Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine. . . . The Lord . . . will deliver me . . ." (xvii. 32, 37). And, trusting in the Lord, David went forward, slew the giant and delivered Israel. What tremendous blessing may come to many if only one will dare to trust God! It was this same David who later wrote: "What time I am afraid, I will put my trust in thee . . . In God have I put my trust, I will not be afraid" (Ps. lvi. 3, 11).

You will remember also the children of Israel at the Red Sea, with the Egyptian army pursuing them. God opened a way through the sea, causing the waters to divide, and to be "a wall unto them on their right side and on their left" (Ex. xiv. 22). Suppose some poor, timid Israelite had said, "I am not going to venture between those walls of water in case they fall on me before I have got across." Well, he would have been captured by the Egyptians and would never have known the joy of liberty, just because he was afraid to trust God.

This matter of daring to trust God is so important. Our Christian life is really very much like that of the explorers moving amongst crevasses. There are plenty of possible dangers and difficulties to be faced. The seen ones can often be avoided by walking carefully. But there are many that we cannot see. What shall we do about those? We must be careful not to make the mistake that Peter made, thinking that *he* would never get into trouble. Do you remember his confident words? "Even if I must die with thee, yet will I not deny thee" (Matt. xxvi. 35). But very soon afterwards an unseen "crevasse" opened beneath his feet and he had an awful fall, from which only the Lord Whom he had denied could deliver him. "Let him that

thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." But if we are not like Peter, we must equally not go to the other extreme and say, "because I cannot see all the hidden difficulties I will not move at all lest I fall into a 'crevasse'." Do you know what God wants you to do over some matter? Then you can quite safely go forward in that direction *if you do so trusting in the Lord and not in yourself*. He will carry you safely over all the dangerous places, and you need not be afraid. You cannot trust God and be afraid at the same time. Which would you rather do? Surely it is better to have a trusting heart than a fearing one? It is a sheer misery to live in continual fear of what may happen, at every step in life saying to yourself, as it were, 'I am afraid I am going to fall into a crevasse this time.' Many men in our Bibles show us the blessedness of the man who trusts in the Lord, but none, so well as our Lord Jesus Himself. In everything that He did and everywhere that He went, He was trusting entirely in His Father. His trust was perfect, without a trace of doubt or fear. His enemies laid traps for Him again and again, hoping that He would fall into them. He never ran foolish risks and walked always very carefully; but beyond that, He knew that He could quite safely trust Himself to His Father's care so long as He did only the things that pleased His Father—and He was thus the most care-free man that ever lived. His heart and mind were in perfect peace because He trusted. And

among the precious words that He spoke to His disciples before He left them were these: "My peace I give unto you. . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful" (John xiv. 27). How can He give His peace to others? In the same way that He gives all else that He possesses—by giving *Himself* to those who believe in Him and being with them in the way that they take. "Lo, I am with you always . . ." He has said. Having His Spirit within us, and the Lord Jesus Himself walking with us as our companion and guide, we shall find that the most dangerous path becomes safe, however many "crevasses" may lie in it, and we may go boldly forward wherever God leads us. Remember that He is the One Who walked on the sea, and enabled Peter to do the same (Matt. xiv. 25-31). He can surely take us safely across the snow-bridge of a hidden crevasse!

Are you one of the fainthearts who is afraid to trust God? You will never reach the "South Pole" like that! Away with those fears of yours! Turn your eyes upon the calm, strong, confident face of the Lord Jesus, and say to Him from your heart, "Lord, by Thy grace I will trust and not be afraid, and I will follow thee whithersoever Thou goest."

Trusting as the moments fly,
Trusting as the days go by,
Trusting Him whate'er befall,
Trusting Jesus, that is all.

G. P.

The New Day of the Spirit

V

The Sovereignty of the Lord in the Spiritual Conflict

Reading: *Psalm ii. 1-12; Acts iv. 24-27.*

WE are taking account of the new nature and order of things which came in for the age with the advent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost—a new spiritual order, the setting up and the establishing of the Lordship of the Spirit, the supremacy of that which is spiritual; the heart and the sum of the whole matter proving to be a revelation and a knowing of the Lord Jesus in a spiritual way. The initiative was with the Lord in heaven—"the Holy Ghost sent forth from heaven"; it was a movement on the part of God Himself.

But we do not proceed very far in "The Acts" before we can detect the rumblings of a counter-movement from another quarter—the

challenging answer to heaven on the part of the forces of evil and darkness. That storm gathers force and breaks with all its might in the seventh chapter, where we have the account of Stephen's testimony and death. The thing of which to take note is that in that chapter, at that point, everything is gathered up and focused upon a two-fold issue. We may say that all that has been implied, all that has been in the Divine thought up to that moment, is there crystallised and brought up as the double issue of the whole matter—heaven's object and hell's counter-attack.

We have earlier indicated how comprehensive was Stephen's survey, starting with Abraham, tracing history down through Joseph, Moses and Israel and the prophets, right up to the end of that dispensation, and finding its heading-up point in the murder of the Lord Jesus; and in that survey two things come out,

or two aspects of one inclusive thing. One is that everything points toward the Lord Jesus and His absolute sovereignty in the purpose of God. The other is the house of God, the sanctuary: it is the place of God's dwelling, where He is to be found. It is very remarkable how those two things are here in Stephen's summing up, and they are the two things which really provoked the trouble in that moment, or caused the storm to burst. In view of the way in which Stephen speaks firstly about the Lord Jesus and then about the temple, you can quite understand that his hearers would be very deeply provoked and embittered.

The Conflict as to Christ's Lordship

Well, as to the Lord Jesus, what Stephen does is this. He goes right back and says that God in sovereignty moved to secure that which would lead right up to His Son, and in sovereignty He appeared as the God of glory to Abraham. Then it is not long before Stephen comes to Joseph, and what has he to say about him? Well, he tells very briefly the story of Joseph and the famine and Egypt, but what he is underlining is this, that Joseph's brethren were jealous. Then having said it, having touched the thing that he is after, he passes on and soon arrives at Moses, and then speaks of his going to his brethren in Egypt, being turned against and rejected, flying into the wilderness, being met by God in the bush, commissioned, and going back supposing his brethren would receive him. Says Stephen—"our fathers . . . thrust him from them." They rejected him, repudiated him. Again there rose up this inward antagonism and Moses suffered at the hand of his brethren what Joseph had suffered at the hand of his brethren. So Stephen goes on, and all the time he is under-scoring this particular thing, the antagonism of the Lord's people to this and that and that which pointed to Christ. Joseph and Moses pointed to Christ. Stephen quotes a passage from the Old Testament, "A prophet shall God raise up unto you from among your brethren, like unto me"—words used by Moses pointing to Christ; and they cast him out, they would have none of that. Then Stephen goes on and brings into review the rest of that history—Israel in the wilderness—and he says some extraordinary things. I confess that I do not understand some of the things that he says in this address. We will come to them in a minute, not by way of explaining, but because there is something there that is very startling.

But he comes to the prophets—"Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute?

and they killed them that showed before of the coming of the Righteous One." These prophets, as he indicates, were all pointing to Christ, and what Stephen is saying comprehensively is this—that right from the beginning in the history of Israel there has been something inside Israel which was ground for the Devil to work against Christ and all God's purpose concerning His Son, the Lord Jesus: something there all the time, constantly cropping up, and the forces of evil using it and causing it to work in this way, that wherever the evil powers saw an inference, a suggestion, concerning the Lord Jesus, they made their hatred manifest, it came out in expression. That is the awful spiritual history back of religious nature. You can be intensely religious, as religious as the most rabid Jew and Pharisee, and yet when it comes to the real issue of the absolute sovereign Lordship of Jesus Christ there is something that is positively antagonistic. You see the issue in that matter is the issue between the flesh and the Spirit, seeing that this is now the day of the Spirit that has come; and when the day of the Spirit really comes in, then the flesh is dragged out and manifested and shown to be what it really is, as something energised and actuated by the very powers of evil, although it may be most religious flesh. It is a most impressive thing that we never know what is in us until we are challenged on some point of the application of the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ; if you like to put it the other way, of the absolute government of the Holy Spirit.

The Spiritual Nature of the House of God

Then Stephen touches this other thing—the sanctuary. It is there that he says these extraordinary things which I confess I do not understand. He quotes from Amos v—"Ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of the god Rephan," and the question is asked, "Did ye offer unto me slain beasts and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?" Then Stephen adds: "Our fathers had the tabernacle of the testimony in the wilderness." Is he implying that, while they offered sacrifices outwardly and ostensibly to Jehovah, in their hearts they were alienated and were really worshipping some other god? A terrible suggestion; but I do not know how you are going to explain this, otherwise than that Stephen is saying in connection with the main theme—"You people, although you appear outwardly, supposedly, as the people of God, in your hearts you are really antagonistic to the Lord, and you always have been." He sums it all up when he says, "Ye stiffnecked

and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit." 'Even back there in the wilderness when you were supposed to be worshipping God, deep down it was not the worship of Jehovah; some foreign thing was in you all the time.' It was a terrific charge to lay against them. You can understand their gnashing their teeth. He passes immediately from the tabernacle to the temple. "But Solomon built him a house"—and that is all Stephen has to say about it, and dismisses the whole thing, seeming to say, 'Yes, but it did not matter, it was not the real thing.' "Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in houses made with hands; as saith the prophet, The heaven is my throne, and the earth the footstool of my feet; what manner of house will ye build me? saith the Lord." It is remarkable with what brevity Stephen dismisses that great mass of the Old Testament which circles round the temple. What is he saying? 'Because God discerned inside of the people something which was so contrary to His mind, all the outside did not really count with Him; He is after something more than that.' We know quite well that the temple did mean something in the thought of God as a type, but that is another line. Stephen is showing that all that history really deep down was not *spiritual* history; it was in the realm of men's souls and natural life, and therefore it was not what God was after.

Now he brings the two things out. He brings Christ right out in absolute Lordship, affirms so positively that in spite of all that they had done: in spite of everything, right through their history, of antagonism to God's Son: in spite of all Satan's fury against God's Christ: He is on the Throne, He is exalted; and then by implication he says, 'God has another kind of house, the house He has been after, not made with hands, not the tabernacle in the wilderness nor the temple. But He has something now in which He is worshipped in spirit and in truth, where there really is that which He is after. "God is (a) spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John iv. 24), and this house has now been brought in with Pentecost.' That is the implication. It is a mighty twofold issue that comes out with Stephen, and it is a marvellous turning point in the course of things. Everything has been heading up to this. Something is going to happen; you can see that from hell's side things will not be allowed to go on like this much longer, but in the sovereignty of God the bursting of the storm only serves to bring out with clearer and fuller view the two things upon which all is hanging

—the Lordship of Christ and the spiritual nature of God's house. I love to see the Holy Spirit's sequence. Well, there are so many details that are fascinating and tremendously inspiring, but we cannot dwell upon them.

Sovereign Outcome of Satanic Activity

(a) Paul the issue of Stephen's death

Stephen was one of the seven deacons chosen to deal with money matters. The Holy Spirit has other thoughts. When He gets things in hand, He is not finally concerned with money and serving tables. He has the Lord Jesus in view in the fullest possible way. The Holy Spirit lifts Stephen right out of the realm to which he was appointed, because He has bigger thoughts for him. Stephen is slain, with a testimony on his face, and on his lips the cry "I see . . . the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." The storm breaks, terrific persecution follows. They have tasted blood, and they are going to satiate themselves. The sovereignty of the Lord Jesus is riding upon this furious tempest of hell's outbreak, and in very simple and wonderful ways that sovereignty operates. We know one of the immediate results. That sovereignty of the Lord Jesus came with full impact upon Saul of Tarsus, who was standing by and giving consent to the death of Stephen. "Why do the nations rage, and the peoples meditate a vain thing? The kings of the earth . . . and the rulers take counsel together. . . ." All that is taken up here in this movement of hell. But Jesus is Lord! "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." That is not the natural Zion, that is the heavenly, spiritual Zion. "My king." "The Lord shall have them in derision." Here it is working out. Paul is brought in as the immediate issue of Stephen and he is the one who, more than anyone else, brings into view two things—the Lordship of Christ and the spiritual nature of God's dwelling, the Church.

(b) National Enmity destroyed in Christ

But then in other ways the sovereignty of the Spirit is seen. The next chapter brings into view another of the seven deacons—Philip. Oh, the counter-movement of the Spirit to the movement of hell is now setting in. There is persecution, yes; and by the persecution, the believers have been scattered everywhere. Philip goes down to Samaria, and preaches unto them Jesus; and yet "Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (John iv. 9). That was never intended by man, but God is getting His spiritual house in which there is not Jew or Gentile exclusively—nor either of them as

such. It is a spiritual house, it is a heavenly house. And so the Spirit moves down to Samaria in this connection, and the Lordship of Jesus is proclaimed and is triumphant; and out from Samaria—think of the history of Samaria, of Ahab, of Jezebel!—out of Samaria members are gathered into the Body of Christ.

(c) Incapacity removed by the Spirit

Then when things are going on tremendously in Samaria, the Lord tells Philip to go down to the desert. You know the story of the Ethiopian eunuch. Oh, I think it is grand! It is the underlying thing here that is so fascinating—to see this sovereignty of the Spirit underneath everything. Down to the desert; and then this man of Ethiopia, a eunuch. We are touching a delicate thing, but we are going to be sensible, and we are not going to pass it by because it is delicate. It holds something precious if you keep to the spiritual and leave the natural out. He is a eunuch, an Ethiopian eunuch, and he has been up to Jerusalem to worship God. Evidently he is a proselyte. When he got to Jerusalem, what would happen? He would find the door of the temple shut to him. A eunuch was not allowed to enter the house of the Lord, by the Old Testament commandment; and so, having got as far as he could get, a disappointed and dissatisfied man, a man after all still seeking, he has to turn back and go away home to his distant country. And the Lord takes Philip across his path. Why was not a eunuch allowed to enter the house of the Lord? Because there is a spiritual principle involved. A eunuch is an end in himself, a dead tree, one who cannot be fruitful. You cannot have that in the house of God. God's principle says, 'Nothing which is an end in itself has a place in My house; nothing which is unfruitful can have a place before Me. My house is the place of life, continuous life.' You have only to look at Isaiah lvi and you will see there the Lord's promise to the eunuch. ". . . neither let the eunuch say, I am a dry tree." You see the point. Leave the natural and come to the spiritual. Here was this man who was ruled out, incapacitated, forbidden, having no place in the house of God because of his condition. The Lord Jesus came across his path through His servant Philip. Philip took up Isaiah liii and preached unto him Jesus. Then the eunuch said, "Behold, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? . . . and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him" (Acts viii. 36-37). He died to his death in the death of Christ; he

died to all that he was by nature in the death of Christ, and, rising in the resurrection of Christ, he would be a fruitful branch with a new life, a resurrection life. There is something very precious there.

Why that story? Oh, we are occupied with this movement of the Spirit; the Spirit is saying something here all the time. He is stressing the way of spiritual fruitfulness. "First . . . that which is natural"—barren, unfruitful, impossible; "then that which is spiritual," with all the tremendous possibilities of the new life in Christ. That is the inner history of the Ethiopian. "He went on his way rejoicing." Up to that moment he was a disappointed man, feeling his handicap. Is there anyone reading this who knows quite well and is feeling only too deeply that, because of what he is by nature, there is little hope or prospect for him, little chance of spiritual fruitfulness? This story is the story of a great hope for a man who was shut out of the inheritance, shut out of the house of God, for whom there was nothing because of natural condition, but who entered into all the blessed fulness and prospect of a new life, a new world, by identification with the Lord Jesus in death and burial and resurrection. He died to what he was by nature, and he rose to what he was in Christ. It is the story of how the Holy Spirit is making everything fruitful, turning the wilderness and the solitary place into a garden. That is the prospect here.

That is the new age. You are saying, 'Yes, that is very good; that is grand; it is there right enough at the beginning, but we do not see much of that now; why?' And that is the point—why? Why does Satan hold things up? Because he has got ground. Why do people not make spiritual progress? Why is there such limited fruitfulness? Why is there so much barrenness? Because there is ground for arrest. It is the ground of nature, and "the flesh warreth against the Spirit" (Gal. v. 17). "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost" (Acts vii. 51). Now, what Stephen was really saying was this—'You may not be conscious of it, you may not be deliberately meaning to war against the Spirit of God, but that uncrucified nature is there, at enmity with the Spirit of God, and that is the cause of everything.' We must come to the place where the Spirit really gets the upper hand, where that life of nature is truly subjected to the Spirit of God. Oh, I press this because I know so many people who believe in the Holy Spirit, who have all the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and they can work it all out systematically—the baptism and the filling and all the rest of

it—but there is an immense amount of carnality, even in those realms. The point which arises is this, that if there is really going to be this life, this fruitfulness, this enlargement, this progress, this ascendancy over the power of the enemy, it is not going to be merely official and automatic, it is not going to be simply because we believe certain truths, and use certain phraseology and shout certain slogans about Satan being a defeated foe. It is going to be, and only so, as the Holy Spirit transcends our natural life—as our natural life is brought into obedience and subjection to the Spirit of God.

We have all got a strong natural life in some way. It may be in a negative strength, or it may be in a positive strength—and very often the negative is just as powerful as the positive. It may be a feigned kind of humility, an assumed meekness, but it is natural and it is self all the time—self-pity, always wanting to be taken note of because you are such a sorry creature: drawing attention in some way to yourself. That is a negative strength of nature, and it gets in God's way. We have to get this self, whatever it is, out of the way. We have to be occupied with the Lord Jesus Christ and not with ourselves—occupied entirely with Him. The Lord cannot do His work in us until we have a fixed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and an eye riveted upon Him. Immediately the enemy succeeds in turning us in upon ourselves he has broken our strength, he has the ground that he wants for our undoing and our barrenness. Whatever the form of self-life, it must go. First the Lord

Jesus has to come in as Lord; then He can get on with what He is after.

A People living in the Value of Divine Sovereignty

I have left a lot unsaid, but you will gather from what has been said what is in view—a people who are not merely believers objectively in the Holy Ghost, but who are subjectively under His government, in whose being His Lordship is established; in whom He can have His mind over their minds, His will over their wills, and His desires and feelings over theirs. But even then we may not see what is in the book of the Acts as we read it, because, after all, there we have the cumulative thing in a few chapters of vivid history, and we are impressed. If we had lived in those days we should have been far more continuously conscious of the forces that were against us than we were of the mighty sovereign triumph of the Lord Jesus; we should have had to wait till afterward to see that. And it will be like that with us; we shall be conscious of the enemy at work, difficulties arising, all kinds of sufferings abounding, but in due time we shall see the Lord triumph; we shall go into a deep experience but after a time come out and say, 'The Lord has triumphed in that, He has got something out of it.' That is the story—seeing the Lord getting His end through the very works of the enemy and the sufferings of His children. That is a life in the Spirit. The Lord give us to know more of it in experience.

T. A-S.

(Concluded.)

The Lord's Attitude to His Children in Adversity

"In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old" (Isa. lxi. 9).

THE first clause of that verse is what will occupy us for a few minutes, and it will be as in the more correct translation that some of you will find in the margin of your Bibles. While there is some authority for the ordinary translation of the words here, the actual language of the original reads thus—"In all their adversity he was no adversary." You can choose between the translations which you like best, and you will not be in error if you prefer one to the other; but this alternative translation to the usual text conveys a message of its own which I think should be of very great

help, encouragement and strength to us.

The Fact of Adversity

First of all, we note that adversity amongst the people of God is recognised and accepted—that is, it is taken for granted. It is unnecessary to say that, amongst the people of God, adversity is a fact. None of us requires to be told that. Here the word of God takes note of the fact that the Lord's people do know and suffer adversity, and their adversity is under His eye. That is only said lest anybody should think that adversity signifies that things have gone wrong. Perhaps at times we do feel that because of severe and continuous adversity there must be something wrong. While there may be a realm in which the adversity is the result of some wrong-doing, the enemy having rightful ground, neverthe-

less that is not the thing that is referred to here. In the first instance, it was not adversity because of evil and wrong; it was the adversity which is the common experience of the Lord's people who are moving with Him; and when it is like that, as we shall see in a moment, there is nothing wrong about it at all. So much by the way for the *fact* of adversity.

The Nature of the Adversity

Then we come to the nature of the adversity referred to here. The word "adversity" is really the word "straitness"—"In all their straitness he was no adversary"—and that thought of straitness is capable of manifold application. What was the straitness referred to? Well, Israel is here seen as in the wilderness. You notice that all the phrases which follow take you back to Israel's life in the wilderness, and it was the life in the wilderness with its many forms of straitness to which the word referred.

First of all, they were shut up with regard to many things which the world had, and the world could do, which constituted the whole life of the world and gave the world its pleasure and, so far as it went, its satisfaction. They were cut off from all that, and sometimes that form of straitness came home to them very hardly and severely. You know when they got into a very bad time how their hearts went back to Egypt and they thought and dwelt upon the onions and the garlic and all the rest of the things there. In Egypt we did have this and that and the other thing which we miss now, and it is hard to be cut off, as we are, from those things; there was a certain element of certainty in Egypt, but out here you never know where you are going to be one day from another, or what is going to happen to you—so far as actual evidence is concerned you do not know whether you are going to be fed to-morrow. It is all such a life of faith, and faith is a life of straitness so often, cut off from much and shut up to this wilderness where things are, to the natural mind, 'narrowed down' to God. (We know that is the wrong way of putting it—to the spiritual mind things are expanded to God; but who has got fully there, to the place where always earthly straitness is really heavenly enlargement?) Naturally, this is how it was with Israel—shut in, narrowed down, pent up, straitened so far as many things in this world were concerned. Because they were the Lord's people they could not do this nor have that. There was a whole realm of things cut off from them; naturally, in the soul, it was straitness.

Adversity No Proof that the Lord is our Adversary

When you and I begin to feel that—and there are days when the pure, unsullied joy of the Lord Himself and of heavenly things becomes clouded and veiled and remote, and we seem to be far more sensitive to the straitness of our lives and how we are shut up—how quickly the enemy comes in and says, The Lord is against you! This is not the goodness of the Lord, this is not the bountifulness and graciousness of the Lord, this kind of life really is not the life that the Lord promised you. In our hearts and minds he tries to turn the Lord to be our adversary because of the consciousness of the present situation of difficulty. He misrepresents the Lord; he gives to the Lord the colour of our trial, of our difficulty, and says, The Lord is like that, He is a hard master to serve; this Christian life is not all that it was represented to be; the Lord has deceived you, He has failed you; and so on. He twists the whole thing to malign the Lord.

What the word here is saying is quite definitely this—in all that straitness, that privation, that pent-up-ness the Lord was not against them; however it seemed, the Lord really was not against them. Then we must find some other explanation. The facts are very real, these conditions are very true. Adversity, trial, suffering are very real, and if they do not mean that the Lord is against us, what is the explanation?

The Lord's Intention of Good

The only alternative, surely, is that the Lord is meaning this for good—that in His intention it is not ultimately for our limitation and deprivation but for our enlarging, for our enrichment. Evidently the Lord means other than the circumstances seem to say He means. In all this straitness He is not against you. "If God be for us . . . ?" (Rom. viii. 31). In the adversity, the straitness, the cutting off of many things, the saying 'No' to a lot, the Lord is not against you, He is not out to rob you of any really good thing, to take from you any real pleasure, He is not working contrary to your interests, He is no adversary; but in all, He is *for* you while you are in the way of His will, going on with Him.

I said that that word "straitness" is capable of manifold application. I am not going to pursue in any detail those lines along which it could be applied. You know straitness. How often the enemy shuts the doors and then says the Lord has shut them because He is

against you! How often the enemy brings you into suffering, puts upon you something, and then says, It is the Lord! How often the enemy tries to becloud your assurance and bring condemnation and accusation upon you, and to bring you under a sense of judgment, and then says, It is the Lord! Not a bit of it! That is not necessarily the explanation or interpretation at all. You notice that the first phase of this thing finds the people out and moving with the Lord, and as they did so, they came into this adversity of many kinds; and the declaration is that this did not mean that the Lord was against them. If we wanted to, we could gather up many Scriptures to show how the Lord was really for them in those very days of difficulty and adversity. I just give it to you as something to put your feet upon.

The Lord the Adversary of the Rebellious

The passage moves into another and darker stage. "They rebelled . . . therefore he was turned to be their enemy"—their adversary (Isa. lxiii. 10). But even when we state that dark aspect of the thing, it only enhances the other. Have you rebelled against the Lord? Can it really be said of you that you have taken the attitude which these people came to take? You know some of the hard and terrible things which they said in their rebellion, when their hearts turned away from the Lord. In effect, they said, We do not want this Lord any more; we will not have this Lord any more. Can that be said of you? Well, then, the Lord in such situations must turn to be the enemy of that, and be your enemy while you are in that position; He cannot stand by you while you are there. But if it is not like that with you, and despite all weaknesses and all failures, faults, imperfections (yes, we are never without something that might well be condemned in us) nevertheless our hearts are toward the Lord, it is our desire to go on with Him, then He is no adversary. Yes, many imperfections, but He is no adversary. It is when we, like these people, deliberately and positively turn and rebel against the Lord, and say, in effect, We will not obey, we are not going on! then He turns to be our adversary. That means He has to bring into judgment.

The Lord's Love to the Rebellious

But even so, the third phase is a very blessed one. "Then he remembered . . ." (Is. lxiii, 11). Even when He had to be their adversary because of the attitude which they had adopted, the end of it is "He remembered

. . . Moses," He remembered His word; and the last phase is that He came back in love to restore. In the end the Lord reaches out even to the rebellious. "Yea, the rebellious also" says the Word (Psa. lxxviii, 18). "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Psa. ciii, 14). Are you one of those who at some time has really turned in heart, in hardness and bitterness and sourness, against the Lord because of the difficulty of the way and you have become very rebellious against Him, and now the enemy says, The whole thing is hopeless; you see you have shut the door, and that is the end! Oh, how this enemy will take hold of everything to use it for our destruction! But, even if we have done that, the end is "He remembered . . ." It is a marvellous overture of His love again to the rebellious.

They are going on with the Lord; they suffer adversity, but that does not mean He is against them. They rebel against Him, and He has to bring them into discipline; at that time He must be against them. But that need not be the established, permanent situation. "His mercy endureth for ever" (Psa. cvii, 1, etc.). If in our hearts at some time or other we have become bitter, have felt the Lord was too hard and the way anything but the way of His love, if we have entertained bitter and rebellious thoughts, Satan comes in to try and consolidate them into some unalterable situation that has forever closed the door in terms of unpardonable sin. Yet—the Lord remembered His word, and His love is found, after all, not to have changed. Not until we have got beyond this time here on this earth need it ever be said, There is no hope, the door is closed! I hope there are not many who have turned and rebelled. If you have, here is a word of comfort and encouragement for you.

The main word, however, is for the majority of us who, while our hearts are toward the Lord, find much straitness, much shutting up of the way, much narrowing down, much cutting off, much that to the natural life seems a dark way; yet it does not mean the Lord is against us. It means just the opposite. The Lord is after an enlargement that is much more than enlargement of this life here. Although we have all here, and yet are small in the measure of Christ, what have we gained? We have gained nothing. So if the enlargement of Christ seems to mean the narrowing of self and the world, that is the evidence of the Lord *for* us, and not against us. "In all their adversity he was no adversary." In all their straitness, He was not against them.

T.A.-S.

A God that Hideth Himself

"Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour" (Isa. xlv. 15).

IT is as though the Prophet was suddenly overawed and struck with amazement at what he was being made to prophesy! In the midst of his ministry something of its wonder broke upon himself and he interjected this ejaculation.

Leaving, for the present, much of what this might imply as to prophecy as prediction and its vindication, we will stay with the exclamation itself. That statement is one in principle with several instances in the Scriptures. Looking at the present context we see that it is Israel's release from captivity, and return to the Land to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple, which is contemplated. No doubt there had been very much speculating and discussing as to how the prophecies of their return would be fulfilled. Seventy years had been determined and made known as the duration of their captivity. The Gentile powers were in undoubted ascendancy and there seemed very little prospect or possibility of Israel's regaining their national power and glory amongst the nations. The state of things in their own country—the destroyed Temple, the burnt city, the land overrun with wild beasts, the enemy emissaries installed—and the disintegration among the people themselves in exile, made the outlook one fraught with seemingly insuperable problems, and it might well have led to complete bafflement and even despair. Then the Prophet is made to foretell that it would all come about—this restoration—at the hands or by the will of the Gentile power itself; that the Sovereign Spirit of God would come down upon one who—as yet—was not in the position to do it, and probably whose name was not yet known at all. Babylon was not yet overthrown; the Babylonian Empire was not yet destroyed; Daniel's prophecies were not yet fulfilled. But the one who would do it was mentioned by name and the details of his conquest are given in this forty-fifth chapter of Isaiah's prophecies. (Read it fragment by fragment.) And then, even although this man would be in ignorance of God, he would be constrained and compelled by God like an Anointed one to fulfil the Scriptures, release the people, provide the means, and generally facilitate the restoration. As the Prophet sees it all in his "vision" ("the vision of Isaiah,"

i. 1, one vision including everything) he is overwhelmed with wonder. All the problems are solved, the questions answered, the "mountains" levelled! Who would have thought of that? Who would have dreamed such a thing? Oh, how deep are God's ways, beneath our imagination, *hidden* from our most intense speculations. "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour."

There have been several other great and outstanding instances of the mystery of God's ways in fulfilling His major purposes. All the race had gone from Him and become involved in Godlessness and idolatry. It was universal. How would God meet His own need? Well, He moved to put His hand on one man, and out of that one man He made a nation. In sovereign grace He made that nation His mystery, His secret, among the nations. Israel was God's mystery, God's hidden way. There was always something mysterious about Israel. Paul, in contemplating this method of God and finding it rise up with such overwhelming power, did just what Isaiah did. While writing it down he just interjected a loud and resounding ejaculation:—

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!" (Rom. xi. 33).

He might well have added, "Thou art a God that hidest thyself." Who would ever have thought of the Incarnation, and that, not in glory, but in humiliation unto offending every expectation of man? Who would have thought of the Cross for God Incarnate as the method and means of solving the greatest problem ever known in this universe? Who would have suspected that it was all embodied in that Man of Nazareth, "the carpenter's son" as they called Him? There was the greatest mystery of God! Did it work? Has it proved to be *the* way, the *only* way, and the transcendently successful way?

And what is true as to *the Mystery of Israel*, and *the Mystery of Christ*, is also true as to *the Mystery of the Church*. There is a hiddenness about the true Church. No natural eye can discern it. No natural mind can explain it. Reduce it to human sense and description and you have lost it, you have got hold of the wrong thing. "God's wisdom (is) in a mystery," says Paul. Try to commend the Church

to the world without faith and you have stripped your Church of its secret power! Unless men come right up against inscrutable God Who overwhelms them, that which claims to be His dwelling-place is an empty shell.

And we would remind you that what is true in these great epochs of sovereign progress down the ages, these interventions and adventures in the history of this world's spiritual life, is true in the life of each one of His true people. Such will be constantly confronted with the How? of impossible situations, in order that they may be compelled to repeated exclama-

tions in the presence of His *simple* solutions—
"Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself."

"Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will."

"I will give thee the treasures of darkness,
and hidden riches of secret places, that thou
mayest know that it is I, the Lord, who call
thee by thy name, even the God of Israel"
(Isa. xlv. 3).

T. A.-S.

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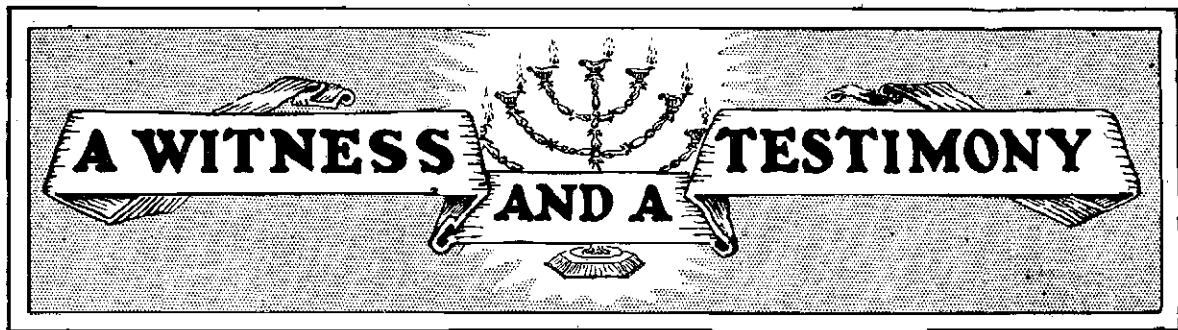
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Editor's Letter

Beloved of God,

I cannot let this issue of the paper go out without some reference being made to the present world situation. That the situation is critical and ominous needs no argument; perhaps it never was more so. No one can contemplate the real possibilities without being deeply moved. When, already, a sample has been seen in the wiping out of tens of thousands of people in a split second, the wholesale delivery of these destructive forces over an extended period, apart from all the other forms of destruction and neutralisation, is something hardly to be contemplated. Truly, reality is given to the words "Except those days be shortened, there shall no flesh be saved."

But this is not our only or supreme outlook. We are compelled to ask the question as to whether such a state of things can actually come about before the Lord comes to remove those made ready for His appearing? Amongst the spiritually sensitive there is a sense of pause as behind the earth scene. It is as though something were pending. Much work is being done, and we are seeking to carry on or "occupy," but we are aware that there is a need of a moving from heaven, and we know that unless God does move in some epochal way, some dispensational way, frustration triumphs. The outlook for the Lord's work in the nations is increasingly—in measure and speed—*very* unpromising and forbidding. The powers of evil are pressing upon this earth in thickening and intensified darkness, maliciousness, and death. The Church is conscious of bafflement, smothering, and inadequacy. Honestly, it is unable to meet the world-situation and overcome. If the Lord is coming, what a lot of problems will be solved and questions answered!

But surely such a prospect calls for two lines of prayer, and this is the main object of this letter. Wherever the Lord's people are able to gather in smaller or larger companies, there ought to be strong *corporate* prayer that

- (1) the work needing to be done both within the Church and through her unto His appearing shall be intensified and perfected; and
- (2) the restraining work of God shall be exercised in and over the nations until the above is accomplished. Satan is always trying to precipitate things, for he is the spirit of lawlessness, causing a wild running amok.

This is not the place for speaking in any fulness of the real nature of the situation and what lies behind it, but we do appeal to all the Lord's people to remember that there is the side of our responsibility as well as that of His sovereignty. It will be too late to pray preventively when the storm has broken upon the world, and the means of grace for spiritual help might well be suspended. One thing all true Christians know is that there will never be a better world until the Lord comes. So let us prepare for His coming, and pray both for it and unto it.

With love and greetings in Him,

Yours in that Blessed Hope,

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.

Prophetic Ministry

I

A Message to Christian Workers

Reading: Deut. xviii. 15, 18; Acts iii. 22; vii. 37; Luke xxiv. 19; Rev. xix. 10; Eph. iv. 8, 11—13.

"He gave some . . . prophets: . . . for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. iv. 11-12).

What Prophetic Ministry Is

WE are going to be occupied just now with prophetic ministry. "He gave some . . . prophets." And here we must make some discrimination, for when we speak of prophetic ministry, we find that people are very largely governed by a certain mentality associated with what is called 'prophecy.' They immediately react to the very term 'prophetic' with that mentality that relates it to incidents, happenings, dates, and so on, mainly lying in the future. That is, they think instantly of the predictive element in prophetic ministry and limit the whole function to that conception.

Now, for the real value of what is before us we must remove from our minds that restricted idea of the pre-eminence of the predictive aspect of prophetic ministry. It is an aspect, but it is only an aspect. Prophetic ministry is a much larger thing than the predictive.

Perhaps it would be better if we said that the prophetic *function*, going far beyond mere events, happenings and dates, is the ministry of spiritual interpretation. That phrase will cover the whole ground of that with which we are now concerned. It is spiritual interpretation. If you think for a moment in the light of prophetic ministry in the Word of God, I am quite sure you will see how true it is—the interpretation of everything from a spiritual standpoint; the bringing of the spiritual implications of things, past, present and future, before the people of God, and giving them to understand the significance of things in their spiritual value and meaning. That was and is the essence of prophetic ministry.

Of course, what we know about prophets in the Scriptures is that they were a special function or faculty amongst the Lord's people, but we must also remember that they often combined their prophetic function with other functions. Samuel was a prophet; he was also a judge, and a priest. Moses was a prophet, but he was other things besides. I believe Paul was a prophet; he was an apostle, an evangelist; he was everything, it seems to me! So

that our purpose is not to speak of prophets as distinct people so much as of prophetic ministry. It is the ministry with which we are concerned, and we shall arrive at the instrument better by recognizing the ministry fulfilled; we shall understand the vessel better and see what it is, if we see the purpose for which it is constituted. So let me say that it is function, not persons, that we have in view when we are speaking about prophets or prophetic ministry.

I am quite sure that those who have any knowledge whatever of the times spiritually will agree with me when I say that the crying need of our time is for a prophetic ministry. There never was a time when existed so extensively the need for a voice of interpretation, when conditions needed more the ministry of explanation. One does not want to make extravagant statements or to be extreme in one's utterances. I do not think it would be extravagant or extreme to say that the world to-day is well-nigh bankrupt of real prophetic ministry in this sense—a voice that interprets the mind of God to people. That may exist in some small degree here and there, but in no very large way is that ministry being fulfilled. So often our hearts groan and cry out, Oh, that the mind of God about the present situation could be brought through to the recognition of His people in the first place, and then through His people to others beyond! There is a great and terrible need for a prophetic ministry in our time.

Prophetic Ministry Related to the Full Purpose of God

Recognizing that, we must come to see exactly what this function is. What is the function of prophetic ministry? It is to hold things to the full thought of God, and therefore it is usually a reactionary thing. We usually find that the prophets arose as a reaction from God to the course and drift of things amongst His people; a call back, a re-declaration, a re-pronouncement of God's mind, a bringing into clear view again of the thoughts of God. The prophets stood in the midst of the stream, usually a fast-rushing stream, like a rock; the course of things broke over them. They challenged and resisted that course, and their presence in the midst of the stream represented God's mind as against the course of things. In the Old Testament, the prophet usually came into his ministry at a time when things were spiritually bad and

anything but according to the Divine mind; the state was evil, things were confused, mixed, chaotic; there was much deception, falsehood, and often things very much worse than that. Here is the thing to which the prophetic ministry all-inclusively relates—the original and ultimate purpose of God in and through His people; and having said that, you have got right to the heart of things. We ask again, What is the prophetic ministry, what is the prophetic function, to what does it relate?—and the answer all-inclusively is that it relates to the full, original and ultimate purpose of God in and through His people.

If that statement is true, it helps us at once to see the need in our time; for, speaking generally, the people of God on the earth in our time have confused parts of the purpose of God with the whole; have emphasized phases to the detriment of the whole. They are confusing means and methods and enthusiasm and zeal with the exact object of the Lord, failing to recognize that God's purpose must be reached in God's way and by God's means, and the way and the means are just as important as the purpose: that is, you cannot reach God's end anyhow, by any kind of method that you may employ, by projecting your own ideas or programmes or schemes to get to God's end. God has His own way and means of getting to His end. God's thoughts spread over the detail of His purpose and you cannot wholly realize the purpose of God except as the very details are according to the mind of God.

God might have said to Moses, Build me a tabernacle, will you? I leave it to you how you do it, what you use; you see what I am after; go and make me a tabernacle. Moses might have got the idea of what God wanted and have worked out the kind of thing he would make for God according to his own mind. But we know that God did not leave a single detail, a peg or a pin's point, a stitch or a thread, to the mind of man.

I only use that illustration in order to enforce what I mean, that prophetic ministry is to bring God's full, original and ultimate purpose according to God's mind, and hold it like that for God—to interpret the mind of God in all matters concerning the purpose of God, to bring all details into line with the purpose, and to make the purpose govern everything.

Prophetic Ministry by the Anointing

(a) Detailed Knowledge of God's Purposes

This involves several things which are clearly seen to be features of prophetic ministry in the Word of God. First of all, it involves the matter of anointing. The meaning and value

of anointing is that, firstly, only the Spirit of God has the full and detailed plan in view and can make everything to be true in principle to God's intention. I say only the Spirit of God has that. It is one of the most wonderful things in Scripture to see that when you get back to the simplest, earliest—shall we say, the most elementary—expression or projecting of Divine things in the Word of God, you find there that everything is so true in principle to all that comes out later in greater fulness in that connection. It is simply marvellous how God has kept everything true to principle, and you never find later, however fully a thing is developed, that there is a change in principle; the principle is there and you cannot get away from it. And God has brought everything into line with those fixed principles. That may not convey a great deal to you, but it is worthy of thought. It is perfectly wonderful that when you later take up a more fully developed matter in the Word of God you find that it is true to the original principle of that matter as it was first introduced. God does not deviate one little bit. His law is there and it is unchanging. The Holy Spirit alone knows all that. He knows the laws and the principles, all the things which spiritually govern the purpose of God; and He alone knows the plan and the details, and can make everything true to those principles and laws. And everything has got to be true to them. We may take it as settled that if in the superstructure there is anything that is out of harmony with God's original basic spiritual principle, that is going to be a defect which spells tragedy sooner or later. The superstructure in every detail of principle has to be true to the foundation, to the original. Most of us are not enlightened as to all that. We are feeling our way along, we are groping onward, we are getting light, slowly, very little at a time; but we are getting light. But the prophetic ministry is an enlightened ministry, and is that which, under the anointing, is bringing things back to that position of absolute safety and security because it is true to Divine principle.

The anointing is necessary, firstly, because only the Spirit of God is acquainted with all the thought of God and He alone can speak and work and bring things about in true and utter consistency with Divine principles which govern everything; and everything from God has got to embody those principles. The principle of the Church, which governs the Church, is that it is a heavenly thing. It is not an earthly thing, it is related to Christ as in heaven. The Church does not come into being until Christ is in heaven, which means that the Church has got to come, as to Christ in heaven,

on to heavenly ground in a spiritual way. It has got to leave earthly ground and really be a heavenly, spiritual thing while here, in relation to Christ in heaven. That is a Divine law and principle which is so clear in the New Testament. It is there from "Acts" onward most manifestly. But this is not something new which has come in with the New Testament. God has put that law into everything that points in any prophetic way to the Church and to Christ. Isaac was not allowed to leave the land and go abroad to fetch his wife. He had to stay there and the servant had to be sent to bring her to where he was. Well, there is your law. Christ is in heaven; the Spirit is sent to bring the Church to where He is—firstly in a spiritual way, and then later literally; but the principle is there. Joseph passes through rejection and typical death and eventually reaches the throne, and with his exaltation he receives his wife, Asenath. Well, Joseph is a clear figure of Christ. It is true that it is *on His exaltation* that Christ receives His Church, His Bride. Pentecost is really the result of the exaltation of Christ, and the Church is spiritually brought into living relationship with Himself, the exalted Christ. There is your principle in the simple story of Joseph. You can go on like that, how God in simple details has kept everything true to principle, and you find His eternal principles are embodied in the simplest things of the Old Testament, fulfilling this final declaration that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. There is something indicative of a great heavenly truth which is the spirit of prophecy pointing to Christ. After all, the very word "prophecy" means the making to shine before, to shine in front of, shine out. It is a presenting before. That is the comprehensive meaning of the very word itself. So that the Lord is making to shine out things concerning His Son.

I wonder how many of you have really been impressed with the tremendous importance of Divine principle in things. There is a principle, and the recognition and the honouring of that principle determines the success of the whole. Now, only the Holy Spirit knows all those Divine principles, only He knows the mind of God, the thoughts of God, in fulness. Hence, if things are to be held to the full thought and purpose of God, it can only be under an anointing, which means the Spirit of God has come to take charge. It is an anointed ministry, which means that God the Holy Spirit has become responsible for the whole thing; He has committed Himself to it. I do not suppose anyone would dispute or challenge the statement of the need for the Holy Spirit, the need for Him to be in charge, for every-

thing to be done by Him. But oh, dear friends, that means a great deal more than general truth and a general position.

