



A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

"A Candlestick of Pure Gold:
of Beaten Work"

Exodus 25: 31.

"The Testimony of Jesus."

Rev. 1: 8.

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THIS MINISTRY

THE OBJECT OF THE MINISTRY of this little paper, issued bi-monthly, is to contribute to the Divine end which is presented in the words of Ephesians iv. 13 — "... till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge (lit. full knowledge) of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we be no longer children . . ."

It is not connected with any "Movement", "Organization", "Mission" or separate body of Christians, but is just a ministry to "all saints". Its going forth is with the prayer and hope that it will so result in a fuller measure of Christ, a richer and higher level of spiritual life, that, while bringing the Church of God into a growing approximation to His revealed will as to its 'attainment' it may be better qualified to be used of Him in testimony in the nations, and to the completing of its own number by the salvation of those yet to be added by the Lord.

This ministry is maintained by the Lord through the stewardship of those who value it. There is no "subscription", but gifts can be sent to the Editor, "A Witness and A Testimony", 13, Honor Oak Road, Forest Hill, London, S.E. 23, England. All cheques should be made payable to 'Witness and Testimony A/c'. The paper is sent only to those who personally desire it, and we count on friends to advise us if this is no longer the case, or if they change their address.

"Personal" letters should be addressed to Mr. T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.



JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1951.

No. 1. Vol. 29.

THE EDITOR'S LETTER

Beloved of God,

As we send out this, the first issue of the 29th year of this printed ministry, we do want to do several things.

Firstly, to acknowledge with deep worship and wonder the faithfulness and grace of God through these years. We are not exaggerating when we say that there has been a very real manifestation of the "exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward", for the enemy has drawn upon all his resources of force, cunning, and malignancy, by every conceivable method, to destroy and end this ministry. We could say that if the enemy *could* have forced us under or out, that is certainly where we should be. It is with no little meaning and background that we say "having received help from God we continue unto this day". Certainly, it is not by the devil's sponsoring or favour that we have been kept in the way of life and steady enlargement. The Lord only knows at what cost the ministry has been maintained. "Unto him be the glory . . . for ever".

Then we want to say how greatly we value and appreciate the encouragement and inspiration which has been an unbroken river through the years from those who have received the ministry. Over against the widespread and saddening misapprehension, and opposition, it has been no small help to have letters—volumes of them—from 'ministers', 'missionaries', faithful and experienced servants of the Lord, and numerous children of His in many parts of the wor'd, telling of the value and enrichment which this ministry means to them. We do want *you*, dear friends, to know how much your fellowship has meant, and still does mean. For your encouragement, we want you to know that the ministry is steadily enlarging and expanding, as we believe it is deepening. By no advertisement, propaganda, or organised effort, in war and in—'peace' (?), it has been held on its course, and we are constantly astonished by hearing of the remote and altogether unimagined places to which it gets. The Lord has added to our facilities for printing the magazine and literature, but prayer is still *greatly* needed for both the protection and sustaining of plant and workers, and for further provision for overtaking the *very considerable* amount of literature which is ready to be printed. Please pray about this.

We do so strongly feel that, like the letters of the apostles, the literature fulfils a ministry far beyond what is possible personally. It will get in *where* persons cannot go. It will get in *when* doors are closed to persons. It will—as it has done—be a help to persons to fulfil their ministry. It will be a contribution to the Divinely-appointed and desired end—viz. "till we all attain unto the (full) knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. iv. 13). It is so little realised that the Lord's ordained and normal way is through a Church in life and oneness, and that the "fulness of Christ" is *the* goal of all. The great enemy is very busy against that, and more than ever—the end being so near—should the Lord's people be on their guard against the suspicions and misapprehensions which serve the enemy's purpose to divide, and thus defeat that great Divine end.

Days are darkening for this world. Souls are languishing and perishing, the number of the elect—

the people for His Name out of the nations—has to be completed. The saints have to be built up. To us there is a very real sense of urgency in all this, and we feel that we must—more than ever—‘give ourselves to our ministry’. So, we thank you for your fellowship; we entreat for redoubled prayer co-operation; and we greet you with the greeting of love in our blessed and glorious Lord.

Yours in His bond-service,

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.

THE GOSPEL OF THE GLORY

VII. THE MYSTERY OF THE GOSPEL

*“The mystery of the gospel” (Eph. vi. 19).
“I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God” (Acts xx. 27).
“... in whom also we were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will” (Eph. i. 11).*

WE have remarked that the mystery of the gospel relates to the deep and hidden counsels of God before creation. If we want to know what those counsels were, we have that given to us mainly in this letter to the Ephesians. There are three aspects of this whole counsel of God, or of this mystery of the gospel. In dealing with it, we are, of course, touching perhaps the most controversial matter that has ever come under the discussion of the Church and probably the most difficult thing that has to be resolved; indeed, I do not think that it can be resolved. We have simply to accept statements of fact. You will see what I mean as we go on.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ETERNAL COUNSELS

There are three aspects of this whole counsel of God, or of that which is called the mystery of the gospel, the mystery or the secret of the good news. Now, a secret is not a thing which lies on the surface; you have to get deeper down to find a secret. It means that there is something here in the good news of God that has a very deep meaning. If God has a secret, you may be sure that it is not some trifling matter. No, it is something tremendous; and the first aspect of this mystery, or secret, or whole counsel of God, is the mystery of the eternal counsels. What are those counsels? We must, of course, speak after the manner of men; but we must not try to bring such things within the limits of our understanding and knowledge. We do not know exactly how it happened, but what we do

know as a fact is this, that before the world was, God is represented as taking counsel with Himself, projecting an intention—a great, comprehensive intention—which is called here ‘the purpose’, ‘the eternal purpose’; a purpose, an intention, which has a centre and a circumference with a good many aspects of outworking and realization.

The centre was God’s Son, known to us as the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the pivot; that in the fullness of the times God should “*sum up all things in Christ*” (Eph. i. 10). That is very comprehensive, for if you have “all things”, you have all; you cannot add to that. “To sum up all things in Christ”. That is the heart of the purpose and of the counsel.

But then there is the marvellous statement—words around which there is so much controversy—that He saw *us*, He had *us* in His eye. When I say ‘us’ I refer to an elect company which at a certain time, in a certain dispensation in the history of this world, would be gathered out of the nations; and He foresaw every one of them. Now this is the mystery of the gospel, and it is beyond us. Imagination reels here; the statement seems almost fantastic. If the word means anything at all, those concerned were individually foreseen, foreknown and chosen in Christ, and foreordained and predestinated. Those are words you cannot overcome; every member of that elect body was foreknown, every member was predestinated. Now listen: predestination was not to salvation or otherwise—that is where so much interpretation has gone wrong. Predestination has to do with specific purpose, not with salvation. It is according to His purpose in Christ Jesus that we were foreknown and foreordained “*to be conformed to the image of his Son*” (Rom. viii. 29). We were predestinated with a purpose, and—marvellous to relate!—given to Christ. It is as though, before ever we had a being, before the creation, the Father had the Son and brought each one of us and gave us to the Son as His. Does that sound extravagant? Well, what

is the meaning of the Scripture? Have you read thoughtfully through the seventeenth chapter of John? What is the thing which is constantly recurring in that chapter? Repeatedly we read there of "*those whom thou hast given me*". And in another place He has said, "*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me*" (John vi. 37). It is tremendous in its implication. Those are the eternal counsels, this is the mystery of the gospel; and although that mystery, that secret, is said to be disclosed now, who of us has got to the bottom of it yet? I doubt whether any of us will get to the bottom of it in this life, but we have at any rate got it opened up. But this mystery of the gospel is so boundless, so unfathomable. Here are statements of fact concerning a people given to Christ in God's foreknowledge. I know, of course, your mental problem about election, but wait a minute; let us begin there, and we will come to the other in a minute.

That, then, is the first thing about the mystery, the wonder, of the gospel, the secret of God which was hidden from ages and generations but now made known (Col. i. 26). I say, that startles our imagination, but there it is; and we can do no more than point it out.

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE MYSTERY

(a) ESSENTIAL, DESPITE DIVINE FOREORDAINING

The second thing about it is the proclaiming of it. "*I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God*". And here in the end of this letter Paul is asking for prayer from believers that he may be able to open his mouth to utter this mystery, that he may have boldness to speak it (Eph. vi. 19); and does it not want boldness to say things like that! See what such preaching makes of Jesus Christ, see where it puts Him; all things summed up in Christ! Go out and say that to Mohammedans and see what they will have to say to you! Well, you want boldness to declare that to those who have not seen. However, the Apostle is concerned with the proclamation of the whole counsel, the mystery of God.

That proclamation brings us up against another matter. If eternal counsel is all this—foreseen, predestinated, given—then why proclaim the gospel? Surely it must happen if God has decided upon it! If it is all settled like that and they are given, why proclaim? Immediately you introduce the question of man's responsibility, and that seems to be a contradiction. That is the great theological trouble; but all I am going to say about that is this, that responsi-

bility in this matter of proclaiming does not undercut what we have just been saying about predestination. It does not mean for one moment that in putting before people an option you rule out predestination. No, you are put into the position of responsibility for declaring the whole counsel of God, and people are put into a responsible position by hearing it. The one truth does not neutralize the other.

It is the same in prayer. If God knows what He is going to do, why pray? Will it make any difference? But we cannot argue like that. We are told we have to pray, that is all. The responsibility comes back on us, although there is all this other side concerning the Divine counsels.

(b) A FULL GOSPEL ESSENTIAL TO FULL GROWTH

Then—and I want to say this very precisely—the full counsel of God is the only safe thing. I wonder if a very poor spiritual condition in converts, in Christianity, is not due to very inadequate preaching. Men are afraid to go too far, and they say, 'Preach the simple gospel of sins forgiven and judgment past and hope of heaven'—making the individual in question the object of it all instead of God's eternal counsels. Yes, the poor state amongst Christians is due to their not having been taught the whole counsel of God at the beginning. I do not believe that it is necessary to reserve the whole counsel until they reach some stage along the road where they can accept it. Why should we not go and declare to unsaved men that God from all eternity had them in view and has now come to tell them so, and to tell them why He had them in view, and what the great goal of it all is—His Son Jesus Christ? I think we should get better converts and a far better state in the Church. I believe that people should be very much better born than they are. Many are very poorly born, and their infancy is far, far too much extended in time. Well, Paul said to the Ephesians, "*I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God*"; and that was before he wrote his letter to them. Yes, a full counsel is the only safe thing. I must leave that there, we have a long way to go.

(c) THE MESSAGE ESSENTIALLY SPIRITUAL AND HEAVENLY

The next thing about this proclamation is that it must ever be kept in mind and in view that the gospel is an essentially spiritual and heavenly thing. When Paul speaks about the mystery of the gospel he does so in relation to all that he has been

saying about "in the heavenlies in Christ". "The heavenlies" is not merely a matter of location, it is the nature of things. Again, the trouble with ninety-nine out of every hundred Christians is that they are so earthly in their Christianity, so earthbound, and the gospel has become after all such a matter of temporalities—how it affects things here in time, and the temporal and material outworkings of Christianity. As we were saying in our previous meditation, the real measure of Christianity is the measure of spirituality, and that means the measure in which the Lord Who is in heaven is known and manifested in us here. Everything takes its rise from a Christ ascended to glory outside of this world. While He was here, He was limited—limited by everything, and most of all limited in the apprehension of those in closest association with Him. When He went to heaven and the Spirit came, they received marvellous enlargement of apprehension of Christ. It was no longer an earthly one, a temporal one. It had to be a spiritual one because He was outside of this world, He could not be seen with natural eyes; in no way was it possible to have any link or communication with Him other than by the Holy Spirit. It is a very wonderful statement that Peter makes in his letter—"whom not having seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Pet. i. 8). You do not see Him, yet He is most real to you. How does that come about? Because you went to Jerusalem or Capernaum and had an interview with Him? Not at all, you do not know Him in that way; your knowledge of Him is entirely spiritual. That may be true, of course, right at the beginning of the Christian life, but the principle of spirituality and heavenliness ought to mean more and more to us as we go on, as Paul wrote to the Colossians—"If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth. For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory" (Col. iii. 1-4).

And the need to-day of proclaiming the whole counsel of God lies firstly in the direction of the Lord's own people. They must know the whole counsel of God; they ought to have known it at the beginning. And then beyond them, the whole counsel of God must reach to the unsaved. But what do we find? We find this sad state in the

Church, and therefore the Church cannot lift the unsaved higher than its own level. We find the Church earthbound, tied up with things here in all sorts of ways, with vision purely earthly, on this low level. The great heavenly vision of that eternal thing which the Church has seen and is seeing purpose of God concerning His Son is not the and is therefore ministering. No, the Church has to be saved from its own earthly condition and to come to the original position of the Church, a purely spiritual and heavenly thing. The whole ecclesiastical system proves the truth of this. What a thing of earth the Church has become in respect of its ecclesiastical architecture, its buildings! And that is pointed to as evidence that the church is something! The more ornate, elaborate, impressive, the building, the greater evidence that the church is something! But that is purely earthly, it is not a bit necessary to real spiritual life and effectiveness. Indeed, very often the real spirituality is found in places very different, or in no place at all—the Lord's people gathered to Him under an opened heaven. That is where the testimony is.

(d) PREACHING DIRECTED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Then in this proclamation, the preaching must be directed or precipitated by the Holy Spirit. Why? For this very reason—and it is a principle that is borne out and shown us clearly in the book of the Acts—that only the Holy Spirit has the Divine knowledge as to where there are those given to Christ who are ready to come to Him. You cannot just go out willy-nilly and be sure of results. We have cited Paul in this matter and here is the principle stated. They were "*forbidden of the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia, and . . . they assayed to go into Bithynia; and the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not*" (Acts xvi. 6-7). Paul might go to Bithynia and Asia at another time, but not then. The Holy Spirit is in charge. "Forbidden of the Holy Spirit . . . the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not". Why? — that is for the sovereignty of God. When Paul came to Corinth, he was up against a terrific situation and the Lord the Spirit said to him, "*Be not afraid . . . I have much people in this city*" (Acts xviii. 9, 10). "I have", not 'I am going to have'. Do you see the working of eternal counsels and foreknowledge?

The whole book of Acts is constructed upon that principle. There is a lonely man crossing a desert. God in heaven has seen him and known that he is ready for the gospel, and sends Philip to make con-

tact with him. "Go near, and join thyself to this chariot". The issue is straightforward immediately (Acts viii. 26 - 40). Then away up in Caesarea there is a man praying; he is evidently asking the Lord to lead him on, to show him all His will. He is living up to the light he has, but he wants more. The Lord in heaven is taking notice of him. To Peter, away at Joppa, the Lord says, 'Go, make contact with that man who is ready' (Acts x). This is the sovereignty of the Spirit in relation to eternal counsels and foreknowledge. The point is that the Holy Spirit must precipitate the proclamation and govern it, or we waste a lot of time and effort. You cannot do this sort of thing by having committees and drawing up programmes. You must be a Holy-Spirit-governed instrument for this work. "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts xv. 28). It is like that all the way along. It must be a matter of the Holy Spirit in charge of things; the proclamation must be entirely governed by Him like that, and precipitated by Him.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE HEARERS

Yes, but then, you see, we come to this next thing—the responsibility of the hearers. In the mental realm this is another problem in the light of what we have been saying. Never mind, put that aside. The responsibility of the hearers. First of all, look at it in this way—the sovereignty of God which lies behind the very fact that the message has come across your path. It may be at work here at this very moment. Yes, away back there in those eternal counsels (this is no stretching of imagination) God saw you, and He said, 'I want that person for My full thought concerning My Son'; and here you are being told it, and all the eternal counsels of God may sovereignly be behind your receiving this message. But the point is this, you are here where the message is being proclaimed. Do you just happen to be here? God is consistent, and if He decides upon a thing in His counsels He works to it, and there it is. You say it just happens; but there it is—we are here, and it is that which begins our responsibility. Responsibility begins when God sovereignly puts His plan into operation and brings it across our path.

But you are saying, 'Man has a free will, and he can refuse in spite of God's predestinating'. That is where the clash comes. Yes, he can; but we are not talking about salvation at this moment, we are talking about the *purpose* of our salvation. Oh yes, we can refuse our salvation, and the clash is there between God's foreknowing and predestinating,

and our free will; we cannot resolve that. But here is the fact—that at this very moment God is telling us that we were called with a holy calling, that there is a tremendous thing bound up with our being saved. We can refuse the Lord what He intended; we can forfeit that which He had in view. You cannot reconcile these two things, but there they are, and there is a responsibility laid upon us. That is where that other side of the New Testament comes in, all the time warning, warning—"if", "if", "if"—and it is said every time to people who are already saved. There is a mighty 'if' constantly being pressed upon them; and are you going to say, as some, that you never know whether you are saved till you get to heaven? I am not going to accept that; I know I am saved. It is not a question that if you do something, you will be saved; and, after you are saved, if only you do something else you will keep your salvation. The 'ifs' relate to this purpose of your salvation, and you can miss that. That is where responsibility comes in on the side of the hearers. It is a mystery, true; but it is a fact.

But what does this amount to? what are we saying? Well, here you are; you believe in the Lord Jesus and believe you have eternal life; you are saved. But then the Lord comes along to you in His sovereignty and shows you that there is an 'unto' as well as a 'from'. It is a great thing to be saved from hell, from sin, from Satan; but now the Lord is saying that you were saved unto something; and if there is a lot from which to be saved, there is infinitely more unto which to be saved. Oh, it is the mighty 'unto' that governs this mystery of God. You see, the 'from' is incidental, the 'unto' is eternal. The mystery of God, our salvation, does not date back simply to when sin entered, the beginning was not the fall of man. Salvation overlaps that point and goes back to purpose—all these counsels of the Godhead before the creation and therefore before the fall. That is the object in view in the end, and God is working to that. He would have worked straight on to it, but man sinned and fell. Now God must make a dip in His course and reach down with salvation to bring back to His original intention. Salvation is in relation to the eternal purpose which was before the fall. It is 'unto', more than it is 'from'. 'From', I say again, is incidental—terribly, tragically incidental, but incidental; it is not the eternal. It is the 'unto' that is governing everything, that purpose of God. Of course, in the 'from', God clothed Himself with extra glory. In the letter to the Ephesians, we have the two things—"that we should be to the praise of his

glory" (i. 12), that is one thing; "the glory of his grace" (i. 6) is another thing. The glory of His grace is the extra that God gets when Satan interferes and man goes wrong. God is never beaten by wrong, He always gets more. So through grace, He adds to His glory.

But, mark you, that was not His intention in the beginning. I have had it said to me that God was glad when man sinned and fell, because it gave Him the chance He wanted of showing He was a gracious God. I repudiate that. No, not at all! Nevertheless, God cannot be defeated, and interference with His purpose cannot leave Him just where He was—He will get more every time. It will be the interferer who loses, and man's sin has only made possible extra glory to God along the line of grace; but it was not His intention, it was His triumph. And He is doing that with us all the way along; He is making good our need of grace in order to get extra glory to Himself. Through grace, He is getting glory where we are concerned.

GOD'S NEED ON EARTH OF A REPRESENTATION OF HIS FULL COUNSEL

(a) EXPERIMENTAL, NOT THEORETICAL

Now, God has set His heart upon having His whole counsel represented—that is the real heart of these meditations. God must have that whole counsel found in representation or He is defeated, and so He sets to work to bring those who will come, who will pay the price, into this position which, in the first place, satisfies Him, and in the second place, serves Him in that purpose; and a basic essential is a passion in our hearts for God's fullest thought. If He is going to lead us into it, He must have that response in us for His own satisfaction. Now in His dealings with us in this connection, He may lead us by permissive ways—ways, that is, which are less than His ultimate and full thought, and yet, in His permissive will, He will lead us by those ways. We find that in the sovereign government of our life we are led into something that is not wholly God's thought. That is true.

If you will allow a personal testimony, I can say with the utmost confidence that the years I spent as a denominational minister were the sovereign permissive will of God. It was right for me to be there at that time, although, as I came to see later, that realm of things was not God's full and final thought for me. But my coming to that fuller thought had to be on the basis of experience and not of theory. In that narrower realm I learned something of weakness and limitation, and disappointment, both

in myself and in the sphere in which I moved, which made me reach out for something better—I knew not what, and I would not have sought it but for the experience of disillusionment in the lesser realm. It was the lesser thing that made me cry out for an opened heaven, and for an order of things where I would not have to preach so many times a week simply because it was required of me as a duty, with all the terrible labour of trying to work up something to preach about—an order of things where ministry would be by revelation out from heaven, and only as and when the Holy Spirit gave and required it. Oh, the heart cry for deliverance from that old realm and order! And God in His mercy brought me through to something else on an experimental basis. Yes, God, in His sovereign permissive will, leads us in certain ways which are not His full thought at all in order to make our ultimate position to be based upon a real spiritual experience, and not upon a doctrine or a theory that we have taken on or that has been imposed on us. There are multitudes of Christians in doctrinal positions to-day which they know nothing about experimentally. They have accepted a tradition, a system of teaching; they are in it, they believe in it, but they know nothing about it in their own experience. That is not God's way.

The point for the moment is that we must be very careful that we do not take God's permissive will as His ultimate will. We must not say, 'The Lord led me into this, therefore I must stay and I must never move'. Be careful; you must always give God a free hand. He will not explain Himself at the time; He will seem to be contradicting Himself sometimes; you will understand later on. The thing is, never fix anything for God. If there is one thing that is made clear in the book of the Acts, it is this—God is not going to be tied up to men's ideas as to what He ought to do. That sheet let down from heaven in Peter's vision is a declaration that in heaven things exist which men will not allow here. Heaven's view is very different. Peter is going to argue this thing out with the Lord: "Not so, Lord". He might have added, 'and I can give Scripture for it! Lord, look at Lev. xi'. And the Lord makes it perfectly clear that He is not going to have anything of that. Sovereignty demands a clear road. God is always doing that sort of thing, and He demands that we shall be in such a position that He can do as He likes with us and we will not argue. That is the only way to fulness. If you are tied by your tradition, by your upbringing, by the thing that may have been of the Lord at one time, if you are tied with it and you say of it, 'as it was

in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, you cut clean across the path of the Spirit of fulness. It is only as we are open to the Lord without prejudice, without fixity, stretched right out to the Lord, only so shall we come into the full counsel of God.

(b) THE PURPOSE, NOT SELF, DOMINANT

You see the real starting point—the point which is the guarantee of fulness—is this, that everything is governed by God's purpose and God's will, and not by our need or our desire. We are called unto His eternal glory, we are called according to His purpose. If we are going to limit the gospel of salvation to just the meeting of our need, we are going to limit things. The full thing is not just to be saved from a fall, it is to be saved back to that which we missed in the fall—and that is not just a life marked by a certain kind of behaviour, but a mighty purpose of God. It is when we see that, and only as that becomes a dominant thing—God's will, God's purpose : not even my need, and certainly not my desire—only then are we on the highway to God's fulness ; and you will find, if you are going

[Concluded]

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

GOSPEL MESSAGES FROM THE ANTARCTIC (No. 25)

" Well done, good and faithful servant " (Matthew 25. 21).

" We call them blessed which endured " (James 5. 11).

THE AREA in which Oates died was about 170 miles from 'home'. This would have been a terribly long journey for the three remaining men—Scott, Wilson and Bowers—in their weakened state; but they had hope of help much nearer at hand. Less than thirty miles ahead was One Ton Depôt—a very large store where plentiful supplies of food and oil were sure to be found. If only they could reach there, they could stay for some time, resting their sick bodies, and yet without any fear of rations running short.

The greatest distance they had been able lately to cover in a day had been about five miles, so they needed five or six days to reach the depôt. They had with them food enough for not more than three or four days, and only a very little oil. When that oil was exhausted they would have no means of heating their food, and this fact alone would mean almost certain death. Moreover, by this time their

to be entrusted with the fellowship of the mystery, that will be the way the Lord will take you. You will constantly be coming up against this. We have to be governed by eternal purpose, not by what we think necessary, not by what we would like, even for the Lord.

This mystery of the gospel—we realise even now how it defeats every attempt to explain it ; but if we cannot grasp the terms, that is, if it does defeat our minds, let us open our hearts to the Lord on this simple but very sound basis—' Lord, there is something very great in Thy thought ; I see it is something infinitely more than that I should be saved. I do not grasp it, I cannot explain or understand it ; but it is something very great to which Thou hast saved me and called me in Christ ; and I want it, and I commit myself to Thee for all that. I trust Thy grace in whatever it may cost ; I trust Thy power to perfect that which concerneth me, to work it all out ; I commit myself to Thee for all Thy will, for all Thy purpose, for the whole counsel, for all that is so far beyond my apprehension ; Lord, work in me that which is well-pleasing in Thy sight '.

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feet were so terribly frost-bitten that they could walk only with the greatest difficulty. Added to this, the temperature remained intensely cold. One day, even when they might have gone a little further, they were forced to stop because of the bitter wind which blew dead against them. ' No human being could face it ', wrote Scott, ' and we are nearly worn out.'

But they struggled on heroically, until on March 19 they were within eleven miles of the depôt. They still had a very small supply of food and the last few drops of oil. They camped for the night, in bitter weather. The next morning a severe blizzard was blowing, and it was impossible for them to go outside their tent. While they waited they considered desperately what could be done. It was decided that their only chance was for Wilson and Bowers to set out as soon as the blizzard ceased, and try to reach the depôt and bring back some supplies to Scott, whose feet were now so bad he could not attempt the journey himself. But the blizzard continued all that day—and the next day—and the next—and the next. Hope was almost gone. Scott wrote that night: ' We must be near the end . . .'

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Have decided we will march for the depôt with or without our goods and die in our tracks'. This was written on March 23. *On March 29* they were still confined to their tent, for the blizzard had never once ceased during the whole ten days. Scott wrote: 'Every day we have been ready to start for the depôt, but outside the door of the tent it remains a scene of whirling drift. I do not think we can hope for any better things now. We shall stick it out to the end, but we are getting weaker, of course, and the end cannot be far. It seems a pity, but I do not think I can write more.'

And there, in their tent, only eleven miles from abundance, the three brave men died of starvation and cold. The blizzard was the last of the many trials which brought about their end. In all the story of the expedition there is no record of another blizzard to equal that one—and it came on the very day when they were about to make their final bid for safety!

It is far too mysterious for us to understand. The Word of God tells us, "As for God, his way is perfect" (Ps. 18. 30), so we must not for one moment charge God with foolishness or with unkindness. There must have been some very wise reasons why He did not cause things to fall out differently. Perhaps one of them was that He wanted you and me to learn something from the story of this tragic but magnificent failure. For it frequently happens in our Christian life that we have experiences of this kind. We set out with God upon a certain course, expecting to reach a certain end, and things do not turn out as we had hoped and anticipated. We have to confess that as far as we can see we have failed to reach the goal—not because we have been disobedient or careless, but simply because matters have 'gone wrong', and this in spite of much costly sacrifice on our part. In our recent talks together we have seen how needful it is not to be offended with the Lord because of His strange ways with us. But how shall we prove that we are not offended? *We shall go steadily on in the path of duty*, quitting ourselves like men (I Cor. 16. 13). It is one of the hardest things to do. An offended person will grumble, and give up; he will say, 'It is of no use going any further; the situation is hopeless and God is against me'. But the unoffended will say, 'I do not understand why matters have turned out like this, but I have a task to perform and I am going on with it faithfully, to the very end. If I fail I shall at any rate have done my duty to the utmost, and in the sight of God faithfulness is more precious than success'. Of course, you may say that Scott and his companions *had* to press on, or die of starvation. Yes—but I think it would have

been easier to lie down and die than to rise up and continue on their weary way. Despite all their misfortunes and the terrible cost of going on, they continued. Nothing could turn them aside or make them give up in discouragement and despair. They were faithful to their task, even unto death, and because of this they have received honour among men such as they would probably never have received had they had an easy path to success. How much it must mean to God when He sees His children concerned above everything else to go on faithfully in the pathway of duty. Faithful plodders are much more to Him than unreliable people who give up in face of the cold winds of discouragement—and some of the winds that blow upon us as Christians are as cold and bitter as any that Scott met on the Barrier! The blizzards of doubt and darkness wrap us around sometimes, with the purpose of making us give up; but the unoffended heart will say, 'I am ready to go on again, as soon as I can see my way, and I *will* go on, even if, like Scott, I die in my tracks'.

Faithful plodders—I think those two words contain our message this time. When things are going badly such people "hold on" their way (Job 17. 9). When tempted to feel that their work is in vain, they are "stedfast and unmoveable" (I Cor. 15. 58). When others would linger by the way, these will "go on" (Heb. 6. 1). They do not grow "weary in well-doing" (Gal. 6. 9). They "run with patience" the race set before them (Heb. 12. 1). They endure to the end (Matt. 24. 13). We ought all to be such people. But suppose the difficulties in the way seem too great for you to face? Well, plod on; you will very likely find the difficulties disappear when you come to them, as the women did who said, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the tomb?" (Mark 16. 3). But suppose you do not like the duties you have to perform? Plod on just the same; the duties will become less irksome if you accept them as from God's hand. But how long are you to continue plodding along that road? Until God shows you He wants you to go some other way. But suppose it is costing you very much to go on: must you go on whatever the cost? Yes, plod on, though it cost you everything. Your Lord has said, "Be thou *faithful unto death*, and I will give thee the crown of life" (Rev. 2. 10). He Himself was faithful unto death; He faithfully continued along the road of His Father's will for Him—a road beset with many and terrible trials and difficulties and which led Him to the Cross, at a cost to Himself beyond our power to measure, but with infinite blessing to others. But suppose that while you are doing everything

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you can, no one seems any the better for it? Still plod on, being faithful to your calling and in "patient continuance in well doing" (Rom. 2. 7); God probably sees values in what you are doing which you cannot see, and in the end He will say to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25. 21). Please note very carefully that His "well done" is for the *faithful* servant—not for the *successful* one.

Do you say that this is asking too much of you, because you are not a courageous and strong person like Scott and his companions, and that you cannot 'keep it up' as they did? Indeed, most of us are like you—weak and timid and easily defeated. But thank God there is a remedy for our weakness. The very strength of the Lord Jesus Himself is available to us. We may run our race "looking unto Jesus . . . who endured the cross, despising shame" (Heb. 12. 2); and the inspiration of beholding Him in His faithfulness will move us to trust Him, and as we look to Him in faith even the weakest of us can "be strong *in the Lord* and in the power of *his* might" (Eph. 6. 10).

Now, are you a faithful plodder? Can you see any matters in your life which God gave you to do but which you have given up because it did not seem worthwhile, or because it was too costly to

go on? If you can, then so far as those matters are concerned Scott and his men put you to shame; and if the story of your life is ever written, those matters will not be recorded as *glorious failures* which do you honour, nor will you receive for them from the lips of your Lord His "Well done, good and faithful servant", but rather He will have to say to you, "I have found no works of thine fulfilled before my God" (Rev. 3. 2). Be wise therefore, and take up again the unfulfilled tasks; plod on, whatever is involved; and ask the Lord that, even though you may not seem to have accomplished anything very wonderful, you may, by His grace, be found at the end of the journey numbered among those who were "called, chosen *and faithful*" (Rev. 17. 14).

The boy or girl who is a faithful plodder will never be a failure in God's sight, whatever men may think; and the one who is most faithful will be the first to reach the 'South Pole'.

Not to the strong is the battle,
Not to the swift is the race;
Yet to the true and the faithful,
Victory is promised through grace.

G. P.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

"And behold, one of them that were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and smote the servant of the high priest, and struck off his ear. Then saith Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into its place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt. xxvi. 51-52).

"And he said . . . But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise a wallet; and he that hath none, let him sell his cloak, and buy a sword" (Luke xxii. 36).

THERE seems to be a contradiction in those two passages—"Put up . . . thy sword . . . for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword"; "he that hath none, let him sell his cloak, and buy a sword." Whatever other explanations may be given to this seeming contradiction, I am going to ignore them and come down upon one particular point.

OUR WARFARE SPIRITUAL NOT PHYSICAL

It is clear that the whole of the subsequent

teaching of the New Testament about warfare relates to spiritual and not physical warfare. You call to mind at once passages that bear that out. "*The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God*" (II Cor. x. 4). "*Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood*" (Eph. vi. 12.) (There is a change of metaphor from fighting to wrestling. 'Wrestle' is a very good word, and means to sway to and fro. Our swaying to and fro is not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers.) Moreover, we nowhere find the apostles—those to whom these words were addressed or any others—with swords when they went out on their ministry. So we are brought back by these passages, not to a contradiction but to this position; on the one hand "put up thy sword", because our warfare is not with flesh and blood: if you have the idea of anything in that realm, you are wrong: put away the idea, as you are commanded to put away the sword which indicates that you have that idea; and on the other hand, sell your cloak and buy a sword, that is, address yourself to active participation in spiritual warfare.

THE REALITY OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE

In the first place, there is an emphasis upon the reality of spiritual warfare. We may know all there is to know as to Bible teaching on this matter, and we may be full of information about it, but the fact remains that you and I at times, because of certain things, forget that this is exactly what is happening at a given moment. We put down our trouble to other causes. We begin to look at people or at circumstances or at our own misfortunes and disappointments: we begin to attribute it to physical conditions, and all the secondary causes are made primary: when so often the fact is that a mighty spiritual conflict is going on now and we are in it. There *are* times when the strain is due to wrong relationships and the fault is ours: it then is of no use blaming the devil for that for which we are responsible. But there are times when we cannot make any secondary cause a primary cause; we cannot say the trouble is because of this or that. There is something that we cannot get at, something behind, something that we cannot lay our hand on. It may be coming through this or that means, but it is something extra to the people or the things. I do bring this re-emphasis to you and entreat that you will seek to bear it in mind. There is a warfare in heaven, and situations are created by this, and people affected.