(b) Knowledge Imparted by Revelation

It leads to this second thing in prophetic ministry—by the anointing there comes revelation. We can accept in a general way the necessity of the Holy Spirit's doing everything—initiating, conducting, governing and being the power and inspiration of everything; but oh! that is a life-long education, and it brings in the necessity for everything to be given by revelation. That is why the prophets originally were called "seers," men who saw. They saw what no other men saw. They saw what it was impossible for other people to see, even religious, God-fearing people. They saw by revelation. A prophetic ministry demands revelation; it is a ministry by revelation. Later we shall examine that more closely, but I want just to emphasize the fact at this moment. I am not thinking now of revelation extra to the Scriptures. I cannot take the ground of certain "prophets" in the Church to-day who prophesy extra to the Scriptures. No, but within the revelation already given—and God knows it is big enough!—the Holy Spirit yet moves to reveal what eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard. That is the wonder of a life in the Spirit. It is a life of constant new discovery, everything is full of surprise and wonder. A life under the Holy Spirit can never really be static, it can never reach finality here, nor come to the place where the sum of truth is boxed. A life really in the Holy Spirit is a life which realises that there is infinitely, transcendently, more beyond than all we have yet seen or grasped or sensed. People who *know*, and have come to a fixed place in things and cannot see beyond—to say nothing of moving beyond—their present position, do not really represent a true Holy Ghost position. Prophetic ministry under the Holy Spirit is a ministry through growing revelation.

A prophet was a man who went back and back again, and did not come out to speak until God had shown him the next thing. He did not just go on in his professional office because he was a prophet and it was expected of him. There was nothing professional about his position. When it became professional, then tragedy overtook the prophetic office. It did become professional through the schools of the prophets set up by Samuel. We must not even confuse these schools of the prophets with true prophetic office. There was a difference between those who graduated in the schools of the prophets and the true prophets represented by such men as Samuel, Elijah, Elisha. When-

ever things become professional something is lost, because the very essence and nature of prophetic ministry is that it is coming by revelation afresh every time. A thing revealed is new; it may be an old thing, but it has about it something that is fresh as a revelation to the heart of the one concerned, and it is so new and wonderful that the effect with him is as though no one had ever yet seen that, although thousands may have seen it before. It is the nature of revelation to keep things alive and fresh, and filled with Divine energy. You cannot recover an old position by just the old doctrine. You will never recover something of God which has been lost by bringing back the exact statement of the truth. You may be stating the truth of the early days of the New Testament exactly, but you may be far from having the conditions which obtained at such times. Prophetic succession is not the succession of teaching; it is the 'succession of anointing.

Something can come in by God, from God, something very real, very living, which God does through an instrumentality which may be individual or collective, and that is alive because God brought it in under His anointing, and then someone tries to imitate it, duplicate it, or later someone takes it up to carry it on; someone has been appointed, elected, chosen by ballot to be the successor. The thing goes on and grows; but some vital factor is no longer there. The succession is by anointing, not by framework, even of doctrine. We cannot recover New Testament conditions by re-stating New Testament doctrine. We have to get New Testament anointing. I am not dismissing doctrine; it is necessary; but it is the anointing which makes things alive, fresh, vibrant. Everything must come by revelation.

Some of us know what it is to be able to analyse our Bibles and present, perhaps in a very interesting way, the contents of its books and all its doctrines. We can do that with "Ephesians" as well as we can do it with any other book. We can come to "Ephesians" and analyse it and outline the Church and the Body and all that, and be as blind as bats till the day comes when, God having done something in us, something deep and tremendous and terrific, we see the Church, we see the Body, we see "Ephesians"! They were two worlds; one was truth, exact in technical detail, full of interest and fascination, but there was something lacking. We could have stated the truth from beginning to end, but we did not know what was in it; and until we have gone through that experience and something has happened in us, we may think we know, we may be sure we know, we may lay down our

life for it; but we do not know. There is all the difference between a very keen, clear, mental apprehension of things in the Word of God, and a spiritual revelation. There is the difference of two worlds but it is quite impossible to make people understand that difference until something has happened. We shall speak about that something that happens later, but here we are stating the facts. By anointing there is revelation, and revelation by anointing is essential to the seeing of what God is after, both in general and in detail.

So, building up, we arrive at this—a prophetic ministry is that which has, by the Holy Ghost, seen the purpose of God, original and ultimate; although much detail has yet to be revealed, even to the most enlightened servants of God.

(c) Exact Conformity to God's Thoughts

And then there is the third thing we find connected with this anointing. It is that to which we have already referred in general—exactness. The anointing brings about that *first hand touch with God*, which means seeing God face to face. Was it not that that was the summing up of Moses' life? "There hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. xxxiv. 10). And when that happens you come into the place of direct spiritual knowledge of God, touch with God, the place of the open heaven—you cannot be a person under any consideration, for any advantage at all, who compromises, who deviates from what has been shown to your heart.

What is it that the Apostle says about Moses? "Moses was faithful in all his house as a servant" (Heb. iii. 5); and the faithfulness of Moses is seen particularly and largely in the way in which he was governed exactly by what God said. You know those later chapters of the book of Exodus, bringing everything back again to the Word; again and again and again, "as the Lord commanded Moses." Everything was done as God said; and through the whole system which Moses was raised up to constitute and establish he was exact to a detail. We know why, of course; and here is that great, that grand, comprehensive explanation of what I said just now about principles. God has Christ in view all the time in every detail, and that system that Moses instituted was a representation of Christ to a fraction; and so it was necessary that in every detail he should be exact. It is a difficult and costly way, but you cannot have revelation, and go on in revelation, and compromise over details and have things at any point other than exactly as the Lord wants them. You are not

governed by diplomacy or policy or public opinion. You are governed by what the Lord has said in your heart by revelation as to His purpose. That is a prophetic ministry.

Prophets were not men who accommodated themselves to anything that was comparative in its goodness. They never let themselves go wholly if the thing was only comparatively good. Look at Jeremiah. There was a day in Jeremiah's life when a good king did seek to recover things, and he did institute a great feast of the Passover, and the people did come up in their crowds for the celebration of that Passover, and it was a great occasion apparently. They were doing great things there in Jerusalem, but with all that was going on which was good, confessedly good, Jeremiah did not let himself go. He had a reservation, and he was right. It was seen after that this thing was very largely outward, that the real heart of the people had not changed, and the high places were not taken away; and Jeremiah's original prophecy had to stand. If the apparent reformation had been the true thing, then Jeremiah's prophecies about the captivity, the destruction, the complete handing over to judgment would have gone for nothing. Jeremiah held back. He may not have understood, he may have been in perplexity about it, but his heart would not allow him to go wholly with this comparatively good thing and he found out the reason why afterward—that, although it was good up to a point, it did not represent a deep heart change, and so the judgment had to be. The prophet cannot accept as full and final what is only comparative, though he rejoices in the measure of good that may be anywhere. We should, of course, be generous to any little bit of good that is in the world, to anything that is right and true and of God; let us be grateful for it, but oh! we cannot say that is altogether satisfying to the Lord, that is all that the Lord wants. No, this prophetic ministry is one of utter faithfulness to the thoughts of God. It is a ministry of exactness. That is what the anointing means, and we have said why—it is a *full* Christ Who is in view.

That last statement in Rev. xix. 10 sums it all up. It gathers up into one sentence prophetic ministry from the beginning. I suppose prophetic ministry commenced in the day when it was stated of the seed of the woman that it should bruise the head of the serpent, and then passed on to Enoch, who prophesied

saying, Behold the Lord cometh! (Jude 14), and so on and on. It is all gathered up in the end of the Revelation in this thought, that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." That is, the spirit of prophecy from beginning to end is all toward that, the testimony of Jesus. The spirit of prophecy has always had Him in view from its first utterance—"the seed of the woman"—to "Behold the Lord cometh" (and how beginning and end are brought together so early on!). All the way through it was always with the Lord Jesus in view, and a full Christ. "He gave . . . prophets . . . till we all attain unto . . . the fulness of Christ." That is the end, and God can never be satisfied with anything less than the fulness of His Son as represented by the Church. The Church is to be the fulness of Him; a full-grown Man—that is the Church. The prophetic ministry is unto that—the fulness of Christ, the finality of Christ, the all-inclusiveness of Christ. It is to be Christ, centre and circumference; Christ, first and last; Christ in general and Christ in every detail. And to see Christ by revelation means that you can never accept anything less or other. You have seen, and that has settled it. Seeing then, by the Holy Spirit, is the way to reach God's end, and that seeing is the basis of this prophetic ministry.

I think if I stop there it is enough to have shown what I said earlier, that if we see the nature of the ministry, we at once see what the vessel is. The vessel may be individuals fulfilling such a ministry; it may be collective. Later we may say something more about the vessel, but let us not think now technically in terms of apostles and prophets and so on as offices. Let us think of them as vital functions. God is more concerned with the function than with the man. The man may fail God and God may have to set him aside—even the prophet—but the function is the thing God is concerned about. He will bring the function back again somewhere else. I am not at all interested at this time in people called prophets. I am concerned about this function that is so needed, that we may function in this capacity. We will not go out advertising ourselves as prophets; but God grant that there may be raised up a prophetic ministry for a time like this when His whole purpose concerning His Son is brought back into view amongst His people. That is His need, that is their need.

T.A.S.

In the press : New edition of "The Battle for Life"

The Four Pillars of Jacob

The Pillar of Revelation

"And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it." (Gen. xxviii. 18.)

THERE are two men in the Bible with whom we almost all feel a strange oneness and sympathy of heart. They are Jacob and Peter. Their experiences and characteristics seem so to tally with our own that we all find help and encouragement from hearing about them. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, both of these men were failures in themselves. We are conscious of our own failings and so find a kinship with them. Secondly, they were both greatly loved of the Lord, in spite of their failures; God was very patient and gracious towards them, and we are glad to be able to identify ourselves with them in this respect. Thirdly—and I hope that this is as true of us as it certainly was of them—they were wholehearted and downright in their history with the Lord. It was this thoroughgoing characteristic in Jacob which influenced him in setting up his pillars. We read of four such pillars which he erected in the course of his spiritual pilgrimage, each one of them representing a landmark in his own inner history. It sometimes took Jacob a long time to learn a spiritual lesson, but once the lesson was learned it became a governing factor in his life. He accepted wholeheartedly the implications of what God had shown him, and set up his visible testimony to the fact in a pillar.

The following are the four pillars: Revelation (Gen. xxviii. 18), Separation (xxxii. 45), Transformation (xxxv. 14) and Resurrection (xxxv. 20).

Genesis xxviii speaks to us of the first recorded occasion on which Jacob really committed himself in this way. He took the stone which had been under his head as he lay asleep and set it up for a pillar to mark the place where he had received a remarkable revelation from God. Peter likewise very early in his career had a Divine revelation, and in both cases the revelation was concerned with the same spiritual truth. Peter realised that the Lord was the Christ, the Son of the living God. The Lord added to that by affirming, "Upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt. xvi. 16, 18). In a spiritual way Jacob also saw Christ, the Rock, and was shown that the house of God is involved in knowing Christ in that way.

The Circumstances of the Vision

Think for a moment of the circumstances of the revelation. Jacob was utterly alone with God. All other voices were silent; all other influences removed; it was as though he was alone in the world—alone with God. That is true of all revelation. Peter was not literally alone, but he was the only one to perceive what he did, and the Lord Jesus said to him, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee," that is to say, 'thou hast not learned this from some other man.' Learning and studying the Bible is a general matter: revelation is individual. We all wish to learn as much as we can of the truth as contained in the Word of God, and we can do this together. But when the Lord opens our spiritual eyes to see a Divine truth, that is something peculiarly personal; we are alone in it. The matter is no longer one of theories and doctrines but a direct, personal challenge to our own hearts. We see that which the natural man does not know, and our whole life is changed by what we see. The proof of revelation is the effect that it has upon our lives. This revelation to Jacob made a profound revolution in his life. He saw for himself the truth of God's house.

We are apt to think of spiritual revelation as the fruit of some long process of spiritual maturing, but this is by no means invariably the case. Both Jacob and Peter were at the very beginning of things when the light of Divine purpose first dawned upon them. We would say of Jacob that he was nowhere spiritually when this incident occurred.

'Though like a wanderer,

The sun gone down,

Darkness comes over me,

My rest a stone'—

That is not the language of a triumphant, spiritual giant, but only of a miserable and discredited fugitive. Nevertheless this is the very man whom God has singled out for revelation. I do not think that he was ashamed of what he had done, but doubtless he realized that everything had gone wrong. What, now, was the use of the birthright and the blessing? His mother, Rebekah, had been optimistic in advising him to flee to Laban "and tarry with him a few days." Jacob knew that his brother's anger would last for years. He knew nothing of the future—that he would prosper in the land of his exile. All he knew was that everything appeared to be lost. He had no

home of his own. And that was when he was shown the house of God. When you have your own house and are getting on comfortably in it you may not be particularly ready to be enlightened as to God's house. No, this vision was not the reward of spiritual maturity but the answer to abject failure.

It may be that many do not appreciate Divine revelation just because they have no such sense of personal insufficiency or failure. The ability to plan and to prosper may blind men to God's highest purpose. The place of revelation may be the place of conscious failure and unworthiness. Thank God, He does not wait until we are worthy. Not that Jacob was particularly worried about his personal unworthiness at this time, any more than Peter was when he received his revelation. The Lord, however, knew that one day each of them would realise—Jacob as he wrestled at Jabbok and Peter as he wept bitterly at Jerusalem—how utterly unworthy he was. It is one of the glories of God's grace that He shows us that which is dearest to His own heart, even though we are Jacobs and Peters.

A Vision of the House of God

Now as to the vision. You will notice in Genesis xxviii. 14 that it was a vision of universal significance. We are apt to think that it was just something that concerned Jacob, since he was promised a blessing—"I am with thee, and will keep thee whithersoever thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (Gen. xxviii. 15). But this experience was something far more than a personal encouragement to Jacob. God showed him what was His provision for the whole world, for all men, and all the nations. "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." It was as though God said to him, 'Jacob, what you are seeing is not just something that you are going to do—even that you are going to do for God. What you are seeing now is the key to the will of God in all the nations and for all time. It is the house of God.'

We talk of visions and revelations. How often we think in purely personal terms!—that the Lord is showing us what He is going to make of us or do with us, or what we are going to be for Him. The great men of God forgot themselves as the zeal of God's house took hold upon them. We who are so much less tend to think of revelation in terms of our own part in it, putting ourselves into the centre of the picture. Well, it is true that there is a place for us in the vision—there was a place for

Jacob. God wanted and needed Jacob, but His real purpose was bound up with His house, from which all the nations were to derive their blessing and their life.

I am not sure that it was a ladder, as we think of ladders, that Jacob saw. It is the only occurrence of the word in the Bible, so there is no means of comparing it with any other reference. It appears to be derived from a verb which speaks of that which is set up, which rises up. It may well be that what he saw was not at all a literal ladder, but some kind of sloping causeway joining earth and heaven. His stone the next morning symbolized for him what he had seen. In any case, John i. 51 shows us quite clearly that whatever the ladder looked like its spiritual counterpart is Christ—Christ set up as the great means of communication between heaven and earth.

This was set up on the earth at the place called Bethel. What is the significance of Bethel? It is that there is a place on earth which is wholly the Lord's. It is God's house. Of course the whole world is His, but this is peculiarly His, for here He is Lord indeed, He is supreme and all His rights are fully recognised. And what is more, everything which goes up to God from the earth must go up from Bethel. "The angels of God ascending . . ." It is not one of many ladders which may be found in various places. There is a specific and unique way by which all that comes up to God from man must ascend. Thus Jacob's eyes were opened to discover the house of God. Everything goes up from here. It is possible for us to do a lot of work, in activities here, there and everywhere, without much of it going up to God. Only that which comes through Christ can ascend to God. The whole point of Bethel is to insist that service must be Godward. That does not mean that service takes no account of the needs of men, but it insists that the true direction of service must be Godward even if it is expressed in manward activities. Thus it is that Peter reminds us that we are ". . . a spiritual house . . . a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter ii. 5).

Similarly everything which comes down to man does so on this Divine staircase at Bethel. God speaks at Bethel, He speaks in His house. His is the only voice heard there. Of course, God spoke in all sorts of places and He does still, but the essential speaking of God—that is the meaning of the vision—comes down through Christ to His Church. In a world of men who do not know and cannot know the speaking of God the Church is God's means

for making His voice heard. Alas, how many other voices may be heard in that which is called 'the Church'! However careful we may be to avoid a stereotyped form of Christianity it is very easy for us to provide an opportunity for the voice of men, the words of men, rather than the speaking of God.

Everything is kept living. Bethel does not mean that there is a place for God on the earth, fixed and detached, in which everything which is said must be of Him. No, there is a constant coming and going, that is to say a constant, living relationship with heaven. Bethel speaks of an opportunity for God so to manifest Himself that *even a Jacob* says, "How dreadful is this place." This means something more than a powerful sermon. It means much more than a mere accurate setting forth of Scriptural types and teaching. This humbled Jacob; this was God drawing near.

Bethel does not speak of a locality, as such, but of the spiritual truth of a people who are in living communication with God through Jesus Christ in a present and powerful way. That which can go up to God goes up from them, and that which God desires to do among men He is able to do through them. In them is found an expression of the authority, the will and the purpose of God; through them honour, glory and worship are presented to God in the name of Jesus Christ. Thus Jacob saw in type what is God's intention for His redeemed people.

A Present Divine Fact

And this is the remarkable thing about it—Jacob saw it not as an ideal which he was to try to bring about but as a Divine fact. It is striking to notice that at first he says "This is . . . the house of God" (verse 17) and then later, "This stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house" (verse 22). It will be because it is. Such a declaration would be absurd among men, but it is quite logical when we are dealing with spiritual terms. Divine revelation in this matter does not mean that we set to work according to a pattern to make something that will be the house of God, but rather that we seek to enter experimentally into what is already true in Christ. Such revelation shows us in a spiritual way what is already true of the Church in Christ, so that by faith we may say 'It shall be, because it is.' Jacob did not say that he would build the house of God because he had now understood what it should be like, for in that case it would bear the marks of Jacob, even though it were intended to be for God. No, he saw the true nature of the house of God and

realised that he needed conforming to it. He would not make it, but it would make him. There is an important difference in these two views. That which men make, even in a sincere desire to reproduce the Church, the house of God, invariably conforms to the individuality of those concerned, bearing their marks and their name. Divine revelation as to the house of God makes us realise how much we need to be conformed to God's pattern in Christ. Like Jacob, we may know ourselves to be very different in nature, but like him we may prove how the Lord is able to break us and make us anew.

The great point about this revelation so far as Jacob was concerned was that he committed himself to it; he set up his pillar. The message of Jacob's first pillar is to call us to a whole-hearted committal to what we have seen.

Effects of the Vision

(a) Humbling

The first effect of this vision on Jacob, a very necessary effect, was that it humbled him. "How dreadful is this place!" What he really meant was, 'I am not fit to be here.' Divine revelation will always make us very humble. There are those who claim to have revelation from God, but who are clearly inflated by what they know, and ready to lord it over others because of their supposed spiritual pre-eminence. Alas! they cannot really have met God; they merely have the knowledge which puffs up. We are so different in ourselves from what God shows to be His will for us in Christ, that we can only tremble as Jacob did, and confess our utter unworthiness. When he saw the house of God in vision he said, 'I am not fit to have anything to do with it; it is too big, too high and too holy for me. How dreadful is this place!' That is a very healthy reaction.

(b) Faith

But the next reaction of Jacob, equally healthy, was to say, 'This may have been a dream in its beginning, but it is a revelation of Divine purpose to which God is committed, and I intend to make it quite manifest to everybody where I stand in the matter. I am committed to it.' It was in this spirit that he set up his pillar. Later on he would gladly have abandoned such a downright position. He was having a good time, he had lost his worries and fears, he had his wives, children and flocks, and was becoming rich and prosperous. Do you imagine that he was concerned about Bethel and that tenth which he had promised

to the Lord? Not he! He would gladly have forgotten the matter, as we often try to do when our difficulties are surmounted and we are prospering in some way which is not so utter for the Lord. But God had not forgotten. Things began to go wrong in his relationship with Laban, and Jacob found trouble on every side. What was the matter? The Lord was forcing him to remember his experience of revelation and committal, and calling him back to that. "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst a pillar, where thou vowedst a vow unto me; now arise . . . and return . . ." (Gen. xxxi. 13). The Lord is so faithful to His own revealed purpose that he will not allow Jacob to be at ease anywhere else than at Bethel. Jacob may have forgotten his pillar and his vows, but he meant them then, and God will hold him to them now, for he has seen Bethel and committed himself to its implications. It took years for the realisation, but it had to be. He could not rest anywhere else, nor belong to anything less. He might be miles from Bethel, nevertheless he belonged to it and the Lord was able to bring him there.

Jacob cannot constitute Bethel by his own efforts, but he must find his place in it. In fact, the whole point of the vision seems to be the appreciation of the spiritual fact of God's house. It is not what God *is going to do*; He *has done it* in Christ. Spiritually the day of Pentecost was the occasion when there was completed in Christ a people for His name. The Lord's people who are scattered and

lonely, seeing no signs of a true expression of Bethel, should not get to work to try and form a little Bethel of their own but claim in faith the realisation of the vision of what is true in Christ. We must make it clear where we stand, but only the God of the revelation can bring us there. Bethel is a spiritual reality to which we must be conformed.

(c) God's Committal

Jacob's way of spiritual discipline brought much suffering, but it also brought rich blessing. At Bethel he received a promise. As Jacob set up his pillar in token of absolute acceptance of the revelation, he received the assurance that the Lord also was wholly committed to him. "I am with thee, and will keep thee whithersoever thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (Gen. xxviii. 15). It is for us to accept the vision, with all its implications, and the Lord will undertake to bring it about so far as we are concerned.

We must not behave as mere spectators in the matter of Divine revelation, admiring, discussing, rejecting, or postponing our decision. We, too, must set up our pillar, affirming thereby that whatever the cost we are committed to that which the Lord has shown us. And if we do that, God—the God of Jacob—assures us that He will be with us to bring us right in to the fulness of His purpose in Christ.

H. F.

The Prayer of Committal

"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass" (Hebrew, "He worketh") *Psa. xxxviii. 5.*

THERE is a kind of prayer that we need to learn. It involves a definite transaction with God. Generalities are avoided. Time is saved and results are obtained. It is a 'common-sense' kind of prayer.

The above text may be summarized in three phrases: "Commit, trust and He worketh." culty in becoming established in his Christian

To commit anything fully to God, it is necessary to have a definite transaction with God.

We heard of a farmer who had great difficulty. He was always giving himself to God and in a short time the enemy would tell him that nothing was done, that he was not a Christian and that his consecration did not amount to anything; and he would fall into

uncertainty and doubting. This up-and-down experience troubled him and he rarely had any peace of mind. The devil seemed to torment him continually. Drawn by a new impulse he made up his mind that, right where he was in the field, he would yield himself to the Lord **ONCE FOR ALL**, and to make it absolutely definite he would drive a stake in the ground on the very spot. Not long after, as he was at work in another field, Satan attacked him as aforesaid and told him that he had not given himself to God. He replied, 'Come this way, Mr. Devil.' Over the fence he went and back to the field where he had driven the stake. 'Look here, Mr. Devil, here is the spot where I did it, and this is the stake I drove, and this is the place where God accepted me.' This definiteness and decision lifted him far above all doubts and suggestions of the adversary. Many are in doubt because of their lack of definiteness in dealing with God.

* Erratum: Line 11 should follow line 15.

Many pray about their needs and keep on praying as though they did not believe and in consequence pray themselves out of faith. In Mark xi. 24, we see that we are to be definite in making our requests known to God, and it is just as necessary to be definite in believing what God says about the answer. After praying and believing, if the answer still carries outwardly do not continue to pray for it in such a way that it is evident you are not believing Him for it. If you do you will find when you have finished praying that your faith has weakened or has entirely gone. If God keeps you waiting for the conscious answer tell Him that you are waiting and are still believing and praising Him for the answer; thus you become one of the Lord's "remembrancers," spoken of in Isaiah lxii. 6-7 (margin), by reminding Him of His word of promise and by still maintaining your stand of faith and saying 'Lord I believe Thee and praise Thee.'

Other methods of prayer may result in praying yourself out of faith altogether. It is ruinous to faith to go back over the same ground again and again. There is nothing that so fully clinches faith as to be so sure of the answer that you can thank and praise God for it. We may know we have believed the Lord because after we pray we are not restlessly planning and working for the answer to our prayer but are filled with restful praise because we have believed God's word that He "worketh."

A sure sign that we have believed is found in Hebrews iv. 3, "We which have believed do enter into rest." Prayers that pray us out of faith are the result of centering our thoughts on the difficulties in the way rather than on God's promises. We are not to be occupied with our feelings or symptoms or our faith, or lack of faith, but only with what God has said. The simple way is to begin calling the things we have prayed for ours and to thank God for them before we feel or see the answer. God is faithful. He cannot deny Himself.

Joshua dared to claim a promised victory on the authority of God's word alone, while as yet there were no signs of that victory being accomplished, and according to their faith God did unto them, so that when they "shouted" (praised), He made the walls to fall. Abraham "considered not his own body . . . He staggered not at the promise of God" (Rom. iv. 19-20. See also iv. 17).

If the realization of what we have believed for always came immediately where would faith have any chance to grow and be perfected?

The same thing is true about committal or consecration as about prayer. People consecrate and re-consecrate over and over again, not realizing that each repetition discounts the one previously made. If you were to give a book to a friend and then went and repeated this gift day after day, soon nobody would know to whom the book belonged. We find in the law of offerings in the Bible that when an offering was once laid upon the altar, from that moment it belonged to the Lord and no man dared to stretch forth a hand to retake it. The surrender having been made the next thing to do is to believe that God accepts it and to reckon that it is His and keep on reckoning this. Don't keep on committing and re-committing your case to God. One of Satan's most subtle traps is to get us to do this.

To commit suggests not only bringing the matter to God, but also leaving it there. This matter of bringing it to God is hard enough, but to leave it there is harder. Yet it is necessary to leave it with Him and trust Him if He is to work.

Suppose you have something the matter with your watch. You take it to the watch-maker and ask him if he can repair it. After he looks at it through his magnifying glass, he replies, 'Yes'; then you take the watch and say, 'Thank you,' and go your way. Will your watch be repaired? No; if you want it repaired you must leave it with the watchmaker. So often when we pray we ask the Lord if He will undertake a certain difficult thing for us. He says, 'Yes,' and yet we fail to leave it with Him and nothing is done.

We have to learn to really hand over to God our requests and pray till we believe and then leave them with Him. So often when there are difficult things or urgent matters, we like to feel that we have them still in the power of our hand. It is difficult for us to give up the control. Why not give God a chance to work?

Let us look again at another analogy, a parable in nature that teaches exactly the same lesson. A small boy who had been born and brought up in a large city asked his parents for permission to plant some Indian corn in their little garden, and was given a few seed corn. He recalls the wonder and responsibility when he planted that corn. He committed it to the ground and buried it out of sight. He watered it, and although he hardly expected it to come up the first day or two he could not resist the temptation of digging up each grain and seeing how it was getting on. Needless to say he raised no corn from that planting. He had to begin all over again and put in some

new seed; and after a long while gathered the little harvest of corn.

There are some requests which we commit to God that we treat exactly as he did those grains of corn. We commit them to Him and water them with our prayers and tears, but we are too impatient. It is hard to wait. We dig them up and take them in our hands to see how they are getting on. This blocks the working of God. Never dig up in unbelief what you have sown in faith. There is too much self-effort and too little real committing to God. Some prayers have to be hidden in God's hand till they die, and God wants us to leave them there by faith, for God knows that "if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

When anything is really committed to God we must not act as we did before. Usually He does not want us to do anything but trust Him. If there is anything else He will make it plain. We must be careful to do only what He directs. Nothing must be done by us inconsistent with the faith of committal.

The Word of God tells us, "When ye pray BELIEVE," Mark xi. 24. Many, when they pray, simply pray and think that there is virtue in saying prayers; but God, in this text, calls our attention to the necessity of believing when we pray. This believing is not simply believing in God, but means to believe for the very thing for which we are asking Him.

We must take the definite place of believing God. This is not merely to believe that God WILL answer our prayer some time, for that would be putting God's working off until some future time and would be only HOPE instead of FAITH. We must believe that we HAVE the answer, even though we neither see nor feel that we have. (See I John v. 14-15.)

God says "Now faith is"—Heb. xi. 1, not faith shall be, for that would be only hoping for and not present tense believing and having. Faith begins NOW.

The faith that one has must be more than a mental willingness to believe; it must be a faith founded on God's promise. Beside, you must believe it is God's will to answer this particular prayer. If you so believe Him you can begin to thank Him. If you can honestly thank God from your heart that He has heard you, you can be sure that your faith is sufficiently perfect for Him to work. Then you can say, 'Lord, I believe Thee and praise Thee.'

His Word says, "By prayer and supplication with THANKSGIVING, let your requests

be made known unto God." Thus pray until you can believe and thank Him for the answer and He will begin to work.

It is always an aid to us to have some specific case that will exemplify the principles that we are presenting and often we can learn more from example than from ordinary directions that are given.

A certain church got into financial difficulties and it looked to the young pastor as though he would have to resign. There was a large indebtedness; he endeavoured in every way to have the need in money provided but all in vain. He made the matter a subject of prayer, but seemed to get no answer. Then God spoke to him and said, 'Commit this to Me and trust Me and I will work.' As he bowed in prayer, God spoke an appropriate promise, Phil. iv. 19, "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." With a definite act of faith, he committed the church and all its affairs to God and claimed the promise, the supply of all the needs and said, 'Lord, I thank Thee and praise Thee.' He retired but could not sleep—the crisis seemed to be so great in the church and also in his own life. After tossing on his bed for an hour or two, the suggestion came to him to get down and pray again and ask God to provide for this need. He saw that it was from the enemy, but as he could not sleep he arose to kneel by his bedside and said, 'Lord, when I retired I committed this matter to Thee, and I told Thee that I believed that Thou would'st work; Lord, I still believe Thee and I praise Thee.' He again retired but not to sleep. After an hour or two of wakefulness the suggestion was repeated to get up and pray and ask God to provide for this great need. He arose and felt sure that the enemy was fooling as he was evidently trying to get him to pray himself out of faith, but he still said, 'Lord, when I retired I believed Thee and I still believe Thee and I praise Thee.' Again he retired but not to sleep; another hour or two were spent in the same kind of restlessness and pressure. The same suggestion was repeated, 'You had better rise and pray.' He arose and prayed after the same manner, 'Lord, I still believe Thee and praise Thee.' Then he fell into a quiet sleep; and when he awakened there was real peace. Needless to say, God abundantly provided and answered that prayer and taught him the wonderful lesson of "Commit, trust, and God worketh."

SELECTED.

Four Greatnesses of Divine Revelation

X

The Greatness of Christ's Enthronement

"Then Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king" (I Chron. xxix. 23).

"Then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God" (II Chron. v. 13-14).

THE words which we have read throw us forward again to our New Testament. "Solomon sat upon the throne of Jehovah as king." Of course, that can only be said in a typical, limited, sense. The throne of David, the throne of the house of Israel, was indeed God's throne rightly, but only in a very limited sense comparatively. What we come to concerning the Lord Jesus—again in the letter which has so largely interpreted that part of the Old Testament for us, the letter to the Ephesians—is that God

"raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. i. 20-23).

There we have the non-comparative, the absolute, that of which Solomon's throne was but a poor shadow. We can say that Jesus sat, in that full sense, upon the throne of Jehovah as King.

The other fragment about the glory of the Lord filling the house is seen in two ways in the New Testament. Here again in Ephesians, after this vast comprehensive survey of Christ and His Church in the heavenlies according to the eternal counsels of God, the great summing up of the Apostle is in these words:—

"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever" (Eph. iii. 20-21).

"The glory of the Lord filled the house."

We know that a spiritual beginning of that very thing was made on the Day of Pentecost. The Lord Jesus having been exalted to the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens and having taken His seat on the throne of Jehovah

as King, on the day of Pentecost the glory filled the house. There we have some indication of the Lord's intention, both for His Son and for His people.

Now I want to bring all that into a small compass of application. The all-governing thing is Christ enthroned. Everything takes its rise from that, everything flows out from that—Christ enthroned in the very throne of Jehovah. He comes into the place of God Himself, and there is no room for any other. Even the priests could not minister because there was no place for them. The glory of the Lord filled the house—it *filled* the house. When the Lord has His place, there is no place for any other, He holds it alone. When the Lord Jesus is really Lord, everything else goes out. That is what we shall come to more fully, perhaps, in a few minutes. That is where we begin, and that is the secret of, and the key to, everything else—Christ in His place, the place of Divine assignment, the place for which God ever intended Him. "That in all things he might have the preeminence" (Col. i. 18). You never have the secret of spiritual fulness until Christ has the place which God has appointed for Him, so that there is no room for us or anything else.

That is simple, but it is the sort of thing that lies beneath all our troubles and in regard to which there is a great deal of difficulty in making it actual, even with the Lord's own people. Really, it is all a matter of the Lord having His place. When He does have His place, then we have the secret of the filling of the house of the Lord with the glory of the Lord. We then have the secret of fulness.

The Results of Christ's Enthronement

(a) Rest to the People of God

Now, when you look at Solomon, and you see him taking his place upon the throne of Jehovah as king, and look to see what the issues, consequences, effects of that were, you find several things quite simply indicated. One is that Israel came into a time of wonderful rest. Solomon sat upon the throne of Jehovah as king, and Israel had rest round about on every side (I Kings iv. 24, 25).

Of course (by way of parenthesis) we are remembering that all this points very largely to the literal Kingdom age. It has its literal side in the next age that is to come—the Millennium. But Scripture always has a double aspect, the dispensational and the spiritual. We have indicated what happened on the day of Pentecost.

But the Church, in an outward, earthly way, did not have rest from the day of Pentecost. It had anything but rest outwardly—but a wonderful rest entered into the Church. You cannot fail to see how things changed, even for the Apostles, from that time—there was a wonderful assurance, a wonderful confidence, a wonderful courage and boldness, and wonderful effectiveness in witness. Yes, all because they had come to rest, inward rest, born of the knowledge that Christ was Lord. Whatever happens, Christ is Lord! That is their message, that is their note. Whatever rulers and people do, Christ is Lord! However things go favourably or contrarily, Christ is Lord! You see them moving through the book of the Acts on that basis, and what they met was not a little of difficulty and opposition and trial; but it was all the time, Christ is Lord! And as they affirmed it, so it worked out; the very things which were against them worked out to prove it; not Satan, not man, not circumstances, not forces, but Christ, was Lord! There was a deep, quiet assurance and confidence and rest.

We know by numerous small experiences, as well as in the great crises of controversy with the will of God, that it is only when we yield to His absolute Lordship, when our wills, our desires, our preferences, our likes, have been subjected and submitted to Him, and we bow—not rebelliously, not under compulsion, but gladly, willingly, responsively—to His Lordship, then a wonderful rest comes into our hearts; and there can be no glory until there is rest. That is the word that governs this house. "Arise, O Jehovah God, into thy resting-place, thou, and the ark of thy strength" (II Chron. vi. 41). 'Enter into Thy rest in the house.' Until there is rest in the house, there is no glory. They brought the ark in, and they drew out the staves—the staves which always suggested movement, progress, restless going on—they drew them out and said, 'This is the end, we have come to the end of the journey.' And the glory of the Lord filled the house.

It is all a picture of the rest of faith of which the letter to the Hebrews speaks so much; and that rest of faith comes from a real heart apprehension of Him as in the throne, both as King and High Priest. We must not stay too long with each fragment. The first thing resultant from Solomon's exaltation was rest unto the people of God.

(b) Enemies Reduced to Helplessness

The next thing—and as a part of the former—was that all the enemies who had been asserting themselves for so long, whom David had

been continuously fighting, were helpless. It seems that this exaltation of Solomon set up a mighty, paralysing awe over all those enemies so that they were helpless; and that also has a spiritual counterpart. Oh yes, the New Testament shows perfectly well that the enemies were active, they were working, they were doing all in their power to assail and destroy, but after all, what was the result? Well, they were helpless to bring this thing to a standstill, they were absolutely incapable of destroying the glory. In a very real sense they were helpless. That is the story of the book of the Acts. There were plenty of enemies, they did not cease to exist, but how helpless they were against this Name and this testimony, against this Christ! What they did, not only turned upon themselves, but was made to serve the Lord's purpose, and in that double sense they were helpless. When Christ really is in His place there may be enemies and they may be active and they may seem to be doing a lot of harm and having much their own way; but when Christ is Lord His sovereignty opposes them and renders them incapable of accomplishing their purpose and carrying through their designs. ". . . to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose" (Rom. viii. 28), and the "all things" very largely cover the enemy's activities—they are turned to good by the sovereign activity of the Lord; the enemy is unable to triumph.

(c) Abundant Wealth for the People of God

The next thing resultant from Solomon's enthronement was the abundance of wealth for God's people. We have said in earlier chapters that the wonder of the wealth of Solomon which God gave him was great. God gave Solomon . . . "Jehovah magnified Solomon exceedingly in the sight of all Israel, and bestowed upon him such royal majesty as had not been on any king before him in Israel" (I Chron. xxix. 25). We have said that it was not for himself, not to be spent upon himself for his own gratification. It was for Israel, and Israel came into the good of Solomon's wealth when he was enthroned.

Well, we are told here in this letter and its companion letter to the Colossians that God has filled the Lord Jesus, God has caused that in Him all fulness should dwell. "It was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fulness dwell" (Col. i. 19). There is a favourite passage of ours in Philippians—"My God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. iv. 19). Well, He is filled full.

The wealth is for you. Israel came into the good of God's lavish hand upon Solomon, and when Solomon was in his place, Israel shared the good. Oh, I am not just using language! I am not trying to be eloquent! I believe it is of such practical moment that we know the riches of Christ, that the people of God everywhere should know how full Christ is for them. How the people of God to-day need to be saved from this awful tragedy of going about in starvation, looking for spiritual food and finding none, and, by their weakness, ineffectiveness, by the lack of an impact of God through them upon the world, showing that they have not enough and to spare, they are not a people with a competence! That is how it is very largely to-day, and it should not be. It is God's thought that His people should be in the good of the wealth that He has stored up in His Son for them. When Christ is in His place, then we begin to know what we inherit in Him.

(d) The Enlargement of the Kingdom

The next thing resultant from Solomon's being enthroned was the enlargement of the kingdom. God had promised it, and it began. You find that Solomon began to expand, to take in, to build; his kingdom increased. Well, we do not need to argue that out so far as the New Testament is concerned. When the Lord Jesus was enthroned, immediately the enlargement of His kingdom commenced—that spiritual kingdom into which we have been translated, the kingdom of the Son of God's love.

Now, my point is this. What is the key to—what shall we call it?—the growth of the Church, the expansion and enlargement of the work of God? What is the key to increase, world increase, of that which is of Christ? It is Christ's being apprehended in His glory, in His Lordship, in His enthronement in the throne of Jehovah. It is along these lines—firstly, that He is Lord and He is in His place; and then, as the result, that we are a people who have rest. If we go about with haggard faces and worried looks as people who carry an awful burden of sorrow and trouble, and bear that before the world, there will not be much increase, growth, spiritual expansion. When we can carry with us the testimony of a heart that has found rest on the ground that Jesus is Lord, the world watches. Here is a Christian going through deep trial, things have all gone wrong for that life, things are hard and difficult, no one has greater reason to question the love, the power, the sovereignty of God. The world watches; what do they see, what do they

hear? 'Save, Lord, we perish!' or 'It is all right, the Lord is on the throne, things are not as they appear, we are coming out, and coming out triumphantly; this is not the end!' A quiet, restful assurance through stress and strain, trial, adversity, contradiction—that is how the kingdom increases. The rest of faith is a mighty power of testimony unto increase; when others know that we have not only enough to get on with but that we have plenty: that we are not all the time having to go down to Egypt, to the world, to find something to make up what is lacking in our Christianity, we have enough: that we have not only as much as the world has, but a very great deal more: that we are completely independent of this world for our satisfaction, and have a new source of complete satisfaction: then there is a testimony that counts. Oh, I am afraid so many of us have rather given the other impression—that to be a Christian is almost to lose everything. We not only give that impression by our looks and ways and influence, but by what we do—hungering after this and that and the other: we must have this, we must have that, because the Lord has not filled everything. Yes; but when He is really in His place, there is that moving into His wealth which will result in others wanting to know the secret.

The Way to Christ's Enthronement

I must gather up and close, and I come for the final word to this. How is all this really made possible and brought into experience? We want this rest, we want this wealth, this spiritual fullness, we want the enemy to be rendered incapable of finally achieving his end, we want the enlargement of what is the Lord's on this earth. But how is it to be? We say—and it is the inclusive truth—it is when Christ is Lord, when He is on the Throne. Yes, but how is He to get there? because this is not something official and objective—that God has chosen Jesus Christ and put Him on the Throne, and that is the sovereign, official act of God. This is something spiritual, and has an immediate application and meaning inside of us. This enthronement of Christ has to have an inward meaning, and it cannot be until other inward things are dealt with; so that the realisation of Christ's enthronement, with all that it means for us of victory, of rest, of wealth, and of expansion or enlargement, all rests upon the altar, the Cross. How great that Cross is we have tried to see, but here you can see its greatness inasmuch as the practical results of the exaltation of Christ depend upon it. What I mean is this—Christ cannot be

Lord, with all the beneficent results thereof, until all other lordships are subdued under Him, the lordships within the kingdom of our own hearts. You can work that out, and see that in every letter of the New Testament that is what is being applied. What is brought into view is the rightful place of Jesus as Lord, and then the Apostle gets down to this business, and he says, for example, to the Corinthians, 'You are spoiling your testimony, you are not knowing spiritual wealth, you know nothing about real rest; everything is limited and marred because you are not a crucified people, because your natural life is in the way of Jesus Christ. He cannot be Lord because you, in the strength of your natural life, are lord, and that has to come to the Cross, you Corinthians.' 'You Galatians, you are allowing an Old Testament, typical, regime to come in again and dominate you; the law has returned, you have got on to another basis altogether. You have Christ, Who has fulfilled all the law, out of His place, you have fallen from grace and gone back to the law.' Galatians ii. 20, in its immediate sense, must be an actuality. "I have been crucified with Christ." You notice the connection. The immediate context is with regard to the law, the reign of the law. Paul is saying how he was under the law and how the law had dominion over him and brought him into bondage and limited his whole life. Then he says, 'I got out of it by being crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I that live, but Christ. The law was in the way; I was in the way in the sense of this legalism of my life.' Any Christian who is bound by legalism is an obstruction to the Lord Jesus, and will limit the expression of His power. You find the same note in principle in every letter. Something of the old natural life is in the way,

and it is limiting, spoiling, and causing everything to come into a state of contradiction, and whatever it is it must all come to the Cross.

You and I, in all that we are by nature, have to come under the power of that Cross. The Cross has to get us out of the way in order that Christ may fill all things. That is the meaning here. I see that the altar, the great altar, was set up by Solomon, and a mighty, all-inclusive sacrifice to God's satisfaction was offered in type, and then the king had his place and then all these blessed results followed.