When, in New Testament language, we speak of heaven, do not let us think of something far away, remote, somewhere in or beyond the clouds. The New Testament makes it perfectly clear that what is meant by heavenly warfare is in the very atmosphere all around us. The devil is spoken of as "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. ii. 2). Now, all the air is not above the clouds. It is where we are; we are breathing it now. The heavenlies are wrapping us around all the time, and this spiritual conflict is in the very atmosphere. If you need any illustrations of that, you have only to turn to the Old Testament. "Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see" (II Kings vi. 17), and when his eyes were opened, the very near things were seen to be encompassed about by forces erstwhile and otherwise unseen. It is heavenly, but for us the better word is atmospheric. We know a little about atmospheric in spiritual conflict; but even then it is not always outward and objective, because it is spiritual. Because we have a spirit, which is the medium of connection with that which is spiritual, this thing cannot always be said to be outside of us. It seems to be right inside sometimes. We must not

divide up outward and inward in that way, because flesh and blood are not barriers to spiritual conflict at all. Our bodies are not a bulwark against spiritual influences. They register them but they do not resist them. The conflict is very often inward, and so we feel this atmospheric thing right inside of us. It becomes very real, that is the point. The *reality* of this spiritual conflict is what I want to emphasize.

THE OCCASION OF THE CONFLICT—THE CHURCH'S DESTINY

(I). CONFLICT TO MAINTAIN FELLOWSHIP

In passing on, let me remind you that the occasion for this conflict is the destiny of the Church. All departments and realms of truly spiritual work come into touch with these spiritual forces in opposition, and this stands to be borne out and can be verified. The nearer we get to the great, eternal conception of God as to the destiny of the Church, the Body of Christ, the nearer we get to the antagonism of the enemy, and the more pronounced it will become. We shall meet spiritual antagonism in seeking to win souls for Christ because that is the beginning of this thing, but when the full thought of God in a corporate body, the Church, is brought into view, then the full challenge of the forces of evil is registered; because it is in the Church and in relation to the Church's destiny that the whole realm of Satan is to be met and overthrown. Hence, of course, the tremendous significance of corporate life. On the one hand, the enemy hates corporate life and will do anything to break it up, and always by the simplest means possible *whenever these will succeed*. If you are a moody person, just a mood—"I don't feel like it"—and you very soon fall out of the corporate life. That is all the enemy needs very often with some people to put them out, and he strikes a blow at the very destiny of the Church by the moods and temperamentalism of Christians. And if on simple lines he cannot succeed, he will press to the more complex or highly developed forms, just to destroy the relatedness and fellowship of the people of God; therefore fellowship and relatedness become a battleground. Some think fellowship is a kind of picnic, a religious festival, having a good time. Praise God for all the joy and blessedness of fellowship, but it goes far beyond that, and it is more a matter of real battle, warfare. A field of desperate conflict is the maintaining and preserving of true inward heart fellowship with all other Christians—not with just the sort that we like,

but with all.

We have to think this matter out sometimes when it comes to difficulty with regard to some, and we have seriously to get before the Lord and say, 'How can I find a ground of going on with So-and-so? I have to eliminate this, ignore that, refuse to come on to certain ground with them and keep on other ground, but at all costs I must go on.' The battleground of fellowship is very real, and fellowship is truly a great factor in this spiritual conflict. Do remember it. Fight for it, stand for it and withstand for it, and, having done all, stand for it.

(II.) CONFLICT IN CORPORATE PRAYER

And of course as a part of that there is the great corporate function of prayer. We know that this matter of spiritual warfare is carried into the realm of prayer. "*With all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints*" (Eph. vi. 18). We perhaps need to be reminded from time to time that our seasons of coming together for prayer are not just to ask the Lord for a lot of things. Let me be clear here. We have, of course, to be definite with the Lord and to ask Him for things; but what things? We look at the book of Daniel, and we find that Daniel was stretched out for three whole weeks fasting and praying, giving himself to prayer. What was he asking for? He was asking for things, yes, but what things? He was asking for the fulfilment of the great purposes of God. He knew the great purposes of God in relation to God's people, for he had acquainted himself with them. He had said earlier that he "understood by the books" (Dan. ix. 2). He knew the details God had given to other servants of His, and, more than that, he knew that he too was related to those purposes; they were in his own heart. It was because those purposes of God were at the time in a state of apparent suspension, because there was a contradiction to God's intention, because the people of God were not coming into those purposes and the realization of them, and because the enemies of the Lord had been given an advantage through the unfaithfulness of the Lord's people—it was that that drew out Daniel in his praying. And then we know there was a great warfare in heaven. We have some tremendous revelations here. During the twenty-one days of this particular season of prayer a terrific scene had been going on without his knowledge. The very principalities and powers had been so stirred

and moved because of this kind of praying that they had withstood the messengers of God. A fight had been going on, and one great angel needed to come to the support of another, showing that even the greatest angelic beings are not almighty; one was not enough; there was no way for him to get through. It is not the asking for things, it is the things that we ask for that touch heaven. When we come together for prayer, we ought to be right in line with, and in full view of, God's great revealed purposes concerning His people, and making these the burden of our hearts. I do not underrate the importance of praying for all sorts of things, and there are times when those things may come in, but they must not occupy the ground in the place of the major things, the great purposes of God. What God needs is a people who have seen His intentions and purpose, seen the destiny of His Son and of the Church which is His Body, and are really giving themselves to pray this issue through. It will be warfare. Sometimes there is a blanket over the atmosphere; then we are tempted to give it up. But no; that is the occasion for persevering. Oh, for discerning hearts to say, 'There is something happening tonight, something against us, we are not going to take this on; in the name of the Lord we set up our banners!' The Lord does need that, and He must have an instrument to serve Him in that capacity. That kind of prayer is the warfare prayer that sets the conflict going, makes us know the conflict, and calls us out to engage in it. So the occasion of the conflict is the destiny of Christ and His Body, and it touches this matter of corporate life and corporate prayer.

THE GROUND OF TRIUMPH

Now just a word about the ground of triumph. We have an assured ground of triumph, but we must take it. I am not going into all the details of Eph. vi. 10 and onward. I think the metaphors there have often got in the way of their meaning. "*Wherefore take up the whole armour of God . . . having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness . . . and take the helmet of salvation,*" and so on—a very interesting picture; and people begin to operate in a mental way around material things. What do you do in the prayer gathering? Do you say, when you feel the battle is on, 'I do now take the helmet of salvation, I do now put on the whole armour of God?' If so, you are rather late! The Word says, "Stand . . . having girded . . . having put on . . ." The battle has started,

and then you begin to think about finding your armour! You have to come to the prayer meeting in armour! We have to live on this ground.

(a) THE REALITY OF TRUTH

And what is the ground? Dismiss the metaphor, and get right down to the spiritual reality. "*Having girded your loins with truth.*" The ground in the first place is truth. That is to say, we must be on the ground of reality. If there is anything false about our position, anything artificial, anything unreal—and that may be in mere mental knowledge of truth, something we have been brought up in, some teaching we have received, and not heart knowledge—if we are not in the thing truly and this position that we occupy is not utterly real, then we shall effect nothing. Of course "truth" here may also relate to freedom from error in doctrine.

(b) RIGHTEOUSNESS

"*Having put on the breastplate of righteousness*"; the ground of righteousness. And what is it? We know by much teaching that righteousness is that which is of satisfaction to God. The whole question of righteousness is that of God's rights, what He has a right to; and what God has a right to must accord with His own nature—and God is right, righteous; He is equal, He is true. So God has to have that which satisfies Him. Justification by faith is another way of speaking of righteousness by faith, imputed righteousness. God is satisfied because of something or Someone, and that is our ground. You see, the wiles of the devil are always against that, to get us off the ground where we stand in the absolute satisfaction of God by faith. The enemy is saying, 'God is dissatisfied, God has all sorts of things against you.' What is our ground for meeting the enemy?—God's satisfaction, God's rights, secured unto Him in Jesus Christ; righteousness covering the most vital part—the *breastplate* of righteousness; the ground of that righteousness which is through faith in Jesus Christ. There may also be a reference to righteousness in our every day, practical lives. If we are unrighteous in our dealings, transactions, judgments, etc., we cannot stand against Satan.

(c) THE GOOD NEWS OF PEACE

"*Having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace*". Forget the picture of the feet and the shoes. What is the thing?—peace; and it is the gospel of peace, the good news of peace. Anybody with real, Divine, good news

is a menace to the kingdom of Satan. What is the enemy always trying to do? He is ever trying to make us look and feel as though we had, or were going to have, bad news. The 'good news' attitude! It is only another way of speaking of joy. Feet shod with the preparation of the gospel—giving good news of peace. Go to the world with good news—and how the enemy hates it! He does not mind us going with bad news, or with a face that suggests it; but go with good news in spirit and manner! Paul and Silas went to Philippi with good news, the gospel of peace, and we know the enemy very soon rose up to try to take that off their faces and out of their voices (Acts xvi. 11-34). He did not succeed. Triumph over the enemy was because the 'good news' spirit was in their hearts. It is a tremendous strength against the enemy to be standing in the good of the good news, the good news of peace. He "made peace through the blood of his cross" (Col. i. 20). There is now no need for estrangement or enmity or anything like that. God is not against you. God is for you. In Christ He has shown He is for you. It is good news. You are countering something of the enemy's work when you stand on that ground.

(d) FAITH

"*Taking up the shield of faith*". It is literally, "the big—or overall—shield of faith". Faith is all-embracing and relates to all the other aspects of the conflict. We all know how needful for spiritual triumph is the spirit of faith.

(e) THE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

And "*the helmet of salvation*"—what is that? Well again, it is salvation, it is assurance that all is well. That covers a lot of ground. It is on the head as a helmet. It is there that all these arguments and debates and waverings and fears and uncertainties take place. It is the strength of our salvation, the mighty strength of this salvation which is of the Lord. We have to stand under the cover of this.

(f) THE WORD OF GOD

Finally, "*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*". That will mean that we know the word of God and know how to use it at the right time. You see how the Lord met the enemy in the wilderness with an apt quotation from the word of God in which He had soaked Himself. It came not only as a quotation of Scripture but as just the right thing for the moment. Therefore "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly"

(Col. iii. 16). Do not let any of us think that we are going to triumph in the spiritual warfare if we neglect our Bibles, any more than if we neglect prayer. Neglect prayer and the Word and you will be worsted, just as you will if you neglect fellowship. These things are essential—the Word, prayer, fellowship; and all on this ground of truth, righteousness, peace, faith and salvation:

Well, the Lord use this, if for no further enlightenment, then at least for fresh provocation to stand and withstand. Even while we know theoretically we are in a warfare, the enemy often tries (and successfully, too) to make us to be as though we did not know, and as though it did not matter. We must be active in our knowledge of these things.

T.A-S. §

“STEPHEN THY WITNESS”

Reading: Acts vi. & vii; xxii. 20.

A CRISIS IN THE CHURCH'S HISTORY

IT is quite clear that Stephen's death marked a turning point in the history of the Church. Stephen himself presents many new features. He is the first one not of the apostolic band to come forth as a mighty exponent of the truth, a witness to the risen Christ. His was the first triumphant death that the Church had known. There was one of the original apostolic band who had died a tragic death by his own hand. There were two, Ananias and Sapphira, who had died under the hand of God. Death had a very sombre atmosphere for the saints until Stephen died, and then they saw the glory, or something of the glory of it, even as he did.

But supremely it was a turning point in the history of the Church. Although Stephen's own testimony may seem to have been without effect, this point marks the moment when the Church ceased to be just a localized, limited group of God's children. From this moment the gospel spread abroad. Philip was one of the first to be found in that great movement, and a host of unnamed children of God scattered abroad carried Christ with them; and most of all, a young man, Saul, from this moment, I believe, came in a new way under the convicting band of God, and he in the end was the greatest missionary of them all. So this is a most important point, marking a great change in the whole outlook of the Church. Stephen's martyrdom seems to have released the pent-up power of the Spirit that the testimony might be carried into the whole world.

THE MESSAGE AND THE MAN ARE ONE

We are told a great deal about his message, but surely it is the man who stands out rather than the message. If I were to ask an average Christian

what was contained in the seventh chapter of Acts, I think the answer would be a very hazy one. Test yourself on this. Would you be hard put to it to develop any particular argument or to set forth any very striking parts of Stephen's very long discourse which fills that chapter? We know it starts with the God of glory. We have a vague idea about the way it finishes—very abruptly. But most of us cannot remember the message itself. But surely there is not a child of God but knows who Stephen was. All can tell you his face was as the face of an angel. They can tell you that though men gnashed on him with their teeth he did not look at them but looked up to heaven and saw the risen Christ. They can tell you that in his dying moments he prayed for his murderers in the true Spirit of the Master. Everybody knows that. You see the point. We do not know the message but we know the man. I am not suggesting that the message is unimportant, but surely this does stress for us the importance of the man.

“Stephen thy witness”. Put your own name there. Can the Lord say of you, ‘So-and-so, My witness’? As a matter of fact, if we were considering Stephen's message alone, we might almost be permitted to say that the message as such was a failure: Now of course there have been many critics of what Stephen said, and I am not joining part with them. Some have said he did not answer the charges against him—but such people are thinking in Western fashion. He answered in Eastern fashion. Everybody knew what he was saying; they knew the drift of the argument and saw the point only too well. It was a good message, spoken in the power of the Holy Spirit, full of Divine truth; and yet there is a sense in which I think we may say it failed. But the man triumphed, and, as we have already said, the effects of Stephen's testimony were tremendously far-reaching. That is an encouragement. Sometimes what you say seems to have failed even though the Lord helped you to

say it. Well, that might be said about Stephen; but none of us will deny that there was a tremendous impact of his life, and by his death a testimony which, far from failing, was most successful and triumphant. So it is in a sense the man who matters far more than the message. The man in the last resort is the message, and such Stephen was.

To begin with, he proved what he was saying. (Of course, it is very unwise indeed for us to say what we are not proving. There is no testimony in that, it is mere theorising.) In that last tremendous, concentrated period of testimony the very message which Stephen was speaking was wrought out in him and he became a living expression of the truth of the spiritual realities which he proclaimed. The devil sees to it that we are that. If we have a testimony to give, the devil will soon press us as to whether it really does work in our lives, and that is where many of us lamentably fail. What is the good of a message without the man? The man is the message. And the Lord will see to it also, for that is what matters most to Him. He gave His Spirit as the Spirit of wisdom to Stephen, in order that Stephen might speak words of wisdom—as indeed he did. But He gave His Spirit also as the Spirit of grace to Stephen, that Stephen might not only persuade men about the Saviour but, under the harassing circumstances, show men the Saviour. They could not see heaven—only Stephen could see that. They could not see the Son of man at the right hand of God, but they saw that same Christ in Stephen. The same Christ that Stephen had in view was shining out of Stephen's face and manifesting His grace in Stephen's life.

THE MESSAGE

(i) GOD'S JEALOUSY FOR HIS FULL PURPOSE

It seems to me there were three great points to his argument as he went through this long story of Israel's history. Each one of them was an answer to the charge brought against him. The first, as I understand it, is this—that God never settles down to anything less than His full purpose. The charge against Stephen was—"This man ceaseth not to speak words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us" (Acts vi. 13, 14). How quickly men make of Divine things customs, and get into a settled position, marking out what is supposed to be according to God here on this earth! Now the argument of Stephen all through is something like this. Whenever did God's

servants settle down? We take them from the beginning—from Abraham. He was not allowed to settle down in Ur of the Chaldees, but he was called out of Ur. He was not allowed to settle in Haran; he was removed out of Haran. But, even more than that—when he came into the promised land he never had as much as a single foot of it that he owned. God saw to that. Even where he was, in a sense, in a realm of Divine promise and blessing, God never let him settle down. He kept him always moving on. Abraham's people were in Egypt for four hundred years—quite a sufficient period in which to settle down. But God did not let them settle. He moved them on, even by trial and trouble, and moved them out. Moses, after his failure, went away into Midian and kept sheep, and did it for forty years, and I think anybody that has done the same thing for forty years can be generally considered to have settled down. It is a long time, and I expect Moses had settled down—settled down to the small measure that he had of the Lord. But God brought him out of it, moved him on. So the whole history of the people of God is traced. Joshua brought them into the land. David found that the tabernacle, with all the blessings and wonders of it, was not enough, and so the temple was built. But even the temple was not God's final thought; and at the moment when he was cut short, Stephen was developing the argument from Isaiah, showing that it is not in a place, it is not in a set of customs, not even in a Divinely ordered tabernacle or a God-given temple, that God will dwell. There is only one goal which represents God's resting place, where He settles down, and that is in a man like Himself. Stephen was hindered from completing the quotation, but doubtless he was about to add the words "to this man will I look . . ." (Isa. lxvi. 2). But he showed them the Man in the glory. You notice Stephen's emphasis on the manhood of that glorified One. This is the only recorded occasion on which the Holy Spirit ever caused the Apostles, or one in close association with them, to speak of the risen Christ as the Son of man; but it was the Son of man that Stephen saw. The whole of his argument amounts to this—that whether it is with Israel or with Stephen or with you and me, God's purpose is never a limited blessing, it is never a limited experience of Himself, however wonderful and sweet and precious and fruitful it may be. If we settle down with it, we lose the Lord. The Lord is going on right through to the Throne and to the glory.

Poor Stephen found that it is not always so pleasant to the flesh when God is going on. Perhaps

he would have liked to settle down as a deacon as a whole time job, but the Lord did not let him settle down; or as a preacher—would that not have been a blessed and useful ministry? Stephen might have said, 'May I not be permitted to preach and gather in these lost ones and point them to the Saviour?'. The Lord would reply, 'Yes, that is blessed; I am causing that to be done, and will do so more and more. But I am not going to let you settle down; I will not be satisfied till you are in the Throne'. Stephen's movement, of course, was amazingly swift—so swift that we have to feel that his experience was almost unique. You open chapter vi of the Acts and nobody knows who Stephen is. At the end of chapter vii you can almost see him in the Throne with the Lord. I think perhaps the Lord would bring us by swifter movements if we were more obedient. But in any case the significant thing is not the time He takes but the end He has in view.

Most of us are not apostles or even deacons, and perhaps we are not given, as was Stephen, that amazing gift of proclaiming Christ in such a convincing, irresistible power of argument; but we are still called to be the Lord's witnesses, and maybe our greatest testimony, as Stephen's surely was, will be not in what we say but in the Christlikeness of our lives. Anyhow, here we see the alternatives set out, not only for Jews but for us all. It is either the customs or Christ; you cannot have both. The Jews preferred the customs. Stephen preferred Christ; and so do I, and so must we all.

(ii) HEAVENLY GLORY MEANS EARTHLY REJECTION

Secondly, I think the great development of his speech is along this line—that heavenly glory always means earthly rejection. You notice the sneering way they say "this Jesus of Nazareth". There is a whole world of meaning in that. This despised, unofficial, unrecognized, poor, lowly, uncultured upstart and all that is associated with him—how can it in any way be accepted or acceptable? And Stephen has a very full answer to that. He goes through the story, and his great argument, it seems to me, is this—'Whenever was a man who sought the glory of God acceptable, even to the people of God?'. The story opens with Abraham called by the God of glory, and bringing in a line of men who, responding to that call, were pressing on to the glory and to likeness to God, which is His goal. Look at them. First there is Joseph. Verse 9—"The patriarchs"—mark you, his brethren—"the patriarchs, moved with jealousy against

Joseph, sold him into Egypt". Then there is Moses. Look at verse 27—"But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him (Moses) away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?" Verse 35—"This Moses whom they refused . . ." Verse 39—"To whom our fathers would not be obedient, but thrust him from them". There is more argument in this chapter than appears on the surface. Here is Stephen's great argument about Moses—and it fits all who are set on the heavenly glory; they are bound to come into a clash with the men of earth and those who have interests in the things of earth. They have always been rejected by such. Well, we know that. We have heard it many times; but the thing is that Stephen not only told them that, but he told them in the fiery experience of proving the truth of it. The Word of God tried him as it tries us; but with most of us, though we have it all by theory, when it happens to us we go all to pieces. We feel there is something wrong. We accept the devil's gibes. "This Jesus of Nazareth!" You can catch something of the implication of the sneer—"Your line of things must be wrong because it is a failure and it is not recognized and it is rejected by the popular voice", and so on. Well, the way of heavenly glory will inevitably bring the clash with earthly glory and bring rejection. Stephen, of course, was able to mount right above that, as Moses did in his day, and they both did it in the same way. Moses "endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. xi. 27). And Stephen did not look, we are told, at the crowd who were around him, gnashing their teeth and venting their spite and their fury. It says he "looked up stedfastly into heaven". He kept his eyes on the Lord. We put our eyes on the Lord but we do not keep them there. He kept them there, so that even in the midst of all that was happening, his face was like the face of an angel. Heavenly glory was well in view, and that meant power to his testimony.

(iii) FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD IS INDEPENDENT OF PLACE AND CIRCUMSTANCES

Then, thirdly, let us look again at the charge laid against Stephen—that he "ceaseth not to speak words against this holy place". Stephen's answer amounted to this—that fellowship with God never depends upon a place. Where did Abraham begin to have fellowship with God? In Ur of the Chaldees. It was not the place but the presence of the Lord that was the secret of the fellowship; and so it was all through Abraham's life. And Joseph? He was sold into Egypt, but God was with him.

You say God could not be with him in Egypt because God belonged to Palestine, and if Joseph was taken away from his brethren, his home and the promised land and put into Egypt, he was taken away from God? 'Oh no', says Stephen; 'fellowship with God has nothing to do with a place. You can have fellowship with Him anywhere'. Moses away in the desert might be thought to have left not only the promised land, but even the people of the promise who were in Egypt. But God met him in the burning bush and commanded him to take off the shoes from his feet, for he was standing on holy ground. But it was only desert ground in the wilderness! It had not been consecrated; nothing had ever been done to it by men! No, but God was there, God was with him, and this made it holy ground.

That is a matter that may be proclaimed, but, if we proclaim it, it is going to be tested; and it was as though the devil said to Stephen, 'You say God is with you wherever you are, that His presence has nothing to do with circumstances and places? All right, I will put you into a place that is more like hell than anything could be, where violent death faces you, in the presence of murderous men full of

hatred: now, is God with you there?' Stephen looks up into heaven and says, in effect, 'Yes, God is truly with me. Indeed He is with me as I have never known Him before. This experience, which might have been unbearable, is really wonderful. It is glorious! "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God".' We are not Apostles, and we will not claim equality with Stephen, but like him we shall be put to the test, that our testimony may be not only in word, but also in experience.

Stephen's testimony seemed to end in failure. The marvellous power of testimony that was given to him was silenced for ever, and we read that from that time the Church seemed to be broken up. But was it failure? I think that probably it contributed more to the evangelisation of the world than anything ever in the history of the Church. It was a turning point. And there is encouragement for us all in it. Here in your small corner, suffering, you say, 'What is the use?' You do not know; but be faithful to the Lord, and He may make far more of your testimony than ever you may live to see, but you will know about it in the glory.

H. F.

GOD'S MAN

*"But thou, O man of God . . ." (I Tim. vi. 11).
"O Timothy, guard that which is committed unto thee" (I Tim. vi. 20).*

"O MAN of God . . . O Timothy". In these words you will sense a strong and intense going out of heart on the part of the Apostle. It is a cry, an appeal, as though the floods have welled up and are seeking to break out. You see, the Apostle is on the last lap of the race, he is near to the end of his course, he is conscious that he has very little time left in which to say all that is in his heart—and there is so much to say, the situation is so critical, the need is so great; and in this final stage he is speaking his last words. They are the last words of a great Apostle. He tries to condense into small space a greatness of desire, and so he breaks out—"O man of God"! "O Timothy"! Last words are always words to be taken account of, noted, regarded with solemnity.

We are not able, of course, in a brief space to note all the content of these last utterances of the Apostle, and I propose only to speak of the nature of the appeal which he makes and the way in which he makes it. This exclamation—"O man of God"—is not an unfamiliar phrase. We know

how often in the Old Testament it is the designation applied to servants of God; and there is a sense, of course, in which it is a specific term, the title of those who stand in a peculiar responsibility for the Lord's interests—"the man of God". But there is also a sense in which it is of general application, for surely this should be true of us all; surely this does represent what the Lord would have in the case of every one of us, the title "man" covering us all in Christ, and the designation resting upon us all—"man of God". An old missionary received a very heartening message one day from a man whom he had led to the Lord out of heathenism many years before. Another missionary was visiting that quarter and came upon this man, who asked after his old spiritual father and said, 'When you see him, tell him that so long ago I became God's man, and I am still God's man'. That is just what it is—all men of God, God's men.

A CHALLENGE

Put like that, we can see how it can and should apply to us all. 'O God's man!'—which of course covers the woman as well; and in the very meaning and tone of that outburst from the

Apostle's heart there is the message. We do not need to try to break it up and expound it, to bring in all that it means to be God's man; the message is just there. It might startle us individually if someone approached us and addressed us in that way. Think of anyone coming to you and saying, 'O Man of God!' It is a challenge. The very idea brings us up short at once—'A man of God!' Have you ever thought of yourself like that—as God's man? Amongst all men, you are God's man, God's woman; and because that is true, all the rest follows. All that Paul had to say to Timothy followed on that and came because of that. 'You are God's man; therefore I say to you all these things that I am saying and am going to say.'

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF GOD'S MAN

(I) A TRUSTEE CAREFUL OF HIS TRUST

And you notice that certain lines run through these two letters to Timothy, and one of those lines has to do with himself as God's man—as to the supreme concern of God's man. Paul says firstly, 'Because you are God's man, you are a trustee'. "O Timothy, guard that which is committed unto thee" (1 Tim. vi. 20). Literally, 'O Timothy, guard the trust', or, 'guard the deposit'. It is a banking term in the original language: someone has placed in the safe keeping of the bank something very precious and made the bank their trustee. And Paul says to Timothy, 'O Timothy, because you are God's man, you are a trustee; a great trust has been deposited with you'; and here there opens up all that is in these letters. Paul perhaps sat down to write a personal letter and to open his heart to Timothy as a father to a son—"Timothy my beloved child" he calls him—and perhaps he thought, 'I will say some heart-to-heart things to Timothy; he needs to be helped, advised, counselled'. But Paul finds that he cannot write on merely personal things; he is almost instantly caught away with the vastness of God's eternal thoughts, purposes and counsels. What there is of depth, profundity and vastness in these two short letters! Read them again, and see how far-reaching are the things mentioned. He says in effect, 'Timothy, the trust which has been deposited with you is no small thing; it touches all the ages and goes beyond them; it touches all realms. It is not just an earthly and temporal thing; not just your little life here as a Christian; no, far more is bound up with God's man than making a success of life here and now, according to this world's standards'.

And so he says, 'You are a trustee; O Timothy, guard the deposit'.

And he does touch on some detail of that which may apply to some of us. 'From your infancy you have been taught the truth. Faith dwelt in your grandmother and in your mother. You are God's man with a responsibility; you have had the deposit of the truth. You are one of those who, out of the millions of your fellow men, have been brought, in the sovereign wisdom and grace of God, into touch with these supremely important and valuable things; you are responsible for them as God's man.' "I charge thee in the sight of God, and Christ Jesus, and the elect angels . . ." (1 Tim. v. 21); "I charge thee in the sight of God, who giveth life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed the good confession . . ." (1 Tim. vi. 13). 'I charge you, O man of God, before all heavenly intelligences and before men; you are in trust and have a great responsibility—not on the ground that you are a missionary, a minister, a pastor, or under some special designation in the realm of God's servants, but simply on the ground that you are God's man, that is all'. That is what it means to be God's man. You are a trustee.

(II) A SOLDIER CONCERNED ONLY FOR THE LORD

You are a soldier. "Take thy part in suffering hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier on service entangleth himself in the affairs of this life; that he may please him who enrolled him as a soldier" (II Tim. ii. 3, 4). The appeal is—'As God's man, you are supposed to be all the time on active service and must not be of a divided mind, a divided heart, with dual interests weakening you in the warfare, pre-occupied with things of this world; but, whatever your work may be on the earth, you are to be of an undivided mind, of a single heart. Your one concern must be to give satisfaction to Him Who enlisted you to be His soldier; O man of God, that is how you should be; a man with but one passion—to bring satisfaction to your Lord'.

(III) A HUSBANDMAN READY TO LABOUR

'And', he says, 'you are a husbandman'; and "the husbandman that laboreth must be the first to partake of the fruits" (II Tim. ii. 6). By that he means, 'You have to labour'. The true husbandman, the true farmer, knows all about labour, if any man does. He is qualified to talk about labour, and he knows that he will get nothing without hard work. He will be the first to partake of the fruits

of hard labour. Of a man who really labours it can be said that his heart and his strength are in his work, he is given to his task because he knows that fruitfulness depends upon that labour.

(IV) AN ATHLETE RESOLUTE TO WIN THE PRIZE

And he says, You are an athlete. "If a man contend in the games, he is not crowned, except he have contended lawfully" (II Tim. ii. 5). Timothy would call to mind the words which Paul had earlier written to the church at Corinth—"Every man that striveth in the games exerciseth self-control in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight I, as not beating the air: but I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage" (I Cor. ix. 25-27). Timothy well knew with what self-discipline his father in the faith had run his course, and Paul did not hesitate to remind him of it (II Tim. iii. 10 etc.).

"O man of God"! This is what the man of God is to be. Whether it be in the realm of the contest, or the warfare, or the hard toil of the field, or the trusteeship of riches—whatever metaphors are used, they all have but one purpose. The aged apostle seeks to utter something that lies heavily on his heart. 'O man of God! O Timothy! This is what should be true of you if you are God's man'. It is a heart cry—the heartbreaking cry—of a man who says, "I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come" (II Tim. iv. 6). 'I shall not be able to say much more, but I make this full-hearted appeal to you, O man of God!'

One line through the letters is just that—what God's man is and what he is like. There are other lines which we will not pursue, as I want to leave that one note of emphasis with you. I have found myself gripped, not so much by the content of the letters of Paul to Timothy but by the cry of the

Apostle, as if that cry had entered into me. All I can do is to re-echo it in this very feeble way. It is true that, in the sovereignty of God, Paul had a brief spell of liberty from prison between the writing of the two letters to Timothy. I think he was a little surprised about that himself. But it was only a little while at most, before he was brought back to prison and he knew that very soon his course would be ended. "I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (II Tim. iv. 7). But he makes this the basis of a fresh appeal for diligence and urgency—"I charge thee in the sight of God, and of Christ Jesus . . . (II Tim. iv. 1). It is the end and it is a cry. Though in our case the details are different, nevertheless the same cry of the Spirit should surely reach our hearts to-day. There is an urgency. It is not merely the urgency of a closing ministry, but of a man of God who yearns that every one who may be called God's man, God's woman, should be like this—intent, utterly abandoned to one thing. You may be literally a soldier, a farmer, a banker; you may be anything literally on this earth; but over and above that, you are God's man. Your earthly vocation has to be made to serve God's ends; you have to be bent upon these eternal things, with undivided heart; not distracted by conflicting interests, not influenced at all by earthly circumstances, not pre-occupied by things of this world, its pleasures, its gains, its successes amongst men; but motivated by this one thing—to please Him Who enrolled you as His own. Listen with the inner ear to the inward implication—"O God's man"! If only you and I could get hold of what is in that—"God's man"! I am *God's* man. I am *God's* woman. What ought such a person to be like? Well, above all things, on God's interests bent. "O man of God"! That is a comprehensive word, but it becomes personal—"O Timothy". Amongst God's men, O Timothy, you—you—are marked out by Him as His man.

T. A-S.

"God is no man's debtor, and the man who really lives for God, to do the thing that God wants done, is the best paid man in the universe." (Page 268).

* * * * *

There were to be twelve more (volumes). She was then fifty-eight years old, but stronger than she had been when she was young, and for the

Extracts from "Mrs. Howard Taylor, Her Web of Time" by Joy Guinness.

next fifteen years of her life her health was at its best, and her capacity for work at its highest. Five books were published between 1920 and 1930, and seven more after she was seventy years of age. . . . Her books cost her long labour and an output of spiritual energy which few readers can estimate. With each one there were special conflicts both within and without to be faced and fought through. (Page 219).

SPIRITUAL HEARING

V. THE ATTENTIVE EAR

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches" (Revelation iii. 20 - 22).