Dear friends, we are in the way, we are our own plague, we are our own limitation. After all, it is this natural life that is the real bane; but there is a mighty Cross. It is still possible for us to say, "I have been crucified with Christ." It is still possible to enter into the meaning of that and to know that fundamental breaking of self-life, self-strength, self-centredness, that real breaking of the very backbone of our natural life—yes, even our religious natural life, our devoted natural life, whatever it is that is, after all, the natural life—the breaking of it so that its strength is gone, to make room for the King, for Him to fill all things. In the practical outworking we know by a very little spiritual history that not until that natural life, at some point or another, is dealt with and brought down and broken do we enter upon a life of spiritual rest and spiritual growth and spiritual wealth. The Cross governs it, the Cross leads to the Throne: from the altar to the Throne, and from the Throne to the glories of Christ. May the Lord Himself apply the word and speak through it, and may the result be that He gets His place, His full place, His unquestioned place, and we come into all the blessings of Christ in His place.

T. A. S.

For Boys and Girls

Gospel Messages from the Antarctic (No. 9)

"Jesus said, I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish . . ." (John x. 28).

"Lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. vi. 12).

IN our last story we were speaking of crevasses, those cracks in the ice which were a constant danger to the explorers. Although every effort was made to avoid them, on many occasions men fell in; but the remarkable thing was that in spite of the many falls not one man was killed or seriously hurt. The explanation was that the men did not go without a companion in the areas where there were likely to be

crevasses, and almost always they travelled roped to their sledges; that is to say, they wore what they called harness, to which was attached a rope, the other end of the rope being tied to the sledge. This enabled them when necessary to pull the sledge, but it also acted as a safeguard in case they fell.

You can imagine what frequently happened. The men would be travelling over the ice when suddenly one of them would disappear down a crevasse. If it was a deep one he would fall, and then suddenly stop with a jerk as he reached the full length of the rope by which he was tied to the sledge. It would cause a

tremendous strain upon the rope and his harness and, if there were any weak places in either, the sudden jerk would almost certainly result in a break, and then there would be nothing to prevent the man from falling to the bottom of the crevasse, and probably being killed. But if the rope were strong, the man would remain hanging safely but uncomfortably in mid-air. If, in a moment of alarm, he began to struggle to save himself he would probably do no good at all, but on the other hand he might either break the rope or accidentally slip out of his harness and fall to his death. No, the only thing to do would be to remain quietly there, laying hold of the rope and trusting in it and in the sledge to hold him safe, and waiting patiently until his companions came to the rescue. Fretting and struggling would not help at all. Quietness and confidence would be the wiser and more helpful course.

Here is the description of one incident:—

“Lashly dropped into a crevasse. He fell to the length of his rope and harness. I was glad that, having noticed his rope rather worn, I had given him a new one a few days before. He jerked Crean and me off our feet backwards . . . and pulled the sledge half across the crevasse. I was a little afraid of sledge and all going down, but fortunately it held. We could not see Lashly . . . but we eventually pulled him up.”

Of course, if the sledge itself had fallen there would have been no hope for anyone, as its weight would have pulled all the men with it to the bottom of the crevasse. Everything depended upon the sledge remaining on the firm ice. Happily, not once in all the expedition did a sledge fall into a dangerous crevasse, nor did a rope or harness break at a critical moment.

Now, other people besides Antarctic explorers may suddenly fall into ‘crevasses,’ however carefully they may seek to walk. We all know something about them in our ordinary, daily life. Some of our falls are our own fault, but some are not. Circumstances sometimes arise that make us feel as if the ground has opened beneath our feet. We do not know where we are, nor what to do. We may find ourselves suddenly in great anxiety or fear or sorrow, or deeply convicted of having sinned—the ‘crevasse’ of sin is one we all too often fall into—and we may be almost ready to despair. If at such time we have no ground for hope we are indeed in a sad plight. The Word of God speaks of those who are “separate from Christ . . . having no hope. . . .”

(Eph. ii. 12), and it speaks of others who “abound in hope” because they have “joy and peace in believing” (Rom. xv. 13). These latter are the people who, when they fall, know that they are safely united to a ‘sledge’ that will hold them fast. They are true Christians. A true Christian is not a person who merely believes certain truths or does (or does not do) certain things. He is one who “is joined unto the Lord, one spirit” (I Cor. vi. 17). The Word of God says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts xvi. 31); and when we do truly believe on Him, not only are our sins forgiven but the very life of the Lord Jesus is given to us and we become “partakers of the divine nature” (II Peter i. 4)—united to Him *by His own life*. This is what the New Testament means when it speaks of people being “in Christ.” Such people cannot be separated from Him unless that link of life can be broken; and that can never be, for there is no power—not even death itself—strong enough to overcome the power of His life. When He died on the cross and rose again from the dead He overcame all the power of evil, making Himself Master of sin, death and Satan. Paul says in Romans viii. 38, 39:

“I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels . . . nor things present, nor things to come . . . nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

So you see how confident a Christian should be, that even if he falls into difficulty or danger, or even into sin, he can never really be separated from his Saviour, and his hope of deliverance lies not in his own strength but in the fact that he is united to the Lord Jesus by a bond that nothing can break. And moreover—unlike the sledge which *might* have fallen down the crevasse—the Lord Jesus is as firm as a rock, established for ever in a place of victory from which He will never be moved. If only we could remember these things when we are in the midst of our trials how much more calmly and triumphantly we should bear the trials!

Paul and Silas remembered them when they fell into a very big ‘crevasse’ at Philippi. You can read the story in Acts xvi. They were in very great trouble. Everything seemed suddenly to have gone wrong. It looked as if the Lord had forsaken them, as if there was no possible way of escape and no ground for hope. What an occasion for despair! They might well have been gloomy and afraid—as I think many of us would have been. But what did they do? In the black darkness they

showed no sign of worry, but prayed and sang hymns to God! They remembered that, although they had fallen into a deep 'crevasse' that seemed as if it would swallow them up alive, there was a life-line—invisible but very real—that united them to One above, and that so long as that union remained all must be well. Their Lord was livingly joined to them in their trial and what could their enemies do against *Him*? They knew *by faith*—not by sight—that, whatever the appearance of things might be, they had not been abandoned and their Lord would somehow make all the evil circumstances to work out for good. And so instead of despairing they sang in hope; instead of fretting and fearing they rested and quietly waited. What a deliverance they had in their hearts before ever their bodies were released from prison!

In contrast to Paul and Silas, the disciples of Jesus acted very differently one day when they suddenly fell into a 'crevasse.' They were with Jesus Himself in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, when suddenly a great storm arose and it looked as if the boat would be swamped. The disciples were greatly afraid and expected every moment to be the last for them and for their Master. They had not yet learned that there was no need to be fearful when He was with them. He Himself was quite at rest. He arose and commanded the wind and the sea to be still, and there was a great calm. Then He said to the astonished disciples, "Why are ye fearful? Have ye not yet faith?" (Mark iv. 35-41). What unnecessary fears they had endured! How much better it is to count on the Lord than to fly into a panic!

Do you see what to do when *you* fall into a 'crevasse'? If you really belong to the Lord Jesus you are *not* abandoned and alone, a poor victim to be overcome and destroyed. You may feel like that, and everything may appear like it, but you must look by faith at the things not seen. You are joined to the Lord Jesus:

His life is yours. By the unbreakable power of that life He upholds you. Nothing can separate you from Him. And the end of the story cannot be disaster if He is involved in it. Count on Him continually. Do it day after day. Even though circumstances do not quickly appear to improve keep on counting on Him, and overcome the tendency to despair by the assurance that He is Lord of all and therefore all things must in the end yield to Him. And as you continue to do this a strange thing will be happening, which may perhaps take you by surprise: you will suddenly find that, though your circumstances may not have altered, you are no longer feeling as if you are in a 'crevasse.' In heart you will have escaped from it on to firm ground again. You will not have had to call others to your help, as our explorers did, nor will you have saved yourself by frantic struggles. You will have come up and out as the result of your faith, and the Lord would say to you as He said to others when He was here on the earth—"Thy faith hath saved thee."

Now are you quite sure you are "joined unto the Lord"? If not, make certain of it now, by believing on Him with all your heart. And then count on Him in every situation, whatever happens, knowing that as long as He lives and triumphs you live and may triumph too in the power of His life. The boy or girl who most counts on Him in times of difficulty and trial—who lays hold most firmly on eternal life—will be the first to reach the "South Pole."

Jesus triumphant all along the line;
Triumphant Saviour, all Thy triumph mine;
For since I am a partner in Thy love,
My life on earth is lived through Thee above.
Count on Him, count on Him,
Every hour of every day:
Count on Him, count on Him!
He says you may.

G. P.

"God Hath Spoken"

No. VII

The Reiterated Appeal

WERY early in this letter to the Hebrews the writer, having made a many-sided and very great comparison and contrast between the greatest persons and things of the old dispensation and Jesus the Son of God, launches an inclusive appeal and warning in superlative terms. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" Throughout the letter

he applies that in various connections, but he does so as always governed by that last clause

"So Great Salvation"

So that is what it is all about! Salvation. *Great* salvation. *So great* salvation! As there cannot be two salvations, this one and some other, but this one is really what God intends by salvation, it is as well that we look again at what has been said in these pages as to the greatness of Christ, the greatness of our call-

ing, the greatness of our intended destiny, and the greatness of our responsibility. One thing ought to emerge from this consideration, that is, that salvation is a much greater thing on the side of its *unto* than on the side of its *from*. That is, there is much more in God's purpose for man than to save him from sin, judgment, death, and hell. However great redemption is, it is only to get man back to the place where the original full intention of God can be proceeded with. It is a very costly 'fall' that has happened to man, but his recovery has far more in it than the recovery itself. The Gospel of Salvation as it is usually preached is so largely occupied with man himself and the immediate advantages and benefits of being saved. To promise, and get him to, heaven is about the limit. The "so great salvation" has immense issues bound up with it and includes all the superlatives and "mysteries" of Paul's unparalleled unveilings of "the eternal purpose." Salvation's greatest aspect is what it is unto, however great may be what it is from. If more of this greatness had broken upon the preachers, and were the mighty motive of their preaching, as it was in Paul's case, and others, the impact upon men would need little of the upholstery mentioned in our last chapter.

It is in the light of this more positive aspect that our writer so repeatedly appeals, urges, and warns, and it is now our intention to close our meditations by surveying these calls quite briefly.

While the writer was too moved by his theme to stop for systematising his matter, it may help if we do something in that way. We can therefore, quite without straining, put these reiterations into three connections—A, B, and C.

It is assumed by this letter that those to whom it was written were believers in the Lord Jesus and that they had given themselves over to Him. They are called "holy brethren" (iii. 1) which implies consecration to Christ. On this assumption the writer bases his appeals and warnings.

A. The Basis of Consecration

This basis is seen in the first series of appeals governed by the words "Let us."

i. (iv. 1) "*Let us fear.*"

If the consecration to the Lord is a genuine one upon an adequate apprehension of His superiority to all others, it will have in it this element of holy fear. The context shows that it is the great prospect which has come into view with Christ that creates such a fear lest it should be missed. Holy fear should always

be a feature of a Christian's life; not fear of judgment; not dread of the Lord; but fear lest there might be a missing of *all* that is implicit in the call of grace. The presence of such an exhortation is itself enough to prove that just to have accepted Christ is not enough to guarantee the attainment (to use Paul's word) of all that which is included in our having been "apprehended by Christ Jesus." ii. (iv. 11) "*Let us give diligence*"; literally "hasten."

This bears upon the time factor, especially the spiritual time factor. "So long as it is called To-day" or "To-day, if ye shall hear" is the ground of appeal here. The lack of urgency and diligence will have two effects. God's actual time opportunity—which is never shown to be other than now—may be missed; and, or, our capacity or ability to make good all that can be apprehended may slip past, and we be found like ships stranded on a mud bank.

iii (iv. 14) "*Let us hold fast*"; literally "grasp."

It is so easy to lose grip and firmness of hold, and become loose or slack. You have made a confession; reaffirm, and do not let its full meaning and value slip out of your hand, or be taken from you. Close your hand tightly upon it against all that would steal it from you.

iv. (iv. 16). "*Let us . . . with boldness.*"

False fear, timidity, uncertainty, or any member of that large family of Doubt, will keep us away if possible. The Throne of Grace is there. The Blood has opened the way. The High Priest in all sympathy holds out God's hand to take yours. Why be hesitant, doubtful, wavering? Staying away means only to be more and more involved in despondency and Satan's accusations. Make the bold plunge of faith in God's mercy and love; give Him credit for meaning what He says, and "draw near."

B. The Development of Consecration

i. (vi. 1). "*Let us go on . . .*"

The real value of this exhortation is found in the implication of the Greek word used. It is the same word as in Acts ii. 2 ("rushing") and II Peter i. 21 ("moved"). It really means to be borne along by another. This would indicate that God is moving on, the Spirit of God is going forward. He is not tarrying or delaying, but with great energy is pursuing His goal. Let us fall in with Him. Let us be caught in His goings. Let us yield to His energies. Let us not be left behind by the Lord. "Full-growth" is His goal; let

us not remain infants or immature.

ii. (x. 22). "Let us draw nigh."

This is not the same as No. iv. above. That was a matter of adjustment of ourselves to being received. This is unto communion following the adjustment. In the one we need not, and must not, stand without, asking whether, peradventure, we dare approach. In the other, we should not come with reserves that will keep us from entering positively into the communion that is there for us.

iii. (x. 23). "Let us hold fast."

Again, this is not the same as No. iii. above. That was taking hold, taking a firm grip. This is maintaining our hold. It is a matter of tenacity as to "our hope," "that it waver not." This goes right to the root cause of this whole letter. It is a costly and difficult way. It is "outside the camp, bearing his reproach." We made a confession. Perhaps we weakened. Having tightened our grip, let us not weaken again, but be pertinacious.

iv. (x. 24). "Let us consider one another."

Rather "study" one another, with a view to

(a) Emulating the good in one another.

(b) Inciting one another to good; to love and good works. In short, let us take account of one another with a view to positively helping one another toward the goal—not to noting one another's faults and defects and so retarding their progress and our own.

C. The Characteristics of Consecration

Having made his appeal for renewed consecration, and having shown what consecration is, by the same phrase—"Let us"—the writer proceeds to a series of exhortations which indicate the kind of person a really consecrated person will be; what is necessary as characterising such an one.

i. (xii. 1). "Let us lay aside."

If we really mean business in relation to this "heavenly calling" (iii. 1) we must and shall look at everything from the standpoint of whether it is positive or negative as relating thereto. Does this thing help? If not it must go. For it to hinder, or retard, or make heavy going is its condemnation. The course must be as clear as we can make it, and anything or anyone not in the real business, but just obstructing or loitering, must be pushed aside. This will apply to 'the luggage of life'; it will apply to distractions and diversions; it will also apply to discouragements and disheartenments. There is no place for temperamentality and moodiness in this race, and the easily-besetting sin of doubt and mistrust will bring the pilgrim quickly to the Slough of

Despond.

ii. (xii. 1). "Let us run."

Not talk about consecration; not be interested in it; not be merely a member of the 'Consecration Committee'; not be an expert in the technique of athletics, knowing about running and runners, courses, rules, outfit, and prizes; but "Let us run," let us *do* it. How many know all the teaching and doctrine of consecration who are slow starters, or poor runners, always needing to be urged, encouraged, get refreshments, or have a rest! Let us get on with it, and "with patience." *Keep on with it.*

iii. (xii. 28). "Let us have (or take) grace whereby we may serve . . ."

Here the Greek word for serve suggests that it is return for something received. Grace is a great blessing and benefit. The grace which has called us with *such* a "heavenly calling," into *such* a 'partnership' (iii. 1) surely creates a responsibility born of indebtedness. Let us take this grace with grateful hearts and prove our sense of indebtedness by service.

iv. (xiii. 13). "Let us go forth unto him without the camp."

In appreciation of the supreme greatness of Christ and of the grace bestowed upon us, let us show that we are not ashamed of Him, but rather are prepared to suffer with Him and share His reproach. If we are really consecrated to Christ we shall be glad to stand by Him while and where He and His fullest interests are excluded, even from the Christian-Judaistic system which is more for itself than for Him.

v. (xiii. 15). "Let us offer up a sacrifice of praise continually."

This is the topstone, the crown, of consecration. Reproach and rejection, yes, and all else involved; but is He worth it? Will the end justify it? Sonship, dominion, partnership with Christ crowned with glory and honour, God's House for ever; these are the things held up to view in this letter. If we have really seen Him, and what partnership with Him means, so that we are abandoned to Him, we shall be in that priestly course of singers which—in David's constituting—never ceased. This letter is so largely on the line of the House and the Priesthood and the Sacrifice, so that it is not surprising that it should end on the "twenty four courses of the singers" by implication—a course for the whole circuit of the sun, day and night. "A sacrifice of praise continually," or "a sacrifice of perpetual praise."

Thus fourteen times in this letter the appeal is made against any and every failure to be

always characterised by an active outreach after God's fullest thought for His people. The spirit of Caleb is so a propos to it all; he "wholly followed the Lord," and at an advanced age requested hill country and a mountain to prove that he was still of that mind, and that the Lord honours such with supplies of spiritual vitality. He had seen that God had made known what was His mind for His people and that was what mattered. He—Caleb—would not accept anything less. He would not talk about that being 'the ideal, but quite impracticable,' or 'the state of things being what it is—in ruins—we must accept it, and make the best of a bad job.' Any such talk would be to Caleb treachery or betrayal: disloyalty to the Lord: an admission that God had intended something, but it had proved unworkable and must be scrapped for something less. The mind of Caleb was *that*; the majority might take the other attitude, but until God gave another and modified revelation of His purpose, though he were the only one to "go on" he was going on. This attitude, spirit, and activity God fully honoured, and not only did Caleb inherit, but Judah came into their inheritance because of

his faithfulness. And Judah stands for something in the Divine thought!

While "Hebrews" and "Ephesians" still remain a part of the Bible, that is what God means for His people, even if but a comparatively few "go on." It can only mean serious and grievous loss to take any other attitude. Hence with the repeated "Let us" the writer links a repeated warning note "Lest." The nine occurrences of this warning note are worth considering. They cover every form of possible cause of failure—from the lack of alertness necessary to grasp the mooring as the vessel is carried by the current either out to sea or on to the rocks, to a definite hardening of heart against the appeal "To-day, if ye shall hear his voice." This last is an appeal to Christians, not *here* to the unsaved as it is almost exclusively used by preachers.

All this, then, brings us back to our starting point—the implications of this letter—and should cause us to examine modern Christianity and our own position to see if it is a set system, a tradition, an inheritance; or whether it is really—and *now*—bringing to the Land and the goal, the fulness of Christ.

T. A-S.

(Concluded.)

The Need for a Spirit of Grace

"And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt" (1 Sam. xxiv. 5).

"And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends" (Job xlii. 10).

"And the people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. And the tidings reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he made proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, nor drink water; but let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and beast, and let them cry mightily unto God" (Jonah iii. 5-8).

IN the above three fragments of Scripture, we have examples of how much value the Lord puts upon a spirit of grace. Very great spiritual issues are shown to have hung upon the spirit which actuated each of the three men concerned. Let us look at them, each in turn.

Grace, the Way of Ascendancy

It is impressive how the Spirit of God so governs the narrating of David's life and activities as to disclose what was in his heart. Concerning him God had said that "the Lord looketh on the heart," and so it must needs be that his heart is uncovered.

This incident is very revealing. It was during that painful period when David was being hunted by Saul, as he said, 'like a flea, or a partridge.' Saul was making life as much of a burden for David as possible. David knew that he had been anointed for the throne. He knew that Saul would one day be at his mercy. But he was sorely harassed by this demon-driven man, and was constantly in deadly peril because of him. And now, the hour of opportunity had come. He had come upon Saul asleep and unguarded. One blow and his troubles would be over. One thrust of his sword and he could be free of his worries. Moreover, the man who stood in the way of his destiny would be removed, and the throne could be his. Although urged by his men to believe that it was the Lord Who had delivered

Saul into his hands in order to put an end to him, David put back the suggestion, quenched the dart of temptation, and, in order to show just what he could have done if he had liked, he cut off the hem of Saul's robe and withdrew to exhibit it as evidence of—what?

It was then that "David's heart smote him." Was it just that David had a conscience, or was it the Spirit of God that smote David's heart before his heart smote him? Conscience could easily have been squared with the argument that the Lord had delivered his enemy into his hand, especially as the Lord had told him that such a day would come. No, the Spirit of God sees more and goes further. He goes right on to "the grace of the Lord Jesus." For one thing, grace takes away all merit, and if David was in danger of saying with his evidence 'What a good boy am I; see what I could have done if I had chosen, but I didn't,' then it is not grace, and he, for that much and that moment, was under condemnation and judgment. David was in the way of the throne, that is, the way of authority and government, and so he must learn that in this age it is a "throne of grace." Spiritual ascendancy is the principle wrapped up with David's life and destiny, and spiritual ascendancy in the life of one in vital relationship with Christ is through "Father, forgive them." So Christ came to the Throne. Do we want power, spiritual authority, and the support of the Lord? Then meekness, suffering wrong, "being defamed, we bless," "bless them that curse you," is the way. There must not be even a small bit in our hand which we use to prove our own goodness. What a thing it is to be sensitive to the Lord, so that the Spirit in us can tell us when we are infringing Divine principles, even when we think that we are being very generous! Pride is a very subtle and deceptive thing, and it may be behind even our good works. Kingship is not something official with God; it is a regal, noble, and transparent spirit.

Saul may represent anything in the permissive will of God that seems to stand in the way of our Divinely-appointed destiny or vocation. The principle is that we may not do anything out of personal interest. We may not be governed by ambition or self-realisation. In personal heat we may not take matters out of the Lord's hands into our own. The Lord had seemed to put Saul into David's hands, but it was only to test David's heart, his faith, his humility, his selflessness. This was necessary training to govern.

We pass to Job, and here we see

Grace, the Way of Enlargement

With Job the same point of vindication arises. The Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends. He was not their enemy. They had made themselves his enemies, they set themselves against him in the main. Now the end of the story is that the Lord says to them, 'You go to My servant Job and he shall pray for you.' And they went and they brought their sacrifices, and Job saw them coming, and what was Job's reaction? Put yourselves in Job's place. After having had such a time at their hands—oh, what a time they had given him, and what wicked and cruel and malicious things they had said, how they had persecuted that man's soul, hitting a man when he was down!—now they were coming, and all their interests hung upon whether he would pray for them, on how he received them. What a chance!

You see again, what is the point here? It is not only ascendancy and vindication, it is enlargement. Afterward the Lord gave Job more than ever he had before—twice as much as he had before. It is a matter of enlargement now, it is a matter of wealth, it is a matter of increase, it is a matter of the Lord being able to say, 'I am unrestrained in my desires toward this life, toward this people; there is no need for Me to keep back; I can give twice as much; I can give here.' Ah, but it just hung upon the way Job reacted toward these people. He might have said, 'So you see I am right after all; you have had to come to see that I am right!' No, it is a matter of the graciousness of this man kneeling down in the presence of *these* after all, and saying, 'Lord, bless these men, bless them as much as you possibly can!'—and the Lord blessed Job when he did that.

Now spread that out as far as it can go. Have you got enemies, individual enemies, collective people, who are always misjudging, misrepresenting, misconstruing, condemning, saying you are wrong? What are you going to do about it? Watch for their downfall, wait for the day when they will have to admit you are right after all? No! Pray for them, for their blessing, show the spirit of grace. That is how God has dealt with us. It is the way of enlargement.

And now we pass on to Jonah, and the message in him is as to

Grace, the Way of Expansion of the Kingdom

Jonah had been a great man, but he now has a bad name and a little place among the Prophets. It goes a long way to redeem his reputation that he wrote his own story and

covered up none of its shame. Jonah was contemporary with one of the greatest of Israel's kings after the dividing of the kingdom. Jeroboam II did great work in restoring the kingdom, recovering lost territory, and building the destroyed places. He brought the kingdom to a high level of prosperity and strength. Jonah was his friend and counsellor, and doubtless had much to do with Israel's restored and prosperous condition. It was just there that the trouble arose. Steadily and powerfully there was growing up beyond Israel's frontiers another great power, the Assyrian, with its mighty capital, Nineveh. Its wickedness was very great, and its numerous inhabitants were in gross moral darkness. The Lord commanded Jonah to go and preach or proclaim to Nineveh pending judgment. Jonah was alive enough to know that God did not want to destroy Nineveh if Nineveh would repent; if He did He would not tell them what He was going to do. Jonah

therefore saw the possibility of Nineveh repenting and being spared. He was so much a patriot that their being spared was the last thing that he wanted. Then he would not give them a chance by preaching. The end of his story clearly shows that this was what was in his heart.

Well, what does it all amount to? There can be such zeal for God's interests as is blind to God's grace. If Nineveh is saved, then Israel will suffer. There is only one way of really serving the Lord's interests, and that is by revealing His grace, whatever the cost. Consequences must never be taken account of. Policy must never be a governing consideration. Diplomacy must not influence. Leave the Assyrian with God. He dealt with their presuming upon His grace later on. Ours it is to exhibit the spirit of grace, for only so does the kingdom expand and stand.

T. A-S.

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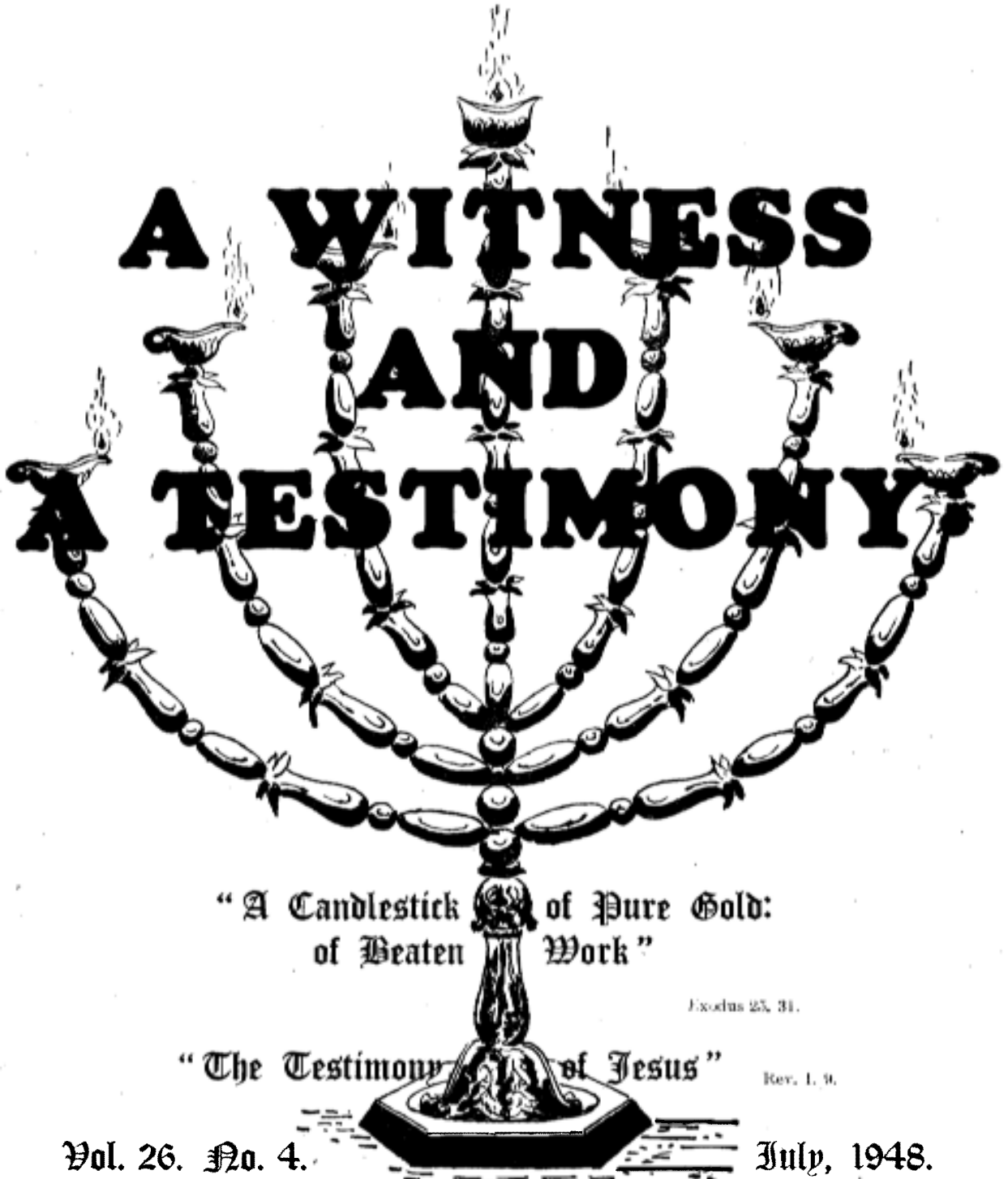
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Prophetic Ministry

II The Making of a Prophet

LET us continue our consideration of the nature of prophetic ministry. It is something which has not come in with time but is eternal; it has come out of the eternal counsels. Perhaps you wonder what that means. Well, we remember that, without any explanation or definition, something comes in right at the beginning and takes the place of government in the economy of God, and involves this very function. When Adam sinned and was expelled from the garden, the Word simply says, God "placed at the east of the garden of Eden the Cherubim . . . to keep the way of the tree of life" (Gen. iii. 24). Who or what are the Cherubim? Where do they come from? We have heard nothing about them before, no explanation of them is given. It simply is a statement. God put them there to guard the way of the tree of life. They have become the custodians of life to hold things according to God's thought. For the thoughts of man's heart have become evil and have departed from God's thoughts; everything has been marred; and now the custodians of the Divine thought about the greatest of all things for man—Divine life, uncreated life—the custodians of that, the Cherubim, are placed there.

But later we are given to understand what the Cherubim are like; this symbolic, composite representation has a four-fold aspect—the lion, the ox, the man and the eagle: and we are given to understand very clearly that the predominant feature is the man. It is a man, really, with three other aspects, those of the lion, the ox, and the eagle. The lion is a

symbol of kingship or dominion; the ox, of service and sacrifice; the eagle, of heavenly glory and mystery; the man, the predominant aspect of the Cherubim, what is that? We know that throughout the Scriptures it takes the place, in the Divine order of things, of the prophet, the representative of God. The representation of God's thoughts is a man. That was the intention in the creation of Adam—in the image and likeness of God to be the personal embodiment and expression of all God's thoughts. That is what man was created for. That is what we find in *the Man*, the Man Who was God manifested in the flesh; He was the perfect expression of all God's thoughts.

Where has this symbolism of the Cherubim come from? It is simply brought in. It comes out from eternity. It is a Divine, an eternal thought, and it takes charge of things, to hold things for God. So that man—and we know that phrase "the Son of man"—is peculiarly related to the prophetic office, and the prophetic function is an eternal thing which just comes in and is, in its very nature, the representation of Divine thoughts, to hold God's thoughts in purity and in fullness. That is the idea related to the man, to the prophet, and that is the prophetic function and nature.

The Identity of the Prophet with His Message

But what does that carry with it? Here we come to the most important point of the whole. It is the absolute identity of the vessel with the vessel's ministry. Prophetic ministry is not

something that you can take up. It is something that you *are*. No academy can make you a prophet. Samuel instituted the schools of the prophets. They were for two purposes—one, the dissemination of religious knowledge, and the other, the writing up of the chronicles of religious history. In Samuel's day there was no open vision; the people had lost the Word of God. The people had to be taught the Word of God again, and the chronicles of the ways of God had to be written up and put on record for future generations, and the schools of the prophets were instituted for that purpose in the main. But there is a great deal of difference between those academic prophets, and the living, anointed prophets. The academic prophets became members of a profession and swiftly degenerated into something unworthy. All the false prophets came from schools of prophets and were accepted publicly on that ground—they had been to college and were accepted. They were false prophets. Going to a religious college does not of itself make you a true prophet of God.

My point is this—the identity of the vessel with its ministry is the very heart of Divine thought. A man is called to represent the thoughts of God, to represent them in what he *is*, not in something that he takes up as a form or line of ministry, not in something that he does. The vessel itself is the ministry and you cannot divide between the two.

The Necessity for Self-Emptying

That explains everything in the life of the great prophets. It explains the life of Moses, the prophet whom the Lord God raised up from among his brethren. Moses essayed to take up his life-work. He was a man of tremendous abilities, learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, with great natural qualifications and gifts, and then somehow he got some conception of a life-work for God. It was quite true; it was a true conception, a right idea; he was very honest, there was no question at all about his motives; but he essayed to take up that work on the basis of what he was naturally, with his own ability, qualifications and zeal, and on that basis disaster was allowed to come upon the whole thing. Not so are prophets made; not so can the prophetic office be exercised. Moses must go into the wilderness and for forty years be emptied out until there is nothing left of all that as a basis upon which he can have confidence to do the work of God or fulfil any Divine commission. He was by nature a man "mighty in his words and works," and yet he now says, "I am not elo-

quent . . . I am slow of speech . . ." There has been a tremendous undercutting of all natural facility and resource and I do not think that Moses was merely disagreeable in his reply to God. He did not say in effect, 'You would not allow me to do it then, so I will not do it now.' I think he was a man who was under the Divine discipline and yet on top of it. A man who is really under things and who has become petulant does not respond to little opportunities of helping people. We get a glimpse of Moses at the beginning of his time in the wilderness (Ex. ii. 16, 17) which suggests that he was not of that kind. When there was difficulty at the well over the watering of the flocks, if Moses had been in a bad mood, cantankerous, disagreeable because the Lord had seemed not to stand by him in Egypt, he probably would have sat somewhere apart and looked on and done nothing to help. But he went readily to help, in a good spirit, doing all he could. He was on top of his trial. Little things indicate where a man is. We go through times of trial and test under the hand of God, and it is so easy to get into that frame of mind which says in effect, 'The Lord does not want us, He need not have us!' We let everything go, we do not care about anything; we have gone down under our trials and we are rendered useless. I do not believe the Lord ever comes to a person like that to take them up. Elijah sat down under a juniper tree and fled, dispirited, to a cave in the mountains; he will have to get somewhere else before the Lord can do anything with him. "What doest thou here, Elijah?" (1 Kings xix. 9). The point is that the Lord never comes to a man who is in despair and recommissions him. 'God shall forgive thee all but thy despair' (W. H. Myers—'St. Paul'), because despair is lost faith in God, and God can never do anything with anyone who has lost faith.

Moses was emptied to the last drop, and yet he was not angry nor disagreeable with God. What was the Lord doing? He was making a prophet. Beforehand, the man would have taken up an office, he would have made the prophetic function serve him, he would have used it. There was no inward, vital relationship between the man and the work that he was to do; they were two separate things; the work was objective to the man. At the end of forty years in the wilderness he is in a state for this to become subjective; something has been done. There has been brought about a state which makes the man fit to be a living expression of the Divine thought. He has been emptied of his own thoughts to make room for God's thoughts; he has been emptied of his own

strength, that all the energy should be of God.

Is not that perhaps just the meaning of the fire and the bush that was not consumed? It is a parable, maybe a larger parable, but I think in the immediate application it was saying something to Moses. 'Moses, you are a very frail creature, a common bush of the desert, a bit of ordinary humanity, nothing at all of resource in yourself; but there is a resource, which can carry you on and on, and you can be maintained, without being consumed, by an energy that is not your own—the Spirit of God, the energy of God.' That was the great lesson this prophet had to learn. 'I cannot!' 'All right,' said the Lord, 'but I AM.'

A great deal is made of the natural side of many of the Lord's servants, and usually with terribly tragic results. A lot is made of Paul. 'What a great man Paul was naturally, what intellect he had, what training, what tremendous abilities!' That may all be true, but ask Paul what value it was to him when he was right up against a spiritual situation. He will cry, "Who is sufficient for these things? . . . Our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor. ii. 16, iii. 5). Paul was taken through experiences where he, like Moses, despaired of life. He said, "We . . . had the sentence of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead" (2 Cor. i. 9).

A Message Inwrought by Actual Experience

You see the principle is at work all the time, that God is going to make the ministry and the minister identical. You see it in all the prophets. He stood at nothing, He took infinite pains, He worked even through domestic life, the closest relationships of life. Think of the tragedy of Hosea's domestic life. Think of Ezekiel, whose wife the Lord took away in death at a stroke. The Lord said, 'Get up in the morning, anoint your face, allow not the slightest suggestion of mourning and tragedy to be detected; go out as always before, as though nothing had happened; show yourself to the people, go about with a bright countenance, provoke them to enquire what you mean by such outrageous behaviour.' The Lord brought this heartbreak upon him and then required him to act thus. Why? Ezekiel was a prophet; he had got to embody his message, and the message was this—'Israel, God's wife, has become lost to God, dead to God, and Israel takes no notice of it: she goes on the same as ever, as though nothing had happened.' The prophet must bring it home

by his own experience. God is working the thing right in. He works it in in deep and terrible ways in the life of His servant to produce ministry.

God is not allowing us to take up things and subjects. If we are under the Holy Ghost, He is going to make us prophets; that is, He is going to make the prophecy a thing that has taken place in us, so that what we say is only making vocal something that has been going on, that has been done in us. God has been doing it through years in strange, deep, terrible ways in some lives, standing at nothing, touching everything; and the vessel, thus wrought upon, is the message. People do not come to hear what you have to teach. They have come to see what you are, to see that thing which has been wrought by God. What a price the prophetic instrument has to pay!

So Moses went into the wilderness, to the awful undoing of his natural life, his natural mentality: to be brought to zero: to have the thing wrought in him.

And was God justified?—for after all it was a question of resource for the future. Oh, the strain that was going to bear down upon that life! Sometimes Moses wellnigh broke; at times he did crack under the strain. "I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me" (Num. xi. 14). What was his resource? Oh, if it had been the old resource of Egypt he would not have stood it for a year. He could not stand provocation in Egypt; he must rise up and fight. He broke down morally and spiritually under that little strain away back there forty years before. What would he do with these rebels? How long would he put up with them? A terrific strain was going to bear down upon him, and only a deeply inwrought thing, something that had been done inside, would be enough to carry through when it was a case of standing against the stream for God's full thought. With us, too, the strain may be terrific; oftentimes there will come the very strong temptation—'Let go a little, compromise a little, do not be so utter; you will get more open doors if you will only broaden out a bit; you can have a lot more if you ease up!' What is going to save you in that hour of temptation? The only thing is that God has done this thing in you. It is part of your very being, not something you can give up; it is you, your very life. That is the only thing. God knew what He was doing with Moses. The thing had got to be so much one with the man that there was no dividing between them. The man *was* the prophetic ministry.

He was rejected by his brethren; they would not have him. "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?" (Ex. ii. 14). That is the human side of it. But there was the Divine side. It was of God that he went into the wilderness for forty years. It had to be, from God's side. It looked as though it was man's doing. It was not so. These two things went together. Rejection by his brethren was all in line with the sovereign purpose of God. It was the only way in which God got the opportunity He needed to reconstitute this man. The real preparation of this prophet took place during the time that his brethren repudiated him. Oh, the sovereignty of God, the wonderful sovereignty of God! A dark time, a deep time; a breaking, crushing, grinding time; it seems as if everything is going, that nothing will be left; emptied out; yet all that is God's way of making prophetic ministry.

A Messenger Divinely Attested

I expect that Moses at the beginning would have been very legalistic, laying down the law—"You must do this and that"—and so on; an autocrat or despot. When, after those years, we find him coming off the wheel, out of the hands of the Potter, he is said to be "very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth" (Num. xii. 3), and God could stand by him then. He could not stand by him on that day when he rose up in a spirit of pride, arrogance, self-assertiveness. God had to let that work itself out to its inevitable consequence. But when Moses, as the meekest of men, the broken, humble, selfless man, was challenged by others as to his office—at such a time Moses did not stand up for his position, his rights, he just handed the matter over to the Lord. His attitude was, 'We will allow the Lord to decide. I have no personal position to preserve; if the Lord has made me His prophet, let Him show it; I am prepared to go out of office if it is not the Lord.' What a different spirit! And the Lord did stand by him marvellously and mightily on those occasions, and terribly so for those who opposed themselves (Num. xii. 2-, xvi. 3-).

Prophetic Ministry a Life, not Teaching

Well, what is a prophet? what is the prophetic function? It is this—God takes hold of a vessel (it may be individual or it may be collective: the function of prophetic ministry may move through a people as it did through Israel) and He takes that vessel through a deep history, breaking and undoing, disillusioning, revolutionizing the whole mentality so that things which were held fiercely, assertively, are

no longer so held. There is developed a wonderful pliability, adjustableness, teachableness. Everything that was merely objective as to the work of God, as to Divine truth, as to orthodoxy, or fundamentalism, all that was held so strongly in an objective, legalistic way as to what is right and wrong in methods, is all dealt with, all broken, and there is a new conception entirely, a new outlook upon things; no longer a formal system, something outside you which you take up, but something wrought in an inward way in the vessel. It is what the vessel is that is its ministry. It is not what it has accepted of doctrine and is now teaching. Oh, to get free of all that horrible realm of things! It is a wretched realm, that of adopting teachings, taking on interpretations, being known because such and such is your line of things. Oh, God deliver us! Oh, to be brought to the place where it is a matter of life, of what God has really done in us, made of us! On the one hand He has pulverized us, and then He has reconstructed us on a new spiritual principle, and that expresses itself in ministry; what is said is coming from what has been going on behind, perhaps for years and even right up to date.

Do you see the law of prophetic function? It is that God keeps anointed vessels abreast of truth by experience. Every bit of truth that they give out in word is something that has had a history. They went down into the depths and they were saved by that truth. It was their life and therefore it is a part of them. That is the nature of prophetic ministry.

A Prophet, Tolerant but Uncompromising

May I revert to what I was saying about the change in Moses? You can see a reflection of it in the case of Samuel. I think Samuel is one of the beautiful and loveable characters in the Old Testament, and he is called a prophet. Do you notice that although his own heart is utterly devoted to God's highest and fullest thought and inwardly he has no compromise whatever, yet he showed a marvellous charity with Saul during those early months? (It seems not to have gone much beyond a year, the first year of Saul's reign, during which it seems that Saul really did seek to show some semblance of good.) And yet you must remember that Saul embodies the denial of the highest of all things—the direct and immediate government of God. That was repudiated by Israel in favour of Saul—"Make us a king to judge us like all the nations." they said (1 Sam. viii. 5-7). God said to Samuel "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me." Kingship was a Divine principle as much as

prophecy was. The lion is there with the man. The monarch, God's thought of dominion, is there. But with Saul it is on a lower level. His coming in represented the bringing down of that Divine thought to the level of the world. "Like all the nations"—a Divine thought taken hold of by carnal men, dragged down to the world level; and Samuel knew it. In his heart he could not accept that, and he complained to God about it; he was against this thing, for he saw what it meant. But how charitable he was to Saul as long as he could be!

Why do I say that? Because there is existing to-day a condition like that. Divine things have been taken hold of by men carnally, and brought down to an earth level; the direct government of the Holy Spirit has been exchanged for committees and boards and so on. Men have set up the government in Divine things and are running things for God. The way of the New Testament is hardly known, that in prayer and fasting the mind of the Lord is secured. Well, those who are truly spiritual, who know, who see, who understand, cannot accept that. But they must be very charitable. A true prophet, like Samuel, will be very charitable as long as possible until that wrong thing takes the pronounced and positive form of disobedience to light given. The Lord came to Saul through Samuel and gave him clearly to understand what he had to do. It was made known to him with unmistakable clearness what God required of him, and he was disobedient. Then Samuel said, 'No more charity with that!' He was implacable. "Because thou hast rejected the word of the

Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king" (1 Sam. xv. 23). Samuel went as far as he could while the man did the best he could. That is charity.

Of course, types are always weak and imperfect, but you can see the truth there. The prophet Samuel showed a great deal of forbearance with things that were wrong, even while in his heart he could not accept them. He hoped that light would break and obedience follow and the situation be saved. We have to be very charitable to all that with which we do not agree.

The point is this—Moses had to learn that; he had to be made like that. We are better fitted to serve the Lord's purpose, we are truer prophets, when we can bear with things with which we do not agree, than when in our zeal we are iconoclasts, and seek only to destroy the offending thing. The Lord says, 'That will not do.'