HERE we have the attentive ear of the book of the Revelation. This matter of the attentive ear covers everything, for it is repeated, as you know, seven times in these first chapters, and it occurs again for the eighth time in the thirteenth chapter—a rather interesting correspondence to the eight times on which it is recorded in the Gospels that the Lord Jesus used similar words. On eight distinct occasions He is reported as saying, " (He that) hath ears to hear, let him hear ". Now the same Lord in the Revelation (using the singular) says—" He that hath an ear . . . ". Without any further comment upon that correspondence, all we need to say is that the Lord Jesus places very great importance upon the attentive ear, for it is clear from the Gospels that He did not mean merely that people heard the things that He was saying, but that they heard something inside of what He was saying—the meaning, the implication; and the same holds good here. " If any man hear my voice . . . " " He that hath an ear . . . "

THE HEARING EAR INVOLVES TESTIMONY

First of all, seeing that this covers the messages to all the seven churches, it is quite clear that it has to do with testimony. This hearing ear involves testimony. The seven lampstands, which are the seven churches, are, as we know, the sevenfold testimony—that is, the spiritually complete testimony of the Lord Jesus. Seven indicates spiritual fulness, and it is concerning the fulness of testimony to the Lord Jesus that these messages were given to the churches; so that the testimony, the full testimony, to the Lord Jesus is bound up with this attentive ear. It is quite evident from the messages that the full testimony was not present, and the

Lord was reacting to something imperfect, something less than full. He was quite clearly saying that, while there might be everywhere that which was good, spiritual fulness is what He came for and what He has made possible, and that for which the Church exists; the justification of its existence is that it has the full testimony of Jesus. That very phrase, as you know, is peculiar to this book of the Revelation—" the testimony of Jesus ". So it all comes down to this, that spiritual fulness in testimony, the justification for the existence of the Church, the very reason why the Church was brought into being, comes to depend upon an ear that is attentive to the Lord.

It is so possible just to go on and keep going on without recognising that the Lord has something to say as to the need for adjustment, the elimination of certain things which ought not to be and the bringing in of things which ought to be. The Lord would speak to bring His people into a place of greater spiritual fulness, but it requires a very attentive ear.

DISCRIMINATING BETWEEN THINGS.

That leads to the ear which approves (as Paul used this phrase) the things that differ. This attentive ear is an ear which comes to understand the differences between things. There are here in these messages good things, but there are also the best things; and it is shown that good things here have become the enemy of the best: that people have settled down in contentment with something good something that they approve, something which answers to their standard, while the Lord has a higher standard and a different point of view, and they are not listening to the Lord over this matter—they have no ear, and so they are not approving the things that differ. If we were really taught of the Lord, if we were really hearing Him, we should not be satisfied with the good, and stop there. We should be exercised about the best. I think we have to say that is a fairly general condition in our time. There is much good, and people are occupied with it, but they are not aware of something very much better—the best. The Lord here says quite clearly that an ear that hears will discern between the good

and the best, and not confuse these, and not lose the best because of a satisfaction with something less.

DISCRIMINATING BETWEEN PEOPLE

And then, of course, in the third place, this word is a discriminating word so far as the Lord's people are concerned. It discriminates between Christian and Christian. The form of the address, when it comes to this particular phrase, is significant. "He that hath an ear . . ." It is as though the Lord were saying inside of the Church, 'Not all of you have an ear, but whoever—if it only be one—whoever has an ear, let him hear'. This matter of spiritual hearing does divide the Lord's people. There are those who are just going on with the Lord's work and with all things 'Christian', largely in an external way, occupied with the whole course of activities and interests; but for the Lord's fullest purposes and thoughts He needs to have amongst His

people those who are hearing in a discriminating way—that is, hearing what He would really say as to His fullest purpose for the Church—and He says, "He that hath an ear . . ." Not all are like that. The ear which hears and attends is a mark of those who answer to the Lord's need and desire more fully. It is something deeper than what is general. Well, it is discriminating between things and it is discriminating between people. The Lord clearly divided between the general hearers and the particular hearers; between those who were seeing the inner meaning of things, and those who were taking things superficially; between those who were content with a certain measure, and those who were realising that the Lord meant something very much more than that. They were alive to His mind, they had an ear. And so it will ever be that the Lord's fullest purposes and thoughts have their realisation in those amongst His people who hear what the Spirit has to say at all times in a discriminating and an approving way.

T. A-S.

SPIRITUAL ASCENDENCY

III. ITS PRESENT BEARING ON LIFE

"Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?" (Psa. xxiv. 3).

"Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, the sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established" (Ex. xv. 17).

"And I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on the mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty and four thousand" (Rev. xiv. 1).

THE great question of the ages, we have said, is this: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?". The answer is found in the first instance in those who are called "firstfruits unto God and unto the Lamb" (Rev. xiv. 4); in a representative company, symbolically (not literally but symbolically) said to be one hundred and forty four thousand. We indicated the significance of that number in our previous meditation.

Of course, our first business must be to identify "the hill of the Lord". It is not something new to most of you when I say that as there is spiritual history back of literal history in the Bible, and spiritual geography back of literal geography, and so on, so it is with this place called "the hill of the Lord". What I mean is that in the Bible everything

has a double meaning, and things which are seen, which are visible and tangible and palpable, are used to indicate a counterpart which is spiritual. The Bible is full of history, but you know how that history is all a portrayal of something spiritual that is going on. Events and happenings have behind them spiritual meanings. Even in the physiological realm of our bodies this is so. They are used to suggest and indicate spiritual principles. And when we come to the geography of the Bible, perhaps it is more patent than anywhere else. Think of all the place names which have not merely taken on a symbolism, but which do actually represent something spiritual that has happened or does happen there. For instance, "Bethel" (which means "the house of God") is not just a name given to a place, but something happened there which had implicit in it all the spiritual meaning of the house of God. When Jacob came first to Bethel and laid down there that night to rest, the heavens opened. In his dream he saw a ladder, and upon it communications were set in operation between heaven and earth, and God above it began to speak to him, telling him of His covenant. Now if all that does not really mean to us the house of God in a spiritual way, well, we have not seen the house of God yet; for the spiritual house of God is surely this, that it is

something which links heaven and earth and through which the communications of God are brought to men, and which implies that there are those on the earth who have an opened heaven and who have entered into the blessings of the covenant; and very much more than that. That is Bethel. It is not just a name: it means something spiritual which was borne out by the experience of a man. So we could go on dealing with place names, showing that, while you have come upon a name, a place, you have come upon something more than that: you have come upon some Divine thought, Divine principle, Divine law, something in the mind of God: and when you get behind the thing seen you are encountering something which, though unseen, is eternal, mighty, tremendous. So that places, mountains, valleys, and all that have to do with geography, have a spiritual meaning in the Bible.

THE HILL OF THE LORD—CHRIST IN ABSOLUTE ASCENDENCY

Here, then, is "the hill of the Lord". We have to identify that hill, first literally and then spiritually. It does not take very long to do that because the Psalms almost open with the identity of the hill of the Lord. "*Yet I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion*" (Psa. ii. 6). "My holy hill of Zion" is, historically and literally, the hill of the Lord.

What, then, is Zion spiritually? Well, do you remember that that second Psalm was quoted right at the beginning of the Church's history? When the earthly forces set themselves in array against the Lord and against His anointed ones, the latter met in prayer and quoted that Psalm, and the place where they were assembled was shaken (Acts iv). The very shaking of heaven came into that place. What did it say? You have touched the holy hill of Zion! Where is that? The Lord Jesus is ascended to the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. It is the place of absolute ascendancy, victory, power. Who is Lord now? "*The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed . . . Yet I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion*".

Zion, then, is not a place on the earth: Zion has now resolved itself into the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ at God's right hand. Thus the Apostle writes, "*Ye are come unto mount Zion . . . the heavenly Jerusalem . . . the . . . church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven*" (Heb. xii. 22-23). It is no longer a place, it is a spiritual position. That

is Zion. and we have identified the holy hill.

Who shall ascend? who shall stand? You see this is a present question. While the consummation of this lies at the end of the way, it is something which has a present bearing upon the life of the Lord's people. Let me say in fuller definition that Zion, or the holy hill of the Lord, spiritually embodies all that Divine thought which the people of God will express when He has them, as He will have them, wholly according to His will. In other words—when God gets a people where He has ever determined to have them, He will have them in what is the spiritual counterpart of Zion—absolute ascendancy over all other powers.

ASCENDENCY THE NORMAL OUTWORKING OF IMPLANTED DIVINE LIFE

That Divine thought begins in a very simple way. It begins by the implanting and imparting of Divine life.

'Glorious things of thee are spoken,
Zion, city of our God;
He Whose word cannot be broken
Formed thee for His own abode'.

The psalm upon which that hymn is constructed makes comparisons between other great cities and places of world fame. "*I will make mention of Rahab*" (that is, of Egypt) "*and Babylon . . . Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia*"; and men were saying, 'This one and that one was born there, and is proud of it'. But "*of Zion it shall be said, This one and that one was born in her*". "*The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob . . . this one was born there*" (Psa. lxxxvii). It is in birth that the beginnings of God's thought about Zion take place. By the receiving of Divine life we have inherent in us all the power of this mighty spiritual ascendancy which in the end, if it is not thwarted, will bring into the Throne.

I say that for this reason among others, that what we are talking about is not something extra to and altogether apart from the normal course of Christian life. It cannot be argued that to be a Christian and a simple disciple of the Lord Jesus, a lover of Christ, is one thing, but this is something else. Not at all! It is an entirely confused mind which thinks like that. This is the normal outworking of that life which every born again child of God possesses, if that life is allowed to work out normally. If you stop short, if you do not go on beyond a certain point, if you become contented too soon, if you become turned aside, if you allow yourself to

be prejudiced, disaffected, influenced by anything that prevents you from going right on, you have intercepted the normal course of the Divine life which is in you. If you will accept all that is involved (and it is following the Lamb whithersoever He goeth; which means suffering and sacrifice), if you will give the Lord implicit obedience, if you will trust Him where you cannot understand Him, if you will allow Him to do all that He wants to do with you, your normal course will be to arrive at the Throne; that is, to come to absolute spiritual ascendancy. We are not seeking to put something extra upon Christians, but to say to Christians, 'This is your birthright'.

We were speaking earlier about Jacob. To return to him for a moment; whatever there was about Jacob, he did see that in the birthright the place of ascendancy was found, and so it came to be that he gained the place of ascendancy. Eventually he became a prince with God, the father of the twelve tribes, the governmental body in God's electing thought, the foreshadowing of the hundred and forty and four thousand, the twelve times twelve a thousand times over. It is all implicit in the birthright. No one has any particular favouritism in the matter of the birthright. No one is elect to the birthright; that is, no one is elect to salvation. If we are elect, it is according to the *purpose* of salvation. That is another subject. The point here is that it is right there in the gift of eternal life at new birth that the Throne is implicit, that ascendancy is found. Well, it works out in that way, at any rate; and we must remember that this Divine life is not something abstract, but personal; it is the Spirit of life Himself.

And what does the Holy Spirit do with a life in which He has a free, full way? Well, He never allows that life to drop down on to low levels without the one concerned knowing it. You know quite well, in the very simplicity of your relationship with the Lord Jesus from the beginning, that if you make a blunder, say or do something, look or feel something, that is on the lower level of the old life, you are made aware of it, and you are not happy until you put that right; and as you go on further with the Lord, you become not less, but infinitely more, sensitive. You suffer very much more over lapses the further on you go. You know with increasing intelligence what it means to grieve the Holy Spirit. Why? Because the Spirit is gravitating back to the place from where He has come, gravitating back in us, and the whole gravitation of a Spirit-governed life is upward. It is a test as well as a statement of fact. Are you gravitating thus? Is there a pull

upward? Can you be happy and comfortable living a low-level Christian life? There is something wrong if you can. That is very simple. The very beginnings of this life of ascendancy are found in the gift of Divine life, and the whole course is the outworking of that life; and when we come (if we do by the grace of God come eventually) to that place of Rev. xiv, it will not be because of any particular merit, but simply that the life has triumphed in us. So you see the consummation of that great thought and purpose of God is glory. The beginning is life; the end is glory.

But what is glory? It is the triumph of life. The body of our humiliation shall be made like unto the body of His glory (Phil. iii. 21). How shall this be? Well, it is all by the Lord the Spirit. It is all by the inworking of His life, resurrection life; glory at the end where life is triumphant. That is said for this reason, that this is the normal Christian life; and the abnormal Christian life is that which acts by fits and starts, up and down, and can be content not to go right on. There is something wrong about that; something has interfered with the normal growth.

Well, here you see that Zion is really something that is planted in us by birth. You remember that other fragment from the Psalms in this connection — "*In whose heart are the highways to Zion*" (Psa. lxxiv. 5). It does not say, Whose feet are on the highways of Zion. It is something subjective: Zion is inside; and it represents a tremendous transformation or change.

ISRAEL'S FAILURE — EGYPT, NOT ZION, IN THEIR HEARTS

Now we have to come back again and use our great illustration of Israel. Israel came out of Egypt and were ostensibly going toward that holy hill, but really they were not. You look for the reason why they took such a long time about it and made such poor progress, and eventually did not arrive at all; you ask for the explanation, and it is this, that, while they were out of Egypt, Egypt was not out of them. Something objective had been done, but nothing subjective. All the time in their hearts they harked back to Egypt; the world was still in their hearts, and that was the cause of all the trouble. Now when you have the highways of Zion in your hearts, you have not got the highways of Egypt in your hearts. Something has been done inside to supplant something else. It is the only way of eradicating anything from the heart. You have to supplant it, to put some greater power within; what Dr. Chalmers called in his famous sermon,

'the expulsive power of a new affection'. The only way to expel the world is to have a new affection. "I will make mention of . . . Zion . . . this one was born there . . . All my fountains are in thee".

This ascendancy takes its rise from the supplanting in our hearts of the world by Christ and all that Christ means. It was that again—and we find ourselves at every turn coming back to the great example of the Apostle Paul—it was that which made him cry, even when so far on in the way, "I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. iii. 8). That word 'excellency' is interesting. It means "the 'ascendancy' of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord"—that this is above everything else: all things counted loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. That kind of thing in the heart is the only way to get rid of all the rest.

EGYPT FLATTERS SELF : ZION SLAYS IT

But the rest is so subtle, it does find so great a response in us. It is here, of course, that the enemy cunningly works to arrest spiritual progress. The world? 'Oh yes', you may say, 'I have given my life to the Lord: I am born again, I have finished with the world, I am out and out for the Lord now; all my life, service and energy is for the Lord'. 'Very well', says Satan, 'let us placard your name everywhere as a great witness for the Lord, and then you will begin to be made a lot of by organised Christianity!' It is all wrapped up under the guise of affording you a great opportunity, and you are altogether unaware of how nice it is, and how you like it. What has happened? That is not the way of the Lamb. What is the way of the Lamb? He "emptied himself" (Phil. ii. 7)—"made himself of no reputation" A.V. "He emptied himself": the Devil is out to fill you. Since he could not fill you with the world, he is going to fill you now with the gratification of the natural life in the service of God. It will not live very long, it will spend itself, and it will, moreover, mean spiritual immaturity: it is not the way of the Lamb.

If we were to press this, we could expose that whole thing very thoroughly by a good deal of evidence. If the enemy cannot get us in one way, he will get us in another, and he has got many a young life by flattery, ruined many a powerful servant of God by popularity. Yes, he has brought him down from his excellency by deeply-laid devices in the way of fame, pushing on, bringing to the fore, getting into the limelight, giving a name. Spiritual life has gradually receded and the end has been tragedy. That is not fiction, that is a tragic fact. The way to

Zion, the way to the Throne, the way to spiritual ascendancy is the way of the Cross, and the Cross ever more deeply planted right down to the very roots of self-interest, self-gratification, self-pleasure, even in the things of God. In the end we shall be brought to the place where it is not the Lord's things that delight us, but the Lord Himself alone Who is our life. So the whole scheme of the enemy is to make the work of the Lord so attractive, to offer the prizes, the spheres, the opportunities, and all that sort of thing. It is very nice, it is very pleasant, it answers to something in our fallen nature. That something has to pass through the crucible of the Cross. It may be something legitimate, something God-implanted, something essential to the outworking of this Divine purpose, but it has been dragged into a realm of defilement.—

AMBITION RIGHT IF SELFLESS

You can call it what you like; aspiration, ambition, wanting to get on, wanting to rise. It is there in the constitution of man, and rightly so; God put it there. "Thou makest him to have dominion" (Psa. viii. 6). That is not just official, positional. That is the fulfilment of some Divine power at work in the very constitution of man that makes him feel he must rise; but it has been perverted. It is perverted by the great pervert, who himself was perverted by his own pride when he said, "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High" (Isa. xiv. 14); and who came down to Eve and said, 'Hath God said . . .? Why, God knows that in the day that you eat, you will have the root of the matter in you, you will not be dependent on God for your knowledge, you will not have to obey God, you will have it in yourself!' Adam and Eve fell to it, and the race fell with them, and from that day to this that holy thing of aspiration—shall we call it ambition?—that great power in us that makes us know we are born for a destiny, is perverted and tainted by self, by pride. So that a man has advanced far on the road to holiness who can never be caught along the line of flattery and popularity, to whom the siren charms and voices are as nothing, because he walks so humbly with his God, meek and lowly in heart. All the prizes and baubles have no attraction for him. I say that is in the holy hill of Zion. We are touching another thing now, how holiness is inherent in ascendancy. But that must wait.

It is not wrong to have ambition, to have aspiration, but it is wrong to have it actuated by personal interest and motive. That has to go through the crucible of the Cross and be burnt out. Here is the

paradox, the problem, the difficulty of a true Christian life : to be broken, emptied, humbled, reduced to nothing, and yet at the same time to have a fiery ambition. How reconcile these two things ? I find it in Paul. With the exception of the Lord Jesus Himself, no man was more mastered by the spirit of ascendancy and dominion—shall we call it ambition, aspiration ? — than he was, and no man was more selfless in it all. How he suffered at the hands of those who owed everything to him instrumentally ! There is no personal thing here. He is the man who can write, “ Love . . . seeketh not its own, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly ”—‘ giveth itself no airs ’. All that is ascendancy ; not just geographical location, but spiritual ascendancy. Oh, let us ask the Lord to put in us a passionate ambition for His glory, and that we may be kept purified by the Cross so that our glory does not force its way in. That will need a lot of the grace of God.

HOLY AMBITION — TO ATTAIN TO ZION

Well, all this is the meaning of Zion, of spiritual ascendancy, and we have really to face its implications. As I have said before, it is a matter which has a very present application. I know I run the risk of being charged with spiritualising everything in the Bible. Well, all right, never mind that. What

I am after is that which is eternal. Everything else will go ; it may be a casket in which eternal jewels are deposited, but the casket will go. I am after the jewel. At the back of all the symbols and of all actualities there is something spiritual, and for me it is far more profitable to get to what is God’s inner thought in things that He says, than it is to be only occupied with the thing said. You may take the book of the Revelation and deal with it historically if you like : you can take it on the futurist basis if you like : you can interpret it literally if you like : but it does not get you very far spiritually to do that. What we need is that spiritual life should be increased, and what I see as the grand issue of the book of the Revelation is a company standing with the Lamb upon mount Zion, whatever that may be. For me, interpreted in the light of all the Scriptures, it is not merely a time nor a location ; it is the arrival at the end of God’s thought in our redemption, coming to the fulness of the meaning of having been redeemed from this present evil world and translated into the kingdom of the Son of God’s love, and reaching the place of highest usefulness to Him when time shall be no more. I suggest to you that it is those things that have very much more immediate spiritual value for us than such questions as whether or not the Jews are going back to Palestine.

T. A-S.

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A WITNESS

AND

A TESTIMONY

“A Candlestick of Pure Gold:
of Beaten Work”

Exodus 25, 31.

“The Testimony of Jesus”

Rev. 1, 9.

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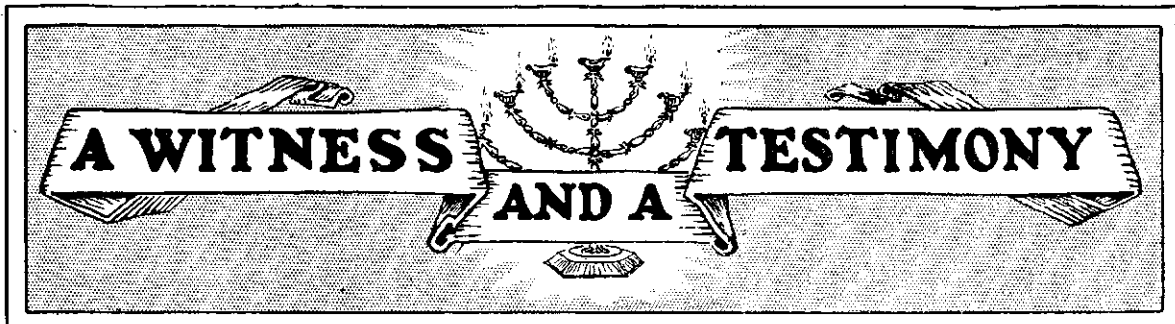
THIS MINISTRY

THE OBJECT OF THE MINISTRY of this little paper, issued bi-monthly, is to contribute to the Divine end which is presented in the words of Ephesians iv. 13 — "... till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge (lit. full knowledge) of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we be no longer children . . ."

It is not connected with any "Movement", "Organization", "Mission" or separate body of Christians, but is just a ministry to "all saints". Its going forth is with the prayer and hope that it will so result in a fuller measure of Christ, a richer and higher level of spiritual life, that, while bringing the Church of God into a growing approximation to His revealed will as to its 'attainment' it may be better qualified to be used of Him in testimony in the nations, and to the completing of its own number by the salvation of those yet to be added by the Lord.

This ministry is maintained by the Lord through the stewardship of those who value it. There is no "subscription", but gifts can be sent to the Editor, "A Witness and A Testimony", 13, Honor Oak Road, Forest Hill, London, S.E. 23, England. All cheques should be made payable to "Witness and Testimony A/c". The paper is sent only to those who personally desire it, and we count on friends to advise us if this is no longer the case, or if they change their address.

"Personal" letters should be addressed to Mr. T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.



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No. 2. Vol. 29.

“ HIS GREAT LOVE ”

I. THE CREATION MOTIVATED BY THE LOVE OF GOD

“ . . . but God, being rich in mercy, for *HIS GREAT LOVE* wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved) (Eph. ii. 4 - 5).

“ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life. *FOR GOD SO LOVED* the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life ” (John iii. 14 - 16).

TH**ERE** is great weight made to rest upon that little word “for” — “*For God so loved the world*”. We say that John iii. 16 is the heart of the gospel; but it is much more than that, it is the heart of the universe. There is back of all things in this created universe a heart; not just a mind or a will, a design, a reason, a power, a fiat, but a heart. We are familiar with the attempts to prove there is a design in creation, that there is a mind behind the universe, and that a will brought it into being. That is all quite good and right; but we are not so often asked to consider that behind it all there is a heart—and more heart than anything else. The reason, the will, the design, come from the heart. Everything takes its rise in the heart of God. We have said much about the thoughts of God, the counsels of God. The nearer we get to the very centre of things, the more we shall become affected by this fact, that right there in the centre is a heart. It is a heart that we shall come to eventually; not an explanation to

satisfy our reason, not a demonstration of power, but just a heart—but a mighty heart: and when we use that word rightly, we simply mean love. We speak of people being heartless. That means that they are without all that love means. Love is not the governing thing in their thoughts, actions, and motives; they are strangers to love. Heart then for us means love, and when we say that back of all things and at the centre of all things there is a heart, we mean there is love.

All the dealings and ways of God with His own people will have a twofold result—but mark well that this is with His Own, who have come into some very real and vital relationship with Himself in an inward way.

THE TWOFOLD EFFECT OF GOD'S DEALINGS

(a) A DEEPENING EXERCISE TO KNOW HIM

Firstly, a deepening exercise to understand Him, to know Him. Think about that. Is it not true that God's dealings with us and God's ways with us have the effect of causing us to reach out longingly for a knowledge of Himself that we do not possess—to know Him, to understand Him? Such are His dealings and His ways with us, that again and again there come times when for us everything does depend upon some further knowledge, some better understanding, of Himself; when things have got beyond us, nay, the Lord has got beyond us. For all that we know, for all that we may have learned,

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

He has got beyond us now, He is too deep, too hidden for us now; He is defeating all our efforts and all our ability to understand Him. But we are not prepared just to leave it there and throw up our hands and say right away, 'Well, I do not understand the Lord, I do not know what He is after, what He means; I give it up'. Those in whom the Spirit of God is at work find that, although they may be in such a position as to be completely helpless and hopeless in the matter of knowing and understanding the Lord, at this juncture they find they *have* to know, they *must* know, they cannot just leave it there and give up. Everything depends now upon knowing the Lord anew. And it is a very big everything—far more than our life here on this earth as mere human beings. If that were all, we should cut it short and seek the way out through the forbidden door. But we know that something very much more is at stake than just the finishing of the tenure of our days on this earth. Everything that matters over and above this earthly life, all that we have said and professed and claimed and hoped for, is bound up with this crisis. There has to be a discovering of the Lord in some new way. That is the first effect of the Lord's dealings and ways with His Own.

(b) THE RESULTANT KNOWLEDGE OF HIS HEART

The second thing, as issuing from that, is the resultant knowledge—not in the first place of His mind, not an explanation to our reason, a solving of our problems, a satisfying of our enquiries, but the knowledge of His heart. Any of you who have known anything of a life with God can test it by your experience. You have these deep crises, you come to an impasse by reason of the ways and dealings of the Lord with you, and the one thing, the only thing, to save you is a new knowledge of the Lord. I ask you, has He *explained* Himself to you in the first place? Has He ever come to you and said, 'Now this is exactly why I have taken you, and am taking you, this way'—and so solved your problems and satisfied your mind? Has He done that? Not in the first place. No, the first effect of this deep exercise of your heart is the knowledge of His heart; that is, arrival in a new way at the fact and the reality of the love of God. We shall come to the wisdom of God through the love of God. We shall come to the understanding of God only along the path of the love of God. Everything is revolving upon this pivot of the universe—the heart of God.

Is that not proved in many ways, and not least by spiritual conflict? Upon what does spiritual conflict turn and hinge? Well, when we get into the

vortex of a great spiritual warfare, where the pressure is almost unendurable, where everything is going against us, when the heavens are as brass over us and our prayers seem to get nowhere, when the Word of God seems a sealed book, when adversity and disappointment follow on in quick succession, what is the upshot? The upshot is the love of God every time. When the evil forces create conditions like that, and when the Lord is giving them so much liberty for the time being, those forces are always near to whisper about His love, to turn for us His love into hate, 'This is not His love, this is the opposite of love!' Is that not true? You have only to get right down, really down, to have that issue of the love of God presented to you. The heart of the universe is this matter of God's love.

THE LOVE OF GOD THE KEY TO THE SCRIPTURES

Having said that, are we not able with this key to unlock the whole of the Scriptures? Is not this the key to the Bible?—for the Bible is one continuous and growing revelation of this central and basic fact, that love is the motive of all things. What was the motive back of the creation, and of man as the very centre of the creation? It was love. All the rest of the Bible is an unfolding of God's love for man. Man was made for the heart of God. It is a mystery. The mystery deepens and grows as we go on; but there is always a mystery about love, even amongst humans. Love is a strange thing. Very often you cannot for the life of you explain why some people love certain other people—why it was that So-and-so fell in love with So-and-so; it defeats every attempt to explain. Well, if that is so in the human realm, the Divine is infinite in its range above the human. To explain in terms of love why God, with all His perfect knowledge, knowing the end from the beginning, set His hand to make man, is not the easiest thing. Indeed, I think we are at the depth of mystery. You follow that through the Bible. As we proceed, we are coming on to that again and again.

GOD AND ABRAHAM
— A HEART RELATIONSHIP

You can only explain and understand the drama of Eden by recognizing that it was a love matter between God and man, and that the enemy's activity from then on to the end was, and ever is, to cheat God of that on which His heart is set, to take from God the object of His love. From that tragedy of the garden, you find God moving again

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in sovereign love, choosing that which is called "the seed". You see Him fastening mysteriously, inexplicably, upon certain individuals. Let Abraham stand out as a very strong and full example. God fastened upon Abraham, and brought him into a relationship with Himself which was a relationship of love. Mark the progressiveness of God's dealings with Abraham as a representative one in bringing that man right into His very heart. Step by step, stage by stage, Abraham was being brought more to the inward side of the heart of God. I am not going now to trace those steps: they are familiar to you. In His dissatisfaction and disappointment with man, and yet in His hunger to have man all for Himself (which was the first motivating activity of God) God chose this man Abraham, brought him in love to that relationship with Himself, one with His heart in His disappointment over man and in His desire to have man according to His own mind; right through those successive stages to the final step—"Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest . . . and offer him" (Gen. xxii. 2). It was the last step of a spiritual journey where finally, in one magnificent, triumphant step of faith, Abraham went right into the heart of God. "For God so loved . . . that he gave HIS only begotten Son". He became one with God's heart in its passion to have man. That is the essence of John iii. 15-16. So the end of that journey sees Abraham as the friend of God, "Abraham, my friend" (Isa. xli. 8). You can have all other kinds of relationship without having that. You can be parents and children; you can be husband and wife; yes, you can be on the basis of any known relationship, and yet not just come to that—"my friend". If a man's son is his friend, or if a son's father is his friend, you have something extra, the climax and the crown of the relationship. And so with every other relationship. Said the Lord Jesus to His disciples, "No longer do I call you servants . . . but I have called you friends" (John xv. 15). Abraham, the friend of God! Is it not perfectly clear that, in the choosing of this seed, what God was after was a heart relationship? It was a matter of God's heart. The climax of all was not merely some world, some creation, some race of very wonderful people objective to God upon whom He had conferred many wonderful blessings and benefits, that the universe could look on and say, 'Well, God thinks a lot of those people, He has done a lot for them'. That is all true, but something far more than that is involved. The end which God has in view is a race of friends, the expression of mutual love; God's love begetting love, destroying that evil work when God lost what He was after in the first place—a potential friend. You cannot

understand that; He is speaking in human language, to express a Divine mystery; but the Bible is full of it.

GOD AND ISRAEL

—LOVE THE ONLY EXPLANATION

From the individual seed you come to the nation. Again the mystery deepens. Why choose that nation, Israel, the seed of Jacob? But here is the nation chosen. It would take us a long time, but it would be well worth doing, to trace the love of God in the history of that nation. We find ourselves very near the heart of God when we touch Israel. You think of all the words the Lord used, the titles He employed, concerning that people. He called Israel His child. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him" (Hosea xi. 1). He called Israel His son. "I . . . called my son out of Egypt" (Hosea xi. 1). He spoke of Israel as betrothed unto Himself, His wife (Hosea ii. 19, 20 etc.); His daughter—"virgin daughter of Zion" (Lam. ii. 13 etc.). He spoke of Himself as Israel's mother—"Can a woman forget her . . . child, . . . yea, these may forget, yet will not I forget thee" (Isa. xlix. 15). Have you not read the prophecies of Hosea? There, within a very small compass, you have this whole story of God's love for Israel in such terms of strength and passion and longing and yearning and heart-brokenness as cannot be found anywhere else.

"When Israel was a child, then I loved him . . . I drew (Ephraim) with cords of a man, with bands of love; and I was to them as they that lift up the yoke on their jaws; and I laid food before them. They shall not return into the land of Egypt; but the Assyrian shall be their king, because they refused to return to me. And the sword shall fall upon their cities, and shall consume their bars, and devour them, because of their own counsels. And my people are bent on backsliding from me: though they call them to him that is on high, none at all will exalt him. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I cast thee off, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboiim? my heart is turned within me, my compassions are kindled together" (Hosea xi. 1, 4-8).

That is God speaking; and note the setting of that eleventh chapter of the prophecies of Hosea. It is the time when Israel's sin had filled the cup to overflowing, the time when they had reached the climax of iniquity and idolatry, practising such wickedness as I would not dare to mention here. It would be a scandal in the presence of decent-minded people to say what was going on in the streets of Jerusalem in the name of religion. It is

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at such a time, when His wrath might most justly have been poured out upon them, that God says about those people—"How shall I give thee up?" You know the story of Hosea's life—how he was commanded by God to go and love and marry a harlot, all to set forth in the life of the prophet the great truth that however deeply buried in iniquity these people were, God loved them. Oh, the mystery of God's love! Will you tell me it is not true that the universe has at its very centre a heart that loves? Well, think again and go back to your Old Testament.

GOD'S LOVE EMBODIED IN HIS SON

We pass to the New Testament, and what do we find? We find there that the heart of the universe is now embodied and revealed in One Who is God Himself incarnate. This One gathers up into Himself—and far transcends—all the past. If Israel has so direly sinned and so stricken the heart of God, that heart has gone beyond Israel now. Here, in the person of His Son, God is showing it is not only Israel that is in His heart, but the whole world. "*God so loved the world*". "*... the Gentiles are fellow-heirs*" (Eph. iii. 6). And then you read the first chapters of Romans, and see the state of the world. Horrible things are said about the state of man in those chapters; and yet how does that letter break out? It breaks out in a matchless revelation of the grace of God, which is only another word for love. In this One—His Son—the love of God, far transcending all the wonderful revelation of it in the past, is now embodied and manifested.

You can see the link of the Lord Jesus with all the Scriptures of the past; and let this be the key to them. It is not just that He was foretold—though that is true: He was the theme of the Old Testament writers and they were all pointing toward Him. But it is something more than that. What have they all been dealing with, what has been the substance, the essence, of all the Old Testament writings? Is it not God's love for man? The Lord Jesus embodies in Himself all the Old Testament on that point; He includes everything.