In all that we have said we have emphasized only one thing—that prophetic ministry is a function. Its function is to hold everything in relation to God's full thought; but you do not do that as holding a line of things in an objective and legalistic way. You do not take it up. You can only do it truly as God has wrought into you that thing for which you are going to stand, that it has been revealed in you through experience, through the handling of God; God has taken you through it, and you know it like that. It is not that you have achieved something, but rather that you have been broken in the process. Now you are fit for something in the Lord.

T. A-S.

Conversion and Salvation

IN the beginnings of the Church, we are told that the disciples continued in the apostles' teaching. This implies something more than conversion; so that, clearly, conversion is not everything. We must beware of confounding beginnings with ends. Conversion is but initiation, it must never be regarded as synonymous with salvation. Conversion is a crisis which may occupy but one brief moment; salvation is a process running on concurrently with life, and the end of which is not yet. It is a process, moreover, that may be hastened, retarded, or even arrested; and is a much greater and grander thing than many even Christian people suppose.

As viewed by Christ and His apostles it is

no mere negative deliverance, it is rich in positive elements, the unfolding of which will demand the eternities for their field, and the infinities for their range—elements which can in no wise be shut up and exhausted within the narrow limitations of time. Who will dare to limit the possibilities enfolded in the new-born spirit? Has it not been born again for deathless and incorruptible being? and with eternal life shall there not be eternal development, and ever-growing likeness to God?

Measured by our years as children of God we ought, many of us, to be teachers; measured by our attainments we ought to be classed as spiritual defectives.

The Four Pillars of Jacob

II. The Pillar of Separation

Reading: Gen. xxxi. 45-xxxii. 2.

THIS is the second of the four pillars set up by Jacob as spiritual landmarks in his life and experience. It would appear that in this transaction there were both a heap of stones and a pillar, the former being made by Laban while it was Jacob who set up a stone for a pillar. This is the pillar of separation—"Mizpah."

In certain circles and in an age more sentimental than our own, people employed the word "Mizpah" to speak of the watchfulness of the Lord between absent friends, to express their devotion to one another during their absence, and their prayer that the Lord would soon bring them together once again. This is certainly not what Jacob meant. He had no intention of returning. This separation was final and irrevocable; that was the declaration which Jacob made in setting up his pillar, and that fact was also recognised by Laban. This was the end. They were finished with one another for ever.

The word separation will probably mean different things to different people. It speaks, of course, of the need for a distinct understanding with the world as to where we stand with regard to Christ—that we are on the Lord's side. It means, however, more than that, for separation from the world must pass from the general sense into every realm which has an element of compromise in it. But it must go deeper than that. There is a whole world of natural life which is as alien to our spiritual being as was Laban to Jacob. This is not so much a matter of external separation as of a clear division in the very person of the believer. One life must be separated from the other, and the pillar of testimony declares our acceptance of this clear demarcation.

An Inevitable Separation

Whatever the particular aspect of separation which applies to us under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, there can be no question as to the challenge of Jacob's pillar. It calls us to a clear cut declaration as to where we stand. For Jacob it marked a definite and lasting cleavage between an old and unsatisfactory realm of mixture and compromise, and a new position with God. His pillar but expressed in visible form what was already true inwardly. That is the only safe kind of separation. It is dangerous to attempt an outward separation unless there is first a true, inward work.

This separation was inevitable, for there was already a deep inward division between Jacob and Laban.

(a) Separated by Birth

They were separated by their birth. True, they had a common ancestor, but there was such a radical difference between the two branches of the family that for twenty years Jacob had been a foreigner dwelling in an alien land. Not only by his ancestry but also by marriage he had become involved with Laban's family, but he was never truly one of them. The line of Isaac marked something quite distinctive, for he was born according to Divine promise and by the power of God. For this reason, when the Lord appeared to Jacob in relation to this separation His command was: "Get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy nativity" (Gen. xxxi. 13), inferring that Jacob was where he did not belong. So it is with the Christian when he is in the world, and so also with the man of the Spirit when he is involved in the realm of the flesh—he does not belong there and ought not to be there. A great gulf is fixed between that which is born of the flesh and that which is born of the Spirit, the two realms being mutually antagonistic. The apostle, elaborating this very matter in connection with Jacob's father, said, "As then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, so also it is now" (Gal. iv. 29). That which obtained in Isaac's case was equally true for his son, Jacob, and is still true to-day. At Mizpah Jacob recognised that truth.

(b) Separated by Faith

They were incompatible by birth—and also by faith. We notice that when making their oaths they both swore by God, yet their apprehension of Him was very different. Laban said, "The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us." Now Abraham and Nahor, with their father Terah, had come out of Ur of the Chaldees by reason of a certain relationship with God. They reached Haran, and there Nahor and Laban's branch of the family had remained. It is true that they were different from the idolators of Ur, but nevertheless they were still idolators even though they in measure served the Lord. On the other hand Jacob swore by "The Fear of Isaac." This implied a very different relationship with God. Abra-

ham had not remained in Haran, but had moved on into the Land, where at long last there was born to him a son of promise, Isaac, the man of the Spirit. It was to this distinctive line that Jacob referred when he made his oath. Laban's relationship with God was in a realm of mixture and compromise, whereas Jacob had a different faith—the Fear of Isaac.

(c) Separated by Vision

And, of course, they were very different in the matter of vision. This second pillar is closely connected with the first, which marked a Divine revelation. When God told Jacob to return to the land of his nativity He reminded him that He was "the God of Bethel." At Bethel Jacob had seen heaven opened: he could never be like other men after that. What a tremendous cleavage there is between the man who has spiritual vision and the one who has not! For twenty years Jacob had done nothing about this revelation, nevertheless he was a man who had received Divine illumination as to the purpose of God expressed by Bethel. He had seen the realm where God is all. He had seen the realm of the Spirit, the realm of Divine glory, of heavenly life and heavenly service, and after that, even though he lived with Laban for twenty years, he could never be the same as Laban. Spiritual vision works a deep inward separation in the heart of the one who receives it. The Lord held Jacob to the vision in spite of himself: He will do the same with us. Often we may think, as doubtless Jacob did, that it is but a dream, wonderful enough but quite impossible of realization. Laban, the man of earth, would urge him to forget it; to make the best of things as they were at Haran; to settle down to a life of compromise; and to be reconciled to the fact that here on this earth Bethel is quite impracticable, though doubtless it will be enjoyed when we get to heaven. But Jacob had seen the vision, and so in spite of himself, in spite of his prosperity in Haran, and in spite of all his doubts and fears, he was impelled to return to the land. There is great separating power in Divine vision. The break with Laban, then, was inevitable, so that when Jacob erected his pillar at Gilead he was only declaring in outward and irrevocable terms what was already true in his own heart.

A Timely Separation

And it was timely! Twenty years had elapsed since Jacob set up a pillar, twenty years since he had taken a stand as to his spiritual position. It was high time for him to erect the second pillar. The wonderful thing about it is that the twenty years were not

wasted. After twenty years he was returning to the first vision, and yet so great is the sovereignty of God that there was no waste. The value of it to Jacob could be clearly seen, for he was a rich man now. He had a family, sons and considerable wealth. He said to Laban, "Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now hadst thou sent me away empty," and there is no doubt as to the truth of his assertion. Jacob would have gone back as he came, with his staff and nothing else, if the sovereign power of God had not safeguarded him. They were, of course, painful years for Jacob, with many bitter experiences, but the Lord is so wonderful that He had seen to it that the twenty years made Jacob a wealthy man. The sovereignty of God is so wonderful that while we are going round in circles, avoiding the vision, forgetting the vision, fearing the vision, our very sufferings bring spiritual wealth into our lives. That period, however, had now ended. The time had come for him to press on into the Lord's real purpose for his life, and so to make this absolute break with all else.

The actual occasion of it was Laban's changed attitude towards him. Before the Lord had spoken to Jacob about making the move, we read, "Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and behold, it was not toward him as beforetime." He suddenly discovered an unexpected hostility in his relative. What a day when we are disillusioned with the world! What a day when we are disillusioned with the things of God as handled by the natural man! And what a day when we are disillusioned about our own corrupt attempts to please and serve God! "The countenance of Laban was not toward him"—literally—"as it had been yesterday and the day before." Only the Lord is the same "yesterday and to-day, and for ever"; all else is unreliable. It was this realisation which precipitated Jacob's action. It was high time to come to a final understanding as to his position. So he set up his pillar.

A Personal Crisis

The crisis of separation was forced upon him. Jacob had not planned to set up a pillar; he was impelled to do so. He had not intended to advertise his action but had thought, as we all do, that it would be easier to slip away quietly and unseen, under the cover of night. The Lord would not permit this, but through Laban forced him to make a clear-cut definition of what was involved. Laban pursued Jacob, overtook him and demanded to know the reason for his behaviour. Thus challenged, Jacob declared himself, and insisted that the

parting must be final. Laban would not go on with him, and he would never turn back again; the pillar must mark a lasting separation between them. Laban thereupon proposed a delay by way of compromise, suggesting that the separation should not be so abrupt. Let them feast awhile, pass some days in happy fellowship, and then perhaps it would be time to part. Happily Jacob realised the dangers of delay and was not beguiled. These pillars in his life stand for definiteness, wholehearted committal; so the stone of Galeed faces us with the crisis of separation, meaning an end to the dilly-dallying, hesitating, compromising position as to the will of God. Like Jacob we must finish with the state of mixture which so hinders the purpose of God in our case.

How personal it was! It is very striking that both his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac had passed through very similar experiences. In their case there was no pillar set up, but oaths were sworn in connection with the Philistines and the well at Beersheba. In his day Abraham made a covenant with the Philistines, not a covenant of unity but one of distinctiveness. Years afterwards Isaac had to uncover the well and open up the whole matter once again with the Philistines. He also made a covenant, and the very same day they found water. It is always like that. Make a clear stand on the Lord's side and you will not have to go round digging for water—it will rise up. Jacob, however, had to go through the very same experience for himself. It was no use his imagining that he was all right just because his grandfather and father had taken a stand. He also must make his oath. We may inherit many privileges, but we do not inherit distinctiveness. Individually and for ourselves we must set up the pillar, affirming thus our own personal repudiation of all that is not definitely on the Lord's side.

In point of fact the separation was not as wholehearted as Jacob thought it was. Accused by Laban of stealing some of his idols, Jacob was filled with righteous indignation that anything of the old sphere should be hidden away in his camp. Nevertheless he was wrong, and the offender was Rachel whom he loved so dearly. Jacob knew nothing of the hidden contradiction to his oath. This is very true to experience. We seek to take an utter position with regard to separation, whereas the Lord knows that deep down in hidden realms there are still links with the old life, although we would be as indignant as was Jacob for such a charge to be made. Jacob did not know it then, but later he came to know and all in good time he had to make further adjustments be-

fore they could move right on to Bethel. For the moment, though, it was enough that he was sincerely setting forth his position by the pillar of separation; God always takes us at our word.

The Way of Blessing

Jacob's pillar is a challenge to us all. It is not enough for us to enjoy his story; we must follow his example and make the definite act of committal and testimony. We saw this in the case of the first one, the pillar of revelation, and now we must heed the call of the second, the pillar of separation. How sharp is the knife which cuts to make this separation effectual! And yet what blessings followed! Jacob's whole life was so closely related to Laban through marriage. The parting was costly, but it was necessary. As soon as the painful scene was over we read, "Jacob went on his way." He had been going round in circles for twenty years, now he began to move straight forward. Until this he had got nowhere. He had worked to the point of exhaustion; he had suffered much; in many ways he had accumulated spiritual values and discovered something of his own need, but geographically he had come no nearer to Bethel. At Galeed, however, the matter was settled, both in his own heart and in a practical way by the testimony of the pillar, and so there was release and Jacob went on his way.

How often this happens! The Lord's people find themselves at a standstill spiritually. They are ready for the Lord's will but there is some positive act of obedience which corresponds to the setting up of the pillar, and until that is faced and dealt with there can be no spiritual progress. It may perhaps be the testimony of baptism, which is certainly intended to set forth a clear-cut separation from the world and the flesh. Laban will counsel caution and delay, will advocate compromise or will argue against anything so downright. However imperfect the apprehension at the time, baptism does represent a wholehearted committal to the Lord of the one concerned; it is like the pillar of stone. On the one side is mixture while on the other is at least the intention of being separated unto God. After twenty years of the former Jacob made his final break with compromise and declared his decision to go on into fulness. This is but one example. The principle follows us all through our spiritual life. Movement onwards is always a succession of deeper committals to the distinctiveness of that which is of the Spirit from that which is of the flesh.

One more incident concludes this section—

the vision at Mahanaim. "And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him." Perhaps the real cause of Jacob's reluctance to make the separation was not so much his love for Laban as his fear of Esau. He dreaded to move back into the line of Divine purpose because he expected to find bitter hostility there. It was an encounter which he had avoided for twenty years, but now he must face it. But first of all heaven opened to him again, and he received comfort and encouragement in his onward journey. What he dreaded most of all was to meet Esau's host. Before he had travelled very far he certainly met a

host, but it was not Esau's—it was God's! He expected to meet the devil but he met the Lord! The other meeting must be faced, but first of all he must know that God is with him. "And he called the name of the place Mahanaim"—'Two Hosts, God's host and mine.' "If God be for us, who can be against us?" So now it is not merely Jacob's weak host which is to encounter the enemy, but two hosts—God's and his. It is always thus when we are downright with the Lord. Mizpah opens the way for Mahanaim and Bethel: the pillar of separation leads straight on to heavenly fullness.

H. F.

The Cross, the Church, and the Kingdom

I The Ultimate Meaning of the Cross

"... this mind . . . which was . . . in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. ii. 5-11).

I FEEL that there is one big question which it is imperative that the Lord's people should face in these days, and if we can answer that question in a living way and enter livingly into the answer, very great spiritual values will be secured. The question is this—*What has God revealed as His supreme objective resultant from the Cross of Christ?* The question which springs out of that is—how has God revealed that the objective shall be secured and expressed? Probably it will be that subsidiary question which will occupy us largely in these meditations, leading to the answer to the main question.

As we approach this main question, we may do so by a series of enquiries. Is the supreme outcome of the Cross of Christ found in there being so many Christians enjoying the knowledge that they are saved? Further, is it found in so many saved people seeking to get other people to the same position—enjoying the fact of being saved? Further, is the answer found

in having so many saved Christians mainly occupied with their own sanctification, the way of victory, and a fuller life? And, yet again, is it to have so many Christians devoting themselves to the knowledge of deeper things, the deeper things of God? And if we put all the four together, have we got the objective, that is, God's *full* objective, in the Cross of Christ? All the things that I have mentioned certainly are part of it; but when we have them all—salvation, soul-winning, sanctification, education—does it end there? Are any, or all, of these the end? Will that satisfy God? Will that fill up His desire and expectation and be an adequate outcome of Calvary? Well, that is what we are going to look at, as the Lord enables.

The circle drawn by all the things which we have just mentioned may still be a limited circle in two respects. Firstly, all that may still resolve itself into something personal—*my* salvation, *my* service, *my* sanctification, *my* spiritual education. Secondly, it may all resolve itself into something very largely, if not entirely, earthly, having to do with life here on this earth—being saved, getting others saved, growing in grace, increasing in spiritual knowledge. It may be quite an earthly thing, although, of course, leading to heaven and having heaven ultimately in view. But is not that, after all, still a circumscribed position? Again, does it represent all the meaning of the Cross?

Now all of these phases that I have mentioned are seen in the New Testament. Indeed, in a certain sense, we may say that the New Testament in sections deals with these respectively. Romans may, in the main, deal with the first—our salvation. Corinthians may deal

with the second—our sanctification. The New Testament does definitely provide for each of these in quite a specific and definite way, but what we ought to recognise is this, that we can never, by means of any one section of the Word of God, see the whole purpose of God. We need all the Word of God for all the purpose of God.

A People to Express Christ's Lordship

So when we come really to the Word, we find that the Cross as our basis and as our way leads on to these, but through them ever on and ever up to something much more than they are, either separately or collectively and inclusively, and it is that ultimate something which is the supreme objective resultant from the Cross of the Lord Jesus. When I use that word 'ultimate,' I do not want to divert your mind from the present. I am not using it in the sense of afterward, final, in the sense of time; for that ultimate is now. God has shown that He would have a full vindication of the Cross of His Son *now*.

Let me stay for a moment for an extra word on what I have just said. We Christians ought to be tremendously interested in our Christianity, interested not merely as a mental matter, but as a heart matter; interested in heart really to discover where we are being led by the whole Word of God. We read the Bible; I suppose we read a few verses every day; some do a great deal more than that; but the Bible is the book of Christians, and we read it more or less. I wonder how many of us really do approach the Bible with this one heart enquiry—where is this leading? What is it all unto? This is not just something by the way in itself. There is something tremendous, something immense, involved. There is always a forward look, a prospect, something in view, something being pointed to, something toward which we are being urged, drawn on; and, putting it all together, where shall we arrive if we see what God has really put into this Word? How many of you do that? If we do approach the Word of God with that spirit—with that enquiry coming from our hearts, that is, born of the very love which has been begotten in us by the love of God: if we are not merely interested in Christianity as our religion but as a heart relationship with the Lord for His satisfaction—if we approach the Bible like that, desiring to know what it is His heart is set upon, and therefore what our hearts ought to be set upon, and if we take the Cross of the Lord Jesus as the key to it all, we shall find ourselves led to some very great conclusions, a very great position.

Can we try—for it will be no more than an endeavour—to set down in a mere phrase what that ultimate something is? May I put it in this way? The ultimate is shown to be *the supreme lordship and headship of Christ expressed and manifested in the whole cosmic realm in and by a body of Christians in whom the Divine meaning of the Cross is an experimental reality.*

A Conscious Spiritual Relationship, the Fruit of the Cross

Breaking that up further, what does it amount to? Well, in other words it is this. Firstly, believers living in a conscious, spiritual relationship which is the fruit of the Cross. That is the first fragment—a *conscious* spiritual relationship which is the fruit of the Cross. It cannot be anything but a spiritual relationship. We cannot live in an actual, personal, physical, conscious relationship with all believers. We do not know them. We know but a mere fragment of all those who exist. We cannot organise this thing, bring it within the compass of an organisation, a society, or anything of that kind. It can only be a spiritual relationship, but it can be a *conscious* spiritual relationship. That it is spiritual does not mean that it has to be unconscious, abstract, nebulous, imaginary, something somewhere but undefined. No; a personal, conscious, spiritual relationship with all believers; though they may be scattered to the ends of the earth, yet something has been done by the Holy Spirit which has constituted those concerned people of a related consciousness with all other believers. That is absolutely essential to the ultimate—the expression of the lordship and headship of Jesus Christ. That is no abstract, ethereal thing. That is very positive and very practical, and if the whole cosmic realm is to feel the impact of that lordship, this conscious, spiritual relationship is absolutely essential.

All those powers which occupy that cosmic realm, which have their government there, have no interest in, or concern with, doctrines of Christian unity; but they have a great deal of interest in actual, spiritual relatedness; so much so, that they have never ceased from the day of Pentecost, to make it one of their primary objectives to divide the people of God in their spiritual consciousness. If they cannot get in between them in other ways, they will try to set up a sense of distance, of unrelatedness or disturbed relatedness, because of the tremendous importance of this matter of a living, practical, real, conscious, spiritual relationship between the people of God—something more

than mechanical and organised, something spiritual.

Then, we spoke of this relatedness as being the fruit of the Cross, because this can never be brought about apart from all the tremendous meaning of the Cross of the Lord Jesus in the realm which is now rent and torn and shattered to fragments so far as spiritual relatedness is concerned. This is a universe which has been broken to pieces, endless pieces. Its harmony and unity have been completely disrupted, and those cosmic powers are the forces which have done it, and are doing it. That hardly needs to be argued. We know it within ourselves—the battle for forbearance, for long-suffering, for endurance, for kindness, for patience, for love, for consideration—all those are very practical matters in the Christian life. Look at the way this breaking up is at work, these endless discords in the whole creation, in the whole universe. There is nothing to meet that but the Cross of the Lord Jesus; and that is one of the primary meanings of the Cross to which we are getting at this time—a people in a living, conscious, spiritual relationship which is the fruit of the Cross in them and in this universe. That is why we read those words in Philippians. The goal is His absolute sovereign lordship and headship. How do you reach it? “Have this mind in you . . .” And what is the contextual implication and application? “I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord” (Phil. iv. 2). “Have this mind . . .”—one mind intervening to overcome two conflicting minds, and the only mind that will do it is the mind of Him Who went to the Cross and let go His own personal and individual position and rights for the sake of others. The Cross alone will meet this situation. Yes, the need is for believers living in a conscious, spiritual relationship which is the fruit of the Cross.

A Spiritual Position Above this Earth

Secondly, the need is for believers as so related occupying a spiritual position above this earth; being here, and yet with a vast gap spiritually between them and what is here—and that includes what is here on this earth religiously, just as much as in other ways; it is possible to be religiously on and of the earth, in a religious way touching the earth. You understand that when I say ‘touching the earth’ I am not talking about touching the ground physically, but touching that realm in which a curse resides. There is a spiritual feature and factor—it has been cursed. Is that too strong? We could spend an hour or two in showing how true that is. The mark of

the curse is just this, that it does not matter how far men seem to advance and develop and produce and achieve; running alongside of every ‘advance’ (?), and keeping pace with everything that is called progress, every achievement, every invention, every production, there is the element of a curse which will turn that against man for his own undoing. The very thing that he discovers, invents, produces, for the good of the world, turns out for the world’s destruction. In the day in which we live we are faced with the fullest development of that principle of the curse that has been known in the history of this universe. When men make such a marvellous discovery and achieve such a marvellous thing that in a split second they can wipe out tens of thousands of people from the earth with one experiment, what are they going to do when they let loose the developed thing? Invention? Progress? Oh no, there is a curse attached to everything in this creation. Man’s undoing is found in his own ingenuity. But that is a very intense and strong aspect and expression of this principle. This earthliness has become very refined in many respects; very religious; but still earthly, still something tied down here with its expectations, hopes and enterprises all here. It is not necessary, I think, to follow that unpleasant line very much farther.

But to return to this second fragment of the general presentation—we are thinking of believers living in a conscious, spiritual relationship which is the fruit of the Cross, occupying a spiritual position above this earth, and who are concerned with earthly things only so far as those things relate to higher interests, heavenly purposes. They are a people living in the realm described in that unique phrase of the Apostle Paul “in the heavenlies in Christ”; a heavenly people; which means much more, of course, than we are saying at the moment.

Ever-Increasing Spiritual Fulness

Thirdly, the need is for believers who, because of this living, conscious, spiritual relationship, the fruit of the Cross, and because of this spiritual position above the earth, are characterised by ever-increasing spiritual fulness; for when the Lord gets people like that and in that position there is no stagnation, no limitation. There is constant, increasing, spiritual fulness. They have resources, and they have plenty, and far more than they can consume upon themselves. That is not fiction, that is fact. The whole Word of God bears down upon this, that the Divine thought is also a thought of fulness. Wherever you find

God reaching His end, it is all by way of fulness. Is it the tabernacle or the temple?—then it is filled with His glory. Is it the river of God?—it is full of water. Is it the trees of the Lord?—they are full of sap. Is it the water-pots?—they are filled to the brim. Is it the Church?—then it is “the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. i. 23). So we could go on. The Divine thought is always along the line of fulness. And I said, this is not ultimate in time, this is for now—a people who have more than the ordinary, more than just enough to make ends meet or hardly that. The fulness of Christ—that is God’s end by way of the Cross, and to be known now.

The Rule of the Heavens Expressed

Then fourthly, and finally for the moment, there is need of believers who, because of the three things already mentioned, are showing that the kingdom of the heavens is a spiritual reality and who are extending its range actually—showing that the heavens *do* rule, and that they rule through the medium and by the instrumentality of a people, a heavenly people, after this kind. The bringing of the impact of that supreme rule of the heavens to bear upon the cosmic forces of this universe is the vocation of the Church of which we are speaking, of a people like this; and that is the meaning of the Cross ultimately. Where does the Cross lead to? Your salvation, my salvation? Yes, of course. Is that all? And then that I should be busy to get other people into that position? Oh, yes, of course, without question. And then that you and I should be growing in grace progressively, in sanctification, being conformed to the image of His Son? Oh yes, a hundred times yes, without any question. And that we should be increasing in the knowledge of Him, growing in our apprehension of the things of God, that our spiritual education should go on uninterruptedly? Yes, all that is in the will of God. But is that, or are all those things put together, the end? No, the end of the Cross is that the whole realm of evil spiritual powers and intelligences should meet the impact of all that—that there should be a practical registration of it all objectively.

I said that this can all be personal after all—my salvation, your salvation; my sanctification, your sanctification; my life of victory, your life of victory; my education, your education. It can all be very largely individual and personal, and it can all be something here, so that people gather into little groups on the subject of sanctification, others on spiritual education, others on soul winning. Oh no, that

is not God’s meaning ultimately in the Cross of the Lord Jesus; but He intends that by all those means, along all those lines, this end should be reached—that the whole system of darkness and evil and wickedness should be cast down and brought into subjection to the absolute lordship and headship of Jesus Christ; that every knee should bow to Him. And that should have a very real beginning now where you and I are concerned in this spiritual relationship. It should be a practical thing now, extending and expanding, so that this kingdom of the heavens, expressed through this people, should be registering itself and occupying widening territory so that the power and dominion and evil of the Evil One is being more and more limited. That is the thing for which the Cross of Christ really stands. It brings in the individuals in every stage and phase of the spiritual life, but it goes beyond. It is this cosmic impact that is the ultimate justification of the Cross of the Lord Jesus.

The Needed Discipline of the Cross

Well, that is a challenge to us. At the outset I said that we, as the Lord’s people, have to face a big question and I want to say again—I do not think it is the question merely of our personal salvation. And it is not just the question of our being more zealous soul-winners. With us it should have become a reality long ago that there is a deep and earnest concern in our hearts for the salvation of others. It is not a question merely of our personal holiness. God forbid that we should overlook any necessities in that direction, that we should be closing our eyes to sins and defects in the spiritual life; but even so, there is something greater than that in view. And as for our seeking to know the deeper things of God, what shall we say about that if it is not going to work out somehow in this realm where we are conscious of the activities of spiritual forces, in this realm into which we have to move—some in this country and some in other countries—where the main problem is not flesh and blood but principalities and powers, the dark things of this universe, those awful, sinful, evil forces which are at work? If we do not reach out to that our quest has failed and will leave much to be desired. That is the big issue. What has God revealed as the supreme result of the Cross of Christ? It is that His Son should be in the place of supreme and absolute sovereign headship in this universe, which will necessitate the deposing of every other sovereignty and name and authority. And the Word of God says that that is going to be done by that self-same

Cross having been wrought in a body of Christians to bring them to the place where through them, because in them, that sovereignty, that headship, has been established.

It is a big matter, and it involves us in something very real in the way of spiritual discipline. You cannot go to college or institute to learn that. You cannot get that by conferences and meetings. You cannot get that along any academic lines. This involves us in a very real transaction with the Lord that that Cross, with all that He means by it, shall really do its work in us; and He has endless ways of doing it. The very nature of the work of the Cross involves this, that its operation will always be along the line that we do not like, that we would never choose. If we could have the Cross adjusted to our situation, it would be a very easy Cross. But no; it will always go against the grain; that is the nature of it. It will always call for that which we would never choose. When the Lord leads us on to consider the way that He has indicated, the way for reaching His end, we shall come up against those things. We shall then see that this whole cosmic battle has its centre in us by nature, and it has got to be settled there, at the citadel of the individual's being; and the citadel is the will. Oh, it is one thing to talk about cosmic warfare, about authority over

the powers of darkness! Looking out into the battle, anybody who has any experience does not talk lightly about that. They talk very carefully and very prayerfully; for the whole thing, after all, is not outside us, it is *in us*, it begins *in us*. It is a matter of your will and my will. The dethronement of Satan and of all his mighty kingdom was accomplished by the will of one Man being utterly in subjection to His Father, and so far as He Himself is concerned He has left the enemy completely worsted and cast out. He has left the enemy in being, not annihilated, in order to bring us to the same place as He Himself has come to, and it will be along exactly the same lines—the battle of the will, taken up on countless points, until Satan no longer has any place or ground in our will, and he is undone. If the Lord will, we will follow that out more closely later on.

You see the big question. Oh, it is a big question! For my own part, though I have been convinced about this matter for years I have never been more strongly convinced than I am to-day that the one need is for a people to rise up in virtue of an in-wrought work of the Cross to meet these evil forces which are against the purpose of God. May the Lord produce such a people in part, though it may be a small part, through these meditations.

T. A-S.

For Boys and Girls

Gospel Messages from the Antarctic (No. X).

“*Love . . . endureth all things*” (1 Cor. xiii. 7).

“*Jesus . . . endured . . .*” (Heb. xii. 2).

“*Jesus, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end*” (John xiii. 1).

UNTIL the time of our story no actual exploring had ever been done in the Antarctic during the winter. At that season the sun disappears altogether for four months, during which there is the darkness of night, broken only by the moon and stars. And with the darkness is the cold—so severe that we in England can form no idea of it. Everything is frozen as hard as rock, and death from exposure would be very easy. The explorers remain as much as possible in their hut, where they have light and warmth, and nobody goes outdoors except for really important reasons.

But there was one special piece of work to be done by Capt. Scott's party which could only be done in the winter, and which involved a journey to a point seventy miles away. Some considered it madness to attempt such a

journey, but those concerned thought it worth trying, in spite of the risks; and so three men set out. No one knew what conditions would have to be faced, nor what dangers would be encountered. The route they would have to follow lay over a part of the country they knew very little about, except that it was covered with great ridges of ice like huge waves of a frozen sea, over or along which they would have to make their way. And those frozen waves were likely to be full of crevasses into which the men could very easily fall. All this had to be faced in darkness, and in such cold as no man had ever before endured. It was not an inviting prospect. One of the three men who went called it afterwards ‘the worst journey in the world.’

As the travellers stepped out into the bitter darkness and set forth, pulling their heavy sledges behind them, the comfort and light and warmth of the hut, and the companionship of the men they were leaving there, must have seemed very attractive. One of the three admits that he felt a little frightened. All of

them in their hearts must have felt they dared not look back or they would have been sorely tempted to return. They had to set their faces like a flint and press steadily forward.

Six weeks passed before they returned in safety to the hut. We can have only a very small idea of what they suffered in those weeks. The story of it sounds almost impossible to believe. It scarcely makes any impression on us to read that at times the temperature was more than 100 degrees below freezing point. In England we think it terribly cold when it is only 10 degrees below! The writer of our book says: 'Those days were, I suppose, in their dark severity the worst that men have ever come through alive. . . . The horror of them would have to be experienced to be appreciated . . . it is not possible to describe it.' The men would pull for hours at their sledges, keeping more or less warm by the exercise. As soon as they stopped they would begin to freeze. Their clothing often froze into solid sheets that would not bend. At rest times they would pitch their tent—a very cold and painful task—and then, having with great difficulty made a hot meal, they would try to get into their sleeping bags. They would find the bags frozen into solid blocks which would take perhaps an hour to thaw out. Then they would creep inside, only to find the bags thickly coated with ice which gradually melted owing to the warmth of their bodies, and the men had to lie there wet and shivering! After their hours of so-called rest they would get up, thankful that the ordeal was over, and their wet sleeping bags would in a few minutes be frozen again into solid blocks of ice, requiring to be thawed out again at the next resting place. And to these discomforts were added difficulties and dangers too many to describe here. Our writer says the cold was bad enough but that it was the perpetual darkness that added horror to it. They could never be sure what lay before them. Often they misjudged things and distances and found themselves in trouble, trying to haul their sledges up and down and out of the maze of great frozen waves that surrounded them on all sides. The astonishing thing is that men could go on in such circumstances. It would have been easier to return to the hut and explain how impossible it was to finish the journey. No one would have doubted them or called them cowards. They would have been counted heroes for even setting out at all. But had they yielded to the temptation to return *they would never have accomplished the task which they set out to perform*. I have not told you what that task was—I will keep that for another time, and it

will surprise you when you know it—but, whatever it was, it would have been left undone. That might not have mattered very much in this case—but suppose it had been very important indeed, something that simply *must* be done or else terrible consequences would follow? In that case, no matter how difficult the way, how great the dangers, how fierce the cold, how deep the darkness, how terrible the sufferings, they *must* go on. Well, all honour to our three explorers—they went on and succeeded. But I want to use the rest of my space in writing of One Who accomplished a journey much worse than 'the worst journey in the world'—and Who did it, not with the helpful companionship of others who shared His sufferings, but alone. Had He failed, heaven would have remained closed to us all, and everlasting separation from God would have been our fate. Oh, thank God that He did not fail!

Before coming to this world as a babe at Bethlehem, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had been "with God . . . in the bosom of the Father" (John i. 1, 18). There He had enjoyed the warmth of perfect love, in an atmosphere of utter purity and light, for "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John i. 5). But when He came into this world everything was different for Him. He lived His life of perfect holiness and love, but He was surrounded on every side by sin and hatred and darkness. "Men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil" (John iii. 19). Enemies were constantly at work against Him. Satan was continually tempting Him, in an effort either to destroy Him or to ruin His work. He loved others, but few loved Him in return; and most of those completely misunderstood Him, and scarcely one could enter at all deeply into what He felt and thought; and in the hour of His greatest need not even one was found standing with Him. If only, sometimes, there had been one with whom He could share His burden! But there was not one. How bitterly cold and dark this world was for Him! He was truly "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah liii. 3). And from the very beginning He knew that the worst suffering of all lay at the end of the journey—the Cross on which He was to die. Yet He went forward, never looking back. Such courage and self-sacrifice puts to shame the noblest and bravest act of other men and no other human suffering can be compared with it. No one but the Son of God could have borne what He bore, not only on the Cross but through the years that led up

to it.

And why did He endure so much? It was for love's sake. The only way that sinful men could be saved was by a sinless Man bearing the judgment of God on their behalf—and the death of the Cross was the way God had appointed for this. 'There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin'—only the Son of God; and for this purpose He came and lived in this world. But even He had to be *proved* sinless; and therefore He had to be tempted and tried at all points, and tested along every line of human suffering. Through all the years of His life here, the great question that was involved was this—would He go right through to the end? Would His love for His Father's will and for sinful men stand the tremendous strain, or would He take the easier way and return to heaven without finishing the work He had come to do? We shall never cease to praise Him that He bore it all and endured—"having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end."

The last cry on His lips upon the Cross before He died was a loud one—"It is finished!" And this really meant 'Victory! Victory!' It was the triumph of His love over every evil thing; and it was the outcome of the worst journey that was ever undertaken.

The measure of His love for us is shown by the measure of His sufferings for us. I can say, with Paul, that He "loved me, and gave himself up for me" (Gal. ii. 20). Can you say it also? If so, will you pray that day by day you may understand better what that love cost Him, and that you may love Him more and more in return? I am quite sure that the boy or girl who loves Him most will make the greatest progress in knowing Him, and will be the first to reach the 'South Pole' of the land we are exploring.

He did it for me, He did it for me,

A sinner as guilty as ever could be;

O, how I love Him, now that I see

He suffered, He died, and He did it for me.

G. P.

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Abounding in Love

"The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we also do toward you" (1 Thess. iii. 12).

"We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren, even as it is meet, for that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the love of each one of you all toward one another aboundeth" (2 Thess. i. 3).

"For this cause I also, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is among you, and the love which ye show toward all the saints . . ." (Eph. i. 15).

"And whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, even as he gave us commandment" (1 John iii. 22-3).

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God" (1 John iv. 7).

The Lord's Coming Related to Love in the Saints

THERE is something which lies behind these particular passages and which gives them their real force and value and emphasis. The matter before us has a prominent place in Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, and those letters themselves occupy a place of great spiritual significance. They were the first of the recorded letters written by Paul, and in chronological order they ought to come right at the beginning of his epistles, before Romans and all the others; but, seeing that they are so largely occupied with the Lord's coming and all the matters connected therewith, it is as though the Holy Spirit said, 'Yes, they come first chronologically, but really they belong to the other end,' and so He caused them to be taken out of their chronological order and put last in the arrangement of the letters as we have them. All this about the Lord's coming is after this and this and this as represented by all the other letters. So the letters to the Thessalonians are really the culmination of everything in the coming of the Lord. In them we have the last things; and the Holy Spirit has put them in their right place—at the end—and with a significance which we are going to indicate in a moment.

We pass over to the letters of John, and we find they also are occupied with last things.

When John wrote, every other New Testament writer had gone to be with the Lord. His are the last writings and they are occupied with last things—the Lord's coming, the antichrist, and so on. He says "it is the last hour." Here is the same feature as in 'Thessalonians.'

But with the Lord's coming in view, what is to be the thing which characterises the Lord's people more than anything else? What is the culmination of the whole process and progress of spiritual things? What is the issue of 'Romans,' 'Corinthians,' 'Galatians,' 'Ephesians,' 'Philippians' and 'Colossians'? What is it all to amount to? You notice in both places where the last things and the last times are most in view—'Thessalonians' and 'John'—the emphasis is upon love. That is the impressive thing here. What is the Lord coming to? What has drawn Him at any time? What is it that He delights to find and come to? "*Then they that feared the Lord spake one with another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, even mine own possession, in the day that I make" (Malachi iii. 16-17).* There you seem to have something of an advent of the Lord, as though He saw something there and said, 'That is what I am looking for and there I can come.'

Heart Love, not Head Knowledge, Attracts the Lord

Now, I am not setting aside the personal advent of the Lord. His coming will have many aspects. It will be for judgment, it will be for many things; but as central to it all, must there not be a magnet—something that draws Him out? Will He come only to judge the nations, to judge iniquity, to judge the man of sin—will that be enough for Him? Will He not rather come because He has found a treasure, and everything else of judgment is bound up with that treasure?

A familiar illustration is found in the life of David. When he was being driven out from his rightful place by the usurper, for the time being an exile from his city and throne, he sent back the priests with the ark into the city, to be there as a focal point for his heart's affections while he was in exile (2 Sam. xv. 25). We know well that the priestly aspect of things in the Scriptures is the love aspect, as the kingly is the administrative. Again, we find

the love aspect coming in with Aaron. What is almost the first thing that is said about Aaron to Moses?—"when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart" (Ex. iv. 14). It was a heart matter that brought in the priesthood. The principle obtains all the way through Scripture. It is the priest who in his love and devotion holds the Lord's people in a heart relationship with the Lord; and when the Lord had to say the hardest things that He ever did say to His own people it was because the priests were then carrying on a system with no true heart relationship with Himself. Yes, the sacrifices and the services were there, but "this people draw nigh unto me, and with their mouth and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me" (Isa. xxix. 13). There was all the priestly service without the heart. The priest represents the heart side of things.

Now this matter of love is the most practical thing that ever we can have to do with. It raises more problems than anything else. But let us look at it firstly in the light of the Lord's coming. If the Lord is coming, what will He come to? I do not think He will come because there are people who have a lot of truth and a lot of exactness in their technique and all that sort of thing. Do not let us disregard the great value and importance of light and truth, of being right according to the Lord's laws and principles; but all that will never satisfy His heart. What He will come to will be that in which He finds His heart satisfaction because of love. Paul, in the first letter to the Thessalonians, prays that their love for one another and for all men may increase. In the second letter he does not pray any longer that it may be so, he gives thanks that it *is* so; their love to one another does abound exceedingly. And in that context he opens up the matter of the Lord's coming. I do not think we are straining our interpretation here. The Holy Spirit is so consistent in His thoughts. We can talk about the Lord's coming when we can say our love aboundeth, overfloweth, but I wonder whether we can talk about the Lord's coming with any real heart confidence unless that condition obtains.

Love Not Offended by Appearances

"Abound in love one toward another." Love for those of our own company may not be so difficult. But the Word adds "and toward all men." That goes deeper. I have of late felt more deeply and strongly than ever before the force of very familiar words—"Knowledge puffeth up, but love buildeth up" (1 Cor. viii. 1), and other words such as "maketh the in-

crease of the body unto the building up of itself in love" (Eph. iv. 16). If we are going to be affected by that which is present in other people, all those features in Christians and in Christian work and activity which are repugnant to us, we are going to close up and withdraw in heart and nothing is going to be done in the way of mutual helpfulness and edification. Again and again the very practical question arises—because of this or that which we meet in another can anything be done, is anything possible? And very often, in the acute consciousness of so much that appears on the surface, we have revolted against it; and then, going to the Lord about it and facing it out with Him, we have been enabled to go on, and something has happened and the Lord has wrought, and we have been surprised, and rebuked for our original offendedness. We have to look through all that to the heart, and be reminded every time that the Lord looks on the heart. We are looking on all this which is largely the result of ignorance, lack of proper teaching and so on, and this can offend us. But the Lord looks on the heart; He sees if there is something deep down under all these preponderances, if there is a real heart love for Himself, and He knows if this is really the endeavour to express that love. There may be misapprehension, there may be ignorance, there may be other causes, but this which offends us is, on the part of those concerned, their way of showing their love for the Lord, and we must not be turned aside—we must get close to them and find what possibilities there are for the Lord. He is going on, He is not giving up; He is making all He possibly can of the least bit of heart love for Himself and for all men. The challenge of this is very practical and very searching for us. If we are affected by what we meet, by what we see and hear, by that whole world of sense—I am speaking in the realm of Christians now—we shall be put off, give up and decide that nothing is possible. "Love buildeth up"; you find there is something possible, there is some building up possible, more often than you would really believe or imagine, if only you take the love line—not the reserved line of criticism and judgment, but the love line. If there is any possibility at all for the Lord, that is the only way to find it, and you have to do a good deal of digging down, and apply yourself to it with real purpose, to discover whether, after all, there is any genuine, pure heart devotion to the Lord behind all the rest and wrapped up in it. And that 'all' covers a great deal which I will not attempt to detail. If you find that true heart love, you have found your ground of possi-

bility; and for us, dear friends, this is our business, a business to be diligently pursued. It is not a sentimental matter at all, but intensely real spiritual business.

Love Not Offended Because of Deficiencies

So much for the preponderances; there are also what we may call the deficiencies. We may say of others that we do not find in them knowledge or truth or teaching or understanding; we find, as we feel, nothing to work upon. We are tempted to say 'they do not know, they have not seen'; oh, the iniquity of a phrase like that when it is used as some people use it! 'Poor things,' they say, in effect; 'they have not seen this aspect of doctrine which we have seen'; and they pass them by because they have not seen! I say, that can be an iniquitous thing because it may be robbing the Lord of any possibility at all. It may be true that little or nothing is understood of that with which we are familiar; they may know nothing about this or that aspect of truth. But is there some heart relationship to the Lord, even with the very minimum of spiritual understanding and enlightenment and instruction? Because there is nothing of all that which we feel to be so necessary, are we going to abandon such children of God? This is a matter in which I feel we do need to be fully awake, and if necessary, to make adjustments.

Love Looks Upon the Heart

Love—not the presence of a lot of understanding and teaching and truth, and not the absence of all sorts of things—is the governing matter with the Lord. It is not that He Himself in His heart accepts the wrong things, but He sees through them, He sees differently from ourselves. There are two statements about David made in the Scriptures—made from two different standpoints. Speaking of David, the Lord said to Samuel, "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. xvi. 7). That meant that the Lord's look upon David's heart was one which was favourable. But when David went to take bread to his brethren in the army his eldest brother looked at him and said, "Why art thou come down? . . . I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thy heart . . ." (1 Sam. xvii. 28). Here we have God's look and man's

look. We have to be very careful concerning the standpoint from which we are looking upon people before we judge them by the outward signs.

You can see there is no hope of building up unless there is love—and love for all men. You and I ought to be greatly concerned with this matter of building up. Oh, God only knows how much of spiritual increase and building is needed! It is a paralysing situation that faces us if we look at our own limitations. I am sure nothing is going to be done unless we have a very large heart to look over and in and through and beyond, refusing to be held by the thing that is glaring at us, striking us and hurting us, and reaching through to that which is true in the heart.

Love Builds

In the light of the Lord's coming, it is very important to be well instructed and to have all the light that the Lord can give us, but never let us think for one moment that light and truth and teaching are inevitably the building factors, for there are many people with a vast amount of truth and love who are not very large spiritually; they are very small, shrunken and closed up. It is love that builds. Moreover, it makes differences in those who exercise it, it brings them into rest. Truth alone may bring a strained look into the face and eyes. Love ought to bring into the countenance some suggestion of quiet strength and restful confidence. Look again at those closing verses of Romans viii—"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors." Look at the things in question—the ultimate things so far as our lives are concerned. No, none of these things can separate us from the love of God. Well, let us sit down in the armchair of His love and be at rest, and then get to work. You cannot work unless you have a background rest, and rest does not spring firstly from truth. It comes from love, God's love. Whatever else He gives us and adds to us, may the Lord make us a people who are characterised supremely by this love for one another and for all men.

T. A-S.

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Paths to Power

THE greatest event in history was the coming of Jesus Christ into human flesh to live and to die for mankind. The next greatest event was the going forth of the Church to embody the life of Christ and to spread the knowledge of His salvation throughout the world.

It was not an easy task which the Church faced when she came down from that upper room. To carry on the work of a man who was known to have died—to have died as criminals die—and more than that, to persuade men that he had risen again from the dead, that he was the Son of God and the Saviour: this mission was, in the nature of it, doomed to failure from the start. Who would credit such a fantastic story? Who would put faith in one whom society had condemned and crucified? Left to herself the Church must have perished—as a thousand abortive sects had done before her—and have left nothing for a future generation to remember.

That the Church did not so perish was due entirely to the miraculous element within her. That element was supplied by the Spirit Who came at Pentecost to empower her for her task. For the Church was not an organization, not a movement, but a walking incarnation of spiritual energy. She accomplished within a remarkably short time such prodigies of spiritual conquest that we are left wholly without an explanation—apart from God.

In short, the Church began in power, moved in power, and moved so long as she had power. When she no longer had power from God, she dug in for safety and tried to conserve her gains. But her blessings were like the manna: when they tried to keep it over, it bred worms and stank. So we have had monasticism, scholasticism, institutionalism, all indicative of the same thing, absence of spiritual power. Every return to New Testament power in Church history has marked a new advance somewhere, a fresh proclamation of the gospel of life, and every diminution of power has seen the rise of some new mechanism for conservation and defence.

If this analysis is reasonably correct, then we are to-day in a state of very low spiritual energy; for it cannot be denied that the modern Church has dug in to her ears and is struggling desperately to defend the little ground she holds. She lacks the spiritual insight to know that her best defence is an offence, and she is too languid to put the knowledge into effect if she had it.

If we are to advance, we must have power.

Paganism is slowly closing in on the Church, and her only response is an occasional 'drive,' which might be described as a slight twitching of the moral muscles. These reach the headlines, they may even rate a picture on the back page, but they accomplish little that is lasting and are soon forgotten. The Church must have power, she must become formidable, dangerous, if she is to regain her lost prestige and go on to make her message the revolutionizing, conquering thing it once was.

Since 'power' is a word of many uses and misuses, let me explain what I mean by it. First, I mean spiritual energy of sufficient voltage to produce great saints once again. The mild, harmless breed of Christian grown in our generation is but a poor sample of what the grace of God can do when it operates in power. The emotionless act of 'accepting the Lord' to-day bears little resemblance to the whirlwind conversions of Bible times. We need the power that transforms, that fills the soul with a sweet intoxication, that will make a former persecutor to be "beside himself" with the love of Christ. We have to-day theological saints who can (and must) be proved to be saints by appeal to the Greek original. We need saints whose lives proclaim them to be saints and who need not run to the concordance for authentication.

Secondly, I mean a spiritual unction that will give a heavenly atmosphere to our worship, that will make our meeting places sweet with the mystic Presence. In such a holy place showy sermons and stream-lined personalities will be felt too out of place, an embarrassment to the Holy Ghost; and the emphasis will fall where it belongs, upon the Lord Himself and His message.

Then I mean by 'power' that heavenly quality which marks the Church as a divine institution. The greatest proof of our weakness these days is that there is no longer anything terrible or mysterious about us. The Church has been explained, the surest mark of her fall. We now have nothing that cannot be accounted for by psychology and statistics. In that early Church they met together in Solomon's porch, and so great was the sense of God's presence that "no man durst join himself to them." The world saw fire in that bush and stood back in fear; but no one is afraid of ashes. To-day they "durst" come as close as they please. If we ever again impress unsaved men with a wholesome fear of the supernatural, we must know once more the holy dignity of the Spirit; we must have again that

awe-inspiring mystery which comes upon men and churches when they are full of the power of God.

SELECTED.

The Battle which is not Yours

Reading: 2 Chron. xx. 1-27; Col. ii. 15.

WHILE it is true that in the New Testament the Lord's servants are designated "soldiers," and while it is also true that there are battles to be fought, there is one big fundamental and all-inclusive battle in which the Lord's people have no part whatever. To engage in it is to write over all the work of our Lord Jesus in His Cross, Failure!—to write it off as something which does not hold good. There is a battle in which you and I have no fighting place. It was the Lord's battle, not ours, and it is over the recognition and settlement of that fact that most of the trouble arises in the experience of multitudes of the Lord's people. There has been a battle which includes all other battles, which has been fought by the Lord Himself for us. It is important for us to know both that fact, and what that battle was.

A Victory to be Appropriated by Praising Faith

The story in the Old Testament which we have read is an illustration of it. I am not saying that it fits into Col. ii. 15 in doctrine, but in principle it does. The principle is this—that in both of those passages of Scripture a battle is set forth as having already been won.

The next thing is that the victory which already exists has to be entered into by faith. There has to be a stand taken in relation to that, and not a fight for it. If you begin to take up that fight you are destined to defeat, because you have put God's ground away from under your feet. We shall see that when we come to the nature of the battle. But it is very serious, and we should recognise it. Here is something in existence, and upon that something as an accomplished fact in the realm of hostilities a stand has to be taken by faith, and no conflict allowed.

In the case of the people of Judah of whom we have read, their faith as to what had been said—"The battle is not yours, but God's . . . ye shall not need to fight in this battle"—was demonstrated by song. You do not need that I stay to show how necessary faith was, and that it was genuine faith and not mere optimism. No, it was faith that was required. It was a very desperate situation naturally, but faith was demonstrated, and it was demonstrated by singing. Their song was the evidence that they believed God and His

Word; they believed the thing that was declared to them, and they proved it by singing. And it was not the kind of singing of the little boy walking along the country lane in the dark, who sings to try and keep himself cheerful in the midst of terrible fears. There is no doubt about it, it was a song of assurance and confidence; read it again.

The Battle Already Won in the Cross

And then—this is where we begin to get near to the heart of the nature of this battle—the song was governed by the priestly and Levitical side of things. You will see at the end of the previous chapter how the government was put into the hands of the priests; and then the narrative in chapter xx shows that it was the Levites, whose it was to praise, who spontaneously broke into praise. Praise expressive of faith was governed by what was priestly and Levitical—which shows the nature of the battle at once. This was the question, the whole question—on whose side was God? and God has no favourites. God is not on one side just because He feels inclined to favour that side. God is only on the side of righteousness, on the side of holiness—"in holy array." God is on the side where salvation is already implicit by reason of priestly government, or the government of priestly principles—that is, the Blood, the Cross, all that redemption means through the work of the Lord Jesus. And so the answer to the question, On which side is God? is this—He is found where that is represented and implicit which is the work of His Son on Calvary. That is the nature of the battle; and that is not your battle nor mine; that was God's battle!

So we come over to this well-known passage in the letter to the Colossians. It is a wonderful passage. I have been looking at several different versions, and, although I do not often trouble you with the technique of different translations, I think it worth dwelling upon two or three.

"Having despoiled the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it (his cross)."

"The dominions and powers he robbed of their prey, but them to open shame, led them away in triumph through his cross."

"He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in his cross."

Now you notice that is all in the past tense; that is something done. The ground has been taken from the enemy—that is the first thing; and when an enemy's ground is taken from him, he is in total confusion. Note the confusion back there in 2 Chron. xx—they are all killing one another. Why?—their ground upon which they trusted has been taken from them. In Colossians it is the same confusion: "put to shame." What is shame but confusion? If anybody is in confusion, they are very much put to shame. In confusion they are helpless, you can take their prey; and that is what Judah did in the story we have read. That is why I gave you those different versions. He took their prey, prey from the principalities and powers. Why?—because their ground was taken away.

The Enemy's Only Ground of Hope

What was the ground upon which the principalities and powers rested their confidence, and upon which they found their strength? Now, follow closely here; let us look at it.

"And you who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having cancelled the bond which stood against us in legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the Cross. He despoiled the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing openly in his cross. Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food, drink, festivals, new moons, sabbaths; these are only the shadow of things which were to come."

You see the point—handwriting in ordinances and legal demands. 'Thou shalt!' 'Thou shalt not!'—the whole sum of law written in ordinances against us. Where was and is the strength, the solidity, of the principalities and the powers? It is here—firstly, that whole range of legal demands; and, then, the weakness of man. All the power of Satan is upheld by those two things against us—'Thou shalt!' 'I cannot!'; 'Thou shalt not!' 'But I am always doing it, I cannot help myself!' The demand, the law; and our weakness. Oh, what a playground for the devil! All his strength is there, all his confidence is there, all his solidity is there. Take that ground away, take away the handwriting in ordinances against us, take away from him all the legal demands, and he has nothing to stand on, he is in confusion; he is made a show of openly, put to shame, to confusion; he is broken up, he is helpless.

You stand, and then you take. Listen, friends—immediately you, as a believer in

Jesus Christ, admit the slightest suggestion into your heart or mind that there is a question about your salvation, you have capitulated to the devil and undone the work of Jesus Christ in His Cross; you have strengthened the devil's power to spoil you, immediately you admit anything like that. Satan must recover ground in order to have power, and his ground is that. What is it?—our weakness over against legal demands; that is his ground, and he will never, never, to the last breath of our bodies, cease to try and get that ground back in his hands.

The Enemy's Suggestions to be Repudiated

But, listen again. You and I are not to fight that battle. That is the point—*we are not to fight that battle*. We are to take the attitude that the battle has been fought and finished—that is all there is to it. Let the suggestion of doubt be presented—our attitude must be that there is no place for such a suggestion; it is not our concern at all; God has undertaken that, God in Christ assumed responsibility for that, and settled it once and for all! Admit the suggestion, and see what a mess the devil will make of your life! You know, as well as I do, that the song goes out at once. What then are we to do on that matter? We have to stand in faith and rejoice—that is all. Oh, if ever a Christian, or even a servant of God with long experience, says anything to you indicating that he or she has some question, some doubt, about his or her salvation, you say at once, 'You have absolutely given the ground back to the devil and he is robbing you of your life.' I cannot be strong enough about this. I know the enemy in this matter, and what he is trying to do, and how many lives are being turned by him right in upon themselves and made to go round this whole matter of whether God is with them, and to question their own salvation. They are always bringing up again this basic sin question, looking at it, talking about it. Their consciousness seems obsessed by this matter of sin.

If there is some specific thing that has arisen as a ground of controversy between the Lord and yourself, and you know it, your attitude toward that must be to take it right back to this fundamental and inclusive ground and put it there, and not bring into question this whole matter of Calvary's immense triumph. "If we confess our sins"—not to one another; do not go round confessing your sins to people—"If we confess our sins"—to Him—"he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John i. 9). Why? Because already He has

secured the complete ground for so doing.

Confidence Essential to Victory

But mark, there is no contradiction here. "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle; set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord"; "tomorrow go ye down against them." Does that sound like a contradiction? Oh no, there is no contradiction. You must express your faith. Yes, there is fighting to be done, but there is a great difference between fighting *in* a victory and fighting *for* a victory when it is a matter of our salvation. Oh, please, dear friends, do not be amongst those who talk much about the devil and the Lord's victory over him, and have in your own hearts a dark shadow about this matter. The only people who dare face the enemy and take an attitude against the evil powers are the people who have such assurance in their hearts on this fundamental matter that they are in joy. Do not go out against the enemy with a cloud of doubt in your heart. This enemy cannot be faced with a doubt. We have to take a heavenly position, a position on an established fact. Immediately we come down on to the position of nature—what we find here on this earth and in ourselves—we are undone.

To maintain our heavenly position we have to recognise that the whole question of progressive sanctification is another and entirely different issue, and there is no hope for us—we shall make no progress in sanctification and conformity to the image of Christ—unless this one fundamental issue is settled all-inclusively. We must have a vantage ground from which to move, we must have a position on which we stand and stand fully assured in all the will of God.

Introspection Leads to Defeat

Now, with one further word I will close. Dear friends, if any truth has the effect of turning you in upon yourself, making you introspective, self-occupied in a spiritual way, that truth has been wrongly apprehended. You may assume the position of the most spiritual, but you are all wrong in your apprehension. This great work which Christ did in His Cross was never intended to make anybody miserable. Of course, that goes without saying; yet there are multitudes who are miserable after trusting the Lord, miserable over the sin question in their lives; and the number, I am afraid, is increasing. Always keep a very distinct and broad line between fuller revelation, deeper truth (whatever you may term it—all that going-on-to-full-growth realm of things) and this whole matter of introspection. Some

people seem to think that to become more spiritual we must become more intense and tied-up and occupied with this whole matter of the spiritual life, and really they are the most unbearable people, the joy has gone out of them. I am certain of this, that nothing will ever come to you, however deep, however mighty, however tremendous, *by revelation of the Holy Ghost*, that will make you miserable. The revelation of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit—and there is no other revelation—will never make a soul miserable. There is something wrong if a Christian is miserable on spiritual matters, and it is either failure to apprehend the one great, absolute reality that the victory was God's and that He won it in Christ, fully and finally, and we are not called to share at all in that battle; or the truth which has come subsequently has been misapprehended and has become something that is a burden grievous to be borne. The Lord Jesus said, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. xi. 30). And what was the yoke? Well, listen again; you will get it in various places in the New Testament where the very word is used. "They bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger" (Matt. xxiii. 4). What was the yoke, the burden?—the law, ordinances, 'thou shalt,' 'thou shalt not'; the enforcement of this. "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." He "despoiled the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in (his cross)." How? He nailed to His Cross the whole list of ordinances against us and took the ground of the enemy's strength and assurance from him. You know quite well that the enemy has no abstract power over anybody. It is always concrete, it is always positive. The devil must have something to make his power felt. It does not exist, in effect, unless he has got moral ground, and the thing with which he lashes and drives and harasses is this law of carnal ordinances which was against us, against us, against us! Listen! The enemy is always saying that God is against you, His Word is against you, things are against you. That is his ground and strength. But—"if God be for us . . ." (Rom. viii. 31). Oh, that is another side—"for us"! How? Not abstractly. "He despoiled." "He made a show." "He triumphed." It was not simply a clash between spiritual forces in the Unseen; a moral issue was involved. It was taking ground and robbing the enemies of their strength, their coherence. Confusion resulted. They in effect, say, 'What can we do now?

All our weapons are gone.' Then they begin to blame one another, to kill one another. There is no love among these evil forces, they have no coherence of love. It is all hatred there, and immediately they find the ground taken from them, they turn upon one another.

Well, we will stop there; but do get this matter settled. Any introspective Christian is useless as a servant of the Lord. Your days, weeks, months, years, go, and all that might

be for the Lord is devoured by that canker-worm of uncertainty as to your own spiritual life. Life is thrown away, the devil is triumphant, he is spoiling everything. If you want to know effectiveness, then do not fight in that battle at all. The real power that overcomes in this matter is faith. So believe God, and, if you will, believe His prophets—the thing which is declared unto you, which is the very truth of God.

T. A-S.

Corporate Life

IN order that life may fulfil its function, reveal its power, reach its full measure, and pass on its potentialities, it must assume form. Life in itself has never been seen. Only through the form which it takes can it express itself. It must have a body. It is only through the body and corporate relations that the great laws of life and the spiritual kingdom can come to fullest expression and efficiency. Life involves relations. Isolation spells death.

The relation into which the new-born child of God is introduced is twofold—first to its risen Lord, as Head of the Body which is the Church, and secondly to all its members, consisting of those who in every age and country have heard His voice, and come out at His call. They have not merely been 'called out,' they have been 'called in.' It is a call with a double object.

First it is private, personal, specific, as between the individual and his Lord. Stripping himself clear of all relations, entanglements, and environments, he must come first of all into the consciousness of his own nakedness. face to face with God *alone*, bringing nothing with him of his own personality. We are as truly born naked in the spiritual as in the natural realm. In the private presence of

God relations are set up which are primary and fundamental. Spirit meets with spirit.

From that personal relatedness the child of God is introduced to a new order, a great spiritual fellowship, a relatedness of all who have been "born of the Spirit." This relatedness is as absolutely essential as is that of the organs of the physical body. For growth, function, safety, balance, and fulness, this co-ordination, interdependence, and co-operation in spirit and practice is indispensable. It involves an utter repudiation of independence, separateness, and self-centredness. This is inherent in new birth and being "in one Spirit baptized into one body," and the sooner it is recognised the greater the saving of the precious time in spiritual maturity.

We are related to an order which is higher than anything on this earth or of the natural creation. The higher the organism, the longer the process of co-ordination. It takes a very much longer time for an elephant to be formed than other animals. But the presence of life can and will consummate the order if it is not violated.

"Till we all attain unto . . . the stature of the fulness of Christ."

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Assistant Editor: G. PATTERSON

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Prophetic Ministry

III. A Voice that Conveys a Vision

"For they that dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him" (Acts xiii. 27).

A Voice Which May be Missed

THE above statement as a whole carries a significance which embraces a very great deal of history, but its direct and immediate implication is that if the people referred to—dwellers in Jerusalem and their rulers—had been in the good of the most familiar things, they would have behaved very differently from the way in which they did behave. Every week, Sabbath by Sabbath, extending over a very great number of years, they heard things read, but eventually, because of their failure to know what they were hearing, they acted in a way entirely opposed to those very things, though under the sovereignty of God fulfilling them in so doing. Surely that is a word of warning. It represents a very terrible possibility—to hear repeatedly the same things, and not to recognise their significance; to behave in a way quite contrary to our own interests, making for our own undoing, when it might have been otherwise.

The point is this, that there is a voice in the prophets which may be missed, a meaning which may not be apprehended, and the results may be disastrous for the people concerned. "The voices of the prophets"; that suggests that there is something more than the things that the prophet says. There is 'a voice.' We

may hear a sound, we may hear the words, and not hear the voice; that is something extra to the thing said. That is the statement here, that week by week, month after month, and year after year, men read the prophets audibly, and the people who heard the reading did not hear the voices. It is the *voice* of the prophets that we need to hear.

As you go through this thirteenth chapter of the Acts, you are able to recognise that this little fragment is in a very crucial context. This chapter, to begin with, marks a development. There in Antioch were certain men, including Saul, and the Holy Ghost said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." That was a new development, a moving out, something far-reaching, very momentous; but you are not through the chapter before you come upon another crisis, which became inevitable when in a certain place a great crowd came together, and the Jews, refusing to be obedient to the Word, stirred up a revolt. The Apostles made their pronouncement—"It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. Seeing ye thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles"; and they quoted a prophet for their authority—"I have set thee for a light of the Gentiles." These were epochs in the history of the Church; and the Jews, as a whole, were turned from, and the Gentiles in a very deliberate way were recognised and brought in, because of this very thing—that the Jews had heard these prophets Sabbath by

Sabbath but had not heard their voices. Big things hang upon hearing the voice.

On the one hand, failure may lead to irreparable loss. It is not too much to say that what we are seeing in these present days—the storm clouds gathering in a new way upon that very people, with all the kings of the earth lining up—is because of Acts xiii. Very big things have come into these centuries concerning that people. It is not my intention to launch out on matters of prophecy concerning the Jews, but my point is this. On the one hand, it was no small thing to fail to hear the voices of the prophets. On the other hand, you notice that the Gentiles rejoiced. It says here, “As the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of God.” Well, on both sides, it is a great thing either to fail to hear what could be heard if there were an ear for hearing, or to hear and give heed. I think that is a sufficiently serious foundation and background to engage our attention.

Old Testament Prophets in the New Testament

Having said that, we come to look more closely at this matter of the voices of the prophets. A fact of very great significance is this, that the prophets have such a large place in the New Testament. I wonder if you have taken account of how large that place is. You will not need to be reminded how largely the Gospels call upon the major prophets, as they are called. “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet . . .”—how often that statement alone occurs in the Gospels. It came in from the birth of the Lord Jesus, and in that connection alone on several occasions the major prophets are quoted. But when you move from the Gospels into the Acts and the Epistles, you move so largely into what are called the minor prophets—not minor because they were of less account than the others but because the record of their writings is smaller. It is tremendously impressive and significant that these minor prophets should be drawn upon so extensively in the New Testament; over fifty times they are quoted.

Prophets Men of Vision

From that general significance, two factors arise. One, as to the prophets themselves. Why do they have so large a place in the New Testament? Well, the answer to that will be largely another question. What do prophets signify? They are ‘the seers’ (I Sam. ix. 9), they are the men who see, and in seeing, act as eyes for the people of God. They are the men of vision; and their large place in the New Testament surely therefore indicates how tremendously important spiritual vision is for

the people of God throughout this dispensation. Of course, the other thing is the vision itself, but I am not concerned just now to speak about what the vision was and is—that, with other aspects, may come later. At the moment, I feel the Lord is concerned with this factor—the tremendous importance of spiritual vision if the people of God are to fulfil their vocation. It resolves itself into a matter solely of vision unto vocation, and the vocation will not be fulfilled without vision.

Vision Imparts Purpose to Life

So for a moment let us dwell upon the place of vision—and you will not think that I am talking about visionariness. No, here it is something specific, it is *the* vision, it is something clearly defined. The prophets knew what they were talking about—not merely abstract ideas, but something very definite. Vision, then, is something quite specific, something with which the Lord is concerned and which has become a mighty, dominating thing in the life of those who have it; clear, distinct, precise, specific; taking hold and mastering and dominating them so that the whole purpose of existence itself is gathered into that. Such a people are at that place where they know why they have an existence, they know that for which they are alive and are able to say what it is, and their horizon is bounded by that thing; they, with their whole life in all its aspects, are gathered into that, poised to that. It is an object which governs everything for them. It is not just living on this earth and doing many things and getting through somehow; but everything that has a place in life is linked with this definite, distinct, all-governing objective. It is such a vision which gives meaning to life.

It is not necessary for me to take you through Israel’s history as governed by that very truth. You know quite well that, when Israel was in a right position, that is how things were—focused, definite, everybody centred in one object. And, before we go further, let us say again that all these prophets—the men who were the eyes of God for a people, and signifying to that people God’s thought and purpose concerning them, their Divine vocation, God’s interpretation of their very existence—these prophets who embodied that are all brought into the New Testament dispensation and into the Church, with this clear implication—that is how the Church is to be if it is to get through. It is to be a seeing thing, dominated by a specific object and vision, knowing why it exists, having no doubt about it, and poised in utter abandonment thereto, bringing all other things in life into line with that. Our attitude

has to be that, while in this world we necessarily have to do this and that, to earn our living and do our daily work, yet there is something governing all else, there is a Divine vision. These things have to bend to that one Divine end. That is the first implication of the fact that the prophets have such a large place in this dispensation. We cannot now stay to follow that out in detail from the Word, but it would be very helpful to go through the New Testament, and see how the bringing in of the prophets is made to apply to this, that, and the other aspect of the Church's life. It is very impressive.

Vision a Unifying Factor

The prophets are governing this dispensation in this way. This vision, *the* vision, was the very cohesiveness and strength of Israel. When the vision was clearly before them, when their eyes were opened and they were seeing, when they were in line with God's purpose, when they were governed by that end to which God had called them, they were one people, made one by the vision. They had a single eye. That little phrase "If . . . thine eye be single" (Matt. vi. 22) has a great deal more in it than we have recognised. A single eye—it unifies the whole life and conduct if you have a single eye; it will unify all your behaviour. If you are a man or a woman of one idea, everything will be brought into that. Of course, that is not always a very happy thing, but in this case it is. People who are obsessed, as we say, and have 'a bee in their bonnet,' with nothing else to talk about but one thing, are very often trying people; but there is a right way, a Divine way, in which the people of God should be people of a single eye, a single idea; and that singleness of eye brings all the faculties into co-ordination. During the rare periods when Israel was like that, they were a marvellously unified people. On the other hand, you can see how, when the vision faded and failed, they disintegrated, became people of all kinds of divided and schismatic interests and activities, quarrelling amongst themselves. How true is the word—"Where there is no vision, the people perish (go to pieces)" (Prov. xxix. 18); and so it was with Israel. See them in the days of Eli when there was no open vision. What a disintegrated, disunited people they were! That happened many times. The vision was a solidifying, cohesive power, making a people solidly one, and in that oneness was their strength, and they were irresistible. See them over Jordan in their assault upon Jericho! See them moving triumphantly on! While they were governed by one object, none could stand before them. Their strength

was in their unity, and their unity was in their vision. The enemy knows what he is doing in destroying or confusing vision; he is dividing the people of God.

Vision a Defensive Power

What a defensive power vision is, vision like that! What little chance the enemy has when we have a people set upon one thing! If we have all sorts of divided and personal interests, the enemy can make awful havoc. He does not get a chance when everybody is centred upon one Divine object. He has to divide them somehow, distract them, disintegrate them, before he can accomplish his work of defeating God's end. All those features of self-pity, self-interest, which are ever seeking to get in and spoil, will never get in while vision is clear and we are focused upon it as one people. It is tremendously defensive. The Apostle spoke about being "in diligence not slothful; fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Rom. xii. 11). Moffatt translates "fervent in spirit" as "maintaining the spiritual glow." Being centred upon an object wholeheartedly is a great protective thing. Such a condition in a people closes the breaches and resists the encroachments and impingements of all kinds of things which would distract and paralyse.

Vision Makes for Definiteness and Growth

Vision was like a flame with the prophets. You do have to recognise that about them, at any rate—that these men were flames of fire. There was nothing neutral about them; they were aggressive, never passive; and vision has that effect. If you have really seen what the Lord is after, you cannot be half-hearted; you cannot be passive if you see. Find the person who has seen, and you find a positive life. Find the person who does not see, is not sure, is not clear, and you have a neutral, a negative, one that does not count. These prophets were men like flames of fire because they saw. And when Israel was in the good of the Divine calling, Israel was like that—positive, aggressive. When the vision faded, they came to a standstill, turned in upon themselves, went round and round in circles, ceased to get anywhere. This aggressiveness, this positiveness, which is the fruit of having seen, provides the Lord with the ground that He needs for a right kind of training and discipline. It does not mean that we shall never make mistakes. You will see in the New Testament—and I hope you will not charge me with heresy—that even a man so crucified as Paul could make mistakes. Peter, a man so used and so chastened, could make mistakes. Yes, apostles could make

mistakes. And prophets could make mistakes. "What doest thou here, Elijah?" (1 Kings xix. 9). 'You have no business to be here'—that is what it means. Yes, prophets and apostles could make mistakes, and they did; but there is this about it—because they had seen, and were utterly abandoned to that which they had seen of the Lord's mind, the Lord was so abundantly able to come in on their mistakes and sovereignly overrule them and teach His servants something more of Himself and His ways.

Now, you never find that with people who are indefinite. The indefinite people, those who are not meaning business, who are not abandoned, never do learn anything of the Lord. It is the people who commit themselves, who let go and go right out in the direction of whatever measure of light the Lord has given them, who, on the one hand, find their mistakes—the mistakes of their very zeal—taken hold of by Divine sovereignty and overruled: and, on the other hand, are taught by the Lord through their very mistakes what His thoughts are, how He does, and how He does not, do things. If we are going to wait in indefiniteness and uncertainty and do nothing until we know it all, we will learn nothing. Have you not noticed that it is the men and women whose hearts are aflame for God, who have seen something truly from the Lord and have been mightily gripped by what they have seen, who are the people that are learning? The Lord is teaching them, and He does not allow their blunders and their mistakes to engulf them in destruction. He sovereignly overrules, and in the long run they are able to say, 'Well, I made an awful blunder, but the Lord marvellously took hold of that and turned it to good account.' To be like this, with vision which gathers up our whole being and masters us, provides the Lord with the ground for looking after us even when we make mistakes, because His interests are at stake, His interests and not our own are the concerns of our heart. Well, the prophets and the apostles learned to know the Lord in wonderful ways by their very mistakes, but they were the mistakes not of their own stubborn self-will but of a real passion for God and for what He had shown them as to His purpose.

Vision Gives Ascendancy to God's People

And then note that the very ascendancy of Israel was based upon vision. They were called of God to be an ascendant people, above all the peoples of the earth, set in the midst of the nations as a spiritually governmental vessel. The Lord did promise that no nation should be able to take headship over them. His

thought for them was that they should be the head, and not the tail (Deut. xxviii. 13). But you follow through: that was not going to happen willy-nilly, irrespective of their condition and position. It was when they had the vision before them clearly, corporately, as an entire people, dominated, mastered, unified by the vision—it was then that they were head and not tail, it was then that they were in the ascendant.

And that brings in these prophets again. (We think now of the later prophets of Israel.) Why the prophets? Because Israel had lost their position. Assyria, Babylon and the rest were taking ascendancy over them because they had lost their vision. It is in the minor prophets, as they are called, that you have so much about this very matter. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea iv. 6). That is a note to which all the prophets are tuned. Why this state of things? Why Israel now the underdog of the nations? The answer is—lost vision. The prophet comes to try to get them back to the place of the vision. The prophet has the vision, he is the eyes, he is calling the people back to that for which God chose them, to show them anew why He took them from among the nations.

Vision Needed by Every Child of God

All this is but an emphasis upon the place of vision. It may not get you very far, you may wonder what it all leads to. You are saying now, 'Well, what is the vision?' That is not the point at the moment, that can come later. The point is that that is the necessity, the absolute necessity, for the Church to-day—for you, for me; and let me say at once that, while pre-eminently it is a corporate thing—that is, it is something which is to be in a people, even though that people be but a remnant, a small number amongst all the people of God—while pre-eminently a corporate thing, it must be personal. You and I individually must be in the place where we can say, 'I have seen, I know what God is after!' If we were asked why the Church is as it is to-day, in so large a measure of impotence and disintegration, and what is needed to bring about an impact from heaven by means of the Church, could we say? Is it presumption to claim to be able to do that? The prophets knew; and remember that the prophets, whether they were Old Testament or New Testament prophets, were not an isolated class of people, they were not some body apart, holding this in themselves officially. They were the very eyes of the body. They were, in the thought of God, the people of God. You know that principle—that God looks upon the one High Priest as Israel, and deals with all Israel

on the ground of the position of the High Priest, whether it be good or bad. If the High Priest is bad—"And he showed me Joshua the high priest . . . clothed with filthy garments" (Zech. iii. 1-5)—that is Israel. God deals with Israel as one man. The prophet is the same; and that is why the prophet was so interwoven with the very condition and life of the people. Listen to the prophet Daniel. Personally he was not guilty, personally he had not sinned as the nation had sinned, but he took it all on himself and spoke as though it were his responsibility, as if he were the chief of sinners. These men were brought right into it. There is such a oneness between the prophets and the people in condition, in experience, in suffering, that they could never view themselves as officials apart from all that, talking to it from outside; they are in it, they are it. My meaning is this, that we are not to have vision brought to us by a class called ministers, prophets and apostles. They are here only to keep us alive to what we ought to be before God, how we ought to be, constantly stirring us up and saying, 'Look here, this is what you ought to be.' So it ought to be with everyone of us personally, that we are in the meaning of this prophetic ministry. The Church is called to be a prophet to the nations; and may I repeat my enquiry—it is a permissible question without admitting of any presumption—could you say what is needed by the Church to-day? Could you really interpret the state of things and explain truly by what the Lord has shown you in your own heart? I know the peril and dangers that may surround such an idea, but that is the very meaning of our existence; it will be in greater or lesser degree in everyone of us; but, more or less, we have the key to the situation. God needs people of that sort. It must be individual.

Vision Calls for Courage

But remember it will call for immense courage. Oh, the courage of these prophets!

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courage as over against compromise and policy. Oh, the ruinous effects of policy, secondary considerations—how it will affect our opportunities if we are so definite! Will it not lessen our opportunities of serving the Lord if we take such a position? That is policy, and it is a ruinous thing. Many a man who has seen something and has begun to speak about what he has seen has found such a reaction from his own brethren, and amongst those where his responsibility lay, that he has drawn back. 'It is dangerous to pursue that any further.' Policy! No, there was nothing of that about the prophets. Are we committed because we have seen?

There will be cost; we may as well face it. There is a little fragment in Hebrews xi—"They were sawn asunder." A tradition says that that applied to the prophet Isaiah; he was the one who was sawn asunder. Read Isa. liii. There is nothing more sublime in all the literature of the Bible, and for that he was sawn asunder. Was he right? Well, we to-day stand on the ground, and in the good, of his rightness; "He was wounded for our transgressions." But the devil does not like that, and so Isaiah was sawn asunder. There are tremendous values bound up with seeing, and with uncompromising abandonment to the vision, but there is tremendous cost also.

We will leave it there for the time being; but we must have dealings with the Lord and say, 'How much have I seen? After all I have heard of the prophets week by week, after all the conventions, the conferences, the meetings I have been attending, have I heard the voice of the prophets after all? I have heard the speakers give their messages and addresses; have I heard the voice?' I am sure the effect will be tremendous if we have. If we have not, it is time we got to the Lord about it. This must not go on! What happened in Acts xiii? Hearing they did not hear; but where there was a hearing, oh, what tremendous things happened, what tremendous values came!

T. A-S.

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The Four Pillars of Jacob

III. The Pillar of Transformation

Reading: Gen. xxxv. 1-3; 9-15.

THIS is the third of the four pillars which Jacob erected in the course of his pilgrimage. Each of them represented a spiritual crisis, not merely of Jacob's resolution but by reason of God's gracious intervention in his life. The first one, which we called the Pillar of Revelation, was certainly the outcome of such a Divine visitation; the second, the Pillar of Separation, was also produced by the Lord's initiative; and now we are to consider the third, when once again God broke into Jacob's life. God met him and made him a changed man. Nevertheless, the raising of the pillar shows that from his side Jacob was quite as definite with the Lord as the Lord had been with him. He set up that which would fix his position in an irrevocable way, so that it was not a vague transaction which could be gone back on later, but a final committal by a man who was dealing with God in earnest.

The Return to Bethel

The action took place at Bethel where the first pillar had been put up. Jacob had called the place 'Bethel,' for there, many years previously, he had seen a vision of the House of God. He had caught a glimpse of the blessedness of a life in the realm of God's own House—a realm where the Lord is everything, for all is for Him and all is from Him. He had thought that he would like to live there, and had determined one day to come back and do so, though he recognised that at the time he was not fit for such a sacred place. The House of God would mean an experience in which life was no longer governed by the thoughts, the ways, the plans, the efforts, the ambitions and the glory of man, but only and altogether by that which was according to God. Jacob was not suitable for such a life, but he appreciated the blessedness of the revelation, and in erecting his first pillar committed himself to the Lord to be made suitable. Bethel was not a passing idea which came to Jacob, nor was it merely personal to him, but rather the revelation from heaven of an abiding principle, the possibility of spiritual fulness in fellowship with God. In the very first chapter of John's Gospel we find the Lord's promise to Nathanael, and not to him only but to those who were with him, that they too should come in spirit to Bethel where they would see the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

Fitness for Bethel

But such a realm means that those who live in it must be conformed to it, they must be like it. The House of God is not an outward matter of places, of customs and manners, of beliefs or procedure; it is not that which we can bring about or maintain by our own activities. It consists of a living experience of Jesus Christ where everything is from Him and unto Him. We have to be constituted anew to partake of that experience. Jacob must become Israel if he would live at Bethel. Thus it was that the Lord Jesus said of Nathanael, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." At first He could not say that of Jacob. Much had to be done in Jacob before that would be possible. But now the time had come when the Lord could assure even Jacob that there was a place for him at Bethel. The vision could be realised at last, for the old Jacob was dealt with, and it could be said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed!" God called his name Israel.

That is precisely what God has done for us in Christ, and He calls us, like Jacob, to be quite definite in faith's appropriation. This is the explanation of the third pillar. God took it upon Himself to say, 'You are no longer Jacob, unfit for My House, but you are now Israel, the man who can rightly dwell there.' Jacob's pillar was a token of faith's acceptance of what God had said.

It needed all the wisdom and power of God to effect that transformation. The opening verses of our chapter reveal that the house of Jacob was far from being the House of God. When the Lord commanded Jacob to arise and go up to Bethel this sad contrast became a matter of conviction to him. He knew that for the Lord to be truly honoured all impurities and contradictions must be repudiated: he could not take strange gods up to Bethel. So he called his household together and told them that they must put away all their false gods and cleanse themselves, for Bethel demands a state which corresponds to the holiness of God. Well, there were all sorts of defilement in Jacob's household, and they had to be put away and cleansed. Jacob could do that himself, and he did so.

Inward Conformity to Bethel

But there had been depths of defilement which only God could deal with. Jacob's own

natural life was the greatest contradiction of Bethel. For years he had not appreciated his true nature, but even when he did so he had no power to change himself. It is so with us. When God speaks to us about the place of His glory and reveals Himself to us in the holy Person of His Son we are made aware of features of our lives which are unseemly and unholy. We realize that these must be put away, and that it is our responsibility to purge ourselves from these defilements. But what so many of the Lord's people fail to realize is that when everything has been done in the way of removing the idols and cleansing the garments there still remains an inward nature which is unseemly and unacceptable in the House of God. While under the powerful influence of the Spirit's conviction many sins may be brought to the light, confessed and put away, with a resultant experience of great relief and joy often called revival, there still remains the fact of the old nature which is essentially evil. Wholehearted dealing with the Lord concerning all conscious wrong is most important, but after all it is still only *things* which are being dealt with, and those things are the outward expressions of a nature which is too much for us. God looks deep into the heart, and He knows that the real trouble is not only the harbouring of false gods and the unclean garments defiling Jacob's household, but that the real problem is deep down in Jacob's own being.

This is true of us all. When sins have been confessed and cleansed there still remains the sinful nature which is quite unfit for the House of God. God must deal with it, for only God can. Jacob can put some things away, but he cannot put himself away. When Jacob erected this pillar it was with the Divine assurance ringing in his ears, "Thy name shall not be called any more Jacob." Praise the Lord! God had been dealing with Jacob for years to this very end. This is the explanation of so much frustration and disappointment in his life. Poor Jacob now sees the goal of all the painful years of discipline. A great transformation has taken place, for the Lord, looking upon him in grace, can affirm 'No more Jacob'! Only God could say that. It would have been useless for Jacob to say it. Jacob did not give himself that name; it was given to him; and Jacob could neither rid himself of it and of the nature it implied, nor give himself a new name and a new nature. But the Lord could, and did. This pillar, therefore, speaks of the great work of Calvary in putting away the old man ("not . . . any more Jacob") and bringing in the new man ("Israel shall be thy name"), and of faith's appropriation of that work.

The Call to Faith

We might expect that in the ensuing narrative the name Jacob would never again be mentioned, but that is not so. The two names are now used. Sometimes it is Israel, and then it is Jacob again. At first sight it would appear to be the most satisfactory experience of sanctification, both for Jacob and for us, that at a certain point the old nature should entirely cease to be, while the new nature automatically expressed itself in all things. Well, that will be one day, for at the time of the redemption of the body we shall see Christ and be like Him (1 John iii. 2); but meanwhile our greatest need is for positive faith in the matter. We are commanded to "put away the old man" and also to "put on the new man" (Eph. iv. 22, 24). What God has done for Jacob is to bring him to the place where he can be Israel, and need not be any more Jacob: in the language of the New Testament, "no longer I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. ii. 20). Jacob is what I am in myself. Well, as we read on we find that Jacob can still be something in himself. Israel is what I am in Christ. Thank God for the blessed power and glory of living in that realm! But one chapter can be one realm, while the next chapter is the other, and indeed they can both be found in the same chapter. How well we know it!

Jacob's pillar is a call to faith. The life which we now live is a life of faith. Where would be the call to faith if the old nature had ceased to be and the life of Christ worked in us automatically? Sanctification does not make us independent of God but leads us into a life of utter dependence. Not what I am—that will still be Jacob; even in the holiest place and the most zealous attempts to serve the Lord, I shall still be Jacob in myself. 'Not what I am, O Lord, but what Thou art'—it is in such language that faith expresses its appropriation of the Divine act of transformation which has set aside Jacob and brought in Israel.

The Negative Side

Of course, it was a painful experience for Jacob. There are two sides to this transformation, and so we find that the Lord's word was spoken to Jacob on two occasions. The first was after the terrible night by the brook Jabbok, when the Lord said to him, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel" (Gen. xxxii. 28). The experience at Jabbok was the side where, by the Cross, the strong, ungovernable old nature was smitten and crippled by the touch of the Lord. God broke Jacob at Jabbok, and so made way for the new man. That is the negative side, the side with which we all sympathise when we too are

made to know the Lord's verdict upon our own natures. Like Jacob, though, we can be amazingly strong in our resistance to the Lord in this matter. Jacob wrestled all night, as indeed he had been wrestling for twenty years, but at last he was brought to the breaking point, where God blessed him and gave him the promise of transformation.

In the Cross the Lord Jesus has not merely dealt with our sins; He has also condemned to death what we are, for He knows that what we are in ourselves is the greatest menace to His interests in the House of God. Jacob's pillar, then, means that we accept the verdict of the Cross upon what we are by nature.

The Positive Side

But even more, it points us to the positive side of Calvary. For the second time the Lord spoke the same words to Jacob, assuring him that there was a new name to take the place of the old. When Jacob raised his pillar he was saying in effect, 'God has called me Israel, so I am Israel. I have not made myself Israel, and cannot do so; but the Lord has done so, and I stand upon His word.' It is thus that the spiritual meaning of Bethel is made possible. The negative side is only a half of the transaction, and must be accompanied by the positive reckoning of faith.

Perhaps it is here that we fail so often. We are afraid to raise the pillar, afraid to commit ourselves in faith. Jacob might have waited a while to see how it worked out; he might have demanded sufficient evidence in his own life that he really was Israel before he could accept the fact. In that case there would have been no pillar. He had to stand in faith for what God had called him. And what has God called us in Christ? He has called us holy, He has called us His children, He has called us members of His Son, He has called us His House. All this will be worked out in proportion as the Cross is allowed to work and then as we set up the pillar of faith, saying, 'Well, I do not feel like it, but God says it is true; I would like more evidence of it, but I begin, not by demanding proofs in myself, but by standing

on the word of the Lord.'

What a need there is for this direct speaking of the Lord to our own hearts! Jacob did not hear theories and explanations; he heard the authoritative voice of God saying to him, 'No more Jacob, thy name is Israel,' and he believed God. The Lord did not urge him to try to be a better man, but rather convinced him that all his trying was vain. Jacob had striven hard to get the blessings of Abraham and Isaac which were given to him on this occasion, but he found that all his efforts only resulted in trouble, difficulty and disillusionment. When he gave up striving, when he accepted the Divine decree that there was to be no more Jacob, then all the blessings were freely given to him in grace. The Lord does not appeal to us to try to be less like Jacob and more like Israel; He commands us to believe that the old man is crucified, to give place to the new man in Christ. Our response—like Jacob's—must be a definite committal to the word of the Lord.