Oh, but, you say, there is another side to the Old Testament. There is the awful story of God's wrath. Ah yes, but what is God's wrath? Rightly understood, wrath, anger, only exists because of love. There is no such thing as anger or wrath if there is no such thing as love. In the fallen creation, if we are angry, it is so often because of some self-love. There is very rarely that crystal-pure essence of wrath which is utterly selfless. We are angry because in some way we are cheated or defeated or

robbed; something is happening to us, and we are angry. There is very little of that pure wrath of God in this creation, that which is apart from any selfish consideration whatever, when we are angry in a disinterested, detached way, angry with pure anger. If you can get that, then it is that because you love so strongly, therefore you hate so strongly. Wrath is only the other side of love. If God is angry, it is His love in reverse expression. That comes out at the end of the Bible. It is seen to be anger because of sin and because of complicity with the enemy of all that Divine love means—the very nature of God.

But to return to our point. The issue of the Old Testament is—"God so loved the world that he gave his . . . Son". The Scriptures have all been pointing to that, but it is love that is behind all. The Lord Jesus is the succession of all that has gone before showing the love of God.

THE LOVE RELATIONSHIP OF THE SON TO HIS FATHER

You see Him in His relationship to God His Father. Oh, if the Lord Jesus does reveal God, how does He reveal Him? Well, I do not see any fuller way in which He reveals Him than in terms of love, through His devotion to the One Whom He always calls "My Father": The Father says, once, twice—"This is (Thou art) my beloved Son" (Matt. iii. 17; xvii. 5; Mark i. 11). He could have said, 'Thou art my loved Son', but He did not. He said, "Thou art my beloved Son". It is not making something out of nothing. Look at some words with that little prefix. 'Betrothed'—that is your relationship of a troth to a person. 'Besiege'—the direct, immediate relationship of an investing army to those invested. 'Beseech'—there is something more in beseeching than just asking. When you beseech, you give yourself, you pour yourself out, you let yourself go, you hold nothing back. And so, 'Beloved'. The point is that God has come into an immediate heart-relationship with this One, He has taken Him into His heart, He is related to Him in terms of love. His relationship with this One is not just that He loves Him, He has given Himself to Him. He is 'Be-loved'!

See the relationship of the Lord Jesus to God's will. Oh, yes, it was a bloody conflict, even unto death, sweating as it were great drops of blood, but His love for the Father bore Him through. "*The cup which the FATHER hath given me, shall I not drink it?*" (John xviii. 11). "*FATHER . . . not my will, but thine, be done* (Luke xxii. 42). This love relationship to His Father went down so deep, was

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so tremendous. Words with us have become so common as to be robbed of a great deal of their strength. I was going to say, it was terrific, that love for the Father, when you see what the Son went through. Do you notice that when He had fought through that battle, that battle of His relationship with the Father in terms of love, from that moment He was so calm and steady and tranquil that everything was going down before Him? The battle is over, the situation is established. They come to take Him, with torches gleaming in the night; with sound of hurrying feet, of swords being drawn from their scabbards; a traitor betraying a leader, a traitor who has said, 'I know where He goes, I know because I have been with Him, I will take you to Him; and in case you might mistake one of His disciples for Him, I will give you a sign as to which is He, I will kiss Him'. Thus they came, with all the hatred that lay behind on the part of the High Priest and the rulers; and He is as steady as a rock, they fall back from before Him. "Whom seek ye?" "Jesus of Nazareth". "I am"—and "they went backward, and fell to the ground". Again He says, "Whom seek ye?" "Jesus of Nazareth". "I told you that I am he"; 'if you seek Me, here I am; take Me, let these others go free'. See how tranquil, steady, rocklike, He was right to the last, before the rulers, the High Priest, before Pilate. Oh, there is something about triumphant love that settles a great deal of conflict and hate and fever and anxiety, and makes you very steady. That was the Lord Jesus.

THE SON'S LOVE RELATIONSHIP TO HIS OWN

See His relationship to His Own. It is summed up in one word—"having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John

xiii. 1). Perhaps He loved Judas. You notice that when Judas led that band to Him, He did not look at him and say, 'Traitor! You scoundrel! You wicked man!' He said, "Friend"! I think that was enough to send Judas to suicide. 'He called me friend, and yet He knew what I was doing!' He loved His Own to the end. And, knowing ourselves, shall we not agree that there is a mystery about this love? Oh, yes!

I am going to stop there, because at that point you have to go right on from the persons here in the days of His flesh, through the rest of the New Testament, and all the teaching that was given to the Church, and so at length to the Revelation, and you find it is all turning round this one point—the love of God. I think I have said enough to give some ground, at least, for believing it is true. Oh, there may have been times in your experience, and there may yet be—if you have not yet come there, do not worry, go on with the Lord—when you wonder whether you will ever again speak about the love of God. Everything seems to argue to the contrary, and Satan has struck such a blow as to have made your faith rock. What the Lord is, I think, trying to say to us is this, that that may very well be just the way to a new discovery that it is all in love, and just the opposite to what the devil is trying to say. "*Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth*" (Heb. xii. 6).

Well, to sum all that up again; at the centre of this universe is a heart. That is God's side. Our side has yet to be contemplated. But oh, it is wonderful, inexplicable love, and I, for my part, am one of those who believe that if only we could present the love of God aright, we should never have to speak of the wrath of God in order to persuade men—and even if we did, we should have to show that His wrath is love in reverse.

T. A-S.

THE PROBLEM OF THE STONE

Reading: Mark xvi. 1-6.

"They were saying among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the tomb? . . . for it was exceeding great".

THIS is one of those many human problems which have heavenly solutions. Let us look to see what this stone represented for those concerned.

THE DISAPPOINTMENT OF EXPECTATIONS AND HOPES

Firstly, it represented the disappointment of all their expectations and hopes. If they had been near

when that great stone was rolled into position at the entrance to the tomb and if they had seen (as we are told elsewhere) the seal put upon it, they would have turned away, saying in their hearts, 'That is the end of all our expectations, that is the disappointing of all our hopes'. We know how two of the followers of the Lord went on a journey after that very time, and being interrogated as to the despair upon their faces and in their tones, they said, "We hoped that it was he who should redeem Israel" (Luke xxiv. 21). For them, all hopes for the redemption of Israel had gone with the closing of the tomb, and every expectation on which they

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had set their hearts was finished.

THE POWER OF THIS WORLD

Again, that stone represented the apparent triumph of the power of this world. The world had concentrated its power upon the One in that tomb and had seemingly triumphed. At that time the world had gained the day; all the evidence declared that its power had conquered.

THE SPIRITUAL PROBLEM OF DEATH

But more, that stone represented the terrible spiritual problem of death. Death is a great spiritual problem. I will not dwell upon that now; but in the presence of death you are confronted with tremendous problems, and are always asking all kinds of questions. There is about death such an utterness of helplessness, and demand for something that is beyond our giving. No one has ever come back from death to us personally, literally, to tell us anything of what we want to know. Death is always a tremendous mystery, and it was doubly so for those followers of the Lord; for they were not only perplexed by the general problem but also by the specific problem of *His* death. You can almost hear them inwardly asking questions. That *He* should die, that this should have happened to *Him*! What could it mean?

That stone really was a very great one, viewed from every angle. Indeed, it is true, that "it was exceeding great". And we have to enter as we can into the spirit of what we will call the negative side, the dark side, of its meaning before we can really appreciate the other side—that is, what the stone came to symbolize for them and for us all in Christ.

THE IMMINENCE OF ANOTHER WORLD

In the first place, it symbolized the imminence of another world than this one. That young man in his white robe—we read in another record that there were two in dazzling raiment, but here it says one—was a visitor from another world; and everything associated with this stone and its rolling away, as given in the four records that we have, speaks of the intervention of another world. It declares that this world, after all, is not all that we have to reckon with, or that death or men or our disappointments have to reckon with. There is another world entirely, in close touch with this one, and mightier than it, acting in relation to the purposes of God centred in His Son, and which can never, on any account, be swallowed up in a tomb. That

entire other world is interested in this stone, in all the problems that are bound up with it in the hearts of true, sincere, simple, devoted followers of the Lord Jesus. The imminence of that world was gathered into this stone when it was rolled away, declaring that that world is very near and to be counted upon when God's eternal interests in His Son are at issue.

We do not know—for we have no evidence on which to work—but it would not be surprising if from time to time in after years they referred to it. 'You remember our great problem about the stone, how helpless we felt that morning, how utterly impotent, how every hope was gone; that stone represented for us an impasse, an impossible situation. But it was not there when we arrived on the spot! It was as simple as that! It is good to remember that God can do it like that'. There is another world so superior as to make of our problems nothing, as to dismiss the greatest causes of disappointment and despair as simply as though they had never been; to wipe them out so thoroughly that at one time we feel the situation to be utterly impossible and yet when we arrive on the spot there is no situation at all to be faced. Afterward that was how it seemed to those women. God is like that. That is our resource in a day when there is an exceeding great stone. Yes, the imminence of another world.

THE TRIUMPHANT POWER OF LIFE OVER DEATH

Further, that stone became the symbol of the mighty, triumphant power of life over death. We are so familiar with phrases like that that perhaps they have lost their point; but is not God constantly solving our problems along this very line? We are looking for things to happen, and yet all the time the power of His risen life is silently working and solving so many problems. We look back and remember how often we felt that we could not go on any longer, that we could not survive very much more, that we were at the end of our resources—the situation was really beyond us, and some tremendous thing had to happen. The tremendous thing we expected did not happen. The fact is that we are going on to-day after many such an experience of trial and helplessness; we have quietly been kept going on, and we are going on; we are not yet submerged and overwhelmed and put out. That is the miracle of His Divine life silently solving the problem, dealing with so many things that seem to say, Death, an end! The power of His resurrection is the answer to many of our problems. We look

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for acts; He proceeds along the silent course of life, the mighty power of life overcoming death. "It was not possible" says the Word, "that he should be holden of it (death)" (Acts ii. 24). They were saying, 'It is impossible for us to deal with this stone, this situation!' He was saying, 'It is not possible for death to hold Me'. There are two ways of viewing the impossible. Everything depends upon where you put the impossibility—on the thing or on God. The things which are not possible with men are possible with God (Matt xix. 26). And He answers these impossible things in the normal way—for it is the normal way; the abnormal would be by signs and wonders and extraordinary happenings: demonstrations to our senses; but the normal way in the Christian life is the way of the continuous transcendence of His life over the working of death. That miracle is far more general than we recognize. You have to live your life and do your work in a sphere of spiritual death where everything is against spiritual life, and there is nothing to support you at all, and yet you go on there in the Lord, and are not swallowed up, engulfed and destroyed by that atmosphere and by those conditions. That is the miracle of Divine life working silently. Yours, then, is a life—as is the life of everyone—set in the presence of the great stone of death, spiritual death. We know it, and yet we are preserved alive spiritually and we go on. That is the great miracle. It is the miracle of every day. That is the testimony that God raised Him from the dead.

THE TRANSCENDENCE OF FORMER HOPES

This stone became the symbol of the transcendence of all their former hopes. It was not that in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus their former hopes were resuscitated. Their hopes had to undergo a transformation, their expectations had to be greatly changed. The point is not just the raising of their hopes again with the rising of Christ, but the absolute transcendence of all the hopes that had been disappointed. They were looking for the temporal redemption of Israel: they had to see the redemption of Israel in another light. In the resurrection of the Lord Jesus—or let me put it this way—in union with the risen Christ our hopes are far greater than all our worldly hopes. We may in His death have to lay our treasure in the dust, we may have to let go much that is very precious to us of hope and expectation and ambition and outlook. Our world may have to be placed with the stones of the brook (Job xxii. 24). In resurrec-

tion union with Christ something more is given back than what we formerly wanted. God is like that. You may say that is language and sounds very beautiful, but is it true? Well, I appeal to those of you who have any spiritual life and history at all. You have doubtless gone through a time of deep and dark trial in which you have had to hand everything over—you have come to a crisis where you have had to place on the altar something that was very precious and let it go to the Lord. If the Lord has not given that back to you, have you not come into some spiritual wealth, some spiritual good, something more in a spiritual way that makes you say, 'Well, it was worth it!?' The answer of God through the Cross to all disappointed hopes and expectations is, and in the very nature of God must be, something more than that which was laid in the grave. It is the very principle of Christ risen. He was a far greater Christ in resurrection than He was before—if I may put it like that without being misunderstood. He became universal and not local, spiritual and not limited by the physical. Yes, they would say that they had come into a greater Christ. He was not, of course, in actual fact a greater Christ. They had come into greatness that was always there, but which they had never before appreciated. It is the law of death and resurrection—always increase, always something more. One corn falls into the ground and dies, and many corns result. The transcending of former hopes comes that way—in the coming back again, but the coming back with something added. The stone which seemed at one time to say, 'there is nothing left' became the symbol of increase immensely greater than ever they had thought of.

REBUKE UNTO INSTRUCTION

But with it all, that stone became the symbol of a rebuke, which is always, with the Lord, instruction. The Lord never rebukes in a dead way; He always rebukes instructively. I can imagine them saying to one another in their elation, 'Why did we spend all night preparing those spices? What were we up to, after all? We were going to anoint His dead body with our spices. Ours was a prospect of utter despair. We worked in unbelief'. If you work in unbelief it is always despair. They were rebuked by the stone rolled away. Very likely in after years, when they were contemplating a situation that was humanly very difficult or impossible, the reminder would come back to them—'Remember the stone! Do not go down that street again; death is that way!' Thus the rebuke would be

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unto instruction.

And does not the Lord use our experiences like that? I am not saying that we never do go down that street again, and I am not saying that the Lord never allows us to come up against further impossible situations—He does; but in the second test we should derive something from the first, and in the third from the second, and so we go on building up. “*God . . . delivered us out of so great a death, and will deliver: on whom we have set our hope that he will also still deliver us*” (II Cor. i. 10). We have learned something of Christ. Rebuke—and yet we need that rebuke. So often when difficulty arises we go down, we throw up our hands, we are overcome by it. We do not say, ‘But remember, we were up against a difficulty once before, and the Lord saw us through, we did not go under’. We are slow to do that.

THE NEED FOR SUBJECTIVE EXERCISE

What is it, then, to which this heads up? It is interesting, and I think it is instructive, to note that of the four Gospels Mark’s is the only one in which the subjective exercise associated with this incident is mentioned. The other three only record the objective, the external, incidents of the resurrection. One says that there was a great earthquake and behold, an angel! John goes as far as to say that, coming to the tomb, Mary Magdalene “*seeth the stone taken away from the tomb*”. But none of them mentions what Mark records—that they were questioning one with another as to who should roll away the stone. Here was subjective exercise. It amounts to this. Something has got to be done *in* us as well as *for* us. We want to proceed on the line of having things done *for* us, heaven intervening *for* us, our difficulties removed *for* us, having a straight path made *for* us. Heaven may be ready to come in, the Lord may be prepared to work *for* us, but it is not sufficient *for* Him—and it would not prove good enough *for* us—if that were all. The very principle of spiritual growth and maturity demands that He keeps the objective and the subjective balanced; that is, that something is done *in* us as well as *for* us.

It is the principle of the Cross again. He died *for* us—that is the objective. We died *in* Him—that is the subjective. Here are two sides in spiritual experience. He keeps the balance of things. We have to have this balance wrought in us, and to be delivered from this tendency of allowing our problems

to obscure the Lord, this inveterate habit of ours of viewing the position merely objectively instead of saying, ‘What does the Lord want to teach us about this? What does He want to do in us in this matter? There is something He is after in us.’ He has something to do *in* us before He can do it *for* us. How often we have found that when we have come to a new position with the Lord, when the thing has been done in us, then there has been outward movement. So the mention of the subjective exercise suggests that we have to take this matter to our own hearts as something which requires a change in us. I am quite sure that is how they must have felt when they were able to sit down and go over it all again. ‘We were terribly obsessed with our problem and were asking who could solve it for us. The Lord has made us to see that we must be inwardly different about these things, we must have a position of faith, of rest, over them, we must believe God.’ We must gain inward ascendancy over the stone before there is any ascendancy to be known over it outwardly. The stone is really not outside of us in the first place. It is inside; it is in our faith, it is in our spirit, it is in our minds.

When the Lord moves for His own Son’s sake, and has those interests governing, and when those interests have brought us into such a relationship with Him that we can say there is no stone so big to be removed, no problem so great for solving, no difficulty so intense, but the Lord will do what is necessary for His Son’s sake—when we have come to a position like that, the Lord is free to do a lot of things very quietly. As we say, they just ‘happen’. Ah, but they have been the objects of the exercise of exceeding great power—“There was a great earthquake” (Matt. xxviii. 2). But here, in this aspect of the situation, it does not seem to be an earthquake at all. It has just happened. We must recognize that there is an aspect of God’s activities in which the secret, quiet working of His immense power dismisses the greatest difficulties as though they had never existed. Sometimes He may bring us into the presence of the working of His power that is manifestly terrific, but not often and certainly not always. For faith it is more like this: there is such power at work as to make possible the setting aside of the obstacle very quietly, so that we afterward wonder—“And they were amazed”. And the angel said, “Be not amazed”. It is good to have amazement, but let us recognize that a certain amount of our amazement is because we have not sufficient faith.

T. A. S.

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FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

GOSPEL MESSAGES FROM THE ANTARCTIC (No. 26).

"Father . . . not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22. 42).

"It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good" (1 Sam. 3. 18).

AS we have followed the story of Capt. Scott and his companions on their journey to and from the South Pole, we have noted several times how strangely everything seemed to work against them. The men themselves toiled on bravely; they suffered as few men have ever suffered; they did everything within their power to succeed in their task, struggling on until death made anything more impossible; and yet the end of it all looked like failure. And it must be recognized that the failure resulted from causes for which they were in no way responsible—in particular, the bad weather, and the amazing timing of it. All the occurrences were so remarkable that we cannot dismiss them as being merely unfortunate coincidences. So far, I have not attempted to give an explanation, and I do not pretend to be able to do so in any full way; but before we pass on to other incidents in our story I feel we ought to think a little more about this matter, and that there is something more for us to learn from it.

It is important, because very often we find ourselves in a similar position to Scott's. We undertake a task, and do our utmost to accomplish it, and yet the end seems like failure and disappointment. Sometimes we blame ourselves or other people. At other times there seems nobody to blame, and yet everything 'goes wrong'. Who can be responsible for that?

Let us look at some of the things Scott wrote just before he died. Writing about his companions he said:

'The others, all of them, are unendingly cheerful when in the tent. We mean to see the game through with a proper spirit . . .'

'We are very near the end, but have not lost our good cheer . . . It would do you good to be in our tent, to hear our songs and the cheery conversation'.

Writing of Wilson, he said:

'I should like you to know how splendid he was at the end—everlastingly cheerful and ready to sacrifice himself for others; never a word of blame to me for leading him into this mess . . . he died as he lived, a brave, true man . . .'

Of Oates, Scott wrote:

'He has borne intense suffering for weeks without complaint . . . he did not, and would not, give up till the very end . . .'

So it is quite clear that they did not fail because they were miserable and lost heart.

Then with regard to their care of their sick companions Evans and Oates, Scott wrote:

'We stuck to them to the last . . . We could have come through had we neglected the sick. Wilson has sacrificed himself again and again to the sick men of the party . . .'

So their failure cannot be said to be a kind of penalty imposed on them for their lack of care of their needy friends. They did for them all that could be done—and you might have thought that as a reward for their unselfishness they would have been enabled to win through; but neither reward nor penalty seems to come into the story. When we have said everything, we are forced to one conclusion, which Scott himself suggests in the following words:

'I do not regret this journey. It has shown that Englishmen can endure hardships, help one another, and meet death with as great a fortitude as ever in the past . . . Things have come out against us, and therefore we have no cause for complaint, but bow to the will of Providence'.

'The will of Providence'. We prefer to say, 'the will of God'. I do not know what other explanation we can give to the strange experience of our explorers.

We must all admire the wonderful spirit in which they bore their trials. Many men would have complained bitterly, not only against one another but also against God. But there was no trace of that with these men. They did their utmost, but were forced to recognize that there was a Power at work greater than themselves, and without Whose help and favour they could not succeed. And so they submitted, without bitterness or complaint. They might have used the words of Eli of old; "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good" (1 Sam. 3. 18). In this they are an example to us all, and put many of us to shame.

What is your thought about the will of God? Many people seem to regard it as almost their greatest enemy. They think of it as something which hinders them from enjoying life, a system of laws—"thou shalt" and "thou shalt not"—which get in their way whenever they want to follow their own

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desires; and the one thing they want to do, if they can, is to avoid that will. On the other hand, the will of God seems to them to bring into their lives many undesired things such as sickness, suffering, disappointment, loss, which they think ought not to be present if the will of God is really good; and so on this account also they want to avoid His will if they can. To them God's will is rather a disaster than a blessing, and they fight against it. Their great problem is that, do what they will, they seem unable really to escape from it. 'Oh, what a miserable life that is! Most of us have known something of it. In the face of some part of God's will for us—perhaps something He asked us to do, or something He allowed to happen—we started by grumbling and ended by definitely resisting His will. Perhaps the struggle went on for days, and while it lasted our whole life seemed to be suspended. We could make no progress in any direction, and any joy and peace that we had in our hearts disappeared entirely. We were thoroughly miserable—and yet we fought on. At last, because we could not fight any longer, we yielded to God and accepted His will; and to our astonishment joy and peace returned to us, and life seemed to begin again. Such an experience ought to have taught us that the will of God is good and not evil; but strangely enough, the next time God faced us with something we did not like or could not understand, the rebellion started all over again, and we went through the same course of fighting, and misery, and loss, until once more we surrendered and found our joy again. It is tragic to think that some people go on like that all through their lives, without ever learning the obvious lesson. But it is their own fault if they do. There is a better way open to them if only they will take it. Would it not be far better to settle this matter *once and for all*?

The great question is this—is God's will good or evil, loving or cruel? Well, whose will is it? Who planned it? None other than the One Whom we address as "Our Father which art in heaven" (Matt. 6. 9); none other than the One Who "so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3. 16). Is the will of such a Father likely to be evil for His children? Impossible! But like any other father, He often has to deny us things we want, and to permit us to go through experiences we do not like, in order to train us and teach us what is good for us. Is it evil for any father to do that? Surely not.

The Apostle Paul had no doubts on the matter. Almost more than any man who ever lived, he knew what it was to suffer hardships and disap-

pointments, and to go through experiences he would never have chosen. But in spite of it all, he spoke of God's will as "good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12. 2); and when that will required him to bear something from which he longed to be free, he could say, with ready acceptance, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses" (2 Cor. 12. 9). We can go even beyond Paul, to the Lord Jesus, and we can hear Him saying in the hour of His greatest agony—when the doing of God's will was costing Him more than we can ever understand—"Father . . . not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22. 42). The words which marked His life from beginning to end were, "I delight to do thy will, O my God" (Psalm 40. 8).

It does not sound as if the Lord Jesus, or Paul, thought of the will of God as evil, or as something to be avoided, does it? What do *you* think of that will? Do you dislike it because it prevents you having your own way? Are you afraid of it because of the unpleasant things it may hold for you? God's will is the expression of God's love. It ought to be accepted eagerly, gratefully, whole-heartedly, and immediately. If you will trust Him to do so, He is well able to bring to an end in you that attitude of fear and of resistance to His will, and to enable you to trust Him utterly as He works out His will in your experience—yes, even in the times when you cannot understand what He is doing, nor how the experience can possibly be for good. He has told us that "*all things* work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8. 28)—which means, to them who love Him and His will, and who seek to live according to that will.

I would like to add this—that, after all, the will of God is not a thing but a Person. Anyone who yields himself to the will of God finds that he has yielded himself to be governed in everything, not by a system of laws, but by Jesus Christ. To own Him as Lord of your life is the same thing as to accept the will of God. Need I tell you that the Lord Jesus brings only good and not evil into a life?

I wonder in what tone of voice you would say, concerning some matter, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good". Would you say it miserably, grudgingly, rebelliously—because you could not avoid God's will, though you would if you could? Or joyfully, thankfully, trustingly, knowing that nothing could serve your highest interests, nor bring to God more fruit from your life, than that which His will chooses for you? Which is it with you? A once-and-for-all surrender of your self and your whole life to the will of God

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will save you many a bitter battle later on, and open the door for God to enrich you and use you beyond anything you could imagine. Will you kneel down now and give yourself to Him for all His will, whatever it holds, and ask Him to enable you to love His will because you love Him?

The boy or girl who most loves and yields to the will of God will surely be the first at the 'South Pole'.

O will, that willest good alone,
Lead thou the way, thou guidest best:
A little child, I follow on,
And trusting, lean upon thy breast.
Thy wonderful grand will, my God,
With triumph now I make it mine;
And faith shall cry a joyous, Yes!
To every dear command of thine.

G. P.

SPIRITUAL ASCENDENCY

IV. THE NATURE AND MOTIVE OF SPIRITUAL ASCENDENCY

Reading: Ps. xxiv. 3; Rev. xiv. 1-5;
Ps. cxxxii. 2-4.

WE have been led to look afresh at this whole matter of spiritual ascendancy. We have looked at the vast expanses, seeing the thing very much as a whole. Now we get closer to some of the aspects of it.

THE CHALLENGE OF ASCENDENCY

But first of all there is this question of ascent. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?" If I say something that may sound rather blunt, you will understand what I am trying to get at. At the outset, I would say, Well, who is concerned with ascending? Who is interested in ascendancy? What is the point in raising the question at all? Such a way of approach immediately raises this question: Have we yet become really concerned with this matter of spiritual ascendancy? You see, here in the Old Testament, in the illustration of the thing in the life of Israel, there is a good deal taken for granted. It is assumed that there is both interest and desire to ascend. You find the thing in existence. No one is asked about it at all, no one is appealed to. The people of God are not told that they ought to go up. It is not a command in that sense, that some obligation is put upon them. If you get the atmosphere of this Zion factor as in the Psalms, you will find that there is nothing like that at all. To go up is one great longing, a life-ambition. "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go unto the house of the Lord. Our feet are standing within thy gates, O Jerusalem". Everything that is said about it is just an expression of a great life-desire. One thing which overshadowed everything else in the aspirations of a true Israelite was—if only I could go up to Zion! There was the trek three times a year, as the Lord had prescribed through Moses. "Three times in the year all thy males shall appear

before the Lord God" (Exodus xxiii. 17). You may take it that was not some onerous business they had to perform. For weeks before, they were all astir about this trek to Zion. It was the one thing in their thoughts, it governed the whole of those three sections of the year. The culmination of those months was Zion, and that visit to Zion gave zest and new aspiration to get over another period. It was the one thing for which they lived. I think that is the spirit of the psalms, and certainly it was the spirit of David. It is just assumed there was interest in this matter and great desire concerning it.

That ought to test us and challenge us. As we come to understand, to see more fully what it means to come to the place of spiritual ascendancy, there ought to enter into our lives a new zest. Of course, literally and historically, we can understand it. For instance, it is a good thing to gather together in Conferences periodically and have a valuable time of fellowship and ministry, and perhaps many of you scattered over the earth look forward to it. It is good to have a literal coming together from all over the place from time to time, to enjoy the Lord, and the fellowship of the Lord's people. It is not that we are talking about, good and valuable as it is, and much as we should encourage it; for mutual help is strength. But there is something which is far greater, far more important than that. There is the spiritual meaning of such things; and we are seeking to enter into that spiritual meaning.

But we begin with this: Is there really in us by a work of the Spirit a mighty urge upward in the spiritual life? Have we got it? Is it in us? Are the highways to Zion really in our hearts?

ASCENDENCY A RIGHT AMBITION

Now historically we see that this was a phase of Israel's life; and especially when they were in good spiritual condition was this something which characterised them with great joy. But what is repre-

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sented is of much longer history, the spiritual history of this principle. May I pause for another parenthesis, by way of reiteration? Everything in the Word of God, everything that God has appointed as ordinance and function and event in the life of His people, is only His way of saying something deeper. It is the embodiment of something eternal, something which belongs to a realm that is not passing, not of this earth at all; and in this going up to Zion we have embodied in type this thing which has a so much longer spiritual history; that is, the inborn constituent of human nature to rise. As we have said before, it is not wrong to have ambition or aspiration. I think a lot of people think that is a form of soulishness which ought to be killed. Be careful how you set about killing your souls! They have to be redeemed, not killed; and in the matter of aspiration, of ambition, it is not a question of quenching but of redeeming and sanctifying. Aspiration is something which God put into the very constitution of man. "*Thou makest him to have dominion*" (Ps. viii. 6). It is there. There is nothing wrong with the thing itself, and bound up with it there is this long history of ascendancy. But, of course, as we have said, it was distorted, twisted, polluted, corrupted by the self-motive, the self-interest, the self-principle, so that in man by nature aspiration and ambition is usually to be something himself, to come into a place of ascendancy himself, in order to feel power in his own hands: and while there may be timid souls who think that their trouble is all the other way round, let me say at once that even an inferiority complex is only your way of saying how you hate being down there; you want to be something! It is there, whatever form of expression it takes; and these psychological disturbances, which create this depression and self-occupation and false humility and circling round our wretched nothingness all the time, are only the cry-out of something in our constitution: they express a revolt in us; nature will out somehow, and nature is this, "*Thou makest him to have dominion*". Now the Lord is not going to quench that; He is going to redeem and sanctify it, and through the Cross purge it of all the personal interest and motive, and every element of self, until He has that Christ-likeness of true meekness and humility which can govern, which can reign and take the Throne. It is the *Lamb* Who is in the Throne. The very symbol of weakness and dependence has come to govern.

So we are thrown back to this: Are we without the right kind of chastened, sanctified aspiration? There is an awful malady which overcomes some people, and it is fatal. It is what someone has called

the malady of not wanting. We might change the word and say the malady of not caring. Something has gone very far wrong with us as Christians if there is anything like that about us. While, on the one hand, it should be farthest from our thoughts that we in ourselves should be anything, on the other hand there is this mighty ambition which God would have in us, that we should be unto the praise of His glory, that in all things He should be glorified in us. Are you suffering from the malady of not wanting or not caring? Something has gone wrong, there is a deep injury to your spiritual life, if it is like that. Ask the Lord to heal you of that fatal malady. It may be, of course, just the result of frustrated personal desire. The personal element has been disappointed and you find you have nothing to take its place. That is terrible.

TESTING OF MOTIVE — THE LORD OR SELF ?

Well, it is here, you see, in this realm of spiritual aspiration, this outworking of the great power of ascendancy as God would have it in us by the Holy Spirit, that all our testings take place—the testing of all our motives. Why should we aspire, why should we go on with the Lord, why should we pay the price, why should we endure hardship? If the answer is that we do not stand to get much out of it—well, there is not much reason why we should aspire if we live on that level. Motives are tested along this line. Can you bear a seeming rebuff (it will never be a real one) from the Lord? Can you go on when He gives you no stimulants, when He seems to be standing back? What is your motive for going on? If it is a personal one, then you will have very little to feed it. The Lord will starve all our personal interests in this matter as we advance. He does not want us to go on simply because He is all the time giving that which would stimulate our going on. He wants us to go on for His own sake, because we have come to see the transcendent value of the things of the Lord. That is where we are tested. It is the life of Abraham in a nutshell. It is the life of many another servant of God who has stood closely related to His great purpose in Christ; testing, withholding, hiding, giving very little to encourage. Why should we go on? Motives are tested.

ASCENDENCY DEMANDS SPIRITUAL STAMINA

Faith is tested, and endurance is tested, in this realm of spiritual ascendancy. We have to see

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something bound up with this which puts stamina into us. We have to see, as did the Apostle, "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. iii. 14) for stamina to be put into us as it was into him. Oh, what stamina, what endurance, that man exhibited! How did he do it? He saw the on-high calling, he had the heavenly vision; and all the vast accumulation of discouraging and disconcerting things here could not move him. He was able to say, "*None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself*"; "*that I may gain Christ*" (Acts xx. 24. A.V. and Phil. iii. 8).

Well, it is here, of course, that all the exhortations and appeals and warnings come in Scripture. What are all the exhortations about? They all revolve around this one thing—Go on! "*Cast not away therefore your boldness, which hath great recompense of reward*" (Heb. x. 35). All the appeals are on this ground and all the warnings are connected with this. You remember those warnings which are taken out of the very life of Israel, such as—"*To-day if ye shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts*" (Heb. iii. 7-8). That is said not to unsaved, but to believers. "*Harden not your hearts*". It is so easy for a believer, should he take the situations and the circumstances of spiritual development as an end in themselves, to get hard of heart, bitter of spirit, resentful and rebellious. "*Harden not your hearts*", as they hardened theirs and lost the inheritance. It is in this realm that crises constantly arise in our life.

ASCENDENCY ACQUIRED IN COMMON AFFAIRS

Again and again we find ourselves brought to a crisis: Are we going on or are we not? How many of you have been at that point, many times perhaps, in your spiritual life? It is almost as though you had been brought right to a standstill by reason of the fury of the oppressor, the hardness of the way, the difficulties of the situation, the discouragement of the circumstances; and then you have started to go round in a circle, and sooner or later you have had to come to the place where you say to yourself, 'Well, what is going to happen? Either I am going on or I am not!' A place of crisis; and the crisis is always on the question of utterness. If I am going on, I see that I have to go on without many things I want. I have just to go on, and that is all there is to it. That is utterness—going on because you can do no other than go on with God: you have no alternative. And every fresh crisis is a weakening of crises. You eventually come to the place where you say, 'I have been down this street too many

times before not to know where it leads. I am not going down it again; it leads to deadlock, there is no way out here at all'. The Lord is working at us till He gets us to the place where we will go on, no matter what the circumstances are. That is spiritual ascendancy in its practical outworking.