And then Jacob said, 'This is Bethel!' Precisely! This is the true Church, this is the House of God. It is the realm where man has no standing, it is the place where all that man is by nature, all that he can bring, all that he can plan, all that he can offer, is set aside—'no more Jacob.' And it is the realm where a full place is given to the Lord, that everything may be of Him. What a transformation! It is made possible by the Holy Spirit, as represented by the wine and the oil with which Jacob anointed the pillar. Moreover the voice from heaven assured him, "I am El Shaddai." He had not heard that name since he left his father's house twenty years before. Since Jacob has taken this new ground of Israel he may now count on the complete sufficiency of the Lord. God assumes responsibility in a new way for this life. He had never left Jacob, but He had never been able to commit Himself wholly to him as El Shaddai. All that, however, is now changed, for the Lord has no reserves towards those who live on the new ground of Christ.

H. F.

The Battleground of the Soul

Reading: Matt. xvi. 13-25; Luke xxii. 31-34.

"Blessed art thou, Simon . . . my Father (hath revealed it unto thee)" (Matt. xvi. 17).

"He . . . said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan" (Matt. xvi. 23).

"Simon . . . Satan asked to have you . . .

but I made supplication for thee" (Luke xxii. 31/2).

WE have before us the spiritual history in the making of a servant of God, and this can be seen in the representative and very human case of Simon Peter.

The thing which comes out of the passages

above is the fact that, in the life of one who stands related vitally to the Lord's interests, heaven and hell have a very great concern, and such a one becomes the battle-ground of both realms; God and Satan, heaven and hell. You could hardly have anything which more vividly illustrates that than the tremendous contrasts here. At one moment—"Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven"; and, it would seem, within a few minutes—"Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art a stumbling-block (an offence) unto me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men." Then in connection with this we have the other passage in Luke. Literally the words are, "Satan obtained you by asking, that he might sift you as wheat: but I made supplication for thee." You hardly know what to make of such a swing of the pendulum in one man, but it has its lessons, and the very seriousness of the case accentuates the lessons which it teaches.

The Ground of Satan's Power

(a) The World

You see it is a matter, in the first place, of the ground which is taken and occupied by the one concerned. When Peter took heavenly ground—"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"—he was in a very strong position. The keys of the kingdom of heaven, binding on earth and binding in heaven, were his. He was weak, and in a very weak position, when he took earthly ground, the ground of men, the ground of his own judgment and of his own selfhood. The ground taken decided whether he was spiritually strong or weak, and whether Satan had power over him or not. It would seem that, when the Lord was speaking to them about what was going to take place in Jerusalem as to His death, Simon just took Him apart quietly, and in a very kindly and consolatory way, and yet with a certain amount of patronage, one would feel, told the Lord that He must not be so depressed and gloomy, that He must take a brighter view of things, and that this sort of thing would certainly not happen to Him. But in Peter's attitude, on Peter's ground, the Lord saw quite distinctly a recurrence of what He had met so terribly in the wilderness in His temptation, when Satan had offered Him the kingdoms of this world without the Cross—had sought, that is to say, to divert Him from the way to which He had committed Himself. Peter became but the voice and instrument of that same arch-enemy to turn the Lord away from the Cross. Hence the word following about saving the life. But taking this ground

of having the Kingdom and the Throne on any other line but God's ordained line, which is the way of the Cross, is alliance with Satan, and will put anyone in that alliance into the power of Satan and destroy them spiritually.

Firstly, then, it is very evident that any ground of the world, which in its nature is a kingdom without suffering, without the Cross, without the setting aside of natural life, is the realm of Satan's power and authority. It is perfectly clear that, in the case of the Church, speaking fairly generally, and in the case of countless individual Christians, the weakness, defeat and dishonour which characterize them, and which became so manifest in Peter's case, are due to occupying the ground of Satan's strength. That ground may be said to be compromise with the world in its principle.

(b) Uncrucified Self

In the second place, there was Peter's own self-strength, self-confidence. "Lord, with thee I am ready to go both to prison and to death." He later found out how unready, how unprepared, he was for that, but at the time it was a case of self-confidence, and that ground brought his undoing and Satan's power. The self still alive and dominant instead of dead, put to the Cross, is the ground of Satan's power. Not until the soul has been denied and laid down is the power of Satan destroyed and spiritual power established in the life of the child and the servant of God. It is a question of the ground—whether it is the world or whether it is the self (another word for the flesh)—that determines how far Satan has power and how far we have spiritual power.

The Need for Persistent Determination

Now, what the Lord says here to Peter is very indicative and, I think, very helpful. "Thou art a stumbling-block (an offence) unto me." The Lord had fought out this battle, had taken His ground, put both His feet down upon this way of the will of God for Him, namely, by the Cross to the Kingdom; and it was for Him no easy way. It was not just the being crucified and being killed, but being made sin and all that it involved of ultimately suffering the forsaking of God. It was no easy way, and He had to keep Himself rigidly in that direction, and anything that came along to influence Him otherwise only brought up the new demand for resolution and persistence. Thus it offended Him in the sense that it made it difficult for Him, it made it hard for Him, it was not helping Him. It may have been intended to help, so far as Peter was concerned, not knowing what he was saying, but behind it the Lord saw that it only raised the old issue

again, the old battle, and therefore it offended His sense of the will of His Father and stood across His path to make the way more difficult.

I think that does say to us that a position has to be taken inclusively and over many things where the will of God is concerned. We have to come very definitely and positively to such a position, and then realise that from time to time there will be, by one means or another, an effort of the enemy to change our minds, to weaken us in that course, to make other suggestions, to get us to reconsider it in the light of various issues and interests. We shall meet this offending, this stumbling, this hindering thing and have to be very ruthless with it. The way the Lord dealt with Peter was, in a sense, ruthless. Really there was no weakness in His attitude over that. Discerning its true nature, He saw clearly that, if He yielded to this suggestion, then He would go neither to Jerusalem nor to the Cross. It is a question of whether we have settled that such and such is the way of the will of God, and then, will this

or that arising mean in the long run that we never get there, never do that will? If so, it has to be handled very ruthlessly and put out of the way and put behind us. The Cross comes to us in many connections and different terms.

Then, if we are really going to come through to the place of spiritual power as did Peter, that ground of the enemy must continually be forsaken and refused. The enemy has to be robbed of that which will destroy us and give him power to destroy us, and we have to be very ruthless with anything that arises to give him that position and defeat God's intention where we are concerned. This battle of heaven and hell, God and Satan, goes on in our souls, but there is for us this consolation, that we have a High Priest ever living to make intercession. We have a great asset in the continual intercession of the Lord Jesus for us. Let us close on that note of encouragement and assurance.

T. A.-S.

For Boys and Girls

Gospel Messages from the Antarctic (No. XI)

"God . . . is rich in mercy . . ." (Eph. ii. 4).

"I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever" (Psa. liii. 8).

WE must continue the story of the three explorers who set out in the depth of winter on 'the worst journey in the world.' I told you last time of some of their difficulties and dangers. Yet they pressed on, completed their task and returned safely to their companions, who received them with every possible honour. As we read the story we must feel that no honour could be too great for men who could so suffer and endure, and triumph in spite of so much. If the three men had boasted of their great achievement we could not be surprised. But the truth is that there were occasions in their journey when all their wonderful courage and powers of endurance would have been utterly useless if God had not miraculously saved them. How many times they were saved from unseen dangers neither they nor we can ever know, but we read of two occasions on which quite clearly only the mercy of God delivered them from certain death.

The first incident concerned one of those constant enemies of our explorers—a crevasse. The men were journeying down a slope, pulling their sledge behind them, in the darkness of the night. Clouds had covered the moon for many hours, so that they had little or no bene-

fit from her light. Quite suddenly the clouds parted in front of the moon and her light shone out clearly; and in that moment the men saw, only three paces in front of them, a great crevasse into which they were just about to step. If they had gone in, the sledge would certainly have followed them down, and there would have been no possibility whatever of their escape. All their courage and skill could not have helped them. It was the rolling away of the clouds from the face of the moon that saved them. And who did that? I am glad that the writer of our book acknowledges that they owed their deliverance to God alone. Truly they might have said, "Not by works . . . which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus iii. 5).

The second incident was even more remarkable. It concerned their tent. We must remember that the cold was so great that if the men stood still in the open for even a few minutes they were in danger of being frozen to death, and therefore it was of the utmost importance that they should have shelter and warmth when they rested. The only possible way of providing this was by erecting their little tent every time they halted. It protected them from the wind and snow, and, with the help of an oil stove, enabled them to enjoy a little warmth. To have been without their tent even for a few hours would certainly have

meant death for the explorers. Their very life was bound up with it. After three weeks of indescribable hardship they at last reached the place for which they had set out. It was on the rocky slope of a mountain. They had planned on arrival to build themselves a shelter out of the rocks, so that they could live more comfortably for the few days that they must remain there. This they did—with very great difficulty—but it was not a very great success and so they pitched their tent nearby in a sheltered place and stored most of their goods in it. All went well for a day or two, and after a heavy day's work they lay down to rest. The weather was calm, with absolute silence outside. Then there came a sob of wind, and all was calm again. Ten minutes later, and the wind was blowing as if the world had gone mad. The earth seemed to be torn in pieces; the fury and roar of it cannot be imagined or described. The shelter itself, though built of rocks, threatened to collapse. Almost immediately one of the men cried out, 'The tent has gone!' It was nowhere to be seen. Although it had been very firmly pitched and well secured to the ground, the terrible force of the wind had carried it away as if it had been a piece of paper. In such a hurricane it would be blown miles away in a few minutes, and in any case it was impossible in such conditions to go and look for it. The explorers could do nothing but lie in their sleeping bags in their shelter and wait for the wind to drop. Part of the hut collapsed on them. They had no food. They dare not move outside. For two whole days and nights the hurricane continued. Then conditions improved enough to allow the men to go outside. They knew it was hopeless to look for the tent, but because their life depended on their finding it they decided to search. Such a wind as had been blowing for forty-eight hours must have carried the tent, like a parachute, hundreds of miles away. And remember, it was winter time, and quite dark by day as well as by night. What was the use of looking for the tent at all in such circumstances? But they started out—and half a mile away they found it, lying in a sheltered hollow and almost undamaged! Our writer says: 'Our lives had been taken away and given back to us. We were so thankful we said nothing.'

Could the explorers claim any credit for their deliverance? No, it was God's doing. Once more the only suitable language to describe the truth of the matter could be, "Not by works . . . which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us."

Now our explorers were engaged in a very earthly enterprise. It had nothing to do with

what we call the work of God. But that does not affect the lesson we can learn from their story. The mercy of God concerns us all, and in all circumstances. Everyone, from time to time, has occasion to exclaim, 'What a mercy that *that* happened (or, that so and so did *not* happen) *just then!*' In most cases it is quite clear that nobody but a loving, all-seeing, all-powerful God had any part in causing matters to fall out as they did. It is one of the chief delights of true Christians to notice how frequently God does thus act to save them. It is also one of their chief wonders—for why should a holy God be so gracious towards sinful people? We all have sinned: there is none righteous, no, not one. Yet in His great mercy, God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world, that the world through Him might be saved; and men committed the greatest sin of all by crucifying Him. Could we reasonably expect that God would continue to shew mercy to such a people? But herein lies the greatest of all mercies—for in the very death that He died the Son of God took upon Himself the sin of the world and bore the judgment of God on our behalf; and because of that sacrifice God has been able to be merciful towards sinners. He will shew His mercy towards every one of us in many ways until we finally and deliberately refuse to acknowledge His love—and then mercy will have to give place to judgment.

I must be careful to emphasize one thing. Although I have said that it was only the mercy of God, and not the skill of the explorers, that enabled them to succeed in their task, I want you to notice also that they would never have succeeded if they themselves had been careless or lazy or timid. They had to do their utmost, and to bear bravely all the hardships and sufferings involved. God requires this of us in all that we do. His Word tells us, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Ecc. ix. 10) and "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord" (Col. iii. 23). Carelessness and laziness can never be excused in those who call themselves Christians. But the great lesson that we have to learn is this—that although we do all we can do, we *always* need the mercy of God. No man was ever more capable, or worked harder, or suffered more for the sake of the Gospel, than the apostle Paul. If any man could have succeeded by his own labours Paul ought to have done so. But it was he who wrote, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves . . . our sufficiency is from God" (II Cor. iii. 5). And he went further than that; he wrote, "We despaired . . . that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God . . ." (II. Cor. i. 8, 9).

Some of the things which he suffered were deliberately allowed by God in order to make him know that if God withheld His mercy even for a moment Paul himself would be without hope and all his labour in vain. This is not an easy lesson for anyone to learn, but we all need to learn it. In all of us there is pride that makes us think that we *can* do things for God, and we have to be brought to an end of ourselves in order that we may trust wholly in God and not in ourselves. This involves deeper things than I propose to speak of now. For the present we will be content with this one thing—that we need the mercy of God always and in every situation; and the happiest and most blessed people, and those most fruitful in God's service, are they who know most deeply their dependence upon Him Who "delighteth in mercy" (Micah vii. 18). He will certainly not withhold His mercy from any

one who trusts in Him. "The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them *that hope in his mercy*; to deliver their soul from death and to keep them alive in famine" (Psa. xxxiii. 18, 19). David delighted to speak of God as "the God of my mercy" (Ps. lii. 10). Have you found Him to be also the God of *your* mercy?

In the spiritual land which we are exploring together, the boy or girl who will first reach the South Pole is the one who, while doing his or her utmost and doing everything "heartily as to the Lord," yet at the same time trusts most fully in the mercy of God—mercy which is "from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him" (Ps. ciii. 17).

For His love floweth on, free and full as a river;

And His mercy endureth for ever and ever.

G. P.

Resting in the Lord's Care

"For so is the will of God, that by well-doing ye should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (I Pet. ii. 15).

"For this is acceptable, if for conscience toward God a man endureth griefs, suffering wrongfully. . . . For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps . . . who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (I Pet. ii. 19, 21, 23).

"For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears unto their supplication. . . . And who is he that will harm you, if ye be zealous of that which is good? But even if ye should suffer for righteousness' sake, blessed are ye: and fear not their fear, neither be troubled" (I Pet. iii. 12-14).

" . . . casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you" (I Pet. v. 7).

The Lord's Care for His Own

THIS is just one of the many standpoints taken up by the Apostle in this letter. This one represents the position and attitude of the Lord Himself toward His Own, the realisation of which should produce a certain state in them. The Lord's attitude is one of solicitude for His Own—that is what Peter is saying. "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears unto their supplication." The Lord's attitude toward His Own is one of concern for them. He has His eye upon them, they are not out of His ken. Not only has He His eye upon them, but He has

His ear open to them; and not only so, but He is taking definite care concerning them. These three things Peter says quite definitely.

Our Response to His Concern

Then he says, 'If you realise that, it will produce a state of restfulness, carefreeness, in you. You will cast all your care, your anxiety, on Him because He cares for you.' There are three things we might say about this. One—this word "casting" is a very deliberate word. This actual word only occurs twice in the New Testament. The other occasion is in Luke, where, in recording the entering into Jerusalem on the colt, it says, "they cast their garments upon the colt" (Luke xix. 35). So if you can picture the people casting their garments on the colt for Him to ride upon, you get the mental conception of the word used here—"casting all your care . . ." I suppose the people were deliberate in what they did. It was something quite precise. They pulled off their garments and put them on the colt's back. And in our apprehension of the Lord's attitude and the resultant state produced in us, we deliberately cast our anxiety upon the Lord, put it over on to Him.

The second thing—as to the word "care" or "anxiety." It is one of several Greek words translated in the English "care." This one definitely means, as the Revisers have indicated, "anxiety." The word really means being drawn about—that is, pulled in various directions at the same time. That is what we mean by being distracted. It is the word used by the Lord to Martha when He visited

Bethany. "*Martha, Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things*" (Luke x. 41); 'All these various things you have on hand are distracting you, you are torn. Here is My presence, here is Mary sitting here, you no doubt would like to be here, you have a pull here; and then there are all these other things you are occupied with, and you are pulled that way as well; and being pulled in various directions you are thrown into a state of anxiety, of agitation, of distraction; the whole atmosphere is disturbed; you are "anxious".' It is the word used in the parable of the sower, concerning the seed that fell among thorns; the Lord interpreted the thorns as the cares of this life. "*These are they that have heard the word, and the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word*" (Mark iv. 18/19). The distractions, the anxieties, of this life leave no place or time for the quiet contemplation of, and response to, the word that has come. The Lord sows the word, the Lord gives something with great possibilities in it, but then we are at once called off and engaged and engrossed with all sorts of things which spring up, and the word does not stand a chance. It is anxiety—that is the word.

Carefreeness not Carelessness

The third thing to be said is this. It is as well for us to be perfectly clear about what we have said, because we shall come upon the same English word or the same thought in other connections which seem to be a contradiction. "*Be careful to maintain good works*" (Titus iii. 8). And you find exhortations to carefulness scattered through the New Testament; we are exhorted to take care. It is not the same original word as the one we have been considering. When He says, "In nothing be anxious" (Phil. iv. 6), or "casting all your anxiety upon him," the Lord does not mean that you are to become careless, indifferent, to put the matter away as though it is nothing to do with you, that you have no place in it at all. There is a place where the Lord expects us to take care, to be careful (in the ordinary usage of the word among us), to recognise that we have responsibility, we have to be watchful, we have to come into the situation, we have to

be careful in this way and in that. That is another thing.

In the passages with which we began it is this terrible harass of anxiety that is in view, and it is that that has to be cast over to the Lord. While occupation must go on, many things must be attended to, there must be no distraction resulting from worry about it. "*Be not . . . anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?*" (Matt. vi. 31). Here is the same word again. What it amounts to seems to me to be this—that it is not just a psychological decision or resolution that we are going to be careless, we are going to be indifferent, we are not going to bother. It is to be positively an act of faith. The anxiety usually comes in as to how things are going to turn out, what the issue is going to be. The right care is to do our part. The carefreeness is the result of committing the issue to the Lord and definitely taking the faith attitude that He will look after the outcome while we are looking after what is ours to look after. It is not just spineless optimism, it is definite faith—faith that refuses to be harassed and distracted by many things, by anything.

Now, you know from this letter of Peter that the people to whom he wrote might well have been, and probably were, very much in anxious suspense. The situation was an exceedingly difficult one for them. Their homes, their families, their livelihood, their lives, all were in danger, and from every direction came threats and perils. If it is said to them, surely it should be said to us. He says, in effect, 'The Lord has the issues in hand, He is taking care about all that; you cast your anxiety upon Him because He really does care.' You have to believe that He does care, and, believing that, you definitely and deliberately cast over on to Him that which would cause you to be distraught with anxiety as to how things are going to work out, and what the issues are going to be. It is the committal of faith, very deliberately casting all your anxiety on Him for "he careth for you." "*The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears unto their supplication . . . Who is he that will harm you, if ye be zealous of that which is good?*"

T. A.-S.

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The Cross, the Church, and the Kingdom

II. The Spiritual Resources of the Church for its Heavenly Mission

"But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations . . ." (Matt. xxviii. 16-19).

A Spiritual Challenge to be Answered

THERE is a challenge in this present time which is, perhaps, more acute and serious than at any other time in the history of this world. No doubt in the early days of the Church the challenge was very strong, but then the surface of the earth invaded by the Gospel was very small compared with the range in our time, and in many other ways things were far less developed then than they are now. The development of the centuries has provided so very much more of ground and means for the operation of the kingdom of darkness in relation to this world, and that challenge of the kingdom of evil is very, very serious and intense in our time. In many ways the Church of God is aware of it—perhaps not completely conscious of the cause or the reason, but aware of the fact that she is being stifled, resisted, in a very large degree nullified; made aware of a certain impotence and ineffectiveness and of the absence of authority and power to meet a spiritual situation which is becoming so intense. I say that is a challenge of this present time which does threaten to make the Church a thing which, speaking comparatively, is not to be taken very seriously. The world can pass on and ignore her, and situations can arise here and there with which she cannot cope, before which she is impotent and helpless—and knows it.

That challenge represents a need, and, while we have not the conceit to imagine that that need can be met by us, yet it behoves us to face the challenge and consider the need, and if God will take up the weak and the small and make them to count for something far, far beyond what they would do naturally, then there may be possibilities where we are concerned, if we really seriously face this matter before God.

We have spoken of a spiritual situation, and it is not necessary, I think, to say to you that, while we are very conscious that the temporal

situation is increasingly difficult for the work of God, behind all the external difficulties is a spiritual rulership. The things seen are, after all, only the foreground, the stage, of something far greater behind. "World rulers of this darkness" is no meaningless phrase. It is there that the trouble lies, and, until there is in existence that which can touch things there with the authority of Christ, the situation for the Church is hopeless. We can recite so glibly—it is the slogan of all missionary enterprise—"All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations." I think the emphasis, at any rate the deduction in practice, is mainly on "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel," and not upon "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth." "Go ye therefore . . ."; the word "therefore" has not been given and is not given its real and sufficient place. It is the link between the undertaking and the "all authority" vested in the Lord Jesus. And as for the Church standing in the good and value of that "all authority"—well, it does not say much for the authority if the present impact of the Church is the standard of judging it. It is that that constitutes the urgency of this present time.

The Challenge Answered in a Spiritual People

Now, having indicated again that this whole thing is a spiritual matter to be fought out in the spiritual realm, the work of God must in consequence be seen in the spiritual realm before there can be any meeting of the temporal situation and overcoming it. We are brought right here to the heart of things. We have spoken in our previous meditation of a body of Christians, of a certain kind, in a certain position, doing a certain work. What do we mean by that? Well, to use mere words is not necessarily helpful. We must explain our words. If we say, a spiritual people, in spiritual relatedness, occupying a spiritual position, pre-eminently meeting spiritual forces to their overthrow, that word 'spiritual' eludes us at once. What does it amount to in practical outworking?

The Marks of a Spiritual People

(A) Living by Divine, Not Natural, Life

Well, firstly, it means that the life of such a people must be spiritual life. In the work of

God there can be, and often is, the projecting of a great deal of natural life-force. You may call it by different terms—zeal, enthusiasm, drive, energy, any such word to describe putting yourself into the thing with all your might to make it go. So, by this zest, by this intensity, by this strength, you get the work of God done. Now, it is not that that I am talking about. If this thing is going to be done in the spiritual realm, it is only going to be done by spiritual life, and spiritual life is something altogether different from natural life. As we are basing everything upon the Cross, allowing the Cross to be our basis and our interpretation, it is just here that the great cleavage is made, the great difference is recognised, the great turnover takes place. At the Cross, so far as spiritual things are concerned, all natural life ends; there, all natural energy, as capable of producing any spiritual effect, is brought to an end, is at a discount. Even natural physical life, energy, strength, as producing anything spiritual in effect, counts for nothing. When you are coming into touch with spiritual forces, what is the good of muscular or constitutional strength in the physical, natural realm? Those forces have only to touch the strongest body and it will be broken. So you find in the New Testament that all counting upon the energy, the capability, the strength of the natural life, is set aside, and the men concerned are brought to an end of that and made to know that their spiritual work, their spiritual accountability, takes its rise from Divine life even for the body, so that, under the hand of God, they come to the place where, unless Divine life is administered even to their physical bodies—strong as they have been physically and constitutionally before—they cannot go on, they are at an end.

Paul is a great outstanding example of that. The others were there too. Peter came to his crisis on that. He was very sure of himself and what he could do, how far he could go, what he could go through and endure; but he had to come, by means of the Cross, in the very presence of the Cross, to the place where he recognised that he could never get through on that. The words of the Lord to him had an immediate meaning—"Thou *canst* not follow me now; but thou shalt follow afterwards" (John xiii. 36); not 'hereafter,' that is, in the distant Hereafter, in the next life, but "afterwards." After what?—after you have learned this lesson of the utter impotence of human life, and the absolute necessity and potency of Divine life, even in the physical realm.

So that one of the great lessons that this

people must learn experimentally is to know how to live by Divine life; and when we get on to that basis all issues are taken out of the hands of natural eventualities. Here is Saul of Tarsus, a man with tremendous force and seemingly great powers of endurance physically, a man of very great natural life—what we should call soul-force. What did the Lord do with him? He brought him to the place where he despaired of life in order that he might not trust in himself, but in God Who raiseth the dead (2 Cor. i. 9). In so describing his experience he simply intimates—"Well, naturally I am a dead man, the sentence of death is passed upon me." But here is this man going on—a dead man going on. And we do not find him at the last saying, 'I am now going to be executed, they are now going to finish me, I have got to give in this time.' No! The issue is not with emperors or governments or persecutors. He is going to finish his course—not to have it cut short; no 'broken column' here; he is going to finish his course, keeping the faith to the last moment (2 Tim. iv. 7); not having to give up because of circumstances, but, as he puts it in another place, he will offer himself up as a libation (Phil. ii. 17). Is he not in exactly the same position as his Lord, Who said of His own life, "No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from my Father" (John x. 18). It is not with the High Priest, it is not with the Jewish nation, it is not with anybody else—it is with Him to say when He will die. They said, "Not during the feast." He said, in effect, 'Yes, during the feast; it shall be on the day of the Passover'; and it was.

Authority in Christ, then, is first of all in terms of life. If there is going to be this impact of the Divine authority upon the spiritual kingdom of evil and death, the people through whom the impact is going to be registered will have to come on to this basis where, even for their very physical life, they have to know the life of God, to know how to draw life from God and how to minister spiritual, Divine life to one another. Divine life is a tremendous thing, and if we are living by it we are not going to die because we are old. We are not going to die because nature says so, or the doctor says so! We are going to die when the Lord says so! And when the Lord has decided that Divine life is no longer required for the carrying on of His work through us, then we shall enter into life still more abundant, and it will not be death. That is the authority of Christ in the universe where death is the master opposing power. Such a people must

know this.

To be brought there is not just teaching; this is grim, desperate business. It meets with a challenge, and a challenge from no less a realm than the whole hierarchy of Satan. The answer to that challenge has to come along the line of Divine life known by us for spirit and soul and body.

The Challenge to Life Must be Met Corporately

And how corporate a matter that is! I am talking about *a people*. Yes, it becomes individual; there has to be an individual exercise and experience; an individual knowledge and application and appropriation; but it is something more than individual. In that battle, every individual needs the co-operation and the encompassing of the Church. Woe betide the poor individual, whoever he or she may be, who gets out into that realm of spiritual conflict without the encompassing of the saints!

So this matter of triumph in the spiritual realm is a Church matter, and when I say 'a Church matter,' I mean it is a corporate matter. The Church may be indicated and implied by two or three in the Name of the Lord; but it must be that at least to minister to one another. Oh, if the Church more largely knew about that and stood right into it, what a lot of tragedies would never take place that are taking place! What a lot of people would be spared to the work of God who are being put out! What a lot of retirements from the work would never take place! Do they represent the triumph of the enemy? Everyone who has to give up for want of Divine life—is that the triumph of the enemy? That is what I mean by spiritual people in a spiritual position meeting spiritual forces—firstly, knowing spiritual life (that is, Divine life) for spirit, the inner man: for soul, for mind: yes, and for body.

Natural Weakness Essential to Spiritual Power

Here is the great paradox of Christianity—"when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. xii. 10). "My power is made perfect in weakness" (v. 9). Divine life does not make of us Samsons in a literal, physical sense, so that our muscles develop, our biceps become abnormal, and all that sort of thing. Rather, in weakness there is something the withdrawal of which would mean that the frail vessel would crumple up and fade out very soon. There is something there which is not natural; it is the very life of God. Everything has to be accounted for on that basis.

Let me add a word in order to guard against misunderstanding or misapprehension. I am not saying that you are wrong to be healthy, or even to be physically strong. I am not

suggesting that you go to the Lord and ask Him to take your health and strength away. But I have said, that if that is the basis on which you are working, if it is upon that that you are counting for spiritual effectiveness, you are wrong; it does not count at all. You may be healthy and strong, but you need to recognise that it is not that that will see this work done, but your necessity is as great in the matter of spiritual Divine life as that of the weakest, the most helpless. There may be a place for your health and strength, but something more than that is needed to do the work in the spiritual realm.

(B) Spiritual Knowledge of the Lord by Revelation, Not Intellectual

The same thing holds good in the matter of spiritual knowledge. No amount of natural, accumulated, studied knowledge can touch spiritual things. There is a value in Bible study, there is a value in accumulating knowledge of things in relation to God's Word and God's work. Oh, do not despise that and do not let anything I say turn you aside from diligence in that; but, after all, though you have a vast amount of such knowledge: though you know your Bible throughout: though you be what is called a Bible scholar: all that, at its fullest, stops short of spiritual effectiveness. It does not matter how much of that you have: when it comes to the question of registering upon those spiritual intelligences, there is no natural knowledge that can touch them. You will never overpower the forces of darkness with natural intelligence and accumulated information, however great it is. Spiritual knowledge is of another kind. You may have the intellectual—I say, do not despise it—but you must recognise the need of something extra. Yes, I know the Bible in a way: that is, I know what is here in actual words and sentences and paragraphs; but that will get me nowhere when I come to deal with spiritual things. I have got to have something extra to that—a *spiritual* understanding, *spiritual* knowledge. Something has got to come from God by way of illumination and revelation into my own heart concerning God's thoughts in this Book. How can we explain that? It is so difficult, but there it is—perhaps you understand what I mean. Spiritual knowledge is of another order. It is only God Who knows in the way that can meet the spiritual intelligences.

So this people who count for something in that ultimate realm—that realm where there is the only true accountability—this people will have to be a people of spiritual knowledge and of spiritual understanding. Paul prayed that

“the God of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know . . .” (Eph. i. 17-18); and it is not without significance that that prayer for spiritual revelation and knowledge precedes what he writes concerning the wiles of the devil and “Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers . . . of this darkness” (Eph. vi. 11, 12). There is no training in any seminary or institution which can of itself equip you against the wiles of the devil. This requires *spiritual* training.

Spiritual Training Practical, Not Academic

Let me put here this parenthesis. Some of you who read this may be concerned about your life, your future, and you are wondering whether the Lord would lead you into His service. Some of you are definitely feeling that He will. The question in your mind is, how will you get your training, what about your preparation? Let me say this, that, while sound instruction in the Word of God will be a necessary foundation, do not think that that alone is your training for the work of God. That is not an adequate training, or qualification. The work of God lies in a realm where, though you may have all that, you may be at a discount altogether; you may be frustrated, broken, defeated, as many servants of God are to-day because they have not got the spiritual goods to meet the situation. Your really vital training will be practical, in the spiritual realm. That is, the Lord will deal with you in such a way as to develop you as spiritual men and women who know spiritual life and have spiritual knowledge, and that will only come by a very practical handling of your life on the basis of the Cross. There are many who are not willing to go through that kind of training. They will go to Bible studies, theological lectures, and all that kind of thing; they are ready for that, but they are not so ready to be put into situations where it is extremely difficult to live, to get on with other people, where you find you are rubbed up the wrong way all the time, and everything goes against the grain. In such circumstances the one drive upon you and the one longing of your soul is to get out of it, to run away and find some other place, some other circumstances; and yet to do so would be to take yourself right out of the hands of God. To remain in His hands means to stay in that situation until the Cross has done its work and you are glad to be there, you are triumphant there, you have gained the ascendancy spiritually

there, and the power of the enemy over you there has been broken. That is your training for the work of God. God can put you anywhere if He has you like that, and you will count; but all the rest may be nothing without it.

(C) Spiritual Influence—the Impact of Christ, Not of People

Then this people must be characterised by spiritual influence. What do we mean by that? Well, we know what we mean when we speak of influential persons. For some reason or other, they are people who count. It may be their strong personality, their personal aggressiveness, their initiative, their conspicuous ability, either inbred or acquired. They are not nonentities; they are positives, not negatives. A lot of that kind of influence has been brought into the work of God, and people have been adjudged influential in the things of the kingdom of God very largely because of this or that natural characteristic, natural acquirement or natural inborn qualities.

Now you may be a giant in natural influence, and yet in the spiritual realm the powers of darkness may laugh at you. Your stature is nothing there, your natural measurement means nothing to them. Your accountability in that realm will be just the measure of your spiritual life; your influence in the spiritual realm, with God, with men, and over the powers of evil, will be spiritual or it will not be at all. So it comes to pass very often that the weak things, and the things which are not, are the very things with which the powers of darkness and men have to reckon, of which account has to be taken. It often happens that if you take stock of some believers you do not think very much of them; you would not give them a second thought; you would put them in the category of people who do not count. But somehow you cannot dismiss them like that. There is something there you cannot explain by their personality or lack of it, by their physical presence, by their training. There is no ground on which you can explain this, and yet you have to acknowledge that they count for something; it is spiritual influence. A people constituted like that are the only people to meet the emergency of this time. Such a people will be the instrument by which God will vindicate the Cross of Christ.

But what does it amount to? To this—everything with such a people has to be attributed to the Lord. That is it. What did we say that God has revealed to be the consummate issue from the Cross? It is this—Christ absolutely transcendent over all other powers, and that expressed in a people. Then so far

as that people are concerned the way to this will be by emptying, emptying, emptying—that in all things He may have the pre-eminence. It is the Lord Jesus and not the people that must be in evidence. The evil powers may say, 'Jesus I know, and His servant Paul I know, and that spiritual people I know; but as for you people of pomp and ceremony and natural development, who are you, what are you?'

I hope you are really seeing what the Lord is after. The Lord must be manifested in His universe by means of a people of this kind. The challenge comes to us—will we accept all that it means to be of such a kind?

Spirituality Inwrought by Discipline of Circumstances

Now I must add this before I close. What I have been saying may call for an adjustment or a re-adjustment to your circumstances on the part of many of you. You see, my dear friends, young, middle-aged or old—and let us rule out that 'old' in the light of what we have been saying—it may be that you are as much in 'a training college' now as ever you could be. Going to a seminary or institution would not of necessity add anything to your opportunities of being prepared for the work of the Lord. That comforts some of you, but it calls for adjustment. If you are in the hands of God, you are in the school of God. What are you being taught, what are you learning, what is the meaning of it? Well, is it to know the Bible better as a book, and all kindred and associated subjects, or is it to know the Lord? Give me the man or woman who knows the Lord before you give me the one who knows all other things without that. Bible knowledge and all that kind of thing is a valuable, important, yes, in a sense, indispensable foundation and addition, but *the* thing is to know the Lord. And how will you know the Lord?—in the way in which I have been indicating: knowing Him as your life, knowing Him as your wisdom, knowing Him as your influence. Adjust to your circumstances, to your situation. If I were to appeal for young men and women to come to a course of training, and were to say, 'Now, we are

starting a Bible Institute; will you give your lives to the Lord and come and be trained for His work?' I think there would be some who would respond and say, 'Yes, I am going into training for the work of God.' If you are not already in training, you will never become so merely by going to any such Institute. Adjust to your present situation while it is the Lord's will for you to be in it. Adjust to it as you would to a training centre. Enter upon it with a new adjustment as seriously as you would if you were giving notice at business and packing your bag and going into a Bible Institute. Take that attitude toward your present situation and know that, while you are there in His will, God will teach you Himself; and that is the thing that matters. He will teach you how to live by His life, how to know Him with spiritual understanding and knowledge, how to exercise and exert a spiritual influence. I am not saying, 'Do not raise the question as to whether the Lord, after a probation and a testing of that kind, is wanting you to move out more fully into His work.' It may be; but I think you see the point of this word. We have got to adjust ourselves to our whole life situation. Many of you could never depart from where you are; but that is your college, that is where you ought to be learning. But are you? Or are you all the time wanting to get out, merely enduring it, putting up with it, saying, 'Here I am; I suppose I must stay till something else opens up.' What is your attitude? Look at those fellows who row in the boat-race. The time comes when they go into training and they do it with a mind, they do it thoroughly, they set themselves to it. They have one thing in view, and everything has to come into line with that—fitness to fulfil the task before them. We have to take that attitude toward life where we are in the will of God—'This is a setting in which I am in training, and I set myself to secure all the values possible in this situation of knowing the Lord, proving the Lord, living on the Lord, that I may be qualified to meet the need of the hour'—and it is a great need, a very great emergency, which is confronting the people of God to-day.

T. A.-S.

IN THE PRESS

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Satan Bruised

SEVERAL years ago the writer was examining an ancient temple in India. Carved on the wall was the figure of a man standing on the head of a serpent and holding its tail above his head in his upraised hand. The attending Brahmin priest was unable to explain the significance of that depicted act. To him it was lost in the mists of antiquity. We were able to strip off the mythical element relating to the supposed god, and reveal to him the basis in truth that it represented as the fulfilment of the primeval promise that Satan would be bruised. The strong man armed and keeping his palace was overcome by the stronger than he, that spoiled all his armour wherein he trusted and liberated his captives (Luke xi. 20-22). These had all their lifetime been subject to bondage through fear of death.

Satan and Death Annulled by Christ

In His triumph the Lord Jesus Christ put off from Him principalities and powers and "annulled him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. ii. 14). In some way not clearly revealed, Satan had the power of death, but now the keys of death and Hades are in the hands of the Deliverer. Satan's power is destroyed for those liberated by the Lord. As a recent translation puts it: "By His death He put a stop to him that had the power of death—that is the devil." Satan lost the power to wield death as a punitive weapon where believers are concerned, and it became one of the "all things" that are theirs (I Cor. iii. 22). Thus death is nullified and will yet be destroyed as one of the works of the devil.

The Bible opens with Satan triumphing as death passed upon all men and man was excluded from the garden with its tree of life. Partaking of that tree would have kept man immortal in a sinful body, it seems. The way of the tree of life was preserved, but that was not eating of a literal tree by fallen man. That way is illustrated in type and ceremony all through the Bible, and even in descriptions of the glorified state of believers in the Revelation.

Speculation as to what would have happened if man had not sinned is idle. There may have been some provision for him to have progressed in blessedness till fit for a heavenly existence, but we are told nothing of it. We know that man sinned and "sin reigned unto death." Ruin, misery and woe untellable, have been the result. Satan's power seemed to be estab-

lished, God seemed frustrated, and man, created for His pleasure, became a grief at His heart (Gen. vi. 6). But if the first Paradise was forfeited, the Paradise of God was in prospect. The promise in the first book is crowned by the promise in the last: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God" (Rev. ii. 7).

Satan's works we know; what will be the final destruction of his works in us? Restoring man to the former Paradise in which Satan accomplished his work? No. Infinitely more than that. In the first garden there were the two trees. Access to the tree of life was necessary, and the other, the tree of knowledge, being nearby meant that man could not avoid the test of his obedience. In the Paradise of God there is only the tree of life. No Satan can enter, and no test of man will be made. He will be beyond the possibility of sinning. *This is the result of voluntary obedience to God now in obeying the gospel.* Can those who know the plague of their own hearts think of a greater boon than this—to be for evermore free from sinning or wanting to sin?

The Glorified State

Redeemed and glorified saints, indwelt by Christ, who is God, will be incapable of sin, and be led to the tree of life by their Redeemer for the maintenance of their physical natures in immortality. An early writer on the blessings of heaven thus expresses it:

"What will heaven be but the entire surrender of the soul to Him, without any bias to evil, without the fear of corruption within echoing to the temptation without; every thought brought into subjection to the obedience of Christ; no contrariety to His mind; all in blessed unison with His will; the whole *being* impregnated with holiness—the intellect purified and ennobled, concentrating all its powers to His service—memory, a holy repository of pure and hallowed recollections—the affections, without one competing rival, purged from all the dross of worldliness, the love of God the one supreme animating passion."

In that description we see Satan completely crushed, and forever in defeat where redeemed humanity is concerned. He has been guilty of other high crimes besides the seduction of man. For these he will be dealt with and consigned to the Lake of Fire. In Christ the believer is now secure, but the cross does not reconcile all

things. It reconciles all the things to be reconciled. There are things to be crushed, not reconciled. It pleased the Godhead to reconcile things in earth and things in heaven (Col. 1. 19, 20). God will gather together all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth (Eph. i. 9, 10). There are things "under the earth" not reconciled. But every knee shall bow to Christ, "of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things *under* the earth; and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (not Saviour), to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. ii. 10, 11).

All in heaven shall acclaim Him as Saviour and Lord, all reconciled to God by His death. Increasingly on earth, men and women are being reconciled to God, and more will be reconciled in the kingdom age. The rest—

under the earth, banished from it—will be compelled to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ though forever unreconciled.

The overcomers are fed from the tree of life by the glorified Lord. Who are they? Those who, when the nature and penalty of sin are discovered to them as Satan's work, appropriate to themselves the merits of the Redeemer's work for them on the cross. Such, turning from sin and Satan and conscious of enmity to both, have fulfilled in them the primeval promise, "I will put enmity between thy seed and her seed," and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

"We beseech you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

SELECTED.

Not Here, and Not Now

"... to the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose" (Eph. iii. 10-11).

"Who is there among you that will give ear to this? that will hearken and hear for the time to come?" (Isa. xlii. 23).

IN those two fragments we have two things which really amount to this—'not here, and not now.' Not here—"unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenlies might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God." Not now—"who . . . will hearken and hear for a time to come?" I think those two intimations ought to be a very great help to all of us, and especially to some.

There are a good many things in the ways of God which are altogether beyond our understanding. They are out of our range altogether. God hides Himself while He is working, and seems very much to delay His actions; and from these facts many of our problems and difficulties arise, and we find ourselves thrown into a state of great perplexity and our faith sorely tried.

The Problem of Apparent Fruitlessness

I want to be quite simple and practical, because, on the face of it, these verses contain rather abstract and remote statements; they could fail to help us. I think that one of the most difficult statements in the New Testament to apprehend with any sense of comfort is that in Ephesians iii. 10. Most people cannot appreciate the fact that what is happening in their lives is of interest to creatures altogether out-

side of this world. That does not seem of very much practical help; but there is a very practical side to it. Many of you will never go to the mission field, as it is called; you will never go out into so-called full-time spiritual service. Many of you will never go far from the homes where you are; many of you will never leave the places of business where you are working. Many will never enter upon any particular aspect of work for the Lord. You will be called upon to live just where you are, to go on with what is called 'the trivial round, the common task.' No one will ever hear very much about you. Your name will never appear in the religious press for the great work that you are doing. You will be hidden ones, and you will have plenty of opportunity and occasion for wondering whether you are doing anything for the Lord, whether your life does amount to anything worth while. You hear of others being called and going out and engaging in 'The work.' You envy them, you wish that it were you, and then you begin to reflect upon your life and your place, and you ask the question, 'Well, am I living to any account at all? Do I really matter?' Probably the majority of you will be like that.

There are others who, in all desire to serve the Lord and be wholly for Him, find themselves under arrest, shut up, restrained, as they think—limited, restive, anxious, on stretch, like animals in a cage, going round and round and finding no way out. There will be others who will go out. You will go into what is technically called 'The work.' You may go abroad, or into this or that aspect of specific service and ministry, and when you get there you will spend nine-tenths of your life without

seeing anything for it. You will go on and on, labouring and being quite faithful, and yet seeing little or no result.

And yet all of you, in whichever category you may be—and there may be others not mentioned—are conscious you are in something; at least you are aware that you are in a conflict, that this life for the Lord is not an easy thing; it is full of trial, of pressure, of experiences which you would not have if you were not the Lord's. It is not just an ordinary life like that of an unbeliever—not to say that all unbelievers have an easy life—but you have the extras that result from being the Lord's, and you meet those extras from all directions. You find you have to encounter sometimes quite naked, spiritual antagonisms and oppositions and difficulties.

The Supreme Realm—'Not Here' but the Unseen

Well, of course, the answer to any questionings largely lies there; for here is this mysterious statement in Eph. iii. 10, a statement in the Word of God. (I think that we believers are seriously lacking in a practical, Divine adjustment to the things which we have in our Bible and which we know so well; we do not look at them straight in the face and say, 'That is in the Bible; it must mean something, and it must mean something where I am concerned.' We do not do that enough. We are lacking in our attitude of definiteness toward the things which we believe and accept. There is something more there than we have yet faced and taken hold of.)

Now here is a statement which is in the Word of God—"to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenlies might be made known through the church the manifold (the many-sided) wisdom of God." May not that explain practically all that I have said? leaving room for this, that so far as we are concerned it may be necessary that adjustments be made before the Lord can use us: we may have to come into a position before He can do more through us. Leaving room for that and other such considerations, there still remains this very big realm in which it is not a matter of controversy with the Lord on any point at all, nor of our having to adjust on something before the Lord can do what He would do. We may be right there with the Lord, ready for any adjustment, and yet He does not do the thing that we want Him to do. There is this delay, this arrest. In such cases this word may very well be the explanation and the application. God is doing something with us, in us, by which He is reaching the end for which this universe was created.

Look again at the context of Eph. iii. 10 and see the universal and timeless setting of what is there. The universe was created for the worship and glory of God, and the thing that He is doing is somewhere bringing creatures on their knees in worship and in wonder.

Divine Wisdom Manifested Through Believers

"The manifold wisdom of God." What is wisdom for? Why does anybody want wisdom?—to answer questions, and solve problems, to know how. We might illustrate by the story of an American firm who had a big engineering job done. When it had been completed the engineers sent in their account—simply a statement of a lump sum. When the firm looked at the account they were startled at the greatness of the charge, and sent it back with a request for details. So the engineers sent it back—Materials, so much (which was very small compared with the total cost); labour, so much (which again, put together with the material, did not come to half the total); knowing how—the balance. That is just the point—knowing how. Let us put it like this. Have you ever had a friend in whom you had absolute confidence? You had no question but that he knew how to get out of difficult situations or to solve problems. You have been with him when he has been put into the biggest situation you could imagine. It might be a debate, an argument. The opposition has piled up its case, argument upon argument, problem upon problem, and all the time you have been watching your friend and having no question but that he was going to get out of the difficulty. You have been tense with expectation but completely confident of the result. You have been saying to yourself, 'I know he will get out of it: but how? How will he face this, how will he answer that?'

That is exactly what is here. On the one hand there are the principalities and powers, the celestial kingdom, angels and archangels of light, heavenly beings having absolute and unreserved confidence in God and knowing quite well that He has the key to everything. On the other hand there is this immense situation built up by Satan's interference, by all that has come in through sin—the whole state of things in God's universe, and man's helplessness and inability to contribute anything towards extricating himself. The situation requires something tremendous in order that eventually the universe shall be filled with the glory of God. All these angelic beings are watching, almost holding their breath, as if asking, 'How will He do it?' And they watch what God is doing in you and in me and find their answer there. They watch grace

at work; for it is written that we should be "to the praise of the glory of his grace" (Eph. i. 6).

How will He solve the problem of an individual life? The very constitution of the one concerned is contrary to God, and yet something is happening in that life that is making it contrary to itself, not according to nature at all. There is the most impatient person that ever you could touch; but look! Grace is making a most impatient person patient and gentle, forbearing and long-suffering. There is one naturally hot-tempered, who would flare up at the least word; grace is making him quiet and calm. I sat by a brother in Minneapolis who was dealing with a bit of intricate apparatus, a recording instrument, and all his wires had got into a terrible tangle, requiring hours of unravelling. I sat by him while he went to work quietly, just as though he had all eternity for his task. He said, 'You know, brother, before I was converted I would have lost my temper.' Grace! And the heavenly beings are looking on, seeing the wonder of the grace of God, what He is doing in this life, and in that life, making them altogether other than what they are naturally. "Manifest"—yes, 'many-sided'; the wisdom of God has to find a solution to many problems, as many as there are persons concerned, and the grace of God is sufficient for it all; and so there is worship. The Lord may be more concerned to get glory to Himself in His universe by the expression of His grace in us, than by the number of things we are doing for Him. So we have to wait, see no fruit, and find all kinds of frustration and disappointment. 'Not here, but there.' But, mark you, the manifestation is not only in some distant time—"now unto the principalities and powers." It is going on now.

The Supreme Age—'Not Now' but the Ages to Come

We come to the other aspect—'not now, but then.' "Who . . . will hearken and hear for the time to come?" We cannot stay with the context to indicate what it refers to, but there is the point—"for the time to come." This is where one of the things that we believe needs to be brought much nearer. After all, do we believe there is a time to come? Do we believe that the time to come is a bigger time than now, that the afterward is much greater than the present, that there are ages of ages, and that our whole lifetime on earth, however long it may be, is only a mere fragment of a dispensation? Do we believe that our service "in the ages to come" is far more important

than in this age? We do not thereby rule out the importance of this life and of buying up opportunities and redeeming the time; but, nevertheless, when we have done all that is possible and used every moment fully, our life is but a span which is gone; and just as we are getting to the place where we might have something to give, when we have learned something that might be of value to people here, we depart. What an enigma life is, what a problem! "For the time to come." You notice the Apostles—they always had their eye upon that. "I will give diligence that . . . ye may be able after my decease . . ." said one of them (2 Pet. i. 15). That is the real test—whether we want to be always in view, and unless *we* do something, and do it in our lifetime, we have no interest in that thing at all. Yet you will be prepared tomorrow to go to China or India and serve the Lord for a few weeks and lay down your life, either in martyrdom or in sickness. The question arises, Will it be worth it? Many a young man has volunteered in the hour of crisis and national need, facing what was probably inevitable—a few days on the battlefield, and then life's end. He thought it worth while, he was prepared for it. You are prepared for that. Why?—"for the time to come," for the afterward. Is that it? If we did not believe really in some afterward, that the cost was worth the afterward, we would not do what we do. You believe it will be worth while in the afterward to go out just for a month to India and die, do you? If you do not, you have no right to go.

The Inspiration of an 'Afterward'

"For the time to come." Let us have "the time to come" as a real motive in living. The fruit will not all be immediate; only a mere fragment of the meaning of things can be in our day. The whole mass of value is to appear again afterward. We have to live not only for this time, because, though we live right up to the hilt for our own time, we cannot do or be much, and I doubt whether the outcome here is worth the cost. All this cost just for a lifetime? No, for a time to come; and it may be that the Lord is dealing with us as He is, not chiefly for now—though perhaps there may be much even in this present age. This present is the seed plot out of which there is to come much more later on. He has in view "the ages of the ages." Eph. iii. 10 says, "now unto principalities . . . the manifold wisdom of God." Yes, but Eph. ii. 7 says, "in the ages to come . . . the exceeding riches of His grace . . ."

T. A-S.

The Ministry of the Thorn

PAUL, that peerless prince of preachers, exercised his mighty ministry under no small handicap. From the time of his conversion until the day his noble head was severed from his tired shoulders by the sword of Nero, his was a life of suffering. When Paul was saved the Lord said, "I will shew him how great things he must *suffer* for my name's sake" (Acts ix. 16). The Lord used Paul in a singular manner; he was a chosen vessel through whom were revealed the glorious truths concerning the Church, the Body of Christ. He wrote more of the New Testament than any other man—fourteen books in all. Most of us need perfect health, ideal circumstances and complete equipment before undertaking a work for God, but Paul had none of these benefits.

The Purpose of Paul's Thorn

Paul opened his heart and showed us some of the conditions under which he laboured. Said he, "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure" (2 Cor. xii. 7). This grand man of God testified that he was made and kept humble by a thorn. He was kept useful and usable through the ministry of a thorn. Many have been the speculations as to just what form of affliction was meant by the use of the word "thorn." No doubt the exact handicap has been kept obscure to encourage those of us who have various forms of some thorn of affliction.

Sufficient Grace

The thorn pricked Paul continuously, causing him pain which, in turn, drove him to the throne of grace to find grace to help in time of need. He tried desperately to be relieved of the thorn, for he asserted, "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me" (2 Cor. xii. 8). But although he pleaded with the Lord to take the affliction away, the Lord loved him too much to do it. So after praying three times for relief, he discovered that the Lord would give him grace to bear up beneath the weight of the weakness. The Lord answered his prayer by saying, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (verse 9). *God manifests His grace more brilliantly in enabling*

us to bear up under a burden than by removing it. One method of the Lord is just as much an answer to prayer as the other.

The Value of the Thorn

Paul's flesh recoiled from the ministry of the thorn, and yet the amazing results of his labours may be attributed largely to this very thing. It did not take this stalwart soldier of the Saviour long to realize the value of his handicap. He declared, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. xii. 9, 10). Here was a man who was taught in the school of suffering the invaluable lessons of sweet submission to the will of God. His heart was so tuned to the mind of his Lord that physical weakness, insults, privations, persecutions and trouble, yielded a full measure of pleasure. He extracted the sweet from the bitter.

Be of Good Courage!

Child of God, are you chafing under some overwhelming weakness? Has your frame broken down beneath the load? Do you have more ambition than strength? Is your ministry limited because of some thorn? *The blessed Lord knows your condition, He is able to assist you.* On the other hand do not despise the ministry of the thorn. Remember the blind and crippled saints who have exercised such a powerful ministry in spite of their handicaps. It is far better to be handicapped and humble than to be unhandicapped and puffed up with spiritual pride. God uses the humble, but sets the proud aside.

George Matheson and Fanny Crosby, the blind hymn-writers, saw things others never saw, and thus contributed largely to our hymnology. Suffering saints down through the ages have been enabled to minister sympathetically to others, and leave much of their balm on the printed page for the comfort and encouragement of other pain-ridden pilgrims. Beloved, if God has been pleased to give you some handicap *make the most of the ministry of the thorn*

Selected.

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The Cross, the Church, and the Kingdom

III. The Kingdom of Satan and its Overthrow

"And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore . . ." (Matt. xxviii. 18-19).

" . . . and what the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and he put all things in subjection under his feet and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all " (Eph. i. 19-23).

THIS passage from Eph. I is a very wonderful enlargement of the brief statement of the Lord Jesus that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to Him. The Apostle makes this wonderful exposition of the Lord's own fragment, showing what fulness was included in that "all authority"—far above all principality, all power, all dominion, all names, all ages. That is the "all authority" in its range and compass and content. Then the Apostle says, in effect, that when the Lord Jesus said to His disciples "Go ye therefore . . ."—"for this reason, because of this, go ye"—that self-same fulness was gathered into Himself as head of the Church; that is, that the Church stands directly under all that fulness. It is intended to be mediated from the

head to and through the members. We might well ask, in a sort of paraphrasing of the words of the Ethiopian addressed to Philip in the chariot—"Speaketh the Apostle of some other Church or of this one? To whom does that relate?"—for it is very difficult to see anything that corresponds to that in the Church that we know. Does that apply to some other entity, or does it apply to us? I say, there is a lot of room for asking that question in the light of how very far short of that comes the Church known to us. But, dear friends, the Church, in the mind of the Apostle Paul—the Church referred to by him there—is the Church into which you and I have been baptized in one Spirit, and that exceeding greatness of Divine power is to us-ward who believe.

Well, that is only another way of bringing us straight up against the challenge and the need of this hour, the challenge to measure up, and to find out why the Church is so otherwise, and how it can be according to that declaration. We commenced our meditations with presenting ourselves with this question—What has God revealed as His supreme objective resultant from the Cross of Christ? and what we have just read and said is the answer—a Church corresponding to that description, a people answering to that presentation of the Divine mind. Such is what God has revealed to be the supreme outcome of the Cross—all fulness gathered into His Son as vitally and organically related to His Church, His Body, and that fulness in action; the exceeding greatness of His power in action in and through

that Body in the whole cosmic realm.

At the close of our previous meditation we saw that God is really dealing with us with that end in view, and that we are to regard ourselves as being now in God's training-centre—in the place where, for the time being, His will has appointed us. Training-centres, from the Divine standpoint, are not institutions, nor theological seminaries, but where we are in the will of God—that is our training-centre; and we called upon ourselves to adjust to that, with this mind, that here God has chosen to equip us for the greatest ministry to which mortals have ever been called—the expression of the exaltation and sovereign headship of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to follow that up for a little, resuming at that point concerning our equipment for this ministry along the line of personal spiritual experience, discipline, training—equipment for this great Divine purpose of expressing in this universe, and especially in the great realm of spiritual powers and intelligences, the sovereignty of our Lord Jesus, firstly in terms of Divine life triumphing in us over the death that is working in us and over our natural life; and secondly in terms of Divine knowledge greater than any other kind of knowledge—the only kind of knowledge that can undo and set aside the far-reaching and deep-rooted deception of the false knowledge which Satan succeeded in getting the race to take hold of at the beginning; and then thirdly, in terms of spiritual influence—the registration of something which is not to be accounted for by any human magnetism or personal impress or anything at all that belongs to man or woman—a spiritual, Divine influence.

These are the things which constitute the curriculum of the spiritual training which God has undertaken to accomplish in you and in me with a view to meeting that spiritual realm, and that is *the* service, above all other service, to vindicate the Cross of the Lord Jesus.

God's Quest—Spiritual Personality in Terms of Christ

Well then, that means one thing. It means that God is after persons. It is persons that are needed—not first preachers, teachers, 'workers,' ministers, missionaries, in the technical sense, but persons. Oh, what a false position we may find ourselves in by these titles! How many a one is called a missionary who is no missionary at all, or a minister who is no minister! There is something much deeper than the title. No title makes us what the title represents, and we can have the title and the uniform and not be the person. No, it is neither official people nor things that God

is after—not exponents of some spiritual ideology, teaching, system of truth, but persons, just persons. We have to learn anew to draw lines of distinction. There is all the difference between a church in the New Testament sense, and a congregation. There is all the difference between praying and a prayer meeting. You can have a prayer meeting without praying in the true spiritual sense. There is all the difference between living testimonies on the one hand and ordinances and rites on the other; and there is all the difference between people who officially represent something, and personal embodiments of Jesus Christ. Yes, the main feature in our spiritual training is the person being trained; not the subjects being studied, but the persons being trained.

You see, there is a principle in spiritual training, the training which God is trying to carry out in your life and in mine, and that principle is spiritual personality. And that personality is Christ: not your personality or mine, but Christ's. That principle underlies everything in the Word of God. It is so clear, right on the face of the Scriptures, that God's view of the race is that—it is personal. It is a man; it is Adam.

That is the very principle of representative people in the Bible. Take the priest. The priest is the personal embodiment and representation of the whole nation of Israel. It is a priestly nation, and the priest is the one upon whom God looks as upon the nation. When the priest is right, in a right position and state before God and functioning according to Divine prescribing, the nation is right, and God meets the nation on the ground of the priest. When the priest is wrong, corrupt, polluted, be sure the nation is that, and that is how God sees the nation. It is all gathered up into the one man, the priest. So also with the king: as king, so people. He is the inclusive representation of the nation. It is as though the nation were but one man and that man the king; what the king is, the nation is. You do not need to look very deeply for proof of that. Look at Saul and see the state of the nation when Saul was king. Look at David and see the state of the nation when David was king. And so with prophet. The prophet was the personal representation of the people. He was called upon to do all sorts of extraordinary and strange things, sometimes very degrading and humiliating things, in order to portray to the nation God's view of themselves. What about the very name—Israel? It is the name of a man, of an individual, but it is again the name of a nation; a man's name for a nation. That is the principle, you see; God views the race as a man, as a person.

Now, carry that over to Christ and the principle holds good. Thank God, He does not see us in ourselves. It is Christ Whom He sees when our faith has been reposed in His Son. We sing a tremendous thing when we sing:

What though the accuser roar
Of ills that I have done;
I know them well and thousands more;
Jehovah findeth none.

That is tremendous! God is looking on a Person, and that Person is His Son. That is why we said that a spiritual personality is what God is after, and that it is the personality of His Son. It is, in its effect and outworking, nothing less than—so to speak—bringing out the Lord Jesus Christ, the exalted, glorified Son of God, from heaven into this universe, to register His presence, with all that such a presence means, amongst the forces of evil. You cannot do that except by *being* that. That cannot be done along any academic lines of preparation and qualification, or by any official titles and orders; that cannot be done in any other way than this—that God has wrought Christ into us individually in measure, and corporately in the united measures, and that it is Christ coming out by the presence of His people here; Christ moving out, not only on the earth to men and to nations, but primarily, pre-eminently, Christ moving out into the spiritual kingdom back of the nations, back of peoples, back of conditions.

The Impact of Christ upon Spiritual Powers

His presence—what ought it to mean? You ask the simple question—if Jesus Christ were here, what would happen? Even in His humiliation, what would happen? Well, there would be a disclosing of themselves on the part of those evil forces; His presence would make it impossible for them to remain hidden. They would cry, “Art thou come hither to torment us *before the time*?” (Matt. viii. 29). What a betrayal! Do they know that there is a time for their destruction? They do! And further, they know that He is the One Who is to bring it about. Tremendous, isn’t it? Bring Him out, *even in His humiliation*, and there is registration enough in every realm. But listen—“the exceeding greatness of his power . . . according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name . . .” Bring *that* Lord in! Oh, this, dear friends, may sound to you like a wonderful idea. You are asking about the practical possibility of it.

I believe that God is wanting to say to us that it has got to be much more like that where we are concerned than it has been—we in Christ and Christ in us; we together in that conscious, spiritual, relatedness of which we have before spoken; that has got to tell in the spiritual kingdom. The enemy is having far too much ground and way, and it is not God’s will that it should be so; and it is as though the Lord were saying to us, ‘All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. What are you going to do about it? It is your matter! Go ye therefore . . .’

Spiritual Personality Secured by the Cross

Now then, this matter of spiritual personality—which resolves itself into a matter of bringing Christ into events, and that primarily in the spiritual realm—how can it be? And the answer is—only by the Cross, but surely and truly by the Cross. It is the Cross which stands between those two men, the first Adam and the last, representatives of two races. It is just there that the Cross has its place, between the two.

Before we can know what the Cross means, we have to know what those two men really are, what headship in both cases really does imply and mean; for there is a headship on either side. On the one hand is the body of sin; that is racial, the whole race. There is one head to that body of sin. In its own sense and meaning, that head is head over all things to that body of sin. Satan is head over the whole body of sin, the whole race of the first Adam. Christ, the last Adam, is head over this other Body, and head over all things to that Body—“to the church which is his body.” We have to understand what headship really means in both cases, and in understanding that headship we shall know what the two men are; and we must understand in order to know the meaning of the Cross.

The Root of Sin Dealt with by the Cross

Remember, then, that the Cross goes right behind all that is secondary to what is primary. Sins are secondary; *sin* is primary. Sins always have been secondary, they are the result of sin; and, while God has made a provision, comprehensive and conclusive, for sins, He has gone right behind and done something very much more in relation to sin. The point in making that distinction is this—you and I must be perfectly clear on this point that, until the primary thing has been dealt with, there is little hope of the secondary being dealt with. Are you struggling against sins? Well, you will go on struggling. The key to the sins is sin. You have to get behind your sins, to

where God has gone. What is sin? Well, sin is Satan's kingdom in principle. Satan's kingdom is not some organised, official system, something literal and temporal, objective. Satan's kingdom is within us, just as, for us as believers, the kingdom of heaven is within us.

The Origin of Sin

How is Satan's kingdom within us by nature? It is Satan's nature in us that is his kingdom, and his nature is sin. It is a working power, like an evil disease—you may call it a toxin, a poison—permeating the old creation, actively at work in the system of the race. That is sin, and that is Satan's kingdom. Now we have got to deal with that side. You will at once see the other side, but we are not on the other side of the Cross yet. We can begin now here—the Cross and sin, the primary thing. We call it 'original sin.' What do we mean by original sin? Well, we mean something that goes right back to the beginning and follows through from the beginning continuously and is with us as from that far, far distant beginning.

Where was that beginning? The beginning was not only far, far back in man's history, but it was far, far back beyond man's beginnings. Sin commenced with Satan, and there are two factors in original sin where he is concerned: firstly its immediate and close up relationship to God, and secondly its seat in the exercise of the will.

Now let us get hold of our Bibles. Of course, your acceptance of our interpretation will depend entirely upon whether you agree that there is always a double thought and a double side to what God has said in the Old Testament—that there is a present and earthly aspect, and also a permanent and heavenly aspect. If that is accepted, then we have no difficulty with these passages that we are going to read.

"How art thou fallen from heaven, O day-star, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, that didst lay low the nations! And thou saidst in thy heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; and I will sit upon the mount of congregation, in the uttermost parts of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High" (Isa. xiv. 12-14).

"Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou wast in Eden, the garden of God; every

precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, the topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was in thee; in the day that thou wast created they were prepared. Thou wast the anointed cherub that covereth: and I set thee, so that thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till unrighteousness was found in thee. By the abundance of thy traffic they filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore have I cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I have destroyed thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire" (Eze. xxviii. 11-16).

You see the two things that I indicated as factors in original sin. Firstly, its immediate and close-up relationship to God. It is right in the very presence of God; it is something against God; it is a violation of the uniqueness, the solitariness, of God. There can be no two supreme beings in this universe, there can be only one, and anything which challenges that solitary, unique supremacy is a violation of it, is treachery; and that is where original sin began.

The second thing is that its seat is in the exercise of the will. You notice in Isaiah xiv the five-fold 'I will.' It is the heart of sin, the essence of sin; and the prophet, by inspiration, is caused to disclose something which was probably never uttered in words at all by the one to whom the words are attributed. It is probable, indeed I think it is certain, that Lucifer never expressed himself at all in words. "Thou saidst *in thy heart*"—so that it was a heart matter, an attitude, a state before God. The inspiration of the prophet amounts to this, that he was made to disclose something that had never come out in verbal and audible pronouncement, something that had been deep down in the heart of this one. You remember the familiar words of Heb. iv. 12—"The word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart." That is where God goes. It is deep down there in the inner life that this resolve was made, with this five-fold "I will." It is the inner working of the will, and God knows the secret of all hearts. We do not need to utter it. It may just be there; God knows; and that is original sin. It is deep down in the life.

We may as well face this. It is an ugly

thing. We cannot understand the Cross until we know this. This only enhances the glory of the Cross, and brings out its matchless splendour, when we see its immense range—how far back it reaches, how far up and how far down. The Cross is a tremendous thing. Well, you see, that is the origin of sin—what we call original sin—and that is the toxin, that is the poison.

The Nature of Sin

Let us look at its nature. "Thy heart was lifted up because of thy beauty" (Eze. xxviii. 17). Oh, then, pride is the essence of sin. It is out of pride that sin springs. No wonder the language about pride is so strong! "Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. xvi. 5). "Because of thy beauty"; then self-esteem was the cause; and the accompaniment of pride is always rebellion. Did you ever know a proud person satisfied? Bring along somebody else who looks equally well-dressed, well-supplied; see the reaction of the proud person—'I will go one better!' Pride, you see, gives birth to rivalries at once, and produces this spirit of rebellion, of discontent with even the best position. Pride is never satisfied; it must always get higher, have more, go better than another. It is rebellion; and rebellion in act led to perversity in nature.

In the Old Testament there are two words which mainly cover the ground of sin—transgression and iniquity. They are the two English words for two Hebrew words which mean respectively rebellion (transgression) and perversity (iniquity). Rebellion in an act produced perversity in a nature. We, in Adam, were caught in the act of his rebellion. Adam rebelled, prompted by a spirit of pride—pride provoked by this suggestion: "Hath God said . . . ? . . . God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God" (Gen. iii. 1-5). Pride flared up, with desire to have and to be something that God never intended—and certainly never intended in that way, along that line.

The act of rebellion, the counterpart of Lucifer's rebellion, issued in a nature; and who will deny that in our very nature we are perverse? It does not matter, dear friends, how saintly and consecrated and devoted to the Lord you may be, how deep may have been the discipline in your life, and how great a measure of Christlikeness may have been developed in you—if you have a child, see if it inherits all that! Why, it will not be many hours old before you can see and hear 'I will,' 'I will not.' We do not inherit the Christ-

likeness of our forbears, unfortunately. Perversity is in every fresh generation. It is there, and from what we may call the simple form of that perversity in the rebellious, discontented, peevish cry of the little infant, right up and on to the vast circumference of this whole creation, in all this anarchy, strife, war, murder, cruelty, 'man's inhumanity to man,' it is the same thing, the same nature, the same inbred perversity. Man cannot tame it, nor eradicate it nor heal it. He may set up his League of Nations or his United Nations Organization with intent to curb or to cure international perversity, and what happens? Well, so much the worse for the League of Nations when it comes into collision with original sin! We who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, lovers of Him, devoted to Him, know only too well that if we are put to the test, tried by adversity and by suffering and by disappointment and by frustration and by the Divine withholding from us of those things upon which our hearts are set, is it not all too easy for perversity and rebellion to rise up in us? Is it not all too difficult for us to keep it in check? It is there in the old man; that is the nature of sin. And this in Satan is the very fountain head of all this other with which we are so familiar and which is so common in the creation. That is where it came from and that is its nature, and from this source man has become what he is. That is how it is, that is why it is.

Self the Stronghold of Sin

Well, then, we must look at man, and what do we find? What is the central thing in man? It is this same thing—self, self, self, in some way. What is born in the blood will come out. Self-will, self-interest; the calculating upon a basis of how a given proposition or course will affect me, whether it will be to my advantage or disadvantage; and so on without end. It is not seen only in grossly sensual forms, nor alone in the more common forms of ambition that might even be called worthy—the desire to climb the ladder of success, and so on. But this thing can move right through into our spiritual life and become a secret hidden motive even in our quest for blessing, for power. It can come out in a Peter who, when his Lord says to him "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me" (John xiii. 8) will respond, with eager desire to have as much for himself as possible, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." I do not want to get you analysing and introspective, but I say we have to get down to this thing before we understand the Cross and before this spiritual personality which is Christ can be developed;

for it is only, as we have said, by way of the Cross that self-interest, self-sufficiency, self-realisation, and a dozen other forms of self go out. Not only the self which asserts itself, and is aggressive, imperious, seeking and loving the limelight, but also that which is pitying and drawing attention to itself because it is so poor and miserable and wretched a thing—it is all self. Anything which has the effect of bringing us into view is self, and the Cross stands right in the way of that and says No to the whole thing that came from Satan, whatever form it takes—whether it is self-realisation, asserting, forcing, driving, or self-pity with its negatives and its inferiority. Satan is somewhere behind it all, and he will use it, and the effect is the hiding of Christ; and it has got to be dealt with somehow. That is the school we are in. It is this alliance of fallen man with Satan in the very nature of things which sums up the whole Bible from one standpoint, and shows where God stands in relation to man when man is on his own ground and not on God's ground.

Sin Essential to Satan's Kingdom

Well, the issue—it is a kingdom. That is where we started. What is the kingdom of Satan? Something out there, remote, objective? Are you proposing to gird on armour and to go out and attack the kingdom of Satan—something at a distance, in India, in China, in the slums of London? No; the kingdom of Satan is first of all within you. Until something has been done within, Satan is not dethroned, his kingdom is not overthrown; it is there. His strength is in the nature that he has bitten into the race as poison, by man's permission and agreement. That is the dark and terrible side, but it is essential that we apprehend the fact and nature of that kingdom. Until you see that clearly, you have not come near to seeing either the meaning of the Cross or of the kingdom of the heavens, for the Cross comes right in there, to say No—fully, finally, for ever, No—to that fallen creation; and, thank God, it not only says No, but accomplishes it also. We are in the hands of

God if we are the Lord's people. We know—and if we do not know there is something wrong somewhere, there is a hindrance somewhere that has got to be looked into—we know, or we ought to know, by the Spirit's witness within us, whenever self asserts itself in any form. Oh, is that not the explanation of those many secret battles and experiences when we have had to get away alone, and have dealings with the Lord? We have said or done something that was not fitting; or our manner, if not the substance of our words, has been wrong; or we have had a self-important bearing, we have been talking about ourselves, and we have been bringing all the tinsel of this life and of this world into view and making something of what belongs to the old creation; and we are miserable afterward, we are wretched about it. 'Oh, was not that all death? Why did I get caught like that?' The only thing to do is to get away into the presence of the Lord and get readjusted. We know a lot about that. We are in the school when that is going on.

I think we must stop there, with just this rounding off. This, dear friends, is the nature of the kingdom that we are called to destroy. This is the nature of the warfare. It is not primarily a matter of dealing with Satan and demons personally, but of dealing with the ground upon which that kingdom is founded and which supports their power. That ground is sin, and sin is this inborn rebellion and perversity. Therefore the overthrow of Satan's kingdom is at the Cross of the Lord Jesus where the background of everything was dealt with, and Satan was cast out—not just personally: do not get pictures of Satan as a person being thrown out—Satan cast out in this sense, that his moral ground of strength was taken from him. He was confronted with another nature in which there was no perversity, and that nature was too strong for him; and there are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises whereby we may become partakers of that same Divine nature (I Pet. i. 4). It is along that line that Satan loses his power.

T. A-S.

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The Four Pillars of Jacob

IV. The Pillar of Resurrection

Reading: Genesis xxxv. 15-21.

THIS is the fourth and last of the pillars which were erected by Jacob in the course of his spiritual pilgrimage. There is no record of any space of time having elapsed between the previous pillar and this one. Whether there was such a period we have no means of knowing, but for spiritual purposes this pillar seems to follow immediately upon the third. In this it is very true to our own spiritual experiences. Bethel was the place where Jacob really entered into his vision of Divine purpose, and, as we have seen, this involved a tremendous transformation of his whole life. He entered into the spiritual realm of the house of God, receiving the promise that he should no longer be Jacob, but that his name should be called Israel. How swiftly following that great and glorious experience of Divine power came a mortal blow struck at the very heart of Jacob! He lost his dearest and best. This was the deepest death of all.

A Deeper Death Follows Bethel

How different are the Lord's ways from ours! When we have come to a new place of utter yieldedness to Him we expect to move easily forward into new experiences of wonder and glory; we feel that the death matter is for ever settled and that now we shall be conscious only of life. Yet how true it is to our spiritual history as well as to Jacob's, that very soon after the great crisis of surrender to the Cross we are called upon to know a deeper experience of that death.

Rachel always brings out the noblest and most admirable side of Jacob's character. Jacob loved as not many men love, intensely and with all his heart; his is the outstanding love story of the world. He loved Rachel so much that he was not only willing to labour as a slave for seven years to win her, but the seven years seemed like a few days to him. After he was tricked by her father he devoted a further seven years of his life to labour for Rachel. He never changed in his deep devotion. When, on his return, he found himself approaching Esau he chose a special place of safety for Rachel at the very rear of the whole party. She was the dearest of all to him, his most precious. Nor did he ever forget the sorrow of her death. Many years afterwards, when at the time of his death he was blessing the two sons of Joseph, he broke into the glowing prophecy of their glorious future with the per-

sonal confession, "And as for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when there was still some distance to come unto Ephrath; and I buried her there in the way to Ephrath" (Gen. xlviii. 7). Perhaps it was the outstanding memory of his life, for in a sense he buried his heart when he buried Rachel.

This is not a mere matter of sentiment, but conveys a deep spiritual lesson. This last pillar reveals how deep is the work of the death of the Cross in the life of the believer who is truly pressing on to the Lord's end. This is no longer his death to sin. It is something more than we normally mean when we speak of death to self, for that happened at Jabbok. We may have a great experience of laying all on the altar, which we think should be the end of dying, but there are still unknown depths of our being to which the Cross must penetrate; Rachel, the dearest and best, is yet to be buried.

We might imagine that this was just one of the common chances of life if it were not for the significant fact that it followed so closely upon the pillar at Bethel. Many children of God avoid such deep experiences simply because they never come to the place of utter yieldedness to the Lord. Jacob realized that this was a major crisis in his life; God had permitted the death, and had done so because He had a glorious purpose in view. After all, it is life, resurrection life and power, which we are seeking, and this can only be released by yielding to death. Resurrection life does not only mean that the Lord dies and I live, though in a sense that is gloriously true, but it means that my experience of such life is consequent upon my experience of His death. As Jacob moves on in his spiritual pilgrimage, not away from Bethel but in the power of Bethel, he finds that the Lord has reserved for him even deeper experiences of death, to the very breaking of his heart, only that out of them might come life in new fulness.

The apostle Paul passed through the same suffering. In the second letter to the Corinthians he tells of his own ministry resulting from deliverance "from so great a death." That is Rachel—not only death, but "so great a death." The end of the same letter tells of his "thorn in the flesh," the messenger of Satan sent to buffet him, virtually explaining that his deep experience of the Cross, galling to the flesh, perplexing to the mind and bitter

to the heart was the very ground of his fruitful ministry in the power of the Spirit.

Was Rachel's death just a cruel blow of fate? No! and this is where Jacob's pillar represents the triumph of his faith. On the one hand he lost that which was most precious to him, but that very loss made possible a new and fuller expression of the will of God in his life. His pillar announced that Rachel died here, but it also proclaimed that here Benjamin was born. The only place where Benjamin can be born is the place where Rachel dies.

Benoni or Benjamin?

Poor Rachel! She called his name Benoni, Son of my sorrow. This is the verdict of the natural heart. There is no question as to the bitterness of the death—the Cross is a bitter death. The two names given to this child, however, show that we may take up different attitudes towards the Cross. Self pity will draw attention to itself—'Son of *my* sorrow'—and so miss the whole purpose of God in the matter, namely, that there should be raised a testimony to His glory. When that which is precious to us, or in us, is smitten by the death of the Cross we may permit resentment or perplexity to bring a dark shadow into our lives, being offended because of the personal loss. We may even refuse to accept this sentence of death on that which is precious to us, and so fail to go on unto the fullness of the Lord's purpose. Perhaps we are willing to die to sin, or to the world, or to the uglier forms of self, but when we are challenged with the loss of all things for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ we cry out against such a demand. It seems to our natural hearts that the fruit of such a death would be only sorrow and regret.

Yet if we are in the true succession of Jacob such an experience is inevitable. If we are really committed to the Lord for all His will in His house we may be sure that He will apply the Cross in this new and deeper way. "Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it" (John xv. 2). The Lord knows how to choose that particular suffering which will purge and make more fruitful. It seldom seems like love to us, and, if we take it in the wrong spirit, may become the obsession of our lives. 'Benoni, Son of my sorrow.'

Jacob said No! He looked at the same child and said, 'No, not Benoni, but Benjamin'—Son of the right hand—the one who is to be the occasion of honour, power and glory. He does not say, 'Son of *my* right hand,' for he is forgetting himself and thinking of the glory of the Lord. The sorrow side is personal, it is *my* sorrow; but faith rises above that level.

'Son of the right hand'—may we hope that it is God's right hand? It is true that this pillar marked a grave, and it was thus known for centuries as a landmark on the borders of Benjamin. It was the pillar of Rachel's grave. But surely Jacob meant it for more than that. His grief was great, but this pillar spoke not only of his sorrow but of his hope. He raised this, as he had raised the other three, in token of his utter committal to the Lord in the matter, and of his assurance as to the faithfulness of God. 'Son of the right hand.' That is the glorious issue from so great a death so far as the man of faith is concerned.

The Way of Progress

Now the death experience will happen to us, but the pillar will not happen; it is our responsibility to set it up. The measure of spiritual progress is determined by our reaction to the test when it comes. Perplexity, unwillingness, self-pity, resentment? There are many ways of thwarting the purpose of God if we dwell too much on 'The son of my sorrow.' There is only one way of realizing that purpose, and that is by taking a stand in faith that this death is not unto death, but for the glory of God. It will produce the son of the right hand.

It is most significant that at that point Jacob is called Israel. Until then the name had been a promise but was not applied to him in the narrative. God had said that he should be called Israel, but even after Jabbok, and even after Bethel, it is as Jacob that he is described as journeying on. At this last pillar, however, there is a change, for the account reads, "And Israel journeyed." Peter writes about giving more diligence to make our calling and election sure (2 Pet. i. 10); I think that this is exactly what Jacob did when he raised his fourth and last pillar. He made sure of what God had called him, he made good his claim to be called Israel. The two pillars are very closely related in spiritual experience. Here is Bethel—that is like Sunday morning when we have dealings with the Lord, and feel that everything is settled and we are right with Him. Here is Rachel's Pillar—that is like Monday morning, when the matter is put to a practical test. It is our Monday mornings which count. Jacob became Israel not merely in meeting the Lord, in seeing the vision, in responding to it and being ready to die, but in a practical matter when the Cross smote him, even to the breaking of his heart. He said as he had said at Bethel, but in an even deeper way, 'Not what I am, O Lord, but what Thou art'; not 'Son of my sorrow,' but 'Son of the right hand.' 'Never mind my desires or ambitions,

never mind what people think of me; it does not matter what happens to my things so long as Christ is glorified.' "And *Israel* journeyed."

It will be like that with us. We may respond to Bible teaching, may have a glorious experience of Bethel and may raise the pillar of our faith committal to the Lord, but it is when the whole issue is put to the test in practical life that we shall find that there is yet another pillar to erect before we have really entered in. "Make our calling and election sure."

The Way of Fruitfulness

"And *Israel* journeyed." Where did he journey to? It does not say, but it does say that the road was leading to Bethlehem. "In the way of Ephrath (the same is Bethlehem)." Now Bethlehem means 'The house of bread.' Jacob was right in the way to fruitfulness; he had not reached it yet, but this pillar was directly in the way. Ephrath means fertile, or fertility; it is the same thought. This is the way to fruitfulness. How little did Jacob realise when he set out for Bethlehem that before he reached there he would have lost his Rachel! In spiritual terms this matter of fruitfulness is the whole explanation of Rachel's death. The Lord deals thus with us because He is seeking to lead us into a large life of spiritual fertility. "Every branch that beareth fruit he purgeth it." Unbelief will say, 'The Lord is angry with me, I have mistaken the way and the Lord is against me.' Faith will say, 'No, not Benoni, Son of my sorrow, but Benjamin, Son of the right hand. I move on from this pillar into a fuller and more fruitful life.'

Christ the Way and the End

In closing I should like to make a few simple remarks about the whole subject of these four pillars.

In the first place, they are four, which means that they are universal; they refer not only to Jacob but to you and me. He had his experiences, and we shall have ours, but they are the same in principle. They were strange and sometimes painful to him, as indeed they often are to us. But God has the same glorious end in view.

In the next place, each one of them represented a positive act of faith on Jacob's part. God did so much for Jacob, but God did not erect the pillars for him; he had to do that for himself. Indeed, each one of them represented Jacob's response to the Lord, his committal of faith. After all, when you put up a pillar everyone knows precisely what your position is. You cannot go back on it, and you do not intend to do so. That is what Jacob meant. So the Lord calls us to realise that while He brings the vision to us and He alone can realise it in us, He does expect a whole-hearted committal from our side.

And surely the last and closing point is the significance of the fact that when the fourth pillar was raised the road led straight on to Bethlehem; Bethlehem—royal David's city; Bethlehem—where Christ was born. All spiritual exercise which is truly of God leads directly to Christ. Anything in our lives, in our ministry, in our ambitions, our interests or our prayers which leads in any other direction—well, we don't want it, do we? Above all else we want the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.

H.F.

Prophetic Ministry

IV. A Vision that Constitutes a Vocation

"For they that dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him" (Acts xiii. 27).

WE pointed out at the beginning of our previous meditation that the above statement indicates that there is something more to be heard than the audible reading of the Word of God. "The voices of the prophets." What were the prophets saying?—not, what were the actual words used by the prophets, the sentences and statements, the form of their pronouncements, but what did it all amount to in

effect? These dwellers and rulers in Jerusalem could have quoted the prophets without any difficulty: they probably could have recited the contents of all the books of the prophets. They were well-drilled in the content of the Old Testament Scriptures, but they never stopped and asked the simple questions—What does it amount to? What really is the implication? What were these men after? And because they never did that, they never got further than the letter.

Vocation Missed Because Vision Lost

We are asking those questions now. What

is that which is within and behind and deeper than the written and spoken utterances of the prophets? We know that the prophets were dealing with a situation which by no means represented the Lord's mind where His people were concerned. I could make it stronger than that and say the situation was very far from the Lord's thought, but I have present conditions in mind and do not want to go into any extreme state of things, and so I simply say that the condition did not then, nor does it now, really represent the Lord's mind and intention where His people were and are concerned. The prophets were dealing with such a situation, and because it was like that, the real vocation of the people of God was not being fulfilled. They were failing in that for which the Lord had really brought them into being. Whereas they ought to have been a people of tremendous spiritual strength in the midst of the nations, with a real impact of God upon the nations, with a note of great authority which had to be taken account of—"Thus saith the Lord," declared in such a way that people really had to heed—whereas it ought to have been like that and a very, very different situation in many respects from what it was, they were failing. There was weakness and failure. The prophets sought to get down to the root of that situation, to get behind that deplorable condition and that tragic failure. To get there, of course, they had to work their way through a lot of positive factors in the condition. There were all the things to which the prophets referred—sins and so on; but the prophets were solid as one man on one particular thing, that back of these conditions, resulting in this main failure, the cause was lost vision.

The people had lost their original vision, the vision which had been clearly before them. When God laid His hand upon them and brought them out of Egypt, they had a vision. They saw the purpose and intention of God. It became the exultant note of their song on the farther side of the Red Sea. I am not going to stay for the moment with what that was, but there it was. They were a people to whom God had given a vision of His purpose concerning them, both as to themselves and as to their vocation. They had lost it, and this was the result; and the prophets, in dealing with that, lighted solidly upon this one thing—"Your vocation in its fulness of realisation and accomplishment rests upon your vision, and fulness of vocation requires fulness of vision." That means that if your vision becomes less than God's fulness, you will only go so far, and then you will stop. If you are going right on and through to all that God

meant in constituting you His vessel, you must have fulness of vision; and God is never satisfied with anything less than fulness. The very fact that you cannot go any further than your vision leads you is God's way of saying, 'You must have fulness of vision if you are coming to fulness of purpose and realisation.'

Now, that is the very foundation of the thing with which we are occupied just now. The prophets were always speaking about this matter. We previously quoted Hosea iv. 6—"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee that thou shalt be no priest to me." That is only saying in other words, 'My people go to pieces for lack of vision; you have closed your eyes to My purpose which I presented to you; I have no further use for you'; and that is a very strong statement. It links with another passage—"Israel is swallowed up: now are they among the nations as a vessel wherein none delighteth" (Hosea viii. 8). If you want to get the full force of that, look at a word in Jeremiah's prophecies—"Is this man Coniah a despised broken vessel? is he a vessel wherein none delighteth? wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into the land which they know not? O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days; for no more shall a man of his seed prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling in Judah" (Jer. xxii. 28-30). "Israel . . . among the nations as a vessel wherein none delighteth." Coniah, a man in whom "none delighteth." "Write . . . this man childless." There is no future for a vessel like that. We might well say of Israel as of Coniah, "Write this man childless." That is an end. A continuation, going right through without that arrest, demands fulness of vision.

Vision, Not Knowledge of Facts, Qualifies for Vocation

Do listen to this, especially my younger brothers and sisters in Christ. The fulfilment of that into which you are called through the grace of God—what you may call the service of God, the work of the Lord: what we will sum up as Divine vocation—*must* rest upon a vision which the Lord has given you; a vision, of course, that is not just something in itself but is *the* vision which He has given concerning His Church. You must have that. Then the measure in which you will go right on and through to fulness will be the measure of your vision—the measure in which you have come personally to possess that Divine vision. There

can be all sorts of things less than that which lead you into Christian work. You may hear an appeal for workers, an appeal for missionaries, an appeal to service, based upon some Scripture—"Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel"—and so on. And with the accompaniments of that appeal you may be moved, stirred up, feel very solemn; something may happen in the realm of your emotions, your feelings, your reason, and you may take that as a Divine call. Now, I am not saying that no one has ever served the Lord properly and truly on that basis. Do not misunderstand me. But I do want to say there can be all that, and in a very intense form, and yet it can be not your own but someone else's vision which has been passed over to you, and that will not do. 'But,' you say, 'there is the Scripture—"Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel".' Remember, those to whom those words were addressed had all the facts about Christ—the incarnation, the virgin birth, His life, His teaching, His miracles, His Cross, and all the accompanying heavenly attestations. Some of those very men—John's disciples—were there when the voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son." Others were in the mountain when again the voice said, "This is my beloved Son." They saw the transfiguration, they saw Him in resurrection. Is that not enough with which to go out to the world?—all that mass of mighty facts? Surely they can go and proclaim what they know? But no—"Farry ye in Jerusalem." What was it eventually that constituted them men who could fulfil and obey that command to go? 'Well,' you say, 'of course it was the presence of the Holy Spirit.' Perfectly true. But was there not something else? Why the forty days after His resurrection? Do you not think that they were getting well through the externals, the events, and seeing something—seeing what no human eye could see, what could never be seen by any amount of objective demonstration?