What then is this matter of ascending into the hill of the Lord? It is not some mountain on this earth that we are going to climb. It is this everyday thing: Am I going on with God right through to His full end? There are ten thousand things to discourage and set back. Am I going to allow them to do that? Spiritual ascendancy meets us from the first moments of consciousness every morning and it is there with us all day long. Something is said, and we go down under it. Some situation arises, and we at once collapse. We all know it: there is not one of us who has not been caught by this situation. For the moment, we get down under it. We know quite well we shall never go on till we get on top. The Lord does not lift it off us; He says, 'Come out from under it'. "*What doest thou here, Elijah?*" (I Kings xix. 9). It is the challenge to us to leave the place that we have taken under things. That is spiritual ascendancy; that is the nature of it.

SERVICE THE MOTIVE OF ASCENDENCY

Now, what is the motive of spiritual ascendancy? The motive, surely, as revealed in the Word of God in this very connection, is the motive of service. The Bible is a book of spiritual principles. What is the central thought of the throne in the Word of God? It is service. Take Joseph, for example. There is a man who through deep discipline, frustration, disappointment, abandonment, loneliness, and every kind of adversity, at last came to the throne. We may say that he climbed there. It was a moral and spiritual climb up. It was not just official, not just haphazard. God's eye had been upon him in secret, and when the Lord had tried him ("*the word of the Lord tried him*"—Ps. cv. 19), when that trial was accomplished, they sent and brought him out, and he was made prince in Egypt. But what was connected with that? Well, the story is so patent. It was service: it was for the life of others, it was usefulness in the day of need.

That was the whole thought in the case of David. Starting from that low place as a shepherd lad looking after the few sheep, and the Lord looking into his heart, what a climb his was to the throne! How much discouragement, how much frustration, how much setback, how much heartbreak through those years of the reign of Saul! Hunted, driven, pursued;

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there was plenty there to make a man say, 'Well, it is not worth it. I am going back to my few sheep, to a quiet personal life: at least I had that!' But he never did turn back; he went on. It was a moral climb to the throne. When David came to the throne, he came there because he had proved himself a man after God's heart. It was an inward spiritual history that had been developed. He came there; but when he is there, what does it all mean? It is not just a case of David in solitary isolation at the top of the tree, having achieved and realised all his personal ambitions. Oh, see the good, the benefit, the wealth, the fulness for the people of God! It was not until David came to the throne that Israel really did enter into their destiny, their fulness. His reign and the earlier part of the reign of his son, Solomon, was the peak of Israel's history. Far more marvellous than you and I have yet recognized was that reign. There were powers, kingdoms, rulers, which had held their ground and menaced the people of God literally for centuries. They could never be overcome even by Joshua, and right on through the Judges they still held their ground within the compass of that land of Canaan. But when David came to the throne, every one of them was subjected. His kingdom was a vast kingdom of a great triumph such as had never been before. Yes, it is usefulness to the Lord's people that the throne represents, it is service all the time.

You come over to the New Testament and there you find the matter plainly expressed. "*When he ascended on high, he led captive, and gave gifts unto men . . . and he gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers*" (Eph. iv. 8 - 11). Is not this service in relation to ascending?

Come over to the Revelation. "*These are they which come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve him day and night in his temple*" (Rev. vii. 14 - 15). Upward to service: ascension and service; it is a principle. We could draw on the Scriptures to bear it out so much more fully. But there it is, a Divine law.

Spiritual ascendancy carries with it serviceableness, usefulness, and we know quite well how it works in our present lives. A man or a woman who is spiritually down under is no use to the Lord, and only in the measure in which we have learned spiritual ascendancy—learned how to get on top of things, and how to bring the enemy under our feet—can we really be of service to the Lord. Our ministry is not a ministry of truths, words, teachings, ideas; it is the ministry of life, resurrection life,

ascension life. That is to say, it is the life which overcomes, it is the power of ascendancy, and we have to minister that. That is the effect of life.

When we come together and the Lord's life is amongst us in any measure, what is the effect? We all feel lifted up. You will never minister life if you are down under all the time. We cannot really serve the Lord, except as we learn what it means to overcome—which is another word for spiritual ascendancy. It is the secret of service.

ASCENDENCY PERSISTENTLY ASSAILED

Now is that not just the focal point of all the enemy's assaults and attacks? Why does he bring about situations to get the Lord's people under? Why all the quarrels among Christian workers, why the disagreements and disaffections? Why situations where it is impossible to go on any longer with so-and-so? Oh, yes, shame on us that it is so, but that is the sad story of Christian work. Why all these countless methods and ways of the enemy to get the Lord's people under? Simply to rob them of their usefulness to the Lord, to put an end to their service to Him, to open the way for death to counter the power of life. We know quite well that our usefulness to the Lord is a very practical matter, and very often depends upon our going and humbling ourselves before someone else, getting off our pedestal and getting down very humbly and admitting we have been wrong—or even if we have not been wrong, sometimes taking the place of one who has been in the wrong in an effort to get a situation cleared up, washing anybody's feet if only the way of a release of Divine life can be secured. It is very practical, this matter of 'marching upward to Zion'. It is not mere poetry, no mere beautiful idea. It is right here every day, and our usefulness and our service to the Lord may be held up by some seemingly little practical matter of everyday life. Nothing is small if it limits our usefulness to the Lord. What we might call the smallest thing carries with it no less an issue than the release of the mighty life of God to some other lives. That makes everything very big. Oh, if only we had a sufficient motive for seeing to things! Our motive is not big enough. We have taken a situation as something in itself. We have looked upon it as something merely human, something quite natural, just a happening—yes, it may be a thing very common to man, a thing to which we are all very prone by nature—but we have failed to recognize that behind that are vast issues, far-reaching interests. The enemy knows all about it. Do not let us think that the enemy will do very big things to get us out if

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he can achieve his end by insignificant things. Sometimes we think a thing is so insignificant that of course the Devil is not in that: he is occupied with bigger things than that! But if it achieves the end, it will serve his purpose best not to display himself too much. If he can upset you and put you out of spirit, and out of use to the Lord, by simply making someone say something inadvertently, so long as the end is accomplished it is as good as though he had rallied all his diabolical forces and concentrated them upon you. Why should he do that if he can succeed by a mere phrase? It is the end he is after.

The incentive to ascendancy is service, usefulness

to the Lord; for, after all, ascendancy is the out-working of ascension union with our Lord, and everything comes from that. The ascended Lord in heaven: everything flows from that. But how can He fulfil all the purposes and possibilities of His glorious ascension, if He has not got a people in ascension union with Him through whom to do it?

Let us ask the Lord to write this thing in our hearts—that it is spiritual ascendancy that is so important, in order that the Lord may be able to express Himself in fulness; because, if you look again, you will find that Zion is the symbol of spiritual fulness.

T. A-S.

“THE GOD OF HOPE”

“Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom. xv. 13).

GOD HIMSELF THE ONLY GROUND OF CONFIDENCE

“THE God of hope”. It would be equally true and perhaps more enlightening to us if we put it this way—‘the God of the hopeless’; for that is what it means. How many hopeful hearts suffer bitter disappointment when hopes are not realized! God is not like that. He never has to suffer disappointment, nor ever will, for this reason—that that upon which He has set His heart, that which represents the goal and end of all His desires, will be accomplished. That is absolutely certain, and He is certain of it. He is the God of hope, which means, in the first place, that He has complete confidence, without ever wavering or doubting for one moment. He has absolute assurance that His desires are going to be realized. He finds nothing in circumstances to provide Him with any grounds for hope, and certainly nothing in man to give Him any confidence that His end will be reached; so all His confidence is in Himself. He is the God of hope. Whatever is happening, therefore, and however hopeless the material with which He is dealing, He knows the issue is assured, because He is Himself the sufficiency.

For us, then, hope becomes very much linked up with faith. The God of hope can only fill us with joy and peace as we are believing, because, since the ground of confidence is in Him and not in ourselves, it is only when our faith is secure and steadfast in Him that we share His hope. But we may share it because we do believe in Him, the God of hope.

You will find three designations of God in this chapter, each with its own special and timely significance.

‘THE GOD OF PATIENCE AND COMFORT’—IN SUFFERING

The first is in verse 5; He is called the God of patience and of comfort. That is spoken with regard to the sufferings and the reproaches that accompany faithfulness to Him. This way in which we are to walk, the way of Christlikeness, is the way of self-emptying, a way of suffering. It is, as it was with Him, a way of reproach; and when you are going through that, you need the God of patience to keep you steadfast, and the God of comfort to sustain you.

‘THE GOD OF PEACE’—IN CONFLICT

Then in verse 33 you find He is spoken of as the God of peace. That too is very clearly spoken in relation to a sense of very real conflict described in verses 30 and 31. What a fight it is, this way of faithfulness to God and of service to Him! What wars arise, what enemies assail! How the Apostle feels the need for some aggressive striving in prayer as he faces his visit to Judæa and Jerusalem! He has to encounter them that are disobedient in Judæa, and they represented for him a veritable demonstration and manifestation of the hatred of hell against the Lord. And he had his difficulties also even with the saints in Jerusalem to whom he wanted to take the gift which had been entrusted to him for them, and he was not without very real ground for feeling that there was much need for striving in prayer even in relation to his acceptance and ministry where those saints were concerned.

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What an atmosphere of conflict and strain and aggressive testing surrounded him! There is only one adequate answer to such an experience and that is the God of peace. It is very interesting to note how God is just what we need Him to be under the given circumstances. When we need patience and comfort, He is the God of patience and comfort. When we need peace, He is the God of peace.

‘THE GOD OF HOPE’
— IN DISAPPOINTMENT

Now we wonder why in this central connection He is described as the God of hope. There does not appear to be anything particularly requiring encouragement in the Apostle’s experience at this moment. If you are making a purely verbal study, the connection is obvious from verse 12. “On him shall the Gentiles hope”. Not only the Israelites can find that their true hope is in Christ, but even the Gentiles, who had no hope, can also have hope in Him. “The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing”. That is the surface meaning, and it may be all that the Apostle was conscious of when he wrote this verse; but I am quite sure the Holy Spirit was preparing for a day when the content of those words would be needed much more acutely than that, even by the Apostle himself.

This letter, we are told—and I think it is generally agreed—was written early in the year, the same year, in which the Apostle went to Jerusalem, and we know that he reached there by Pentecost. That was the end of Paul’s voluntary journeys as a missionary. When he penned this letter, he wrote (as we see in this very chapter) about his journeys with the gospel far and wide, even unto Illyricum. He is making plans, as we see in verse 24, that when he has fulfilled this journey to Jerusalem he will be off to Spain. The Lord knew differently. The Lord knew that within a matter of weeks, perhaps—at any rate within a very few months—the Apostle would be taken prisoner in Jerusalem and enter upon an altogether new phase of his ministry, a phase in which, instead of being a free agent to travel abroad, he would serve the Lord as a captive and prisoner. To any man with a heart like the Apostle’s (a heart which is revealed so clearly in this very chapter) that was calculated to drive him into the deepest dejection—not concerning his own safety (for we are not dealing in the realms of mere personal matters when we think of the God of hope) but in relation to the work that needed to be done, and, moreover, the work to which he knew God had called him. Though he did not know it, this present phase was in effect finished, and he was to be as a man bound and held and limited in most

painful and crippling fashion. Of course, we know that that was when his real ministry began in the fullest sense, but he did not, and could not, know it. May we not say that when he penned this verse 13 he was doing so under the government of the Holy Spirit, for he himself would need, in an altogether new way, to know the God of hope?

DESPAIR ONE OF SATAN’S STRONGEST
WEAPONS

It is quite obvious that he realised it was an important issue, because he speaks of abounding in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Dejection, despair, is one of Satan’s strongest weapons against the servants of the Lord. Other conflicts may be fierce, but in a sense they are outside of us, they are things that can be faced; but here is a battle in the heart, an inward conflict, a tremendous concentration of Satanic assault to bring the servant of God into despair, and only the mighty power of the Holy Ghost can make him hope. But God, Who gives us the Holy Ghost, is the God of hope. This temptation, this suffering, is largely associated, I think, with those who are most valuable and vital to the Lord for His interests. Cast your mind back over the Old Testament to the men who were very nearly overcome by despair or desperation, and you find yourself in the company of men like Abraham and David and Elijah.

ABRAHAM’S DESPAIR

The record never says in precise words that Abraham was brought to despair, but it makes perfectly plain that he did come to a place where he and Sarah in effect said to each other, ‘The promise of God cannot be realised; it is hopeless’. He was 85 years of age; he had had many experiences of the Lord and some very wonderful victories. But there was the one matter which was most important if the purposes of God were to be realised, the matter of the birth to him of a son; and after they had been in the land ten years—and ten is a significant number—there came a day when they said to each other—‘It is hopeless’. People react in different ways to this temptation to despair. Some react by collapsing, others by action—premature action—and it was in that way that Abraham and Sarah reacted. They said, in effect, ‘God cannot do it, so we must do it’. It was not put like that, and we would not put it like that, but that is what it amounted to. ‘God is not, after all, the God of hope; if we are to have a ground of confidence, we must find it in ourselves; the Lord alone, and without our help, cannot do it’. There is no need for me to en-

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large upon the long and painful experience that resulted from their action. You know the story. But the point I am pressing is this—it was an overwhelming of the Lord's servant by despair, and he succumbed. Satan had blotted out hope.

DAVID'S DESPAIR

You turn on to the first book of Samuel, and you find that David, after amazing experiences of the Lord, came to the place where he said to himself, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul" (I Sam. xxvii. 1); and so he went and virtually sold himself to the Philistines. Abraham said, 'God cannot do it'. David said, 'He cannot do it now, it is too late'. When David was anointed king, he felt God could do it. When, even in persecution and testing and trial, he was proving the Lord's power and deliverance, he was still feeling, 'Even though I have to wait, I will wait; God can do it'. And then there came the moment for him which comes and will ever surely come in the life of the servant of the Lord who really matters to Divine interest, where the issue is taken to the last, darkest, deepest position of absolute hopelessness and defeat. David said in effect, 'It is no good, I will give it up'. But even he expressed his hopelessness by action, by which he became involved in a most complicated situation where he, who had refused to lift a finger against Saul, was enrolled as one of the special key regiments of the Philistines, armed to fight against Saul. It was by the sovereignty of God and the objection of other Philistine leaders that he was delivered. It was God's mercy to him. God's mercy brought him low, and took him back to Ziklag to find everything there had gone. When everything else had gone, he found God again and God found him. The God of hope! Everything hinges on that moment. As a matter of fact, the time had almost come, Saul's end was very near, David's triumph and deliverance were at hand. When things are just about to mature, that is the very moment when Satan comes in, in an endeavour to get us to act in the flesh or to lose heart just because we lose sight of the God of hope.

ELIJAH'S DESPAIR

Elijah; you do not need that I should begin to describe to you the story of Elijah under the juniper tree. He did not say, 'God cannot do it', nor 'God cannot do it now'. He said, in effect, 'God cannot do it through me. I am finished. Let someone else try. Now, Lord, take away my life; I am a failure'.

CONFLICT PROPORTIONED TO ISSUES INVOLVED

You may ask why it was that these outstanding men seemed to go into the depths of failure, into moral and spiritual breakdown, in a measure that was unknown in many lesser servants of the Lord. My answer is that it was precisely because the issues bound up with their lives were so tremendously great that the conflict was so intense and fierce. It was because what was to be done through them must be something so wholly and absolutely of the Lord that of necessity they must be brought to a position of complete helplessness and hopelessness. As I said at the beginning, the God of hope really means the God of the hopeless, and so it was. They, of course, were peculiarly conscious of their own personal weakness and inadequacy in the face of the tremendous odds that were against them, but they were committed to a course which was not to eventuate merely in the realization of *their* hopes but of *God's* hopes, not of their purpose but of God's purpose, and so they must not say, 'God cannot do it'; they must not say, 'God cannot do it now'; and they must not say, 'God cannot do it through me'.

THE TRIUMPHANT HOPE OF THE LORD JESUS

Now, in contrast to these, some of the greatest of God's saints and servants, we look at our blessed Lord Jesus Who stands in a class altogether alone. Think of Him in the last dark days of His earthly ministry, and there you have One Who has every excuse for hopelessness. Nothing promises at all to realize His mission and His ministry. In this very chapter the Apostle says that Christ has been made a minister of the circumcision (verse 8). Think of Him facing Jerusalem and knowing that He is the true minister of the circumcision! You say, 'Yes, but there were the people who acclaimed Him and cast their garments under His feet'. But they were not, for the most part, the people of Jerusalem, they were visitors. You say, 'There were the Greeks who came and said, "Sir, we would see Jesus"' (John xii. 21). But, you see, the Lord Jesus had come that the purpose of God might be fulfilled in Israel, and, while it may be a little comfort to find that there are those outside who will respond, that does not alter the fact that He has come for a purpose which seems to be utterly impossible. No wonder He wept over Jerusalem! There He found Himself in the heart of a situation which He had come

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to resolve but which was bolted and barred against Him and murderous in its plans to destroy Him. "A minister of the circumcision". It does not look like it.

And, as we know, even those faithful ones who did love Him were to leave Him alone. He knew it. "Ye . . . shall leave me alone", He said (John xvi. 32). I suppose that was true of these others of whom we have spoken and who lost their hope. It is one of the most painful aspects of such experience—the intense loneliness. The Lord Jesus was far more lonely—though He says, "And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me". He was found here as a man assaulted, tested, and tempted in every way to despair—not, I repeat again, merely as to His personal position in relation to the Father (for we know, we never doubt, that if we are the Lord's, He will look after us) but despair as to His mission, despair as to His ministry. And He went down, as we know, to the dark, dark death of the Cross; but He went down in hope. Read chapters xiv, xv, xvi and xvii of John's Gospel, and see the calm assurance of the blessed Lord. The disciples—I do not know what they thought; they must have thought the whole thing utterly absurd. In this dark moment of absolute collapse of everything, how much is said in those chapters in the calmest confidence of faith.

It is all right to pray; God will answer your prayers; ask in My name'. They must have looked at each other in perplexity; God did not seem to be answering a single prayer. Think, too, of all He said about the future, when in a life together there would be glorious fellowship and fruitfulness—the vine, the branches, the fruit, more fruit, much fruit. Strange language when everything has gone wrong! Think of all His words about the Holy Spirit's coming, His presence, His working, His power, His relationship to the whole world in bringing men to conviction and to faith concerning Himself; and, above all, think of His words, especially in chapter xvii, about the glory—not only the glory that was, but the glory that shall be. Abounding in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit—that is the only way to describe the Man Christ Jesus. In the light of the

setting in which His words were uttered, as you read those chapters you have to say—and you say it with something of wonder and worship in your heart —'Abounding in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit'.

HOPE REALIZED IN RESURRECTION

The Lord Jesus might have said, as Abraham said, 'God cannot do it', but He did not. He said, 'God can do it'. He might have said, as David did in effect, 'God cannot do it now, it is too late'. He did not. He said, 'I will rest in hope when I go to the tomb; even that is not too late for God; that is His time' (Ps. xvi. 9, 10). He might have said, as Elijah did, 'God may be able to do it, but He cannot do it through me'. He, by the power of the Holy Spirit, said, 'God will do it, He will do it through Me'; and we know that the resurrection morning proved how truly our God is the God of hope. If you are making a word study and you look at the connections of the word 'hope', you will find it is almost always associated with the resurrection; and the one who is waiting for resurrection is *in himself* the most hopeless of all, because death has brought him to an end of himself. But the Lord Jesus hoped confidently in His Father.

So we are challenged both as individuals and as a people. As the gloom thickens, we are not anxious about our own soul's salvation, but we may well have cause to wonder whether it is possible that God can realize what we have always understood He means to realize through His Church, and what, in all humility, we have believed He means to realize in and through us. Shall we, like Abraham, say, 'God cannot do it', or, like David, 'He cannot do it now, it is too late; we used to think He could, but it is too late now'? Or shall we be tempted to say, like Elijah, 'God may do it, but He cannot do it through us'? Let us rather turn away from that and say, 'No, begone all that temptation! It comes from the pit. God is the God of hope! By grace we will believe in Him and abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit'.

H. F.

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“CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON”

Reading: Rom. viii. 15-30.

I want to speak to you in a general and simple way on what seems to me to be so evident in this portion of Scripture, as related particularly to the time in which we live. I think you will agree that the people of God in this time, as in many past times of severe pressure and trial and suffering, need delivering thoughts, which lift up and out and re-assure the heart and make steady the going; and I do not know of anything in the Word of God more calculated to perform that function than this familiar passage. It brings us right back to the foundation of all things with some mighty affirmations, some tremendous statements—into the eternal and establishing thoughts of God concerning His own people in all times. It is in those thoughts of God, as we recognize them, that we find our strength in times of special stress.

GOD'S PURPOSE, FOCUSED IN HIS PEOPLE, EXPLAINS WORLD EVENTS

The first and basic thought here is this. God has a fixed, determined purpose. He has His thoughts from eternity clearly and perfectly defined. The world is not in a jumble; things are not, from God's standpoint, in chaos. They may be from man's point of view, but from God's they are not. One clear, sure thought and purpose is actively at work in all these things which are going on as they affect and touch the life of the people of God, and we must remember that, at the heart of the universe, are the elect; the very core of everything is the people of God, the “called according to his purpose.” That is why they are never exempt from the things which go on in the world; God never puts them into positions isolated from world happenings, never sets them aside in some place where they are untouched and unaffected. There is a sense in which the people of God register the happenings in the cosmos more than others do, and suffer more. The Lord's people are the heart of things and God's fullest thought is centred in them; and around that people, embodying that thought of God, the whole creation is gathered, according to this Scripture, and is said to be groaning in travail in direct relation to this thought of God which is to emerge ultimately in the manifestation of the sons of God.

Now, I do want to put this as simply as possible. God's thoughts are very high but they are

not beyond any who have the Holy Spirit. Right from the beginning, before the world was created, God had a definite thought. It was not an idea that He was going to try out, not something that had come into His mind and He was going to experiment with it to see if He could bring it to pass. When God thinks a thought it is as good as an act. “I know the thoughts that I think toward you . . . to give you an expected end” (Jer. xxix. 11); and who will for a moment allow room for God's thoughts to be ultimately defeated? No, God's thoughts are God's acts. So that He had a thought which was as good as an accomplishment from the beginning, and right through the ages He has been at work with that thought in relation to His own people; and in such times as this in which we are living, times of great trial for the people of God, that thought of God takes on a new meaning and His people ought to turn back to it in order that they may be saved.

NEED FOR SPIRITUAL ELEVATION ABOVE EARTHLY HAPPENINGS

I was talking to someone recently who is very much in the affairs of this world, and he said, ‘Of course, this world is all upside down, everything is wrong, nothing is as it should be.’ He was not talking religiously, but as a man of the world, without any knowledge whatever of God's thoughts. He went on to say, ‘Of course, so far as our lifetime is concerned, we shall never see recovery, things will never be normal again’—and he spoke with a note which indicated that for him life and the world were all gone; everything for which we lived and hoped, our whole system of things, had gone, there was nothing left; we might just as well depart this life now. If we are going to live at all in relation to this world and this world order, we are going to be in a terrible tangle. To put it quite precisely in the light of present conditions, our essential need is for deliverance from looking for a change of circumstances and the return of conditions in which we can settle down and perhaps enjoy again all the old liberties. If we are from day to day hoping that there will be a complete change and that something will happen which will completely alter things for the better: if we are living in things as they are or as we would like them to be, the ups or the downs of these present world happenings: we are destined and doomed to despair and

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to live under a terrible strain. We have to get out of this somehow, we have to be above it. Of course, we shall be touched with the suffering and the sorrow and the conditions; we shall feel things in the realm of our souls; but in the innermost part of our being, in our spirit, we have to be free from this. We shall never be able to bear our testimony, fulfil our ministry, or be that for which God has chosen us unless we are in a position of spiritual detachment and ascendancy above what is happening. We need deliverance, and we must have it. When we take up our morning paper and read of the course of this world's affairs, we can become terribly involved in it, and the shadow be over us for the rest of the day. That will not do, and if things do go from bad to worse in the realm of earthly things, we have to find a place where still we are outside of it. The same holds good in the matter of elation because of good news, and the apparent improvement of conditions. Disillusionment may cast us down, sooner or later. We must be above this world.

What is it, then, that will secure us there? What will deliver us? It will be the basic and all-governing thought of God. If only you can be assured that God is definitely giving Himself to something, and can see what that something is, and can have, by the Holy Spirit, the witness in your own being that He is doing that in your case, you are delivered. Otherwise you are in chaos and you will soon be in despair. That is where the world is. It is indeed "having no hope and without God in the world."

GOD'S THOUGHT—A PEOPLE CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON

What is this basic thought? The words are so familiar, but I believe everything in history from the beginning to the end in relation to the people of God turns upon this one familiar fragment—

"Whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. viii. 29).

"Conformed to the image of his Son"—that is the basic, all-governing thought of God where His people are concerned. That is what He has been at work upon from the beginning with His people. That is at the very heart and root of our present experiences, our trials, our suffering. God is at work upon you and me with this one thing in view—conformity to the image of His Son. That means many things, which we do not now stay to consider, but we take fresh note of it as the

underlying, undergirding fact. Going right back before time, "foreknown, foreordained," on to "the ages of the ages," the realization; "conformed to the image of his Son." The previous verse (v. 28) expresses this—God is working all things for good with those who are called according to His purpose.

What good? What is the good of the suffering and trial that we go through? It is this—that God is (may I use the word?) reproducing His Son in us; and His Son is His hope, and His ultimate glory is to be revealed manifestly in the saints in terms of sonship. It is the hope for the whole creation—"subjected to vanity . . . in hope." We are travailing in hope. The hope is in God's Son, and the hope is the manifestation of that Son in the saints. "Christ in you the hope of glory."

CONFORMITY TO CHRIST WROUGHT THROUGH COMMON TRIALS

Now to bring that down again to very simple terms. Go back to the place where, for the time being, the Lord has put you, where He has called you to live your life and do your work in all the trial and difficulty and suffering of it, and do not strain to get out of it. Do not lose the present value of it by always living mentally or hopefully in a time when you will be out of it, but go back there and recognize that if you are the Lord's, if you love God and are called according to purpose (as you are if you are in Christ), God is seeking to do something with you and in you by means of the conditions of your present situation. You will only defeat God's end if you try to get out, and fail to recognize and accept what He is seeking to do. I can think of few things more regrettable and grievous than that we should look back upon any part of our life and have to say, 'I might have realized some great purpose of God in that period of my life if only I had taken another attitude toward it than the one I did take; I was chafing, impatient, all the time looking for a way of escape; I was rebellious, living in another mental world of my own creating, in which I would do and be this and that; and I missed all that God intended at that time.' I say, there can be few things more grievous than that.

So we must go back to the sphere and conditions in which the Lord has placed us, with this attitude—God has a thought which relates to me as one of His Own; and that thought is, that through the conditions and sufferings of my life He should develop in me the features of His Son.

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On the one hand, the features of the old creation may be seen to be more and more terrible and horrible, as I recognize them in myself; but over against that God is doing something which is other than myself, not me at all. He is bringing into being Another, altogether other, and that is His Son. Slowly, all too slowly; nevertheless something is happening. That sonship is not very much manifested yet, but it is going to be manifested. What God has been doing will come out into the light eventually—conformity to the image of His Son; “that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

So we look out upon the people of God on the earth amongst whom we are included, and we have to adjust our ideas as to why we are here. There may be things to do, but God is far more concerned with the being than with the doing, and we have to learn all over again what service is. I am not going to pursue that at the moment, but I would say this—service to God is essentially spiritual, or, in other words, it is the measure in which Christ Himself is brought into God’s universe for God’s satisfaction; and we know that we can never bring Christ into anyone’s life by preaching. Have you learned that yet? How much of Christ has resulted from all the conferences you have attended? I am under no delusion that what I am saying to you can reproduce Christ in you. We may talk to the end of our days, but all our preaching is not going to produce Him. We can only help one another in this matter to understand what God is seeking to do.

ONLY GOD’S SPIRIT CAN CONFORM US TO CHRIST

And so we come back to this second thing in relation to purpose. There is the thought, the purpose, which God has in view, upon which He is at work, but the Holy Spirit is brought in here so definitely and fully as the indispensable agent. “*The Spirit . . . maketh intercession . . . according to God.*” The words—‘the will of’ God—are printed in italics in the Bible; they are not in the original. The Spirit Who knows God, God’s thoughts, God’s mind, is working according to God and working in us. We have received the Spirit of sonship, adoption, by which we cry, Father! We are *children* of God to be manifested as the *sons* of God, but all this is because the Holy Spirit is operating, making intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered. “*The Spirit helpeth our infirmity.*” He comes alongside. He alone can reproduce

Christ, conform us to His image. And yet we have thought that service was preaching, teaching, doing this or that or a hundred and one things! Oh, that is only the vehicle of the Spirit. Let us be undeceived about this matter. You are not going to be one whit better spiritually for attending meetings unless the Holy Spirit does something. All that is said may be very true, but your knowing it all will not reach the end of God. We are wrecked upon the Holy Spirit in this matter. Therein is the need for real exercise over everything that we hear.

The fact is this, that we may advance a long way in spiritual knowledge (I mean in information, the knowledge of the truth) beyond our own real measure, and then have the shock, under terrible conditions, of discovering that all that we have accumulated through the years does not help us. We are right up against things and have to say, ‘I have not got the realities I thought I had, they are not helping me; I am being brought right back to foundations in my real, personal, living knowledge of the Lord Himself.’ The peril then, of course, is to jettison all the teaching we have had and to say that it is a valueless thing. It is not valueless; but we must recognize that there is all the difference between knowing the thoughts of God in our minds, and the Holy Spirit’s using that knowledge to accomplish God’s ends. Thus we have to come back with every fragment and have very real dealings with the Lord. Our attitude every time must be, ‘Lord, do save me from ever coming to the time when what I have heard proves only to have been a thing heard; make it a basis of Holy Spirit activity to reach the Divine end.’

Now, if you can grasp this, it is going to be great deliverance. Why are the people of God suffering?—that they may be conformed to the image of His Son. Of course, we may not need a world upheaval to do that, but God is going to use all conditions to that end, and, tragically enough, there are multitudes of the Lord’s people who do need a world shaking. They are so bound up with the externalities of Christianity, with its whole structure and system, that nothing but that which will overthrow, disintegrate, destroy, and raise tremendous questions about the whole business, will bring them to the place where the Spirit of God can begin really to do the work which He has come to do in them.

NEED FOR AN INWROUGHT KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD

I do not want to speak too much about work

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and service at this time, but we are all conscious how very testing are the limitations that growingly bear down upon us as those who would serve the Lord. They raise many questions and problems in our minds, so far as concerns the fulfilment of what we have thought to be our ministry. The situation is a very trying one. We have to look deeper, still more inward, as to God's thought. This is a fact borne out in the case of every servant of God in history who has really come under the hand of God—that the real values of their lives for all time have been those which correspond to the wine of the grape, the thing trodden out in the winepress, the agony of the heart; and you know that it is true in your case that if ever you have had anything at all which you knew to be worth while and which has really helped someone else, it has been born out of some travail in your own experience. You have gone into the winepress, through an agony, to produce it; and that is the nature of real service to God. How do we *know*?—not have information, but *know*? We only know anything in that deepest sense by going into a situation where we are stripped of everything in order to prove that one thing, and to find in knowing it our deliverance, our salvation. That is the way in which we learn, and there is no gap whatever between that kind of knowledge and our very being. That knowledge is not objective to ourselves, it is ourselves, and when we give that we give ourselves. We cannot stand back from that and say, 'I believed that once but I do not believe it any longer; I had those ideas, but I do not hold them now.' Oh, God could never be satisfied with anything like that. There may be sifting and adjustment as to our ideas, but the Lord is after 'true knowledge.' We stand or fall by our knowledge, because true knowledge is life, is being, and it is what God Himself is in us.

PERFECTED THROUGH SUFFERINGS

I wonder if you grasp the point. What is God doing with His people? He is using all these things which are happening, primarily to bring about in His people that conformity to the image of His Son which is to mean Christ in manifestation in an elect people—a people foreordained because foreknown for this very thing. This thought of God is a delivering thought. How do you pray for the Lord's people in times of trouble? Of course, we are all tempted to pray for their deliverance, to cry to the Lord that they may

escape. It may be right at times to pray thus, but suppose the Lord does not deliver? He does not always deliver at once. He allows the situation to continue, to become long drawn out. The enemy will encamp upon that fact and give it his own twist and interpretation—'God is not doing anything; He has left His people, is standing back, is not concerned.' There is no answering voice, no slightest indication that He is taking any account at all. It is like that very often, and that is a real playground for the enemy. God apparently makes no response. How shall we be delivered from going to pieces, from being overwhelmed in such a time and under such conditions? Only by grasping this thought of God; and then we have to begin to pray along other lines. If God does not act to deliver His people, there is a deeper and a higher thought and purpose than their deliverance, and He is at work upon that; and deeply in them He is going to reproduce the patience, the endurance, the long suffering of Jesus Christ. If you go right over the whole ground of God's Son perfected through sufferings and can read your Gospels anew and understand Him as He differs so utterly from the standards of men, you can see what God is doing with us His people. Meekness and gentleness—these are foreign things to our natures; under stress, under adversity, under the cruel hand of tyrannical men, to say, 'Father, forgive!' He could say "I am meek and lowly in heart." Oh, you see—the image of His Son. Such testing conditions are a terrible challenge to our natural dispositions. Our whole nature revolts against meekness and lowliness and wants to rise up and be even with the other one, or be the master. Our nature does not accept and delight in opposition, antagonism, frustration, persecution, and all such things.

But think—and this is the marvel of Christ in Pilate's hall and before the High Priest—think again. Spat upon, mocked, struck, in every way degraded—and He is almighty and infinite God incarnate Who, with the parting of His lips, the silent lifting of His hand, could have smitten that crowd out of existence! The centurion was right; when he saw what had happened, he was filled with fear and said, "Truly this was the Son of God." We have heard of people suddenly discovering their awful mistake and dying of heart failure on the spot. Think of the shock that has to come yet to those who treated Him as He was treated—when they see Him. You can understand something of what took place in Saul of

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Tarsus (who knew all about what had happened in Jerusalem) when he saw Him—"I am Jesus"—saw Him in a brightness above that of the noon-day sun.

But my point is this, He accepted and endured all that, going through to the bitter end, letting them hammer nails through His hands and feet and fix Him to the Cross, with all the deriding—"He saved others; himself he cannot save . . . Let (God) deliver him now, if he desireth him: for he said, I am the Son of God." And He did not stir a finger or utter a word, when twelve legions of angels were standing ready for His aid.

(If one angel could smite the host of Sennacherib, what would twelve legions do?) That is meekness and lowliness of heart, and that is what God is trying to effect in us. That is the thought of God; that is going to be glory in God's universe; that will make a world worth living in, and a universe of that nature will be bearable. God thus works in us; and so the portion we read finds early in it these words—

"I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

T.A-S.

"BUT YE . . ."

"And he said unto them, It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority. But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts i. 7-8).

"Now when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John, and had perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts iv. 13).

NOT . . . times or seasons . . . But ye . . ."
The Lord thus turns the whole question of the new dispensation into a matter of people. The old dispensation commenced with a man. He was God's key to everything in the creation. And here, in the book of the Acts, we have the commencement of the new dispensation and the new creation; and it is focused in a Man—the Son of man—and in men. The key to everything is—"But ye . . ." The disciples were interested in something objective to themselves, and yet in which they would have a place—the kingdom of Israel. That meant they were interested in the interpretation and fulfilment of prophecy—one of a good many themes and subjects; they were interested in teachings. But the Lord said, 'No, it is not teachings, nor truths; not a movement, an enterprise, a kingdom.' All that was to be subsequent to getting the men, and getting the men inwardly in the position which was necessary.

Well, that is a very simple word, but it really goes to the heart of things. What are we waiting for? What are we expecting? Is it a change in our position, circumstances, conditions, location, association? Are we waiting to be precipitated into some movement, for the Church to take action where we are concerned, for others to take

responsibility for us? What is it? Well, let us note this: the Lord says, "Not . . . but . . ." Not any things like that, in the first place, but you: the man, the woman, in right relationship with the Lord, under the full government of the Holy Spirit, filled with love for Christ and for others: the man, the woman, whose eyes have seen the King. That is the key to everything. It may change the circumstances, it may change everything; but to change everything without that would not get us anywhere. The Lord says, 'It is you, everything waits for you'. It is not this and that which you can tabulate, something you may be either definitely or vaguely expecting in connection with a day when you will be in some other position and your job will change and you will be out in 'the work'. You will go on like that to the end of your life; you can have any number of changes but not be getting to the real goal. It is not this and that, but ye . . . The Lord gets us where He wants us and as He wants us.

It is quite clear that is exactly how it works out. We can see that. Here and there are such people, men and women in whom, because of their utterly selfless abandonment to the Lord and because they are so full of the Spirit, the thing is happening. All that we long to see happening is happening with them, the work is being done, there is movement.

So do not let us wait for things. Let us at once recognise the fact where we are. We may not be moved elsewhere. This is to hold good just where we are now, without waiting for some change of time or place or situation or set of circumstances. It is not the thing outside of us at all: we are the key to it all. What is required is that both the Lord and others should be able to look on us and say 'They count, they express the Lord'.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

And, after all, it does not matter what we might get of official position and place in anything that is going. What is the value of that, however great it may seem to be, if it is not the expression of Christ? Let us ask the Lord to show us clearly just what has to be ruled out in our case—that of which He says, 'No, not that, but ye . . .'

We are apt to think that if and when the circumstances and conditions of our lives are changed and we are in another position than the one we now occupy, then something will happen, the purpose of God will begin to be fulfilled. The Lord would say, 'No; it is not circumstances, not conditions, at all; it is you.'

Some think that it is a matter of graduation and ordination and office, and that when they get into an official position, and have recognition there, then they will begin to fulfil the purpose of their lives. So they are waiting until they are either ordained or appointed to their work. The Lord says, 'No, it is not office, it is not ordination, it is not placing; it is you; you are the key.'

from page 42

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And alongside that, many are looking to the organization, the society, the mission, the church connection to which they are related, and expecting a new day for themselves to originate there, and that when the institution, whatever it may be, takes action, then the work of their life will begin. And the Lord says, 'It is not the church, the mission, the organization, the society, the institution; it is you.'

These men in Acts i. were waiting for something to happen outside of themselves. They called it the restoring of the kingdom, the setting up of an order which would be a national—perhaps an international—movement: a new order outside of themselves in which they would find their place and probably be allocated, appointed or ordained to it. And the Lord simply swept the board of all those ideas and said, 'No, it is not that, it is you.' That is how it proved, how it worked out. We individually may be the key to everything in the purpose of God.

T.A.S.

Rugby £2.; Saffron Walden 10s.; St. Austell £1. 5s.; St. Keverne £5.; St. Leonards on Sea 5s.; Sandown 6s.; Santa Cruz, Cal. £1. 15s. 5d.; Seven-oaks £1.; Sheringham 7s. 6d.; Shirley 3s. 0d.; Slough 6s.; Southampton 4s.; Southbourne 16s. 6d.; South Shields 5s., 5s. 6d., 3s.; Spennymoor 10s.; Surat, India 4s.; Swansea 10s. 6d.; Theydon Bois 2s. 6d.; Thundersley 7s. 6d.; Toronto, Ont. £1.; Tunbridge Wells 7s. 9d.; Wallington 10s.; Wheaton, Ill. £7.; Wimborne St. Giles £1. 10s. 0d.; Winkleigh 9s. 6d.; Worthing £1.; York 7s. 1d.; Yountville, Cal. £1. 15s. 6d., £1. 15s. 6d., £1. 15s. 6d.

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THIS MINISTRY

THE OBJECT OF THE MINISTRY of this little paper, issued bi-monthly, is to contribute to the Divine end which is presented in the words of Ephesians iv. 13 — "... till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge (lit. full knowledge) of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we be no longer children . . ."

It is not connected with any "Movement", "Organization", "Mission" or separate body of Christians, but is just a ministry to "all saints". Its going forth is with the prayer and hope that it will so result in a fuller measure of Christ, a richer and higher level of spiritual life, that, while bringing the Church of God into a growing approximation to His revealed will as to its 'attainment' it may be better qualified to be used of Him in testimony in the nations, and to the completing of its own number by the salvation of those yet to be added by the Lord.

This ministry is maintained by the Lord through the stewardship of those who value it. There is no "subscription", but gifts can be sent to the Editor, "A Witness and A Testimony", 13, Honor Oak Road, Forest Hill, London, S.E. 23, England. All cheques should be made payable to 'Witness and Testimony A/c'. The paper is sent only to those who personally desire it, and we count on friends to advise us if this is no longer the case, or if they change their address.

"Personal" letters should be addressed to
Mr. T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY



“A Candlestick of Pure Gold:
of Beaten Work”

Exodus 25, 31.

“The Testimony of Jesus”

Rev. 1, 9.

Vol. 29. No. 3.

May, 1951.

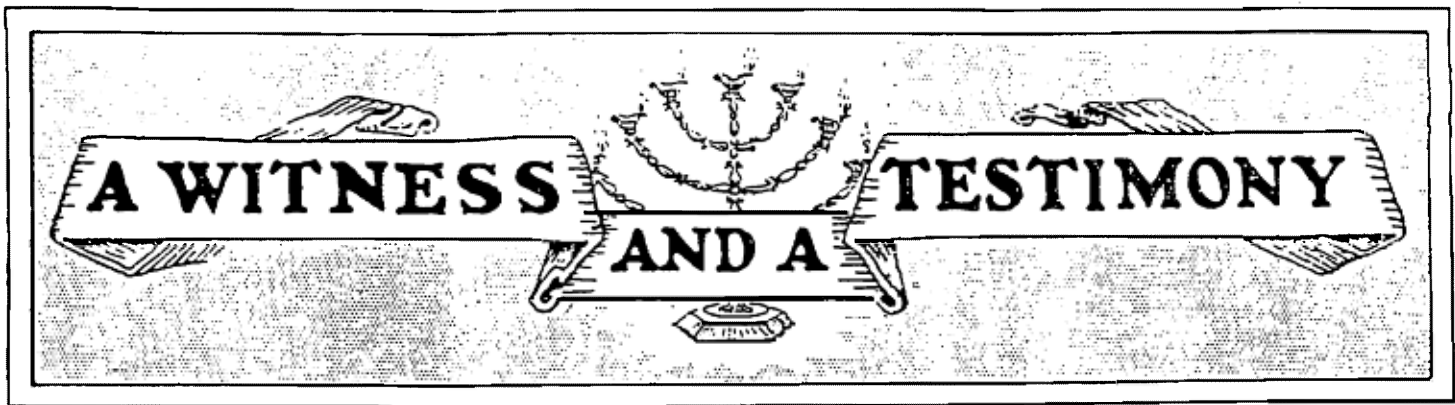
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MAY—JUNE, 1951.

No. 3. Vol. 29.

SPIRITUAL ASCENDENCY

V. ASCENSION UNION WITH CHRIST

Reading: Psa. xxiv. 3; Rev. xiv. 1-5;

Psa. cxxii. 2-4.

"Who shall ascend . . . ?" "Whither the tribes go up . . . for an ordinance (a testimony, R.V.M.) for Israel".

WE continue for a little while in considering this matter of spiritual ascendancy. It might help you if you could draw a mental diagram as of a wheel, and wheels within a wheel. The hub is that which represents Zion. The centre of the hub is the Lord Jesus exalted and glorified. The circle immediately next is that which represents the hundred and forty four thousand, a representative company in closest proximity spiritually to Him. The next wheel within the wheel is the Church as a whole; and the rim is the outermost bounds of the universe. From the hub there radiate numerous spokes. They pass from the centre, first into and then through that inner company; then on to the larger company of the Lord's people in general, who are intended to come into the good of what is there at the centre; and then on beyond the Church to the nations who will walk in the light thereof. These many spokes represent the features of Christ in exalted glory, the practical outworkings and implications and significance of Him in that place and state. Now that mental picture, as I have said, may help a little. We now deal with some of the spokes; but we have to come back for a little while to the heart of the matter.

Comprehensively, it is just the question of Christ and His people in a position of absolute spiritual

ascendancy. Unto that, very much is required in their discipline and experience. But out from that disciplined ascendancy of spirit tremendous values issue in widening circles. The Word of God makes it perfectly clear that that is the order of things. The book of the Revelation alone gives you that diagram. You start with the Lord Jesus in His glory and majesty and authority, His exaltation and His right to govern. You move to that company actually referred to, a representative company, one hundred and forty four thousand; just a typical or symbolic number, meaning a company who have been brought, in the first place, to ascendancy on mount Zion for governmental purposes, as the very number—twelve times twelve—indicates, signifying not only government, but government in great fulness. Then you find that you bring in the whole Church, the Jerusalem in addition to the Zion, and, beyond, the nations that walk in the light thereof. There is your diagram in the one book alone; but the whole Bible works on those lines.

Now we come back to this matter of spiritual ascendancy. We closed our earlier meditation by saying that spiritual ascendancy takes its rise from ascension union with Christ. That, figuratively, is all gathered into the fragment in the psalm: *"Whither the tribes go up . . . for a testimony for Israel"*. You know that is derived from Exodus and Deuteronomy. Twice in the book of Exodus this matter of periodic going up to the place where the Lord had put His Name is referred to. Then again in the book of Deuteronomy it is reiterated:

"Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose" (Deut. xvi. 16). That is the basis of this going up and appearing before the Lord. We shall come back to that presently. We are getting the setting.

A NEW ORDER INTRODUCED WITH THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST

What is the principle? The principle is just going up: it is ascension. These psalms are called "The Psalms or Songs of Ascent". "Whither the tribes go up", and they go up "for a testimony for Israel". Let us get right to this thing in actual spiritual expression. I think the Lord's people are still slow to recognize the immense significance of the ascension of the Lord Jesus. If it does not remain just a date in our religious calendar, in general it is not much more than something upon which we look back in remembrance with a certain amount of wonder, that the Lord Jesus did ascend up into heaven and that He is there. More or less we appreciate the fact, just the fact of the event. I say more or less, because some have seen more in it than others. But few of us have yet been really forcefully impressed with the significance of the ascension of the Lord Jesus—with the fact that upon His ascension the whole character of the ages changed, and that from that time an entirely new order of things was introduced, everything of God from that time for this dispensation being from heaven and of a heavenly order. That is only one thing about the ascension, but it is an immense thing; and it is a grievous fact that the Church as a whole has missed the point of the ascension, for had it grasped the meaning it could never seek, as it has done, to construct anything of a more or less permanent character as attached to this earth, in system and form.

There were, of course, the great historic crises in the history of the Church in which that very thing was developed. It came in with such fulness through Constantine, when he linked the Church with the State and made it a thing of this world. That is what the Devil has always tried to do—to make the Church something upon this earth, to be taken account of here, to have its standing here; its names, its titles, its recognitions, yes, its everything, as something here to impress this world with itself in a temporal way. And the appalling spectacle of the Church to-day, speaking generally, is that it is without authority in this world; it has no voice. What voice has spoken in these terribly critical times through which we have been passing.

when everything in itself proclaims that God has a controversy with the nations, and not least with this nation because of its greater responsibility? There is no doubt about it, the reign of vanity is accentuated a thousandfold in our day, and yet not a voice is raised for God: the Church is silent. The Church has not the voice, it has not the message, it has not the spiritual position required. Why? Because it has become so interwoven with the life of this world and so much a thing of this earth, that its heavenly authority has gone. It is another case of the glory having departed. It is not our desire to dwell upon such things now. That is only by way of coming to this matter of spiritual ascendancy and enforcing the statement that the Church has lost the meaning of the ascension of the Lord Jesus: for if that ascension has one meaning for the dispensation, it is this, that the Church's authority rests entirely upon its heavenly union with the Lord Jesus, its spiritual 'other-worldly' position.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST HIS ENTHRONEMENT

Another thing about the ascension which is even greater is this, that in the New Testament the ascension was always looked back upon by the Apostles and the Church as the enthronement of the Lord Jesus at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. It is never just something in itself, a going up, a changing of location, something called 'the ascension'. It is His enthronement. "*Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted . . . he hath poured forth this*" (Acts ii. 33). That is the ascension, and it is terrific when it begins to register upon this world the import of the fact that Jesus is Lord; and so it proved to be at that time.

THE CHURCH IN ASCENSION UNION WITH CHRIST

Now, in the New Testament quite as much is said about the Church's heavenly position as about Christ's. The two things run together; the one is the counterpart of the other. He "*sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high*" (Heb. i. 3); and "*God . . . made us to sit with him in the heavenlies*" (Eph. ii. 6). Those two things are there and they are kept together. It is a spiritual position, with all the values of it put to the good and the use of a Church that will really take that position. That is the full meaning of spiritual ascendancy. It is really coming to the place where in Christ the Church has been established.

Then, of course, the fight begins, and the fight.

as we have said before. all relates to that: not to keep the Church from getting there. but to keep the Church from knowing that its place is there, and, if possible, to bring the Church down from there; because, you see. the Church began its history there. It was not a climb from the beginning to get there: the Church *was* there; and in the thought of God that is its place continually. But the history is that the enemy has concentrated upon bringing the Church spiritually out of its place. There is a little fragment that the Psalmist uses which, while it does not exactly literally fit in here, is a very good statement, speaking, as it does, about the righteous man, and the conspirators who are talking together of how they can bring him down from his high spiritual place. "*They only consult to thrust him down from his dignity*" (*Psalm lxii. 4*). The conspirators of hell are always at work to see how they can bring the Lord's people down from this excellency of the high place in Christ exalted. So it is ascension union with the Lord Jesus which is the real meaning of spiritual ascendancy, authority and power.

SOME IN ISRAEL A TESTIMONY FOR ISRAEL

Now we can come to the next phrase: "*Whither the tribes go up . . . for a testimony for Israel*". In the type there was periodical ascension; they went up from time to time. They could not have known the meaning of it, but they did go up every so often, fulfilling a spiritual principle that the Lord's thought for His people is that their fulness of life is found on high; and it was so for them in their way. We have said already that it was the high peak of Israel's national life when they went from time to time to Jerusalem, to Zion. They were carrying out this spiritual principle, that ascendancy is a Divine law of fulness of life.

"*Whither the tribes go up*". And why did they go up? for what did they go up? "*For a testimony for Israel*". What does that mean? Remember, it is not all Israel that has gone up literally. "*Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God*". A company representative of Israel went up, and in that representative company there was the testimony for Israel. What was that testimony? It expressed that which the whole house of Israel came into by means of that representative company, the blessings and benefits that all the Lord's people derived from the fact that there were those who went up on their behalf.

Let me pause there. Although the point is not

applicable to Israel because, I expect, all of them would have gone up if they could have done so, yet when you come to the spiritual outworking of this you find, tragically enough, that all the Lord's people are not willing to go up; and it works out in this way after all, that only a certain proportion of them will really take this heavenly position and live this heavenly life. There are so many who want to live a Christian life down here on a merely earthly level, bringing everything in a wrong sense down to earth and relating it to things here. You understand I am speaking spiritually, not literally: I am not talking about abstract things in the way that we do when we speak of 'living with your head in the clouds'. We have said enough to show that this living in the heavenlies is a tremendously and grimly practical matter of everyday life. There is nothing more practical, more real. I venture to say that the realists of this earth are the people who are the most spiritual. They are up against the greatest realities, *the* realities. They are a representative company through whom there will be derived by many others the benefits and blessings of their paying the price, taking the journey, putting up with all the difficulties, going right on to the Lord's fullest intention.

What is the testimony? Just use your imagination for a moment in the case of Israel and their representative company. When they went up, what happened? Well, they went up on three distinctive occasions. The first was at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which marked Israel's deliverance from Egypt. The second was at the Feast of Firstfruits, which marked the growth of the life of the Lord's people. The third was the Feast of Ingathering, the consummation of the life of the Lord's people. When they went up to these feasts, what was their testimony when they came back?

A TESTIMONY TO THE GREATNESS OF REDEMPTION

Firstly, they would say, 'We have had a glorious time up there in connection with our redemption. We come back just full of it, full of the greatness, the grandeur, the wonder, the ever-freshness of our redemption. We bring back to you something fresh in spirit as to what a great thing the Lord did when He saved us, when He delivered us from Egypt.' They would go over it; and while down there, in the customary places of their dwelling, it had become for everybody just some bit of their history, this going up for this particular thing once a year brought into continual, perennial freshness the greatness of their salvation. They saw the

great king in "the city of the great king", and they saw the great house of God, and they saw, in relation to the great king and the great house, how great a salvation theirs was. Until you have really seen the King, you have never grasped the greatness of your salvation. I mean that the more we see of the Lord Jesus, the more we wonder at the greatness of our salvation. "If he shall be manifested", cries the Apostle, "we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is" (I John iii. 2). Again another Apostle says, "We . . . beholding . . . the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (II Cor. iii. 18). Oh, if we only saw the greatness of Christ, what a new apprehension and appreciation of our salvation we should have! And this, in the ordering of the Lord, was to be a perpetual memorial, something to be renewed all along the line; not a living back there so many hundreds of years ago—or so many decades of years ago when we were saved. It is more wonderful to-day than ever it was! That is the testimony for Israel. Our testimony ought to be, 'We have seen the Lord anew, we have seen the King anew, we have seen the house of God anew: we have seen this magnificent thing, this masterpiece of God, the Church, which is His Body.' What a thing it is to see the Church with spiritual eyes, to see God's conception of it! The more we see, the more we wonder at our high calling. It is no small thing to have been chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, to be conformed to His image, and to be a part of that magnificent spiritual edifice which is to dominate the world to come and to be the administrative centre of God through His Christ unto the ages of the ages. They went up and saw the king, and they saw the house, and they went back saying, 'It is more wonderful than ever!' and so all Israel came into the good of their refreshed vision.

I know it is a costly way, but it is a tremendous thing for any of us to have left the lower levels of Christian life, those remote places, and come up to the mount, and to have been shown the Lord in greater fulness. None of us has seen Him yet in very great measure, but it is a great thing to see a little more of Him, and of the meaning of Christ personal and Christ corporate. Therein lies the power of a testimony to the Lord's people—'We have seen!'

I have often asked myself the secret of Paul's endurance and persistence and triumph. The only answer I can find is that he had seen the Lord. You can never undo that.

They went up and were for a testimony for Israel. Oh yes, the hundred and forty four thou-

sand are with *the Lamb*. Ever and always it is the way of suffering and of sacrifice that leads to that place, but it is good to have for the Lord's people that which they need to lift them from their low levels of spiritual life. In the end it is worth it—to know the greatness of their redemption through seeing the greatness of the King and of the house of God.

A TESTIMONY TO THE LORD'S PERSISTENT WORKING

And then the Feast of Firstfruits: "*The feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours*" (Exodus xxiii. 16). The Lord has done something in us. It may not be all done yet, but He has done something. It has been scorching work, fiery work, but He has got us so far. And this is the point: His having done that much is the guarantee that He is going to finish the work. That is the significance of the firstfruits. "*He who hath begun a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ*" (Phil. i. 6). The Lord has exercised power in bringing us thus far. He is at work upon us and in us; there is a history of His faithfulness. Oh yes, however much we feel needs yet to be done, however far we have yet to go, nevertheless we have a testimony; the Lord has done something; and wherever that is the case, He means to finish it. If ever the Lord has taken a life-in hand, He purposes to see that life right through, if that life will let Him. We shall never break down because the Lord is not persistent, because He, as though He were one of us, suddenly slacks off and turns to other interests. No, He is going to pursue this thing. Thank God for that! The fact that He has done something is the earnest that He wills and intends to finish it.

There is a testimony for Israel in what the Lord has done and is doing, both in and for His people. What I mean is this. It is a great thing to be able to say, 'Not only was I converted so many years ago, and came to a knowledge of the Lord, but I have a history since then with the Lord, and it is a very real and living one. I know how imperfect I am, how far short I come, what a lot more there is to be done, but I do know the Lord; right up to date I know the Lord.' They went up to Zion; and whatever they had been feeling about it all through those months while they had been in their own homes, they went back and said, 'The Lord started a work in us long ago and He is going on with it; there are evidences that He means to get us right through to glory; there are tokens that He is doing something.' The people were heartened and lifted

up out of their discouragement and despondency as these went back with their testimony. The Lord needs a people like that to-day. In the midst of everything that has settled down to a cold system and form of teaching and practice, everything that has become merely a set thing, He needs just such a people. Oh, the Lord does need a company, "a hundred and forty four thousand", who represent the goings of God, who are really in the good of a present work of God, in whom something more of His life is manifested. They, in themselves, may be of no account whatever: you may look at them and say they are a poor lot. But there is something there; you meet the Lord in them, you sense life. Those people are alive, there is something there that is active in the life of God. The Lord needs a representative people like that to-day. Is it not true in this Christian world that is so short of life, so systematized and fixed and static, that there is a need of the flow, the release, the impact of life? I say again, there is a price attached to that, to serve in that capacity. But the Lord needs that company, and may He not be seeking out that company even in His approach to us?

The occasion of the Feast of Firstfruits is better known to us as Pentecost. Pentecost seems to have been an inclusive festival and occasion. It looked backward and brought up the greatness of redemption. It spoke of the mighty emancipation of a people for God from the world through the blood of the Lamb. It looked forward and set forth the consummation in the full and glorious ingathering. It led immediately to firstfruits through ripening fires of persecution (e.g. Stephen, and others) and in itself it immediately signified ascension, ascendancy—the Lamb on Mount Zion—"My king upon my holy hill" (*Psa. ii. 6*).

A TESTIMONY TO THE GLORIOUS CONSUMMATION

That brings us to the third occasion on which the tribes went up to Jerusalem—the Feast of Ingathering, otherwise called the Feast of Tabernacles. It was then that the whole of the chief fruits of the ground—the corn, the wine and the oil—were gathered in. That feast was the consummation of all else—a testimony to the Lord's coming for His Own in final fulness, a glorious crown to the whole process that commenced with the deliverance of a people from the bondage of Egypt. It was the consummate expression of the ascendancy of the Lamb and of a people with Him. I believe that really is the heart of the value of the Lord's coming as something held by the Church.

That coming has been resolved into a bit of the Church's doctrine, and, strangely enough, as a subject it has split the churches into fragments; and instead of being a means of elevating the Church and bringing it into a place of power and authority, the teaching of the coming of the Lord has had the opposite effect. You will agree with me that to believe with all your might in the second coming of the Lord does not necessarily carry with it tremendous spiritual power in your life. You can swallow all that has been written on the subject by eminent servants of God, and it may make no difference to your spiritual life. But it ought to. And how should it work? Well, it is not that you have an objective conception and are lifting up your eyes in imagination to that day when the Lord comes. That does not always carry you through the difficult patches. But the Holy Spirit, Who always has that day in view as the counterpart of the ascension and exaltation of the Lord Jesus, Himself bears witness in us, and imparts to us the values of that exaltation whenever we do really, in spirit, contemplate His coming again. Is it not true that if you really in the Spirit sing a hymn about the coming of the Lord, you begin in spirit to rise already? You cannot spiritually dwell upon the coming of the Lord without a tremendous sense of ascendancy. It lifts you up. It is a spiritual thing, not some historical thing in the calendar of the Church, and the Spirit bears witness. On a certain line, we have everything to put us off being occupied with the teaching of the Lord's coming. In my childhood I was told that the Lord would be here before my life had gone much farther on, and that certain people were never going to see death. But they are all dead! That has been going on for centuries. Long before I was born people were saying that kind of thing, and you might well say, 'I have done with this, it does not hold water'. Yet we are going to sing those hymns again, in spite of all these theories and all these things which seem to be so false and untrue, and which seem to justify the men who said, even in Peter's day, "*Where is the promise of his coming? for, from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning*" (*II Pet. iii. 4*). In spite of it all, we are going to sing, and as we sing our spirits will rise. Why? Not because we are putting on blinkers, shutting our eyes, imagining things, wishfully thinking. No; but because the Spirit of God is in us and He bears witness to a great fact, when we in heart, in spirit, turn in that direction. The Church is going up where the Lord has gone up. Ascension is going to be consummated by a great ingathering.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Now the testimony for Israel is not this or that theory about the second coming of Christ, but a living testimony in the life of the Lord's people; which is borne out in this way, that those concerned are really already in the good of it, they are living ascension lives; they know already something, if only a little, of what it means to be raised together with Him. "*Whither the tribes go up for a testimony for Israel*". Those Israelites went up, and then they went back with their testimony glowing in their faces, and the rest got the good of it. And there is a big 'rest' to-day waiting for the good that can come to them through a company of the Lord's people who really do know what ascension life with Him is.

I say again that ascension life is reached progressively, not at one bound. They did not leap

from their distant cities and towns on to the peak of Zion. It was a journey and a climb, and it could only be done one step at a time. If they had tried to take more than one step at a time, they would very soon have been discouraged. It is just a going on with the Lord against discouragement, adversity, trial, suffering, against the enemy that lieth in wait. Yes, all that, but it is a going on, and almost imperceptibly coming more and more to the place where you are not so easily discouraged and overcome as you once were, where the enemy has not quite the same ground as he once had for pulling you down and undoing you. It is a going up. It may seem slow, but none the less it is a going up. There will be a consummation, and we shall arrive at last in glory.

T. A-S.

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FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

GOSPEL MESSAGES FROM THE ANTARCTIC (No. 27).

"I am . . . the Living one ; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore" (Rev. i. 18).

"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead" (2 Tim. 2. 8).

WE have been following Capt. Scott and his companions on their last march, and have seen how they died when within a few miles of safety. But we must remember that nothing of these tragic events was known to the rest of the expedition who were at the base camp awaiting the return of the Polar party. The last news they had had of the travellers was that which was brought back by those who had accompanied them on the outward journey to the Pole: but that news was so encouraging that everybody was confident that the five men would return safely and in quick time, and there was a good deal of cheerful rivalry in estimating the most likely date on which they would arrive.

One of the last instructions that Scott had given had been that a team of dogs should be sent out to meet him, in order to help his party over the last part of the return journey. Owing to various difficulties it was not possible for this to be done on as large a scale as had been hoped, but, as the likely time of arrival approached, two men set out, each with a dog team and as much food as they could pull on their sledges, and travelled as far as their supplies and their strength would take them. But they saw no sign of their friends, and eventually had reluctantly to turn back for their base. It must have been a keen disappointment to them; and we may be sure that before they started back they stood looking longingly into the distance, hoping to see the others. But only the white surface of the Barrier stretched out before them. No welcome figures appeared upon it, and no voice came across it from the distance. All was hidden in the silence and mystery of the great unknown. If only they could have known it, on the very day that they turned back. Scott and his party were only sixty miles away—struggling on their painful way, with hope fast disappearing. Scott wrote in his diary that day: 'Things steadily downhill . . . I doubt if we can get through'.

But, alas, the two men with the dogs knew nothing of the desperate need; and even had they known, what could they have done?

Their report on arrival back at the base, though disappointing, did not cause any great anxiety to be felt for the Polar party; but as the days passed,

anxiety began to grow. Was there anything more that could be done to help? Another party might go out, in the hope of meeting the travellers; but most of the available men had by now been thoroughly worn out by their previous sledging, and the dogs were so exhausted by their last journey that they could not be used again for some time. It was impossible therefore to contemplate a long journey; but in the end two men set out without any dogs, pulling their own sledge. The weather conditions were so bad, however, and their strength so unequal to the task, that after two days they had to return. No doubt they looked long and eagerly into the distance before they turned back, in the hope that they might catch sight of their companions. But the Barrier was empty and silent. If only they could have seen about a hundred miles ahead, they would have seen a little green tent, and in it three dying men, one of whom was writing at that very time these sad words:

'I do not think we can hope for any better thing now . . . We are getting weaker . . . and the end cannot be far'.

But the two men could not see, and knew nothing of the pitiful state of their friends; and even if they had known, what could they have done?

When the two reached the base again, everyone was really anxious. As day followed day and the Polar party did not arrive, anxiety gave place to fear. But how men cling to hope at such a time! Only slowly did hope die, but it did die, and the sad conclusion eventually had to be accepted—the Polar party will not now return at all; they must all be dead. The darkness and sorrow of that fact settled down on the little band of men waiting at the base, at the same time as the long winter night of the Antarctic began to close in upon them. Before many days the light of the sun had gone altogether, not to appear again for four months; and with it the light of hope disappeared from their hearts. And out on the dark and silent Barrier—so near to home!—stood a tent with three dead men in it; and no one but God knew it.

Can you imagine the effect of all this upon the men at the base? This bitter ending to the struggles and sufferings of the months: the cruel sense of failure: the grief of losing trusted and loved companions: the dark mystery surrounding their death—all this must have made the months of winter night that followed almost unbearable. As

we shall see later, the dark mystery was solved in due course, but that could not bring back their friends, nor take away the sense of loss. Death had brought an end to everything.

How closely this resembles another story with which we are all familiar—but one with a very different ending. Jesus, the loved leader of a little band of disciples, had died, and His followers were heart-broken. They had built such high hopes upon Him. They had confidently expected that great success would crown His work and that they would share His triumph. Never for a moment had they accepted the idea that He could fail—that He would die and leave them alone. But now He was dead, and with Him died all their hopes. What a dark time it must have been for them! They had known and loved Him—and now He had gone from them for ever. They had learned to count on His help—and now He could help them no more. They had thought He would be their redeemer—their saviour from their enemies—but now He was dead; and how could a dead man save them? Never were men and women more overwhelmed than they. In their grief some of them went to weep at the tomb where His body had been buried—and there, to their amazement, they found the tomb open and empty, and angels who said to them, “Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen” (Luke 24. 5, 6). When, later in the day, they came together, the astounding news was given to them, “The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon”; and while they talked, hardly knowing whether or not to believe such a startling and impossible story, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them and said, “Peace be unto you” (Luke 24. 34, 36). It was not easy for them to adjust their minds to such an unbelievable thing—that one who had died was alive again. It is true that they had known of cases—such as that of Lazarus—in which Jesus had brought dead people back to life, but there was something different about *His* return from death. As He talked to them they began to understand what that difference was. Those others were brought back from death, to live again the same kind of life as before, and sooner or later to die again. But He was not like that. He was obviously the same loved Master that they had known—His character had not changed, but somehow He was different—greater, more wonderful, more able, than ever before. He could enter the room where they were, without opening the door or window. Things which before had limited Him now had no effect upon Him. He could be wherever He liked at any moment. He could do whatever He wished;

nothing and nobody had any power over Him. During forty days after His resurrection He appeared to the disciples from time to time, until they became thoroughly used to the thought that He, Who became dead, was now alive—and alive for evermore! Instead of being the sad victim of death He was the glorious victor over death. Instead of everything having come to an end, here was the beginning of marvellous new possibilities. With that knowledge there came back to them all their former hopes, in some ways changed but better than ever; their sorrow and sense of failure left them; their sense of helplessness disappeared; a new world opened to them. At length He disappeared from them altogether, being taken up to the Throne in heaven: but before He went He said to them, “All authority is given unto me . . . and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28. 20). He—this living, triumphant One—with them everywhere, anywhere, in all circumstances! And from the day of Pentecost (of which you can read in Acts 2) He was not only *with* them, but *within* them. No wonder they were changed by the resurrection of Jesus! No wonder that one of them—Peter—later wrote, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who . . . begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1. 3)! No wonder that when, a little later, they went out preaching to others, the one great subject that they preached was Jesus and the resurrection! ‘Jesus is alive—and alive in every one who trusts in Him!’ That message transformed those who preached it and those who believed it. It turned weak men into strong ones, timid men into bold ones, sinning men into good ones, despairing men into men full of hope. It is the message which will change anyone who really believes it and yields to it, for it is not only a message, it is a power.