If the Apostle Paul is anything to go by in this matter, he will tell us perfectly plainly that his whole life and ministry and commission were based upon one thing—"It was the good pleasure of God . . . to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles" (Gal. i. 15-16). "I make known to you, brethren, as touching the gospel which was preached by me, that it is not after man. For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. i. 11-12). All the other things may be facts which we possess by reading our New Testament. We have it all and we may believe it as the substance of

Christianity. That does not constitute us missionaries to go out and proclaim the facts of Christ—facts though they be. That is not it. How many have done so! How far have they gone? They go so far and then stop. We cannot stay to dwell upon the limitation. Dear friends, there is terrible limitation in the Church just now, limitation of the knowledge of the Lord, even on the part of many who have been the Lord's servants for many years. It is difficult to talk about the things of the Lord to many Christians even of years' standing.

The Vision—God's Full Purpose in Redemption

Reverting to Israel; you do not find anything concerning Israel that suggests or indicates that they came out, and were in the wilderness or later in the land, to declare as their gospel that God brought them out of the land of Egypt. That was not their message. Of course, it is recounted many times, but that was not their message, not what they were proclaiming. What was it always that was in their view? It was what they were brought out for. It was God's vision in bringing them out. So many of us have just settled down to preach the coming-out side—salvation from sin, from the world. It goes just so far, and the Church does not get very far with that. It is good, it is right, of course; it is a part of the whole, but only a part. It is the full vision that is needed to go right through. Oh, the pathos associated with the lives of many of the Lord's servants! They come to a standstill in a limited realm of life and power and influence because their vision is so small. Is that not true?

What am I saying to you? First of all, if you are going right through, to serve the Lord in any full way, you must have revealed to your own heart God's purpose concerning His Son. You will have to be able to say that God has revealed His Son in you in this sense, that you see not merely your own deliverance from sin but God's purpose concerning His Son unto which you are saved—the big thing, the full thing. You are only a fragment in it. That is the basis of service, of vocation; and these very apostles were held back until there broke upon them the full blaze of the meaning of Christ risen and ascended—the vision of the glorified Christ and all that that signified in the eternal purpose of God. Then they went out, and we find their message was always, not the gospel of God concerning personal salvation, but the gospel of God concerning His Son, Jesus Christ. They had seen, not the historic Jesus, but the glorified Christ

of God; and that, not just as an objective vision, but the significance of it had broken in upon them.

What a change it represented from the old days, when they were always thinking in terms of the coming Messiah, who would set up a temporal kingdom on this earth with themselves seated on his right hand and on his left! They would be notable people down here on this earth and oust the Romans from their country! That thing on the earth was their full and only vision—fighting with literal arms, revolting against literal usurpers of their country. Where would it lead to? Oh, what a vast change when they saw His kingdom! Now, the thing which had held them in its grip simply went, not to be thought of any longer.

Seeing His kingdom! He had said, "There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matt. xvi. 28). What is the kingdom? It is Christ, far above all rule and authority, the centre and the goal of all Divine counsels from eternity. That is language, of course—mere words; but their import needs to be apprehended. You must have vision in your own heart before you can be a servant of God who will get very far, and you have to have growing vision to get right through. Come back to Hosea. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." What does he say a little later? "Let us know, let us follow on to know the Lord" (Hos. vi. 3). It is growing, progressive vision that brings us through to God's full end. It must be like that—not to sit down on two or three facts about Christ and salvation, but to have the eyes of our hearts enlightened to see Him.

What I am saying, of course, is a statement of facts. I cannot give you anything, I cannot bring you into it; but I can, I trust, influence you a little in the direction of going to the Lord and saying, 'Now, Lord, if Thou needest me, I am available. I am at Thy disposal; but Thou must lay the foundation, and open my eyes, and give me the requisite vision that will mean that I do not only go out and preach things about Christ. Something very much more than that is needed.'

That is the first thing, and it applies to us all, not only to those who are going out into what we call full time service.

Israel's Vocation—To Express God's Presence Among the Nations

Saying that, I am able to come to the next thing for the moment. What was the vision that Israel had lost and to which the prophets were seeking to bring the people back? The

vision was this—the very vocation for which God had laid His hand upon Israel, the meaning of their existence as Israel. What was that? The movement of God was like this. Here are nations and peoples spreading all over the earth. Out from those nations God takes one solitary individual, Abram, and places him, so to speak, right at the centre of the nations. That is the spiritual geography of it. And then God raises up from that man a seed, and constitutes his seed a nation right in the midst of the nations; distinct from the nations, perfectly distinct, but in the midst. Then God constitutes that nation on heavenly principles—a corporate body constituted on heavenly, Divine, spiritual principles with God Himself in the midst—with the result that all the other nations gather round to look on. And what do those nations take account of? Not of the preaching of this nation in their midst; you have nothing about their preaching at all—that is, the proclaiming of doctrines and truths. But the onlookers become aware that God, the only true and living God, is there; there is no mistaking it, they cannot get away from it, they have to recognise it—God is there. Because this people is so constituted, God is there, and there is a registration of God all around, wherever these people come. Ah, even before they come, something is beginning to happen. Listen to Rahab! What did she say to the spies? Israel has not arrived yet, but she says, 'We know all about you. We know what you signify. We have heard all about it.' Already the fear of this people is ahead of them. There is something of spiritual power there which does not have to be preached in words. The people are there, with God in their midst—because God has His heavenly thoughts and principles as the very constitution of their life. He is there; the rest follows.

Now I have gathered into that statement the whole of the Bible, Old and New Testaments. As to the Old Testament, what was Israel's Divine vocation? Not primarily to say things about God, but to be as God in the midst of the nations. "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved" (Psa. xli. 5). 'The Lord is here!' What that counted for! That was their vocation. You may say that in the Old Testament it was type; but oh, it was much more than type, it was very real; it was a fact.

The Church's Vocation—To Express the Lordship of Christ

When we come into the New Testament we find ourselves in the presence of a double development. God is here present in the Person of His Son, Jesus Christ. His name is

Emmanuel—'God with us,' and all who have to do with Him have to do with God in a very personal and immediate way. He claims that His very physical body is the temple of God. Then, through His death, resurrection, and ascension He returns in the Person of the Holy Spirit and takes up His residence in the Church, which is His Body. Things then begin to happen quite spontaneously as out from the world of spiritual intelligences—not just because of certain doctrines being preached, but because of that Divine presence.

There are conscious intelligences all around, behind men and nations, and the conflict has started; not because of what God's people say, but because they are here. Let that be corporate, and you have God's idea of vocation. This is not the dispensation of the conversion of the nations. I wonder even if this is the dispensation of the full evangelisation of the nations. We are hoping the Lord may come any day. Half this world has never heard the name of Jesus yet, after two thousand years. If the Lord is coming to-night, something has to happen if the world is to be evangelised before He comes! That is not said to stay or weaken evangelisation. Let us get on with it and do all that is possible; but, remember, the Lord has given us His meaning for this dispensation. "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. xxiv. 14). Literally—"This gospel of the sovereignty must be announced in every nation to set a testimony, and then shall the end come."

Look at your New Testament. It was said, "Their sound went out into all the earth" (Rom. x. 18). It was said then that the whole world was touched. But the world has grown a good deal since then. What happened then? What happened then was that the Lord planted nuclei, corporate representations of His Church, first in one nation and then in another, and by their presence the fight broke out. The one thing that Satan was bent upon was to eject that which inoculated his kingdom with the sovereignty of the Lord; to get it out, break it up, disintegrate it, somehow to nullify it, turning those concerned against one another, creating divisions—anything to spoil, to mar, to destroy their representation of Christ's absolute Lordship; to neutralise that, to get it out, to drive it out, to do anything to get rid of this thing inside his kingdom. Satan's kingdom has acted in this way, as if to say: 'While that thing is here, we can never be sure of ourselves; while that is here our kingdom is divided, it is not whole; let us get it out in order to have our kingdom solid.'

God's object is to get into the nations a corporate expression of the lordship of His Son—to have His place there. I am not saying we are not to preach; yes, we must preach, witness, testify; but the essential thing is that the Lord must *be* there. There are times—and this will be borne out by many servants of God—when you cannot preach, you cannot do anything but hold on where you are, being there, standing there, keeping in close touch with heaven there. You can do nothing else, and the waves break upon you. It has happened many times. Before ever there has been any advance or development there has been a long-drawn-out period in which the one question has been, 'Shall we be able to hold on, to stand our ground?' Satan has said, 'Not if I can help it! You will go out if I can do anything about it!' The whole issue is this—the foothold of the heavenly Lord in the nations. Israel was constituted for that; the Church is constituted for that. It cannot be done single-handed by units; it requires the corporate—the two, the three: the more the better, provided there is the unifying solidity, the oneness, of a single eye. If double motives come in and personal interests, they will undo it all.

Are you fighting a lonely battle? You need co-operation, you need corporate help to fight that battle through and to hold your ground. Mark you, the enemy will drive you out if he can. "This gospel of the sovereignty must be announced in every nation to set a testimony." Preach if you can, but if you cannot, that does not mean that you are to quit. Until the Lord says, 'I can do no more here,' you have to hold on. Do we not know the terrific efforts of the enemy to drive us out? Many of you have gone far enough to know what that means. If he could put you out, he would. That is the vision—what the Church is constituted for in relation to the Lord Jesus, so that, in the light of a coming day, you are standing as a testimony of the coming day; in the nations for a testimony, until He comes Whose right it is to reign, and "the kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ"; a foothold unto that time; an altar built which testifies, 'This belongs to the Lord, the Lord's rights are here, He has purchased this.' You will find every kind of contradiction to that in conditions, and every kind of assault from the enemy to try and prove that the Lord has not anything there, that He has no footing, and that you had better get out.

Do you see how necessary it is to have the vision? You cannot do that on enthusiasm, it will not last; nor on someone else's vision,

it will not support you to the end. You must be like this man Paul and those who endured as seeing Him Who is invisible; not as having seen Him long ago, but living continually in the light of what you have seen, a light which is ever growing.

Vision is the Measure of Vocation

Now, if all this is simple and elementary, it is nevertheless basic. Do you see that vision of God's full purpose concerning His Son, revealed in your own heart in its beginnings but then growing clearer and fuller, is the basis of vocation? I do trust that nothing I have said will have the effect of making you less in earnest and devoted in all simple ways of witnessing, or testifying concerning salvation; but do remember that, for fulness, you have got to see a lot more than that. You will go just as far as your vision takes you; therefore, we all have need of Paul's prayer that God "may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe" (Eph. i. 17-19). That is the vision. And then, as is written in Isa. xxv. 7—" . . . he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering that covereth all peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations." What does that mean—"this mountain"? What mountain? Well, it is Zion. But has that literal mountain called Mount Zion, that rocky eminence in Jerusalem, ever been the instrument of taking the veil of the covering from off all faces? Of course it

has not! What is Zion? Zion in spiritual interpretation is that people living in the good of the Lord's complete sovereignty. It says in the immediate context, "He hath swallowed up death for ever." Well, it is through His triumph, the triumph of His Cross and resurrection, that He comes to us. "Ye are come unto mount Zion" (Heb. xii. 22). Zion is the realm of His absolute lordship and a people living in the good of His lordship. Then the veil is taken away. What the Lord wants here and there and there are these nuclei, these little companies of people living in the good of His victory, living in the good of His having swallowed up death victoriously; and where they are, people will see; they will be the instrument for taking the veil from other people's faces. Where such a company is found, there you see the Lord. When you come into touch with those people, you come into touch with reality.

So the final appeal is that everything must be adjusted and brought into line with the vision, and the one question for us is this—are people seeing the Lord? Not, are they hearing what we have to talk about—our preaching, doctrine, interpretation—but, are they seeing the Lord, are they feeling the Lord, are they meeting the Lord? Oh, I do not ask you to go back to your different locations and gather two or three together to study certain kinds of Bible teaching; but I do ask you to go back and ask the Lord to constitute you corporately that which will have a spiritual impact and in which the Lord can be seen, the Lord can be found—of which it can be said, 'The Lord is there!' May that be true of us, wherever we are.

T. A-S.

A Way of Growth

I. Living "Before the Lord" and "Unto the Lord"

"But Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child . . . And the child Samuel grew on, and increased in favour both with the Lord, and also with men . . . And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli . . . And (Eli) said, What is the thing that the Lord hath spoken unto thee? I pray thee, hide it not from me . . . And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh; for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord" (1 Sam. ii. 18, 26; iii. 1,

17, 19-21).

THOSE fragments serve to indicate the growth of Samuel, and bring us to the matter of spiritual increase, enlargement, growth. The marks are quite simple and yet quite fundamental.

"Before the Lord"

"Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child." "Before the Lord." Like Another even greater, he grew up before the Lord, and it is of far greater importance than might be suggested by the little fragment of three words. That is the first thing that must be true of us—that our whole life is not lived

before men but primarily before the Lord; that there is always that about us which speaks of an inner life before the Lord. When we are alone, shut in our room with the Lord, then everything is very pure. We know quite well that there before Him there is no deception, there is no feigning and pretending, there is no unreality. We know quite well when we come into personal aloneness with the Lord that everything artificial is stripped off. There we know that we are seen through, we are thoroughly well known; we can put on no camouflage, no disguises, in the Lord's presence. There we are what we are, and we know it, and we make no pretence about it. And this is something which has got to be brought out in our lives when we come from the secret place with the Lord—that everything is to be as it is there before Him, as transparent, as clear, as true, as unfeigned as it is in His presence; no pretence, no makeup, no unreality, no false ways. We cannot be on stilts or on a pedestal in the Lord's presence. When we are with people we may put on a lot of things to cover up, to make believe; we may become very artificial. Even when we are praying in the presence of other people, we can be anything but natural. We are so conscious of them, and begin to preach to them in our prayer. We do not do that when we are alone with the Lord, we do not make up anything then. We are right down on the very bedrock of what we are, a certain kind of naturalness; we cannot be other than perfectly natural there. What we are as before the Lord we have to be when we are with people in public life. It is important, it is essential. You see, anything put on amongst people, anything artificial, is not our measure at all; it is a false measure, and it may be holding us up in true spiritual life and growth.

“Samuel ministered before the Lord.” We might well take that for every sphere and every hour of life. “Whatsoever ye do, work heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men” (Col. iii. 23). God said to Abram, “. . . walk before me . . .” That may be very simple in its terms, but it is something which has to do with a ground work for spiritual growth. People who are like that will go on, will grow.

The rest of the statement about Samuel is only fresh emphasis upon what that means—“being a child.” The Lord Jesus Himself put His finger upon that on one occasion. His disciples, grown men, were talking about big things, and high place; He took a little child and set him in the midst and said, “Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. xviii. 3). ‘This is the way to enlarge-

ment. You are thinking about place, position, influence; you are thinking big thoughts; you have big ideas; but this is the way to true greatness—a little child: no assumptions, no pretensions.’ “Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child”; and then, of course, you are not surprised that he “grew on.”

“Unto the Lord”

Then the next thing—“Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli.” If we could put ourselves in Samuel's place, we should find that it was not easy for him in those days. Remember, Hophni and Phineas, Eli's two sons, were there. A most corrupt, base, iniquitous thing was happening, for which eventually they were slain in the judgment of God—a state of things utterly deplorable. Samuel might well have become a cynic, he might have become bitter and sour and critical. It is very easy when things are like that to be cynical, to be disgusted, and to have no interest in what we are doing, even though we ourselves are in no way compromising with the evil. If we must be in it, we simply do it because it is our job. Others involved in it are wrong and corrupt; but the work has got to be done, so without any interest at all, we just do it. But it seems that Samuel closed his eyes to a very great deal, and just kept them on the Lord, and his attitude was: ‘All around me is very evil, very corrupt, but I am here for the Lord; I am not doing this for the sake of these people, nor just for the sake of keeping this thing going; I am here, in the midst of it all, for the Lord.’ Thus was his spirit kept free from sourness and bitterness and cynicism. “Unto the Lord.” He ministered not to Eli, and not to Hophni and Phineas, and not to a mere procedure, to keep it going, but to the Lord.

Remember, that is a secret of growth. We may all have reason to say: ‘There is a good deal around me that I do not agree with and which I am sure is contrary to what the Lord would have; and a lot of people who are wrong and difficult around me, even of those who are the Lord's. If I were to take account of them I should give up and leave; but I am here to live unto the Lord, I am only doing it for Him, and so I intend to stay where I am.’ That is a way of growth. Eli was the embodiment of the religious order of his time, he was in the place of authority and for the time being had to be recognised as such, and Samuel was submissive. He was not trying to oust Eli, nor to condemn him; he was not all the time saying, ‘This whole thing is wrong, I have no place for Eli’—going about gossiping and spreading reports about Eli. It is so easy to

do that; because you find something wrong at headquarters, you can easily become disaffected and critical. Samuel was submissive. Later, even when he did not agree with the people's desire for a king, Samuel received commandment from the Lord to go and anoint Saul, and he obeyed, and afterward did all that he could to make it easy for Saul to do the right thing and to fulfil his mission. Samuel did not accept Saul, but he did not get in his way; he did not spread evil reports about him. He gave him a good chance. The attitude of Samuel to Saul is wonderful. He has not accepted Saul, nevertheless he is submissive for the time being to what has to be; and here before Eli, in a like spirit, he takes the submissive and subject position and ministers to the Lord. No wonder he grew.

You will not grow if you are observing the

faults and flaws and errors around you, especially in people who are holding superior positions, and if you are talking and spreading reports about them. The Lord will say, "If . . . thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness" (Matt. vi. 22, 23). Beware of getting an evil eye on someone—it will stop your own growth. Samuel did not eye Eli thus; he left Eli with the Lord and himself went on with the Lord. Lay such lessons to heart. Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli, in subjection and in patience, waiting until the Lord took steps to deal with that very difficult situation which must have been eating into Samuel's soul every day. It is our spirit that matters—purity, simplicity, earnestness, reality. That is what it means to grow, and to grow on.

T. A-S.

For Boys and Girls

Gospel Messages from the Antarctic (No. XII)

Jesus said ". . . love one another, even as I have loved you" (John xv. 12).

"The love of Christ constraineth us" (II Cor. v. 14).

". . . that I may by any means save some" (I Cor. ix. 22).

I KNOW you are wondering what was the reason which led our explorers to endure so many hardships and dangers on 'the worst journey in the world.' Well, it is time I told you. They were going bird's-nesting! They were looking for birds' eggs! You find it hard to believe, but it is true. Let me explain.

Scientists had certain theories about the origin of birds, and they hoped that if they could examine the eggs of a certain bird called the Emperor Penguin they would be able to prove their theories. This particular bird lived only in the Antarctic region, and nobody had ever found any of its eggs. Some years before our story, Capt. Scott had been to the Antarctic and had found a large number of the birds living on the ice in a certain bay. It was spring-time—the season when most birds lay their eggs—but in this case all the eggs had already been hatched and only young birds, not eggs, were found. From this it was concluded that these birds must lay during the winter season, and that if any eggs were to be obtained someone must go in the bitter cold and darkness of winter to find them. That is what our explorers were doing.

I have told you something of their sufferings and adventures on their journey. They even-

tually arrived in the neighbourhood where the penguins lived. Then some of their worst troubles began. It was necessary for the men to get down to the ice on the seashore at the foot of high, ice-covered cliffs. They made one attempt and failed. The next day they tried again and succeeded. There they found a number of the birds, some of them with eggs. They collected five eggs—as many as they could take with them on their perilous journey—but broke two of them on their way back up the cliffs. What precious things the three remaining eggs were! No gold could have bought them—only the sufferings and endurance of the explorers could have obtained them. You would expect that those eggs would be amongst the most treasured things in the world to-day. Well, they were eventually brought home to England and examined by expert scientists, with results which were rather disappointing to the scientists. What they had hoped to find they did not find. I do not know what has become of the eggs—most likely they were thrown away long ago or, at best, they may have been preserved in a museum somewhere as objects of interest for the few people who care to look at them. We should honour very highly the men who acted so courageously in the cause to which they had given themselves; but, apart from the magnificent example which they set us, I wonder whether the world is really any better off to-day than it was before, in spite of the suffering endured in finding the eggs. We are bound

to ask the question—was it worthwhile? All that I can say is that I should be very sorry to pay so great a price for so little result. It reminds us of the melancholy words of one who said: "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was no profit . . ." (Eccles. ii. 11). What a tragedy, if, after labouring and suffering, anyone has to make such a confession! We need to be sure that our lives are devoted to that which is profitable, and the only way to ensure that is to ask God to keep us in the way of *His* will—not our own will or the will of other people—doing always those things which are well-pleasing to *Him*. What *is* His will? What *is* worth doing? Many answers might be given, but I am going to give only one of them here.

You will remember that in one of our talks together we spoke of the Lord Jesus Christ and the costly road that He travelled for our sakes. He counted no suffering too great, and endured even the death of the Cross in order to save us from our sins, because He loved us. What He accomplished by His death and resurrection was great enough to save *everybody*, but people could not enter into the benefit of what He had done for them unless they knew about it—and they could not know unless they were told. And so almost the last words that He spoke to His disciples before He went back to heaven were these: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations . . . and lo, I am with you always" (Matt. xxviii. 18, 19). He needed His disciples to tell others about Him, but He promised that He Himself would be with them all the time, though unseen—ready at every moment to work for them if they trusted Him; to guide them to the right people, to give them wisdom, to strengthen them to bear all the trials encountered, and to overcome for them all the power of evil that rose up against them. Ever since then, men and women who love Him have been telling others the good news, seeking to win hearts to Him. Many of God's faithful servants have left their homes and loved ones in order to go forth to distant places to make known what the Lord Jesus has done for men. I expect you have read the life stories of some missionaries and will know how greatly some of them suffered—many of them even unto death. Others suffered in less obvious ways—in having to live among people of evil and unclean habits, to endure patiently the foolishness of ignorant people, to bear cheerfully the loss of their possessions, and

very often to be misunderstood and misjudged by the very people whom they sought to help. Why did they go into such conditions? Why did they not turn back and give it all up when they found how difficult the way was? The answer is that the love of God Himself was in their hearts, and they had come to share His desire for those who so greatly needed what He only could give them. His love reaches to every single one in all the world, for it is His will "that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. ii. 4). You remember the Lord Jesus often spoke about sheep. On one occasion, speaking of Himself as if He were a shepherd with some of His sheep gathered safely around Him, He said "Other sheep I have . . . them also I must bring." (John x. 16); and in the parable of the lost sheep He likened Himself to the shepherd who leaves all the rest of the flock and goes after that which is lost, "*until he find it*" (Luke xv. 4). What a great deal is contained in that word 'until'! Patience, endurance, perseverance, courage, longing, suffering—who can tell how much may be involved? And all this is explained by one fact—the heavenly Shepherd loves His sheep.

And it is He Who says to those who love Him, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel" (Mark xvi. 15). If we change the thought from sheep to eggs, in order to fit in with the story of our explorers, it is as if He said, 'There are some eggs that I very specially want to be found and brought to me. I want you to go and find them.' If you and I know that He is saying that to us, and if we are to succeed as the explorers did, then we must be ready to endure as they endured, and to pay the price of success. The difficulties we shall encounter may not be physical ones like cold and darkness, cliffs and crevasses, storms and blizzards—though many of God's servants are meeting exactly that kind of trial in their work—but we shall certainly meet the equally real difficulties of cold hearts, darkened minds, steep descents into places of humbling and ridicule, all kinds of pitfalls into which Satan tries to make us fall, and the howling winds and blinding blizzards of doubt and discouragement. Shall we give up because of them, or keep on until we find that which we seek? I fear most of us will give up very quickly unless we love as the Lord Jesus loved; and the only way we can do that is by having His own love shed abroad in our hearts—loving others with the same love with which He loves us and them. The very nature of that love makes it to desire the salvation of others, and so it will stir us up to seek them, to lead them

to Christ. It will make us willing even to suffer ourselves if only they can be brought to Him. It will give us strength far beyond our own, and enable us to continue when we should otherwise give up. His love is the greatest power in all this world—and we may have it working in our hearts if we will.

Have you yet started on this kind of 'bird's-nesting'? It is certainly work worth doing, and not at all like "vanity and a striving after wind." It will bring joy to the hearts of all concerned—including God Himself—and the results will last for ever and ever. The 'eggs' to be sought are the lives of others whom the Lord longs to have for Himself. Will you ask Him to teach you how to do this work? The first thing to ask is that He will fill you with His own love. All else will follow after that. There are many 'eggs' quite near to us—the people we live with, or whom we meet every day—and we must begin by seeking them; but God may want some of us to go to those who

are further away. Are you willing to go if He calls you? Will you hold back because of the difficulties, or turn back when once you have started? Or will you trust Him to take you triumphantly through to the end? I should like to think that as you read these words you will hear His voice saying to you "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" and that you will answer "Here am I: send me" (Isaiah vi. 6, 8).

I think it will be found that the one whose heart is most filled with the love of God and who most willingly 'lays down his life' in seeking others for the Lord Jesus will be the first to reach the South Pole of the land we are exploring. May the Lord make us all very keen and capable at 'bird's-nesting'!

Lord, lay some soul upon my heart,
And love that soul through me;
And may I humbly do my part
To win that soul for Thee.

G. P.

"Behold, My Servant" (I.)

"Behold, my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry, nor lift up his voice, nor cause it to be heard in the street. A bruised reed will he not break, and a dimly burning wick will he not quench: he will bring forth justice in truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set justice in the earth; and the isles shall wait for his law" (Isa. xlii. 1-4).

I HAVE found the Lord putting it into my heart quite strongly to say something about the service of God; and I think we can gather it under that first clause—"Behold, my servant." Of course, here the words are prophetically related to the Lord Jesus. There is no doubt about that, because they are actually quoted in the twelfth chapter of the Gospel by Matthew, verses 17 and 18—"... that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, Behold, my servant whom I have chosen; my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased"; and there are other passages in the New Testament which are a repetition in part of these very words.

But then, as you go on from chapter xlii of Isaiah's prophecies, you find the same word used very frequently in relation to Israel. You have only to glance through chapters xliii, xlv and xlv to find the constant reiteration—"O Jacob, my servant," "Thou art my servant." But you find that Israel failed in the service, and it was after Israel's failure that the Lord Jesus as the servant actually came in according

to this prophecy, and He took up that wonderful Divine purpose and vocation which it had been God's will for Israel to fulfil—a testimony to the nations. He, the Lord Jesus, became the great, inclusive, model servant of the Lord, fulfilled the service, and then passed it on to the Church. There is a very real and quite true sense in which Christ and His Body, the Church, now is the servant of the Lord, so that it can be said—or should be able to be said—of Christ in the Church "Behold, my servant"; that is, as to Divine principle and purpose. The Church is called in to take up that service of the Lord Jesus and carry it out, and it has to do with a purpose of God which is in the nations. In the familiar words of Acts xv. 14—"to take out of (the nations) a people for his name."

Now, we shall take the Church's vocation in representation, the representation being found in three men. These men are, in principle, the dispensation in which we are living, according to God's mind; that is, they are representative of this particular dispensation which is the dispensation of the Church.

Do remember that in this dispensation we have everything in fulness. You may not think so, but we have everything in fulness. In the dispensations before, we had but figures, and every figure or type was in limitation, and failed at a certain point. Great as they were, even Abraham and Moses and the rest were but figures, and did not carry the purpose through to realisation. In this dispensation, we have them all brought to fulness in the

Lord Jesus. If they were servants in the house of God, we have the "Son" in this dispensation. Service is brought to its fullest and its best in the Lord Jesus. Everything is carried through from the partial, the imperfect and the failure of past dispensations to completeness in this, embodied in the Lord Jesus and transferred to the Church, and that means that service in this dispensation ought to be on the very highest level. It ought to be something very much better than the service of past dispensations.

Now, these three who represent the dispensation in principle so far as the Church's vocation is concerned are, as you guess, Paul and Peter and John, each of them embodying one of the great principles of service.

Paul: The Sovereignty of God (a) In Election unto Service

Paul immediately comes right into line with Isa. xlii. 1—"Behold, my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen . . ."; and what a long way back that word 'chosen' goes! Where Christ is concerned, it goes far, far back beyond the bounds of time—the Father's choosing, electing and appointing of His Son, the elect of God, the chosen of God. Paul comes in as the embodiment of that principle in the Church. In him the Church takes up the first principle of service as to Christ—election. "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles" (Acts ix. 15). He is an elect vessel; and while Paul's special election had to do with his particular function, it was only an aspect of the more general principle of election where the Church is concerned. He makes that perfectly clear later in his letters to the Romans and to the Ephesians. "Called according to his purpose" (Rom. viii. 28); "he chose us in him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. i. 4). The Church is an elect vessel, foreknown, predestinated before the world was; and not in relation to salvation, for election—predestination—is not unto salvation. Salvation only comes in the line of it. It does not apply primarily to salvation; it applies to purpose—predestination unto Divine purpose; that is, that God must realise His purpose and therefore He must have a vessel for it. He cannot go on without such a vessel and so He secures it from all eternity. Election is unto purpose. I repeat, Paul was the embodiment of the principle that the eternal choice of the Lord Jesus Christ is transferred to the Church in relation to the service of God, so that when Paul brings the Church into full view, he shows that it is unto a heavenly and eternal vocation. He traces its spiritual history right back to before time began and carries it

right on into the ages of the ages, and says that the Church, planted right there in the eternities, stands for a special vocation, to serve God in a particular purpose dear to His heart.

The Apostle breaks that up and applies it to every individual member of Christ, and says in many more words than this—'If you have been apprehended by Christ, if you know yourself to have been called into the fellowship of God's Son, if you are a member of Christ's Body, you are that on the ground of election, of eternal choice for a purpose. There is bound up with your life a great service, you are a part of a great vocation eternally predestined by God. You are in "Church" service, you are an elect vessel.' It is a tremendous thing to grasp that; it accounts for and explains a very great deal—far more than we are able here even to suggest. But let us note that there is a sovereignty which lies behind our being in our present relationship to the Lord Jesus. "Ye did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you" (John xv. 16). There is a sovereignty lying behind our being here, and what a lot we owe to that! If it had been left to us, where should we be to-day? What would have happened to us? Thank God for that sovereignty which, having girded us, follows us up, and when we deviate and wander, girds us again, and we find ourselves back again and again and again. There is a sovereignty girding us. Let us make more of it. It will bring a rest into our hearts, it will take an over-amount of anxiety from us, and a wrong sense of responsibility. Our responsibility begins and ends with complete abandonment to the Lord, and trust in Him, and obedience where He shows it to be necessary. The rest is with Him, and His sovereignty has undertaken to perfect that which concerns us, and to relieve us of the very great deal of anxiety and worry and fret and burden which results from our taking upon ourselves what is God's responsibility. I think that we have not yet fully realized how great our God is. The God that we have made is very much after our own mind. We need that He should be enlarged in our own apprehension.

It was the very last thing that ever Saul of Tarsus thought of, imagined or intended, that he should be a servant of Jesus Christ; and because it was so foreign to his mind, to his will, to his intention, he was always afterwards striking this note—'I was apprehended of Christ Jesus; it was the Lord Who did it.' It is one of those sure planks under his feet, one of those things which give him such confidence, such assurance, as he goes on. 'I did not take this thing up, it was not my choice; the Lord did this in His sovereignty.' So Paul

becomes the very embodiment of this Church principle, this dispensation principle—that the Church is chosen in relation to a purpose of God, and we are here because of that.

But it is the purpose that governs, it is the service that governs. We are not here elected to be Christians. If we were, we could sit down, fold our arms and do nothing, and say: 'We are Christians, not by our own will, but God made us such, so, all right, we leave it at that.' Remember, election is unto vocation. It is "My *servant*" which is related to "whom I have chosen." Election is in relation to *service*.

(b) In Governing the Fulfilment of Vocation

Then, again, this sovereignty governs the fulfilment of the vocation. See this man Paul. He is an elect vessel. He has to bear the Name "before the Gentiles, and kings, and the people of Israel" (Acts ix. 15). Note—he is not going just to preach Christianity; he is going to bear the Name, to carry that Name out to the Gentiles, to the nations. He will meet something, for it is in the nations that the prince of this world has his concern, and any name but his name will be unwelcome. Carry the name of Jesus as Lord and King before kings such as they were in Paul's time, and say to them, 'Jesus Christ is Lord'—and see what you will meet. If it needs any stronger emphasis, take the name of Jesus to the people of Israel. We know what happened when Paul bore the Name in those three realms, and particularly before the people of Israel with their prejudice and bigotry and hatred of the Name. Paul found himself dogged everywhere he went by that bitter antagonism of the Judaisers, but he finished his course. He said, "I have finished the course" (II Tim. iv. 7). In words used by his Master, he could have said, on exactly the same basis and principle, "I lay down my life . . . no one taketh it away from me" (John x. 17-18). He ought to have died literally a hundred times, but he did not. He finished his course, he completed his service, he rounded it off, and, although he had to place his head upon the executioner's block and men slew him, it was in reality his offering of himself. The sovereignty which chose carried through to the fulfilment. Oh, take all that you can out of this; it is true. How often we have been tempted to feel that we should never finish our work, that we have come to an end prematurely, that circumstances, difficulties, adversities, sufferings, afflictions, trials, were going to bring an untimely end to our ministry, to our spiritual vocation! But here the word comes that there is a sovereignty which, having chosen, also

governs the fulfilment. And it will be true of every servant, every member of Christ, who abides in Him. God saw to it that, having been called, they fulfilled their ministry. No matter what happened from the nations or from kings or from the people of Israel, they fulfilled their ministry. They had a mandate from heaven and no man could cut it short. It is as true of the Church as of Paul or of Jesus Christ. It is a Church matter. It only becomes an individual matter in that related way; but it is true.

(c) In Governing Circumstances

So the sovereignty governs the circumstances. "To them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose" (Rom. viii. 28). There is election, and there is the sovereignty of God coming in over and through circumstances to make the circumstances serve the end. The circumstances of a Philippian jail further the Gospel. Circumstances of shipwreck fulfil the purpose of God. Everything that Paul catalogues of adverse circumstances—including treacherous brethren—of it all he says, "I would have you know . . . that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel" (Phil. i. 12). It speaks of sovereignty taking hold of circumstances where the purpose is concerned. This is all a part of the election.

That is not all that might be said about Paul, but it brings very strongly into view this principle of this dispensation where the Church is concerned, that election operates in relation to purpose.

Peter: The Formation of the Servant

As to Peter, what does he represent so far as the service of God is concerned in this dispensation? I do not think there is any more fitting word than the word 'formation.' Peter became a great servant of Jesus Christ. He did serve this dispensation tremendously. If there was one man of all the apostolic circle who needed to be made a servant, needed to be formed, it was Peter. What rough material he was! How raw he was! Yes, there was roughness, there was ignorance, instability, unreliability about him. He was not of the learned, the sophisticated; there was nothing of that about Peter; but he became a mighty servant of Jesus Christ, and everybody had to take note that this ignorant and unlearned man had become remarkably instructed and qualified and capable; that this man, who at one time shrank when a little servant maid associated him with Jesus, had now become full of courage. This man, who at one time was any-

thing—but like a rock, is now a rock. Oh, how great was the formation in this servant!

We are chosen, elect, in Christ, and all the sovereignty of God lies behind that if only we come into place and into line. It does not mean that there is nothing to be done in us. There is a great deal of formation needed. We know that; probably we are far too obsessed with that side of things. We are very depressed about our being so unfit, unqualified if not disqualified. But the same sovereignty that elected worked out in formation, saw to it that the ignorant man became an instructed man, the weak man became a strong man, the man so rough and so raw became one of God's gentlemen. I detect that fine trait in Peter as he grows older. "As our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote unto you" (II Pet. iii. 15). That is the man whom Paul withstood to his face. He might have held a big grudge against Paul, and always felt the sting of that withstanding, but no—"our beloved brother Paul." He is a gentleman, at any rate. He is too big for spitefulness, revenge and pettiness. God has done a big thing.

The only thing to ask now is, are we makeable, adjustable, formable? God will do it; the same sovereignty will make us able ministers.

John: Spirituality Expressed in Love

Finally, John; and what is John as far as principle is concerned? He can be summed up in one word—spirituality. He was a man who had marvellous capacity for seeing through things, never taking things just as ends in themselves, beginning and ending with the things. In his Gospel, it is like that all the way through. John has laid hold of things. Yes, Nathanael under his tree, the marriage in Cana of Galilee, the interview with Nicodemus, the woman of Sychar, the impotent man lying by the pool of Bethesda—all the way along he is taking hold of these incidents and looking right through and giving you a spiritual principle in every one. He is not satisfied simply to narrate happenings; he is saying that those

things contain spiritual value and meaning. That is the value of John—his spiritual perception. He is not living on the surface, he is getting the inner meaning of things, and passing on those spiritual values to the Church. Much might be said of John and his spirituality. It is something that is very necessary in the matter of true service.

The Church is not just an earthly institution, a temporal order. The Church is the embodiment of great, heavenly, spiritual truths and values. You have to get through all these externalities and formalities to spiritual principles and meanings, and when you get there you are touching life. And that word 'life' is one of John's great words.

If we were to sum up spirituality in one word, we should say spirituality is pre-eminently expressed in love. That is John. We may have the tongues of men and of angels, we may have the gift of prophecy or any other gift, but if we have not love we are not spiritual people. Love is characteristic of truly spiritual people, and that is the great vocational power. "By love serve one another" (Gal. v. 13). Love is the key to true service. We never get far on the basis of legalism. It is love that builds up. It is love that is the real power of God amongst men, to convict and convince.

"Behold my servant . . . my chosen." Yes, behind the service to which we are called is a sovereignty operating, bringing us into the fellowship of God's Son with a great purpose in view. (I have not dwelt upon the purpose in its details; I merely state the fact of a great purpose to which we are called.) That sovereignty is operating in making us meet for the Master's use. God is going on with the work sovereignly. He is forming us; and in that same glorious election He is seeking to make us spiritual people, as His Church is a spiritual thing. That means that it is not simply some framework. It is the embodiment and the transmitting of spiritual, eternal values. They are the things that matter. The spiritual is the real.

T. A-S.

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The Manifold Grace of God

"GRACE to you and peace be multiplied" (I Pet. i. 2).

"Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the GRACE that should come unto you" (I Pet. i. 10).

"Wherefore girding up the loins of your mind, be sober and set your hope perfectly on the GRACE that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (I Pet. i. 13).

"For this is acceptable (GRACE, Gr.), if for conscience toward God a man endureth griefs, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye sin, and are buffeted for it, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye shall take it patiently, this is acceptable (GRACE) with God" (I Pet. ii. 19-20).

"... according as each hath received a gift, ministering it among yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold GRACE of God" (I Pet. iv. 10).

"Likewise, ye younger, be subject unto the elder. Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another: for God resisteth the proud, but giveth GRACE to the humble" (I Pet. v. 5).

"And the God of all GRACE, who called you unto his eternal glory in Christ, after that ye have suffered a little while, shall himself perfect, establish, strengthen you" (I Pet. v. 10).

THUS we have the keynote to the whole letter found in the word *grace*. It is a word which has several different facets. Sometimes it is used in the sense of graciousness—graciousness of manner and attitude, a sense of beauty, causing pleasure to others. Sometimes, as in the great doctrine of the grace of God, it is that favour which is shown where there is nothing to warrant it—set over against a situation which is altogether unworthy of any kindness and goodness; the grace of God as favour unmerited in forgiving actual debt. That is the great doctrine of grace. Then sometimes it is used, in a very simple form, of being in a state of grace. And then, finally, it is used in the sense of strength and support—"My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness" (II Cor. xii. 9). So it is a word used in the New Testament in these different ways, and here in this brief letter of Peter which we can read right through from beginning to end in a few minutes, we have all those aspects of grace brought before us.

Grace is the great theme of Peter, and that

in itself is significant, when you think of Peter. If there is anybody who should have written about grace, it is Peter. He writes out of his heart. The first word in the second verse of the first chapter is like the spring. It is the spring of grace rising up. It is there inclusive. "Grace to you and peace be multiplied." That is general. As the spring becomes a stream through the letter, it seems to break out into these various aspects, having these different meanings.

Grace as a Ground of Confidence and Assurance

So you come to the two passages in the tenth and thirteenth verses of that first chapter. "Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you." "Set your hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Here we have grace as a great ground of expectation, of confidence, of assurance. It is unto us in this dispensation that the great grace of God, in its full content and full meaning and full purpose, is brought to light. The prophets knew that there was some tremendous thing in store for someone. It was fixed by God that some people should come into something very great; and here it says that we are those people, we are the people in the eternal counsels of God. A people in this dispensation were to come into the full meaning of Divine grace, and the full meaning is just glimpsed with the appearing of the Lord Jesus. Here is grace as a great basis of confidence and assurance that the thing is fixed in its fulness in the dispensation in which we live, and the prophets were in a state of anticipation and not realisation. They had not the assurance that it was for their time, but it was for somebody sometime. We have that assurance. The grace of God has come and is coming to us in His fixed counsels in all the fulness of its meaning.

Grace in Conduct

Then you pass into chapter two, verses 19 and 20. Here we have a strange thing that the translators have done. It is very difficult to know why they have done it. They have twice translated exactly the same Greek word into the word 'acceptable.' Properly read, it should be—"For this is grace, if for conscience toward God a man endureth griefs, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye sin, and are buffeted for it, ye shall

take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye shall take it patiently, this is grace with God." I suppose the translators thought that it sounded a little strange and so they made the change. But there is the word. So here grace becomes a matter of our conduct. One of the outflowings of this grace is expressed in how we behave under trial, under adversity. The grace of God is to express itself in this way. How easily we take offence, get upset, retaliate, want our rights established, get under the weather when we are misunderstood, when our motives are misinterpreted—when we meant well but it has been construed that we had some other motive—when something is brought upon us without any foundation at all. We can go down under that, or we can flare up under that, to get even and to establish ourselves; or we can quietly, humbly, suffer inside and go on without showing any spleen at all—just go on. This is grace. And the great example is the Lord Jesus Himself—" . . . leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps: . . . who, when he was reviled, reviled not again " (I Pet. ii. 23). He showed no retaliation in spirit. That is the grace of God. That is grace in the matter of conduct.

Grace in Character

We pass to the next two references. "As each hath received a gift, ministering it among yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." "Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another: for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." Here grace touches down deep—deeper than our conduct. It goes down to our character; and here the opposites are the proud and the humble. Pride and humility are character factors. We may have a feigned humility that is not true humility. Humility is really something which is the very nature of Christ in us, and so grace here becomes a matter of character, showing itself in humility.

He gives grace to the humble and resists the proud.

The Source of All Grace

Then finally, chapter v. verse 10: "The God of all grace, who called you unto his eternal glory in Christ, after that ye have suffered a little while, shall himself perfect, establish, strengthen you." "The God of all grace." In the light of all that the Apostle has been saying, the summing up in this phrase, "the God of all grace," is intended, I think, to provoke courage. God is the God of all grace. There is grace in God for everything. Do not give up, do not lose heart. There is grace for every situation. Be of good courage—He is the God of all grace.

That statement and chapter ii. 12—" . . . having your behaviour seemly among the Gentiles; that, wherein they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation"—is in the light of the various difficulties and trials to which these believers and ourselves were and are being subjected. It is when faith is tried, when circumstances are difficult—they speak evil against you falsely, and other things are present which create a set of difficult circumstances—when you are suffering for 'conscience' sake, and when you are assaulted by the enemy who goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (v. 8); then remember that the God of all grace called you, and so there is grace for everything, for all situations and all demands. It seems as though i. 2 is the spring, then there is the stream breaking out in its varied applications and meanings and values, and then it seems as though all converge into the sea—the God of all grace; the spring, the distribution over the whole land to meet every situation, and then the coming back and flowing into the great ocean—the God of all grace for all situations

T. A.-S.

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