Poor, sad companions of Capt. Scott! Their leader struggled bravely on until he died under the cruel pressure of overwhelming odds. But happy companions of the Lord Jesus! Our leader has majestically crushed beneath His feet every opposing power, and lives to share with us His victory. Are you one of those with whom He is sharing it? In your times of difficulty and trial are you merely struggling on as best you can, or are you remembering Jesus Christ risen from the dead (2 Tim. 2. 8)? Oh, always remember Him! Count upon Him! His life of victory is for us to share. There can be no despair when we put our trust in Him. Bring to Him *now* whatever problem or burden you may have, commit it all to Him, trust also in Him, and you will find that hope springs up

again in your heart. The risen Lord is sufficient for every demand.

There was another promise the Lord Jesus made to His disciples before He left them, which they remembered joyfully. He had told them He would go away; and then He added, "I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14. 3). "I come again". The disciples lived the rest of their lives in the enjoyment of that hope, not knowing exactly when, but quite certain that He would eventually appear. And we may enjoy the same confident hope—"the blessed hope", as it is called (Titus 2. 13). We have no need to be anxious, as Scott's friends were. We need not fear that an accident will delay Him, or death overtake Him. He has said, "I come quickly" (Rev. 22. 12), and come He certainly will. Unlike the hopes of Scott's friends, ours grow brighter as every day passes. We may be more and more confident that He will come—and, we believe, very soon. Oh, how our hearts are strength-

ened and encouraged as we look forward to His appearing! Ours is indeed "a hope both sure and stedfast" (Heb. 6. 19); "And unto them that look for him *shall he appear* the second time . . ." (Heb. 9. 28).

Are you looking for Him? Then you will surely be joyful and glad of heart. But be careful to see that you are ready to meet Him when He comes. "In an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matt. 24. 44). *But He certainly will come!*

The boy or girl who lives most confidently in the power of His resurrection life, and in the hope of His coming, will certainly be the first to reach the 'South Pole'.

He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives to-day!

He walks with me, He talks with me, along life's narrow way.

He lives! He lives! salvation to impart.

You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart.

G. P.

" HIS GREAT LOVE "

II. GOD'S BELOVED

"...but God, being rich in mercy, for HIS GREAT LOVE wherewith he loved us..."

IN our previous meditation, we were seeking to point out that, although this whole vast universe has behind it a mind, a reason, a design, a plan, a will, a fiat, yet back of all that there is a heart, and that means love. We sought first to see that the very creation of man was dictated by the heart of God for purposes of His own love, and then that the whole Bible is a progressive and growing unveiling of that fact. It is God's love for man that lies behind all His dealings with man. We traced that fact from Adam, through the chosen seed, particularly citing the case of Abraham, and then of the chosen nation, Israel. How full, wonderful, altogether inexplicable, was the love of God! We went on into the New Testament and pointed out how that eternal, mighty, mysterious love of God became fully embodied in the person of His Son, Who lived His life, did His work, gave Himself, all on the basis of love for the Father and that the Father might have in man that upon which His heart has ever been set. We dwelt at some length upon His love for God His Father, and we marked it also in connexion with His disciples, whom, having loved, He loved unto the end; and we saw at

what infinite cost to Himself all was at length accomplished, all in the strength of that love.

GOD'S LOVE FOR THE CHURCH IN THE BELOVED

Passing from the days of His flesh over into the next part of the Bible, beginning with the book of the Acts and running on to the book of the Revelation, we have the love of God from eternity as now seen to be centred, in the first instance, in something called 'the Church': "*the church of God which he purchased with his own blood*" (Acts xx. 28). "*Christ . . . loved the church, and gave himself up for it*" (Eph. v. 25). It is quite impossible for us in a brief time to go right through all that section of the New Testament, but I think we shall be agreed that this unveiling is brought to us, not exclusively but in its fullest and richest form, in the ministry of the Apostle Paul, who himself was a wonderful embodiment of God's love. It was the one note deepest in his own heart, breaking out from time to time in nothing short of utter amazement. He "*loved me, and gave himself up for me*" (Gal. ii. 20). "*O the depth of the riches . . .*" (Rom. xi. 33); they are the riches not only of wisdom and knowledge but also of His love. And this

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

man, who could never understand why that eternal love should light upon him and single him out, has given us such a marvellously full, deep, rich revelation of that love. We are just helpless and hopeless when we try to cope with this revelation through and in Paul. We can only do the best the Lord enables us to do in thinking about it and bringing it to the notice of others.

We remember, as we pointed out in our previous meditation, that, when the Son of God's love stepped out into His great public ministry at Jordan, the Father's word from heaven was—*"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"* (Matt. iii. 17). "My beloved Son". You will recall what we said about that little prefix—'be-loved': not just 'My loved Son', but 'My beloved Son', that is, one to whom I am utterly given. Now this Apostle of the eternal love of God—with what would be frightful audacity were it not the whole doctrine of the love of God—dares to use that same phrase of the believer, *"hath made us accepted in the beloved"* (Eph. i. 6. A.V.). "Us in the beloved"; God giving Himself to us in the same way as He gave Himself to His Son. Oh, I do hope you do not just take that as a kind of play upon words, a little touch of interest, when I stay to underline the beginning of the word 'beloved'. I pointed out that it is the beginning of many words and every one of them has to do with a complete thing. If it is 'betrothed', that is the complete giving. If it is 'beseech', that is something more than asking. When I come to you concerning something with which my life is wrapped up, something which is of very great importance, I do not just simply and casually ask you about that matter; my whole being goes out to you; I beseech. God is very particular about that, and He very often heads us up to something more than easy asking—to beseeching; not because He is reluctant or unwilling, but because He wants us to get right into the matter. It is of paramount importance. "I beseech", said Paul—that was how he approached men. *"We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God"* (II Cor. v. 20). It is a life and death matter. Or take 'besiege'. If you are going to besiege anyone or anything or any place, you do not just walk up to them or it. You give yourself to that thing, you are all in on that matter. That is where God is over His Christ—the Beloved: and that is transferred to us.

CHOSEN IN THE BELOVED

Here, in this letter to the Ephesians, right at the beginning everything is put on that basis. *"He chose us in him before the foundation of the world,*

that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love" (i. 4). An alternative rendering to that is, *"He chose us in love before the foundation of the world that we should be holy"*. *"He chose us in love"*. *"Having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved: in whom we have our redemption"*. (This is the R.V. reading of Eph. i. 5. 6). It is all *in the Beloved*, in the *Be-loved*. Do you catch the emphasis? It is not just that He chose us, or that He chose us for this or that. It is *where* He chose us. Nor is it just that He chose us in Jesus Christ: He chose us *in the Beloved*, giving the character and the quality of the basis of our relationship to God. That being so, our very existence in relation to God is a love existence, a love relationship. It is what Christ's relationship was to the Father that is ours; and you know how in the New Testament this very word 'beloved' is frequently used concerning believers. * Paul was tremendously fond of using it. Here he says it inclusively—"in the Beloved", but again and again he will say to the saints, "beloved of God". That is not just a pleasant thing said. We can use that language to one another, we can address people in those terms; but Paul was not just saying a nice thing, calling them beloved of God to make them feel comfortable.

For him, the whole doctrine of grace was wrapped up in that. He comprehended the eternities past and future in that; 'in the Beloved', 'beloved of God'. If you think that is just language and words, do remember that Paul's horizon, his whole world, beyond which for him there was nothing, was what he so frequently called 'in Christ'. You have little need that I remind you of the way in which Paul used that phrase. I have managed to find 128 occasions in Paul's writings alone in which he uses that phrase, or what corresponds to it. "He chose us in him". "In whom we have our redemption". Now you go on and see all that he has to say about "in Christ". It is in the Beloved.

UNION WITH GOD IN THE BELOVED

Now, what does that mean? As I see it, it means

* *Note. Let it be clearly understood that nothing said here or elsewhere means that the unique and exclusive nature of Christ as "the only begotten of the Father", the eternal Son, is infringed or overlooked. The peculiar nature of the Person of Christ is preserved and jealously preserved. We are here dealing with our calling in Christ.*

MAY — JUNE, 1951

CALLED INTO THE FELLOWSHIP
OF THE BELOVED

that the sum of Paul's ministry, which was the outflow of his own life and experience and understanding, was and is *union with God in Christ*, and that, *living union*, *organic union*. I would have to take you back to the Old Testament again to indicate how much that was so in the terms used. We saw in our previous meditation the terms used by God concerning Israel, calling Israel His child, His son, His daughter, His betrothed, His wife. All these are organic, vital conceptions. It is not the relationship of one brick to another in a building, inanimate, cold, however closely connected. It is the throbbing life of a love union, so strong and deep that Paul will cry in one of those inexpressible utterances of his—" *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?* " (Rom. viii. 35). Then he tabulates and catalogues all the things that do effect separations—life and death, things present, things to come, and all the rest, and he says, But none of these " *shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord* ". The union is so much a part of Himself that it would be dividing God and dividing His Son.

I am not stepping over now to the obligations and responsibilities of this love where we are concerned, but at once you will glimpse something when I quote that passage from Corinthians—" *Is Christ divided?* " That is only one way of saying, that you cannot divide Christ, you cannot make Christ into parts without destroying His very Person. So this love makes for such a oneness with God, of an organic and vital character, that to separate would be to destroy an organism. Oh, that we had a right conception, God's conception, of the Church and of relatedness! What a tremendous statement that is—" *I am persuaded that neither death, nor life* ", nor this and that and that (tremendous things) " *shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord* " (Rom. viii. 38, 39). What a pity it is that the chapters should have been broken there (Romans viii and ix). We need to read on to get the full force of it. But we must not be too detailed now.

Paul's whole conception and unfolding of the purpose of God from eternity is in this little phrase—" *in Christ* ", " *in the Beloved* ". Here, in the letter to the Ephesians, you have the summary of it all. He goes right back before ever we were formed, and before ever this world existed in its present order—before the recreative activity of God. It was back there God chose us in the Beloved. Looking right down through all the ages, He chose us in Him.

Then Paul passes from the eternal choice of love and speaks about our being called into the fellowship of God's Son. Chosen, now called. I wonder what weight you give to your salvation, your conversion, your coming to the Lord, however you may put it? Is it no more than just that one day you met the Lord Jesus, one day you were saved, one day you came to the Lord? Have you recognized that was the day of a call, concerning something related to you and to which you were related, which goes right back before time? It is as though God in eternity past chose you in love, and then called you according to His purpose. He had to wait until you were here to actually call you; and the call came; but that call was wrapped up in something vast, and the vast thing was union with God Himself in His Son in the terms of eternal love.

What is God after? And when He gets what He is after, what will things be like? We talk about the testimony of Jesus. We have a lot to say about the fulness of Christ, of the Church which is His Body, of identification with Christ. All these are great truths, great conceptions. But what I find is this, that we have not come to an end of God's thoughts yet. I am very glad of this; but it is the most painful thing we can know, that we never come to an end here, and in order to go on a further stage something has to happen to us that knocks the bottom clean out of all that has gone before. That is to say, we go through a new experience of death and desolation and emptiness, of hopelessness, in order to come to something further on in the Divine revelation. We thought, 'Oh, now we have come into the fulness of God'; thought! Now at length we are seeing what God is after! We get on with that for a time and it fills our whole vision; and then everything is as though it were nothing, and we go through a terrible time. Oh, yes, it was right, it was true, but it was not God's end. My experience is that it is through just such a history with God, of repeated desolations and emptyings and despairings after wonderful unveilings and times when you feel there cannot be anything more, that you are brought up again into something further on with your vision enlarged. I do not know whether we have come to the last point of God's movement, but what I am saying now is this, that when God gets His end, everything will be only, but absolutely, a manifestation of His love.

I think that is what Paul means here in the letter to the Ephesians, for this is a wonderful revelation.

But look at the place of grace in this letter. look at the place of love. "...the breadth and length and height and depth, and...the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ" (Eph. iii. 18, 19). That is the object. Paul holds it up into view, that we may come to that in the end.

Well then, if you and I are going on to God's end. what will characterize us? This one thing—abounding more and more in love. I state that and leave it for the time being.

ALL-SUFFICIENT PROVISION IN THE BELOVED

He called us, but, blessed be God, His calling of us is on to and into a perfectly prepared ground. to an all-sufficient provision. It is in Christ. What a terrible thing it would be if He called us with so great a calling, and we had somehow to attain to it of ourselves and to find all that is required for attaining. Why, it were better that we had never been called! We know how utterly impossible it is for us to provide the smallest degree of anything that can attain to God's end. Can you find in yourself this love of God, this kind of love? Why, we have only to read one section of this whole revelation to find ourselves defeated at every point. I refer to I Cor. xiii. There is not a fragment of a sentence there that does not knock us to the ground. "*Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil*". And to sum up all—"Love never faileth"; that is, love never gives up. Where are we? Can you stand up to that? No! But He called us in the Beloved, and in Christ is a perfectly prepared ground. "In whom I am well pleased"—an all-sufficient provision.

That causes Paul to go out along one wonderful line, and he says. "*I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me*" (Gal. ii. 20). (Paul is not saying that when we died in Christ we lost our individuality. We ought to have lost our individualism, but not our individuality.) There is some difficulty in translating the verse just quoted. 'I live by the faith of the Son of God', or 'which is in the Son of God'. It seems to me that, in keeping with so much more that Paul says, it means this—"It is Christ Who is providing what is necessary for this new life the other side of the Cross. I live by Him, I live by the provision that He makes". Yes, and God, in calling us into

His Son, has called us into an all-sufficient provision. You say. 'I cannot love, especially in certain directions'. But Christ can, and He has proved it in your case. Do you think everybody loves you? There are some people who do not love you, but Christ loves you whatever you are. You might be unloved for very good reasons by everybody else; He loves you. God loves you now with that love that can and does love the unlovely. He can provide us with a love to love.

Is not this the wonder of the whole evangel? Have we not many times heard missionaries who have come home saying, 'When I was called of God to go to such and such a country and people, they were the very people I felt I could never love; everything about them stirred up in me only bad feelings; but I have come to love them, they are my people'. Well, that is simple enough. My point is that to be called into Christ is to be called into a provision for what that very word 'beloved' means. You have the great example of Paul and the Corinthians. If ever a people deserved the opposite of love from a man, those Corinthians deserved it from Paul. They owed everything to him, and they treated him, to say the least of it, most shabbily, so that he could say that the more he loved them, the less they loved him (II Cor. xii. 15). When you read about them your uppermost feeling is that it requires a great deal to love these people. Yet what is Paul's attitude? His heart is going out in brokenness over them. This is love that is not natural; it is in Christ, it is the provision in the Beloved. Do you catch the thought? I need not labour it. In Christ is an all-sufficient provision.

Well, Paul has many aspects to this great reality of 'in Christ'. As you know, he says that God put us all into Christ in the Cross. When Christ died and was judged of God, in Him we too were judged and death passed upon us all. We are in Him also risen; and not only so, for we are not just left here on this earth as risen: we are in Him seated in the heavenlies. How many aspects of this 'in Christ' matter there are! What does it amount to? It amounts to this, that only Christ is the sphere of the believer, and in Christ that great heart intention of God in the creation is realized—a people in the Beloved, beloved of God, the objects of that love, and who should be filled (the Lord forgive us for our failure!) with that same love of God. It is in that sphere of Christ that God proceeds with His love purpose.

CONFORMITY TO THE BELOVED

What is God doing with us in Christ? Inclusively, He is seeking to conform us to the image of His

Son in terms of love. What is your idea of the image of God's Son? He is the Son of His love, and the very word 'Son' is a love term, than which there is no higher and fuller, and in the revelation of God, Son, Sonship, is the embodiment and exhaustion of love. "Conformed to the image of his Son" in terms of love. I am putting something on you and on myself when I say these things, but there it is. You must ask the Lord to write the force of this in your heart and do not just take it as an address. The Lord will have to help us after this, for there will have to be some very real dealings with Him. We are going to be challenged and found out on this. It is well that we are very much occupied with the word 'grace'. 'Oh, to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be'. We love that word. Do we realize that is only the other word for love, and that it speaks of the initiative of God in this whole matter? In grace He chose us. The initiative of God was in love.

Then what is true of our position in the Beloved is put upon us as our obligation, and when we are bidden to love one another we are bidden to show to others the grace that God has shown to us. In I John iv. 19 there is a fragment which is so often quoted—or misquoted when it is quoted from the Authorized Version—"We love him, because he first loved us". It is a misquotation because the 'him' should not be there, and to put it in really does not make sense with the context. "*We love, because he first loved us*". That is the whole of John's argument in that letter. "*If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another*" (I John

iv. 11). "God so loved": He gave the all that He in heaven possessed. We therefore love one another, because He loved us first.

That is a tremendous test of the reality of our being "in Christ", and a tremendous challenge, and we need something with which to meet and answer that challenge. Paul says that provision is all in the Beloved. That does not get us close enough. It is not as though the beloved Christ is a kind of sphere and God has put everything inside there. It is Himself. "*It is no longer I, but Christ liveth in me*". Christ is the supplier. Oh, how much Paul dwells upon that! Right through to the end, to the ultimate realization—"Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. i. 27). If there is anything beyond what I have said, it might be summed up in that word "glory". "... hath called us unto his eternal glory" (I Peter v. 10). But what is the glory? There is no glory except the glory of perfected love. Perfected love is the glory of God. The glory of God is His love.

Well, if you forget all that has been said, do get the impression upon your heart of the one thing—"His great love wherewith he loved us". This whole matter of a Christian's life is gathered into that. That love in us is the satisfying answer to the heart of God. It is not how much truth and doctrine we possess, how much teaching we have or give; it is not a matter of the mysteries of the Gospel; it all resolves itself into this—the love of God shown to us and then shown by us; that is all. The Lord help us!

T. A-S.

GATHERED OF GOD

"Also the foreigners that join themselves to the Lord, to minister unto him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from profaning it, and holdeth fast my covenant; even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. The Lord God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel, saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside his own that are gathered" (Isaiah lvi. 6-8).

In the latter part of his prophecies Isaiah concentrates on the return from captivity and the restoration of the Lord's testimony in Zion. It is

impossible to exaggerate the importance of this recovery, for at its heart, the goal and explanation of it all, we find the house of God. It is God Himself Who is most concerned about re-gathering His people, for this is essential to His own will and glory.

SCATTERED ONES GATHERED INTO FELLOWSHIP IN GOD'S HOUSE

The Lord's declaration that His house "shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" does not primarily mean that it shall be a place from which prayer shall go out on behalf of men everywhere. It is true that the house does become a centre from which there radiates a ministry of life and blessing

in answer to believing prayer, but the context shows clearly that the first thought is of that house as a centre of gathering, a rallying point to which all who will may come. The Spirit's work is to unite in practical fellowship those who have been delivered from the kingdom of darkness, and to unite them under His own authority in His own house. It is, of course, a blessed privilege for those concerned. They have trusted and proved the Lord in their scattered state, but they have known that they were not experiencing the fulness. There is always something lacking when believers know the Lord in isolation only or in sectional groups.

The Word of God had set before the "outcasts of Israel" prospects which were far beyond their present experience—promises of the glory of God in the midst and of feasts of fat things in the mountain of the Lord. All this was to be accomplished by a great Divine gathering of those who had hitherto been scattered and in limitation. God would make them joyful in His house of prayer. The greatest values, however, were not to be personal and local, but universal and Divine.

It is God's great desire to manifest Himself in and through His people: "*that now . . . might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God*" (Eph. iii. 10). When God's scattered people are freed from every bondage and brought together in true oneness, the impact of His presence and kingdom will be tremendous in its range. This gathering is of supreme importance to the Lord, for it provides Him with His house and ministers to His satisfaction. Who can calculate the effect of the unrestricted and ungrieved presence of God in a people? The house of God is no hollow pretence: it is not a relic of what used to be, nor a vain ideal of what ought to be; it is meant to be a present, spiritual reality. "*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*" (Matt. xviii. 20).

They are not gathered together for their own name, nor for any other earthly name; not for any personal interests, nor even for the furtherance of a cause. They have been drawn by the Spirit into the house of God where all things are of Him and all things are for Him. In that house God is given His rightful place in everything.

During the captivity there was no place on earth where the Lord could truly reign among His people. There were individuals like Ezekiel, or those of whom we read in Daniel, who faithfully represented Him and maintained the testimony to His universal sovereignty. These, however, did not cease to long and pray for the day of recovery, when the house of God would once again come

into being. They knew that the Lord's purposes required a re-gathering of His scattered people, with their establishing in a united fellowship in Him. This is the spiritual meaning of the house of God. For us it is not a building or a locality, nor must we be content to regard it merely as something doctrinal into which we enter when we become the Lord's. It is a practical life together in the fellowship of the Spirit.

GATHERED ON THE BASIS OF GRACE ALONE

Isaiah's ministry was one of comfort, or perhaps better, of encouragement. The purposes of God are so often hindered by timidity or lack of inspiration among His people. There are so many objections, so many arguments and questions, that we tend to accept the low level of things as they are, instead of responding to the heavenly vision and call. The house of God seems to be a dream or a vision: we gaze upon it but take no active steps to enter it in a practical sense and to enjoy the blessings that are to be found therein. From the words of Isaiah we gather there were two groups particularly susceptible to a spirit of discouragement, the eunuchs and the foreigners. The prophet's message is to assure them that they are to share in God's gathering. He speaks to those who are ineligible on natural grounds, assuring them of the abundant grace of God. His house is not concerned with what we are in ourselves; admittance cannot be governed by human considerations; grace has made it a house of prayer for *all* peoples.

But there must be some qualification, for God's house is holy. Why are these outcasts received, and given so warm a welcome? How is it that God says, "*Even them will I bring . . . and make them joyful in my house of prayer*"? There are three statements which seem to give the answer to this question. They love the name of the Lord, they keep the Sabbath and they hold fast His covenant.

GATHERED IN VIRTUE OF CHRIST'S FINISHED WORK

The second and central feature really includes the other two. They are true keepers of the Sabbath. This stress upon Sabbath observance is the more remarkable since the prophet is particularly strong in expressing God's indifference to mere ritual. Nobody could be more emphatic than Isaiah in assuring the people of God that the whole realm of religious observance, even though prescribed by the Scriptures, is in itself of no value to the Lord

and rejected by Him. His message to the people was often in such terms as, " *Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary of bearing them*" (Isa. i. 14). In spite of this, Isaiah lays great stress on the need for keeping the Sabbath. This is surely because of the spiritual meaning attached to that day.

What is this spiritual meaning? It is simplicity and utterness of faith as to the finished work of Christ. This is a term which we make much of in relation to the salvation of sinful men; we rejoice that redemption is secured by the finished work of Christ upon the Cross. But what is true as to the justification of the ungodly is equally true in regard to every phase of spiritual life and experience. The whole work is completed in Christ. Human effort can provide nothing at all, for God's rest is based upon the fact that in Christ and by His Cross all the work is finished. We are called on to find all our life and energy on this basis—that we keep God's Sabbath. Some people, of course, talk a lot about the finished work of Christ and yet live lives which are not glorifying to Him. This is as though they were approving of the idea of the Sabbath—marking it, as it were, upon their calendars—and yet failing to be governed by it in a practical way. God is calling for those who are true keepers of His Sabbath, those who by faith are proving in ever new ways and ever greater fulness the glorious perfection of the new creation in Christ.

We can profane the Sabbath in two ways. The first is by trying to do something, or thinking that we can do something, to add to God's work in Christ. It is the intrusion of self-wisdom or self-effort into the spiritual life. The second is by failing to count on the Lord's sufficiency. If we are governed by some lack or weakness of ours, or succumb to our own sense of unworthiness, the purposes of God in our life are hindered and we are in effect denying the finished work of Christ, profaning the Sabbath.

GATHERED INTO FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD HIMSELF

There is an indication in verse 3 of the doubts and fears of the stranger who has joined himself to the Lord. To him the house of God seems so high and holy that he is inclined to despair of having a place in it. Seeing that he has no natural standing, no virtues or abilities of his own, he is worried as to whether he can claim admittance. He begins timidly to enter in, conscious all the time of his strangeness, and half expecting that

before long someone will come up to him and tell him that he is an outsider who has no right to be there. It is as though while he is thus troubled, fearing that any moment he will surely be separated from God's people and turned away from His house, the High Priest himself comes forward and gives him a cordial welcome. He is taken by the hand and led, stranger though he is, not just into the outer court nor only into the holy place of priestly ministry (which he never expected to see) but taken right through into the very presence of the Lord. Far from being rejected, he finds that God Himself gives him a warm welcome, giving him full right of access to His holy mountain. No wonder that his heart overflows with joy! "*I will . . . make them joyful in my house of prayer*".

God comes out to the man who approaches Him on the grounds of grace. He had been forced to reject many who claimed a place of prominence, because they sought to be something in themselves, and to deal with Him on purely natural grounds. They felt that their name, their education, their orthodoxy or their experience gave them the right to demand God's approval. It was these men and this spirit which really caused the destruction of God's house. The greatest enemy to God's house has never been the enemy from without but religious pride within. Uncrucified flesh spells the destruction of true spiritual fellowship. There is a spiritual significance in the fact that the foreigner, timid and diffident, and the eunuch, weak and despised, are particularly singled out as being welcomed to fellowship; in the restoration God bases His acceptance on pure grace.

This entrance into the house of prayer is described as being taken up into God's holy mountain. A mountain is a place of vision. The Lord's mountain is where everything is seen in its right proportions in relation to Him. When we are in the valley even small things seem to tower over us, and we are easily governed by petty and personal considerations. True fellowship in the Spirit will raise us into heavenly realms, not away from practical realities but into the clarity and breadth of things as God sees them—to spiritual ascendancy, and to fellowship with God in His great universal purposes of grace and glory.

GATHERED TO ENJOY GOD'S FULL APPROVAL IN CHRIST

The second reason for rejoicing is that "*their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar*". What an amazing experience this stranger is having! He feared that

he would not be permitted to enter at all, but now he finds not only that he is welcome, but that all his offerings are brought to the altar and receive the seal of God's approval. No wonder that he is glad! Somehow nothing else seems to matter if we know that the Lord is pleased with us. This is the meaning of the burnt offering—that God is well pleased with the offerer. It is a blessing indeed to know that our sin offering is accepted, for that means that God has nothing against us. Those who have known deep conviction and concern about their own guilt will know the value of the sin offering and the blessed relief of being sure that God has nothing against them. But when heaven's verdict was given upon the Lord Jesus the voice did not say, 'This is my Son and I have nothing against him'. God affirmed, "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*" (Matt. iii. 17). The burnt offering identifies us with this good pleasure, in Christ.

Many Christians who are rejoicing in the sacrifice of Christ as taking away all their sin, know very little of the deeper joy of being assured that in Christ God is satisfied with them. Does this sound presumptuous? What about Enoch? The whole secret of Enoch's walk of holy and happy fellowship with God was that he had the witness that he was bringing pleasure to the heart of the Lord. In ourselves we can never do this, but on the basis of Christ we can and we ought.

God does not merely tolerate the foreigner, but finds great pleasure in his company; and this, not because of anything inherently good in the man, but only on the basis of the altar. Christ is our burnt offering, to be daily appropriated as our sufficiency to bring pleasure to God. Even while we are seeking to walk nearer to the Lord, to be disciplined by His Cross and transformed by His Spirit, the very secret of our holy living is to rejoice in fullest acceptance in Christ. Thus the burnt offering will exercise a mighty sanctifying power in our lives.

And we are to do this in the house of God. Nothing must discourage or divert us from finding our place there. In active association with God's people we are to be rejoiced at the privilege of setting forth something of the perfection and glory of His Son. If we come by way of the altar God will welcome us and God will accept us—even the weaklings and the outcasts.

GATHERED INTO THE FELLOWSHIP OF CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS

This sacrifice has cost the stranger something.

When Scripture speaks of God's acceptance of our offerings it refers primarily to the acceptance of Christ's offering on our behalf, but it also includes our sharing in the sufferings of Christ and the sacrifice of the altar. Those who are pledged to walk in faithfulness with the Lord will find that this is a costly way. That cost may be ignored or despised by others, be treated as the stranger's sacrifice would probably be treated by those who resented his intrusion. How few know the real nature of what we are bearing for the Lord! Men do not appreciate; perhaps some even misunderstand and despise; but God takes full note of the value of the offering. The house of God is not for human glory. Our offerings are not made for men, to be approved or praised by them. When in some solemn hour we joined ourselves to the Lord to minister to His pleasure, we were given a place in His house, not that men might praise us but that our sacrifices, through Christ, might bring joy to the heart of God. He is dealing with us on this basis. So often we are tempted to discouragement; it is as we come nigh to God in His house that we know our sacrifice is precious to Him, and we hear His promise anew, "*I will . . . make them joyful in my house of prayer*".

BLESSING FOR OTHERS BECAUSE OF THE GATHERED ONES

This will be bound to bring life and blessing to the scattered multitudes. True fellowship with God always provides a centre from which blessing is ministered. If God truly has the first place, if people live a life together in which Christ is supremely honoured, then this provides an expression of the house of God which is a house of prayer for all peoples. "*The Lord God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside his own that are gathered*". When God's own people are scattered, wandering in unbelief and profaning His Sabbath, instead of being strong and united in loving communion in and with Him, there is little prospect of blessing for the outsiders. The gathering work must begin with the Lord's people. The house of God must be the place of joyful worship and communion before it can become a centre of life and light. When the outcasts of Israel are gathered, then the Lord can gather in more, for there is a family and a home into which they can be welcomed. What the world needs is not merely a proclamation going out into all the nations, but a setting in the midst of them, however small and weak in itself, of a true representation of God's house

of prayer, whose doors are wide open with a welcome for the lonely and outcast. What a need there is for a gathering into true oneness of the scattered

people of God, and so of a further adding to Christ of others besides!

H. F.

THE EARTHLY MAN AND THE HEAVENLY MAN

"Jesus . . . said . . . Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born from above (R.V.M.), he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John iii. 3).

THESE words and nearby verses are used almost exclusively in speaking to the unsaved, and, of course, originally they so applied. But I am remembering that John wrote this many decades after the incident. The aged apostle, who outlived all the other apostles, went right back to that early time and wrote this, not for the unsaved but for the Church. John's writings are undoubtedly for the Church, and he wrote for the Church, "Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." I do not mean, of course, that he said to the Church that it had to be born again, but he was laying down something of primary importance for Christians. You will notice that I have quoted the marginal rendering of the Revised Version, "born from above," because the original Greek word used here is the same as in verse 31—"He that cometh from above is above all." It is an unusual thing to speak to Christians on that text, but the fact is that, in one way or another and in varying degrees, the whole of the New Testament is about that which is born from above—the nature of it, what it is, what it does, how it should behave, and everything else. That is a sweeping statement, but it will stand investigation.

Let us read a section of the Word, ignoring the very unfortunate chapter division, which of course was not in the original documents. We go back to what is verse 24 of chapter ii and on to verse 13 of chapter iii.

"Jesus did not trust himself unto them, for that he knew all men, and because he needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man; for he himself knew what was in man. Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came unto him by night, and said to him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born from above he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born from above. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou the teacher of Israel, and understandest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and bear witness of that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things? And no man hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven."

TWO MEN—THE EARTHLY AND THE HEAVENLY

Now, in that section, we have two persons face to face, an earthly and a heavenly. One word is used of them both, the word 'man.' "Jesus did not trust himself ("commit himself" A.V.) unto them, for that he knew all men, and because he needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man; for he himself knew what was in man. Now there was a man . . ." I do not want to pass over anything without its force striking you. That John put in that word 'now' is tremendously significant. For some time I puzzled over the place of Nicodemus in the Gospel by John. John in his summary said he had written his Gospel with the one object of showing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John xx. 31), and I could not see how Nicodemus fitted into that; but that little word 'now,' linking with what had just been said and what follows, is a key. "Now there was a man . . ." Then as we go

on we find that this word 'man' is used of Christ, the "Son of man." That title occurs some eighty-eight times in the New Testament, eighty-four of which are found in the Gospels, and eleven of these in this Gospel by John. Forgive this detail, but it is important. Thus John wrote, "Now there was a man," and then later he began to speak about Jesus as the Son of man, or to record His sayings concerning Himself as the Son of man. You will see something very important in that connection in a minute or two. This title is used of others besides Christ in the Bible, but whenever it is used of anyone else it is always without the article—'son of man'; but when it refers to Christ, it has the definite article—"the Son of man."

THE EARTHLY MAN REPRESENTED BY NICODEMUS

You have, then, two people called 'man,' and they are facing one another. On this side is the earthly man. Jesus does not commit Himself unto him. He knew all men in that category, knew what was in that kind of man, what he was made of, how he was constituted, what he was capable of. It is to that earthly man that these other words relate, "There was a man . . .", and John is really saying and meaning, 'Now there was an earthly man named Nicodemus.' "That which is born of the flesh is flesh": that is the earthly man. So in verse 13 again, "No man hath ascended into heaven"—that is the earthly man. Perhaps you say, 'Well now, that is doubtful; Elijah did and Enoch did.' But the exactness of the Greek here has this force—'No man of himself hath ascended into heaven.' Elijah did not of himself, nor did Enoch of himself; but this One, this heavenly Man, ascended Himself. Not so the earthly man—'no man of himself.' Verse 19—"This is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness." This again shows us the earthly man. Verse 27—"A man can receive nothing, except it have been given him from heaven." The earthly man 'cannot'—he has no capacity for heavenly things. Thus we note some of the features of the earthly man—what he is made of, how he is not going to be trusted by heaven, what his limitations are, what he cannot do of himself, what he cannot receive of himself. 'There was an earthly man.'

THE LORD JESUS, THE HEAVENLY MAN

On the other side, there is the heavenly Man. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and

that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." "Born from above." Verse 12—"If I told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things? And no man hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man, *which is in heaven.*" Here is the heavenly Man. Verses 16 and 17—"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son"—the heavenly Man, given from heaven. "God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world"—God *sent* His Son. Verse 31—"He that cometh from above is above all." Then, of course; you want to read all those other passages which are recorded later on. Take chapter vi, for example. "I am come down from heaven" (verse 38); "I am the bread which came down out of heaven" (verses 41 and 51). You know how much there is of it there, and especially verse 62—"What then if ye should behold the Son of man ascending *where he was before?*"

THE EARTHLY MAN AT HIS BEST

An earthly man and the heavenly Man standing face to face—two representative men. Look at Nicodemus. There is a touch of genius (speaking naturally) about this thing, in John's selecting Nicodemus and putting him in here—let us say rather there is the genius of the Holy Spirit. Here we have Nicodemus, a representative earthly man. As to his nation, he belongs to the nation that was chosen of God out of all the nations, to whom belonged the oracles and the covenant, a nation peculiarly and particularly related to God (Rom. iii. 2; ix. 4-5). As to his sect, he is a Pharisee. 'Pharisee' is a Hebrew word which means separated by specific beliefs and practices. Within the chosen and particular nation, the Pharisees were a particularly religious people or sect—you may say the very core of the elect nation; very strict, as we know, in their tithing, in their eating and drinking, their washings and rites; and they held very strictly to the belief in the natural immortality of the soul; yet Jesus says to this representative Pharisee, "Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." As to his position, he is a ruler of the Jews, that is, a member of the National Council, the Sanhedrin. As to his character, he is not a man to be despised. He is a man to be honoured, a perfectly honest man. He is mentioned three times by John. The second occasion is when he raises the question of right procedure in the Council—"Doth our law judge a man, except it first hear from himself and

know what he doeth?" (John vii. 51). The third time is when beloved friends were bringing their spices to the tomb, and it says, "And there came also Nicodemus, he who at the first came to him by night, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight" (John xix. 39). He is out in the open now, in plain honesty. Yet as to his spiritual condition, he is blind, ignorant and helpless. "Art thou the teacher of Israel, and understandest not these things? . . . We speak that we do know, and bear witness of that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you heavenly things?" Blind, ignorant, helpless—that is this representative man, the earthly man at his best in every way.

FEATURES OF THE HEAVENLY MAN

Then by contrast we have the heavenly Man. His nationality is from heaven. "He that cometh from above is above all"—above all sects, above all laws and regulations, above all ritual; that is what John is bearing out throughout the whole Gospel. His position is one of Divine authority: "the Father . . . hath given all judgment unto the Son" (John v. 22). "As the Father raiseth the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son also quickeneth whom he will" (John v. 21). His character also is Divine. With regard to His spiritual condition as over against that of Nicodemus, there is one word that sums up so much—"knowing." Nicodemus was blind, ignorant, helpless. Here is the Lord Jesus just the opposite—knowing, and, because knowing, never being at a loss, never in a quandary, never brought to an impasse. He knew all men, He Himself knew what was in man. "If I tell you heavenly things . . .", meaning that He could. He knew them. "We speak that which we do know."

Now for the real point of this, we must go back to chapter i. 48-49. "Nathaniel saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? . . . Thou art the Son of God." In the Bible this attribute of knowing man is restricted to God alone. It is attributed only to Jehovah. You remember the words of Jeremiah—"I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins (Jer. xvii. 10): 'I, the Lord, know.' It is an attribute of God alone, to know man in this way. "Whence knowest thou me? . . . Thou art the Son of God."

Now you see what I meant when I said John puts two things together. Jesus is the Son of God: Jesus is the Son of man. The Son of man is the

Son of God. Because He has^A Divine attributes, He knew all men. You notice that this knowledge is both universal and individual. He knew all men, and knew what was in man (or "the man"—R.V. margin); "all men," universal, and "the man," individual. This characteristic of Deity was the thing which was constantly manifesting itself, for in this Gospel by John this word 'to know' in this sense occurs more than fifty times. It was constantly coming out—this that men would call His uncanny knowledge, His supernatural insight. He was never at a loss for want of knowing what to do. He would test His disciples on this very thing. "This he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do" (John vi. 6). He was always precipitating impossible situations, and pushing them on to His disciples, and saying in effect, 'What are you going to do about that?' 'We cannot do anything. Two hundred pennyworth of bread will not go very far in a crowd like this!' It was ever a discovery of helplessness because they did not know. And then He would do what was needed, for He knew. Here is the heavenly Man over against the earthly.

THE TWO MEN—IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES

Now, how are we going to bring this together for a present application? We are brought face to face with these two persons, one representative of the earthly at its best, the other God's only acceptable Man—the only One Who stands with God, yet representative of that new race in Himself which God could receive with favour. He is alone with God, and all other men stand apart. Therefore, except you be born from above, you can neither see nor enter the kingdom of God. There is a great divide between these two men, and it cannot be bridged by argument, by discussion, nor by any kind of explanations sought by Nicodemus. It is a great divide caused by irreconcilable differences, and you cannot bridge it. There is the man who 'cannot.' That word 'cannot' is final—"he cannot see." That man is the earthly man. But there is the Man Who 'can', the heavenly Man. John is showing all the way through this Gospel that when no one else can, Jesus can!

THE TWO MEN IN THE INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIAN

Now our point is not just the fact of the difference, nor the fact that we must be born from

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

above, but it is the nature of the difference. At that point everything begins for the Christian. There is nothing at all for you until you have been born from above; but that is only the beginning. I doubt whether any of us has got very far yet in the recognition and understanding of the difference between these two men, and until we do understand that and mark the differences, we shall get nowhere in the Christian life. You and I are still far more earthly and far less heavenly as Christians than we ought to be. The great divide between our natural and our spiritual life is not nearly so clearly marked as it should be; and that opens the place for the understanding of God's strange ways with us.

When we get into the realm of the Holy Spirit's activities through being born of the Spirit, we get into the realm of the greatest reality. Let us make no mistake about this, it is terrible reality. You cannot play with flesh, you cannot tolerate the natural life, if you have come into the realm of the Spirit's activity. Carelessly, knowingly, persistently, habitually, admit there any of the earthly, and you meet no other than very God Himself. That is the reality of this difference. You at once begin to discover that you cannot get on. There is a wall, there is a barrier, you are brought to a standstill when you admit any of the earthly into what is essentially the heavenly. These two are so utterly put asunder in God's sight, that, as far as He is concerned, this natural 'cannot,' may not; there is no playing with it. The very first thing is to recognise the impossibility of the natural being brought into the spiritual, the earthly into the heavenly. That will explain all the confoundings. Nicodemus is confounded when he comes face to face with the heavenly Man, and if we are on natural, earthly ground in any respect, we are going to be confounded in that respect by reason of our relationship with the Lord Jesus.

THE EARTHLY MAN TO DIMINISH

Hence the strange dealings of God with us. What are they all about? What do they mean? We have to recognize there is reality, we cannot get away from it. Sometimes we would like to run away from the reality, it is so real; God is so real, things are so real. They are working out according to principle. By His strange, mysterious ways with us, His deep dealings, God is winding up the earthly, bringing it to an end, in order to make us those who are heavenly. "Born from above," not only as a necessary beginning, but with a view to going on to fulness

of growth and manhood, conformed to the image of His Son; and the course of God's dealings with us is, on the one hand, to confound us in our natural earthly life, and write over it, Impossible! We are made to know that in spirit, in soul, in body, we have no power of ourselves, no attributes, no qualifications, for knowing or doing heavenly things. At our best, we are helpless, blind and in the dark. But that is the negative side.

On the positive side, God is working mysteriously and strangely to bring us into heavenly things, in knowledge and understanding. If you cannot say that is true about you as a Christian, well, look into it, there is something seriously wrong. But it is true that we as children of God do know things that others do not know. We do know—even though it be only in a small measure—what the natural man does not know, and our knowledge of things spiritual and heavenly is growing, very gradually perhaps, but none the less growing. By deep, dark, mysterious, painful ways, we are moving through into a realm where we are coming to see what we never could have seen and what no one could ever see but by a passage through death and being born from above. Oh, we cannot explain all God's methods, we cannot give an answer to all the why's of God's ways, but what we do know is that we are passing through into a realm that is altogether new in the matter of knowledge, a realm that is different, that is other. All the values of God are of this kind. We cannot bring our natural mind to the things of God and give them interpretation with any spiritual value. However much we study the Bible, it is closed for real spiritual value to every one who has not gone through death to a heavenly new birth. Spiritual knowledge waits upon that. But we must understand this great divide—that these two men are totally different, and there is no companionship, no fraternising between Nicodemus and Jesus: there is no fellowship, there is no understanding: they belong to two worlds, they cannot speak one another's language. Even when One from heaven gives heavenly meanings into earthly things, the earthly man cannot see the heavenly meanings.

THE HEAVENLY MAN THE ONLY REAL TESTIMONY

Now the Lord is going to get rid of the difference where we are concerned. "Ye must be born from above", and then the differences begin to go. The things which lock us up, which limit us,

will go: things which are impossible are even now becoming the very things of our normal life. We are learning; but oh, it is a deep way, because this earthly man is so deeply rooted, he is always cropping up in some way or other. Understand what God is doing. He is so working in us that, as we move on through this life and then leave it behind, the one remaining impress will be, not how much we have done or said, nor what our activities have been, but that a heavenly man, a heavenly woman, has been here. The value of that is inestimable. That is the explanation of God's dealings with us. If you forget all else that I have said, do not forget that. The one consequence that God is after is to leave such an impress by our having been on this earth—something has come from heaven and registered its heavenliness here in this world. Oh, it may have been rejected, the reactions to it may have been violent: the more heavenly it is, perhaps the more violent will be the reactions to it. That is what John says about the Lord Jesus, but that does not

alter the fact that Jesus passed through this world and left the impress of a heavenly Man; and that is the whole argument of the New Testament in every part—that believers are to be here, not for this or that or some other incidental thing, but to leave the impress of heaven here: that God should have a witness here: that heavenly things, things of eternity, things of the Spirit, are the things which matter. Do not think that it is a matter of how much preaching or teaching you do or Christian work in which you engage. Those things may be accompaniments, but if there is not the presence of Christ, the heavenly Man, in those concerned, and in what they do and in what they say, and if the one remaining thing when they have passed on is not, 'We recognised the Lord in that man, that woman': if that is not the result, we have missed the meaning of Christianity. Christianity is that. Therefore you must be born from above, because that alone brings in what is of heaven.

T.A.S.

FAITH'S WITNESS IN A DARK DAY

WE are going to be occupied with the book of Daniel, but not with any one particular passage in it. You know that in that great summary of faith's devotion and activities in Hebrews xi, some referred to in this book are mentioned (though not by name) as amongst the great men of faith, that great "cloud of witnesses" (for that is what they are called). It seems to me that the message of this book, so far as the men of God in it are concerned, is faith's witness in a dark and difficult day. There are many features in this book of Daniel which correspond to the position in our own time, and the spiritual principles are those of all time. They are fully revealed in the New Testament in relation to Christ and the Church. Some of those features I want to bring again to your remembrance.

THE SAINTS THE FOCAL POINT OF ALL THAT IS GOING ON

In the first place, we are made to understand that the object in view with all that is going on is an elect people in whom the glory, the honour, the rights and the purposes of God are centred. How many times in this book of Daniel do the words "the saints" occur. In chapter vii they occur six times, and you know that chapter vii is a consummate chapter. If you glance at it, you will see how

everything is gathered into the end of that chapter in the great throne, the great judgment; all is now brought to consummation, and in the consummation of everything those words "the saints" are repeated six times, suggesting that this is the object which has all along been in view and comes out with great emphasis at the end.

Of course, here you are able to observe that "the saints" has two sides. On the one side, it refers to Israel, that elect nation. They are here called the saints, and are such in type and in an earthly way. But it is quite clear also that what is here goes beyond Israel to the Church, and "the saints" are those of the New Testament inclusively—and not now in an earthly way but a heavenly, not in type or in figure but in fulness. That is what the Lord is concerned with, an elect people with whom He has thus closely and inseparably bound up His glory, His rights and His purposes. For that reason, their importance is such as to explain all that is recorded in this book, and it is a wonderfully far-reaching and comprehensive story; heaven and earth are both bound up with this great concern.

PREVAILING SPIRITUAL POVERTY IN THE SAINTS

But here we find that people in a state which

expresses anything but the glory, the honour, the rights and the purposes of God. They are out of touch with those things; a low spiritual life has resulted in a loss of the very testimony for which they existed, the testimony of God's authority. Looking at Israel in the time of Daniel, you certainly have anything but a testimony to the authority of God. They were called to be a witness to God's absolute supremacy in all realms. We know how God did stand by them in that respect in the days when their spiritual life was true, and there was not a nation that was able to stand before them; the authority of God was truly set forth. But now that testimony is lost, and, further, they are in a state of defeat and in bondage to the world. They are having to pay homage to the world, to seek at the hands of the world the very means of their subsistence; they are entirely dependent upon the world for everything. They are totally incapable of standing up in strength, in testimony, without help from the world, and they are in such a position as to be altogether out of immediate touch with what represents the full mind of the Lord; they are away from that.

Now all that is literally true in the case of Israel as seen here in the days of Daniel. I do not think it wants a very great deal of perception to recognize that, speaking in general, there is a state in the Church in our time which very largely corresponds to that. We are not able to say very much about our high level of spiritual life as the people of God. We deplore the poverty and weakness of it, and while being unspeakably grateful for any and all who are going on with the Lord, we have to say of the great mass of those who fear His name that spiritual life is not on a very high level, not very rich, strong, clear; and consequently the testimony of the Lord's authority as expressed by means of His Church is very largely lost. The Church has not an authoritative message and word and position in the nations to-day. Surely in these days of world crisis we are feeling, Oh, that a voice might be raised! Oh, that some Divine authority might be expressed! Oh, that there might be something from heaven to make people aware of their state and their responsibility! Oh, that there might be something to halt this rush toward destruction and perdition! We do not stay to speak of how terrible the outlook is unless something happens from heaven. Well might men's hearts faint for fear and for expectation of what is coming on the earth. Truly the word of Christ has meaning that, unless those days be shortened, there shall no flesh be saved (Matt. xxiv. 22). Oh, for a voice of authority from heaven! Oh, that the Church meant

something to-day in the nations! But we have to say that it is not so, that the Church hardly counts. Rather is she in a state of defeat and bondage to the world. Is it not true, speaking very generally, that the Church to-day is dependent upon the world almost for its existence, having to call on the world for its supplies, having to go to the world to maintain it, to keep it going? It is like that. And who will say that Christians are really in closest touch with the mind of the Lord as to His great purposes in the very election of the Church? I think I need not labour that there is a correspondence between Daniel's time and ours.

We are, then, led to consider Daniel and his friends in Babylon and what they signify, with reference both to their own day and, in figure, to to-day.

GOD'S NEED OF AN INSTRUMENT TO EXPRESS AND EMBODY HIS THOUGHTS

Firstly, they were an instrument of mediation between God and His people in their low spiritual condition, and between the people and God. There those men stood, there they poured themselves out to heaven, there they cried to God: they were the only mediatorial instrument that God had there to bridge this terrible gap between God and His people; to speak for God, and to speak to God about these things.

Much is said that indicates they were men who had intelligence and understanding, men who knew the Scriptures. They were probably the only ones who really had this insight, and together they embodied the mind of the Lord. They were the embodiment of God's mind about His people. Had His people been what the Lord would have had them to be, they would have been like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and any others that may have been of their type, prevailing with heaven concerning conditions here in this world. These alone were the embodiment of that mind of the Lord for the elect, for His people, for the Church. And then they were standing uncompromisingly for that Divine mind which they knew and of which they were the embodiment; uncompromisingly they stood for it at all costs.

We come by way of them to see what God's need is in all such times, and in our time so very greatly, namely, of an instrument to stand between Him and the poor, weak, defeated spiritual state of His people at large—an instrument that has knowledge of the time, has intelligence about God's thoughts for His people, understanding what the will of the Lord is, to whom the Lord has dis-

closed His counsels and His purposes as to the elect. He needs a people, an instrument, like that. But more than that, it must be not just as those who have knowledge, but a people who are themselves the embodiment of the Lord's mind, a corporate embodiment and expression of what He wants concerning the Church. That is a Divine principle which applies to all times. The Lord is not satisfied just to have people to preach His truths. He must have a people who embody those truths and express them in a living way—a voice, a corporate instrument. He must have a company or companies like that. It is so easy to speak about the purposes and thoughts of God, to give them out and then to think that is all that is necessary. It is only when the truth has been made known, and the Lord's thoughts have been revealed, that the work really begins. It is from that point that the revelation has to become embodied and expressed in a people, and all the work of the Holy Spirit to get a people according to that revelation has to be done. It has to be like that. The Lord must have a people who embody in themselves what they know by revelation of the Holy Spirit the Lord wants for His Church, and who stand positively and uncompromisingly for it.

SATAN'S ANTAGONISM

We pass from the vessel itself to what such a vessel has to meet, and it is perfectly clear in this book of Daniel that the men of this kind had to meet no small thing in the matter of antagonism, hostility, hatred, and every kind of evil work. This antagonism, moreover, this cost attaching to their testimony, was universal in character. It embraced heaven and earth. You are familiar with that part of this book which brings out so clearly how that by Daniel's praying and fasting the very powers of heaven were shaken. Principalities and powers were stirred to attempt to frustrate this activity. Yes, that whole realm of spiritual antagonism in the lower heavenlies came into operation because of these men and the testimony for which they were standing. It seems that all heaven was moved, so that when Satan and his angels went out to oppose, God had to put into commission even His archangel Michael to overcome them.

Then of course there was the play of those evil powers upon the earthly forces. Those who could be used by them were all fully employed to destroy this testimony and to put these witnesses out of commission. It is not difficult to see the reflection of Satan in Babylon, of that pride which caused him to challenge the very throne of heaven. It was there in Babylon, man's glory in the place of God's glory.

It is pride which will be found in Antichrist. It is at the heart of all antagonism to God. And when it is the Lord's glory alone that is the concern of His people, there is nothing else for them but a seven times heated fire and the den of lions and such like things. The antagonism against this kind of ministry and service to the Lord is terrific. The cost is great.

THE GROUND OF TRIUMPH— SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD

We must hurry to note this final thing, namely, the ground of triumph. I think there is one thing that goes to the heart of it. It is an inclusive thing, that is, it touches so many other things, so many aspects. It may be gathered into one word—separation. I am not so fond of that word, but it is the word we need here. You notice that it says in the very first chapter of the book that Daniel and his brethren determined that they would not defile themselves with the king's dainties, nor with the wine from the king's table; and that is how they spoke of it when they went to Arioch, the king's representative, to plead their case. They asked—you would think hardly tactfully or diplomatically! — 'that they might not defile themselves'. It is hardly complimentary, at any rate, to speak so of food from the king's table. They pressed this matter of defilement. They had seen the principle—that by this means they and their testimony would in some way be compromised. It was a link with this world and with Satan's kingdom as in this world, and the effect of it would be—oh, how inclusive and comprehensive this is!—that they would be denying in their very persons the all-sufficiency of the Lord. If they were to go the way of the world and look like the people of the world, where would be the testimony of the Lord? If they did not go the way of the world and were to refuse to have any kind of compromise with the world, there would be great opportunity for the Lord to prove that He can go one better than the world, and is more than all the world put together.

This is the challenge. On various grounds and by various arguments, young people especially are tempted to compromise on this point. They think they will gain influence with people of the world by coming down to their level and doing as they do, thus getting on an even footing with the world; but they do not recognize that such a course so often involves compromise. More rarely still do they recognize that when God's people are going to the world for their sustenance and nourishment and pleasure and gratification and so on, it results in a question being cast upon the ability of the

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Lord to prove how far greater He is than this world. The bad spiritual state of the people in Daniel's day was wholly due to their being in bondage to the world. Daniel and his brethren would have none of it. They stood apart in complete separation from the world, its standards, its ideas and all its resources, to give God the opportunity of proving that He is better than the world, and His servants, by His grace, better than the men of the world. That is the testimony, and until that is true, we have no authority, no ascendancy, no real testimony. Separation therefore, unpleasant and hard as the word may sound, is a very fundamental matter if we mean by it that we are separated unto the Lord, that He may show by means of us that this world is a poor thing compared with what we have in Him.

There was a deep rooted seduction in that table of the king, and they were alive to it. It was the snare of the good time, as people call it. It was the snare of a lost clearness and distinctiveness of testimony. It was the snare of arguing wrongly, "*I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some*" (1 Cor. ix. 22)—so often a misapplied Scripture and carried altogether outside of what the Apostle meant when he said it. Do you think the man who gave that phrase to be written in Holy Scripture ever compromised with this world, with sin, with the principles of the Satanic kingdom, or ever lowered his standard?

That was not the Paul we know. With him the words quoted had another meaning. Do not be caught by a catch phrase like that. How many do you win? How many are won out and out for Christ by that policy of compromise? For after all, it is only policy, and policy is an accursed thing in spiritual matters. It is a low standard. The whole work of Satan is to get us somehow defiled, and then we are put out.

Satan's first effort, then, with Daniel and his brethren was to destroy them inwardly by this kind of compromise; but they refused to be defiled. When he found he could not do that, he turned to outward methods of destruction. Hence the fiery furnace and the lion's den—anything to accomplish their destruction, to nullify them, to quench them. The Lord needs men like this as His instruments. It is good to know how the Lord does stand by such. Read the last verses of the book of Daniel. "*Go thou thy way till the end be; for thou shalt rest, and shalt stand in thy lot, at the end of the days*" (Daniel xii. 13). Daniel continued despite fiery furnaces and dens of lions. A true heart meant that the Lord stood with him and he finished his testimony, and no powers of heaven or earth could bring an untimely end to that testimony. The Lord will look after us so long as we are on this line of testimony for which these men stood, the absolute glory and dominion of the Lord, expressed here in a people of this kind.

T. A-S.

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SPECIAL WHITSUNTIDE GATHERINGS

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A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY



"A Candlestick of Pure Gold:
of Beaten Work"

Exodus 25, 31.

"The Testimony of Jesus"

Rev. 1, 9.

Vol. 29. No. 4.

July, 1951

THIS MINISTRY

THE OBJECT OF THE MINISTRY of this little paper, issued bi-monthly, is to contribute to the Divine end which is presented in the words of Ephesians iv. 13 — "... till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge (lit. full knowledge) of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we be no longer children ..."

It is not connected with any "Movement", "Organization", "Mission" or separate body of Christians, but is just a ministry to "all saints". Its going forth is with the prayer and hope that it will so result in a fuller measure of Christ, a richer and higher level of spiritual life, that, while bringing the Church of God into a growing approximation to His revealed will as to its 'attainment' it may be better qualified to be used of Him in testimony in the nations, and to the completing of its own number by the salvation of those yet to be added by the Lord.

This ministry is maintained by the Lord through the stewardship of those who value it. There is no "subscription", but gifts can be sent to the Editor, "A Witness and A Testimony", 13, Honor Oak Road, Forest Hill, London. S.E. 23, England. All cheques should be made payable to "Witness and Testimony A/c". The paper is sent only to those who personally desire it, and we count on friends to advise us if this is no longer the case, or if they change their address.

"Personal" letters should be addressed to
Mr. T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.



A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

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SPIRITUAL ASCENDENCY

VI. THE HOLINESS OF ZION'S HILL

Reading: Ps. xxiv. 3 - 5; Rev. xiv. 1 - 5.

WE have been occupied with what we have called 'spiritual ascendancy'—"Who shall ascend . . . ?" What does it really mean? How does it concern us? The answer will come to us in some such form as this. First of all, the whole of the Word of God from beginning to end sets forth the necessity for spiritual, inner ascendancy on the part of God's people, and that carries with it the fact that there is something to get over; for ascendancy has no meaning if there is nothing above which to ascend, if there is no challenge, nothing to overcome. We have no need, I think, to be told that there is quite a lot that demands absolute ascendancy in our hearts, in our spirits, and we learn afresh almost every hour that there is a great realm, a universe, in which our lives are set, which will press us down and under, and hold us there, unless we know how to get on top of it. That is patent to us all.

ASCENDENCY OVER THE ENEMY

Then we begin to define that, to break it up, and we find three things about it. Firstly, there is a great realm of spiritual forces outside of ourselves which are set upon our casting down, seeking by any means to get us down and under. That is a reality. There is no doubt about that.

ASCENDENCY OVER OUR OWN SOULS

The second thing is that that great realm of spiritual antagonism to us has its opportunity in

something in us. As we find ourselves now in our present state of humanity, there is that in us which constitutes a foothold, a ground and a response to that great system of evil outside. Temptation has no meaning unless there is something in us that can respond. We know that this is not only an objective fight, it is also subjective. This whole matter is an inward one as well as an outward, and until you have dealt with the inward, you have no chance of dealing with the outward.

POWER WITH GOD

Then there is a third thing which arises in the Word of God. It is a question of ascendancy with God, or, to put that in another way, power with God, standing with God; where God's power and support and resources are with us. That is a tremendous thing, for, apart from that, ascendancy in the other two realms is hopeless. We cannot meet the great foe without and have any assurance of victory within unless we know absolutely that we stand well with God, that there is no shadow over God's face where we are concerned. On that basis we are princes with God, we can prevail with God in prayer. (I did not say to prevail upon God in prayer. That is a different thing altogether. We have not to prevail upon God, but to prevail with God; that is, to come so completely into oneness with God that He has no need whatever to have reservations in our case, He can completely let go. To prevail upon God would be to change God. We are not out to do that, but we are out to

bring the unchangeable God—if I may put it in this way—into a place where, in His relationship with us, He can release His power. That is just a little technical difference by the way.) Prevailing with God in prayer is no small matter, but a tremendous thing. This is power with God and, because of that, power with men, and power over the enemy, and power over our own souls—and what an enemy our souls are to spiritual progress! All that is what is meant by spiritual ascendancy: coming into a place where we are really in possession of the situation.

Now, lest you should be discouraged at that point, let me say again that this is not something done suddenly, in a moment. Coming to Zion, as we said earlier, is a journey, but it is an upward journey. This whole matter ought to be progressive.

ZION THE PLACE OF SPIRITUAL POWER

Zion, then, is the place of spiritual power. Zion, we have already indicated, means the stronghold. It was the peak of conquest in the Old Testament. It was the one thing which for ever stood as a testimony to kingship, when kingship reached its highest point of realization in David. It became known as the city of David. That is no mere title: that is achievement, that is triumph, that is the last word in ascendancy. So Zion speaks of being over, up, through: it is there above all other places spiritually. Thus Zion becomes the symbol of the life of the Lord's people in the place of His lordship or of His power, and it is the very embodiment of the meaning of the kingdom of God. And remember, that while by new birth we are brought into the kingdom of God—"Except one be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John iii. 3)—the kingdom of God is also within you (Luke xvii. 21). Both things are true. You come into a position by birth, but that position comes into you. The Kingdom has to be in you. The Kingdom is not just the realm of God's reign. It is a form, a nature, a kind of reign which is above every other authority and power. "His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him" (Dan. vii. 27). It is a spiritual thing in the first place. People talk about the kingdom of God in such earthly ways. They speak of 'extending the Kingdom'. The idea is that you are building something up over a wide superficial area, whereas the Kingdom means something very much more than that. The kingdom of God is a deep thing, a mighty thing; "a kingdom which cannot be shaken" (Heb. xii. 28). Well, Zion, meaning ascension through victory, becomes the simile of spiritual power.

HOLINESS BASIC TO SPIRITUAL POWER

Upon what does spiritual power rest? Power with God, power from God in our lives and in this world, enabling us to overcome; upon what does it rest? Who shall ascend? "*He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto falsehood, and hath not sworn deceitfully*" (Ps. xxiv. 4). "*I have set my king upon my HOLY hill of Zion*" (Ps. ii. 6). This matter of spiritual power is a matter of holiness at its root and foundation. Many have thought that spiritual power is a matter of enduement. To receive a 'baptism' of the Holy Spirit, that is said to be the way of power—something that happens to you like that. Let me point out that that concerns power for witness. "*Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses*" (Acts i. 8). But power over the power of the enemy is by reason of the nature of the Holy Spirit—the Holy Spirit—and the witness, the power, of the Church in its effectiveness at the beginning was simply because the Holy Spirit had come to be absolutely in the ascendent as Lord. That is why, when in the book of the Acts you so soon find something unholy rising up in the midst, there was such an instant action of judgment by the Spirit. You will recall the cases of Ananias and Sapphira, and others.

That opens up a very long and full history, and you at once see that the great enemy's one means and method of destroying power over him was to corrupt, to introduce something unholy. That is the history of man. "*Thou makest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet*" (Ps. viii. 6). But that purpose was definitely countered for the whole race by the subtle movement of the enemy to introduce something unclean, unholy. It was done. The enemy did not come with an army and assail objectively. He simply insinuated something unholy, and that did it, and that whole kingdom crashed. From the beginning it has been like that, all the way through. Israel's history is just such a history. The Lord's purpose for Israel, as we have seen, was that they should be above all the nations of the earth, the head and not the tail. Then Balaam was hired to curse them. But you cannot curse people who are holy. He came in his heart to curse, but his very lips were taken hold of by God, and he said the most glorious things of Israel. "*He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob*" (Numbers xxiii. 21). 'Who can curse a people like these whom God hath blessed? I am helpless in this matter!' He went away and came back a second time to seek to de-

feat these people. to bring them down from their excellency. I suggest you read again those three visits of Balaam and all the magnificent things he said about Israel. He describes them from God's standpoint. After three tries he has to give it up. In effect, he has to say, 'It is no good; people like that cannot be paralysed by a curse, they cannot be defeated.' But then he sells himself, and somehow his soul is bound in the irons of covetousness, and what he cannot do directly, Satan leads him to do indirectly. You have those words in Micah (vi. 5) about Balaam, and then in Revelation: "*Thou hast there some that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication*" (Rev. ii. 14). Balaam went round to the back door and introduced something unclean—idolatry—and down Israel came. How awful is the tragedy of the crash of that glorious people! Not from a position which they had reached by their own merits, not from an exalted condition which was their own native condition, but a position in which God had placed them through faith in Him; our blessed position in Christ it was, virtually. It was not true literally to say of Israel that there was no iniquity or sin or wrong in them. It was how God looked at them while they were there encompassing the tabernacle in a full obedience to the Lord. God looked at them, so to speak, in Christ positionally.

But then idolatry was introduced. It is the story which arises again and again, both generally and particularly, of how Satan gains the ascendancy, what the ground of Satan's power is. The ground is always something unholy.

Is not that the story of Job from one angle? Job, on the ground of righteousness which is by deeds, acts, externalities—the law, if you like—is found blameless. On that ground, then, Satan is released to assail, and under the assault you find things rising up in Job that he would never have suspected. No one would have believed those things were in Job, and Satan is finding a good deal of power, of ground, to shake him to his very foundations, until Job gets through to another position. This is not the position of what he is according to the righteousness which is of the law—works, deeds, externalities—but a position of righteousness virtually by faith, where, so far as he himself is concerned, he no longer talks as he did at the beginning about the kind things he did, and of how everybody acknowledged what a good, generous man he was. 'Now', he says, 'I have learned something:' "*Mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes*" (Job xlii. 6).

When he got through there and capitulated to the Lord, Satan's power was taken right away. Do you notice there is a certain stage in the course of that conflict where Satan disappears from the scene? Satan is very much in evidence at the beginning; but where is he at the end? What has happened to him? You cannot find him. A work has gone on within Job which has taken the ground from Satan and compelled him to retire, and in the end the man is in the place of absolute ascendancy—over friends, circumstances, himself and the Devil. A new ground has been found; not the ground of his own righteousness, but the ground of Another's righteousness. You find right through, as the matter develops, that Job is crying for someone else—for a daysman, a mediator, an advocate; and the only one who answers his need is the Lord Jesus. You see it again and again. His cry is for this mediator to stand between; and speaking typically, Job passes from his own ground to the ground of Christ. And that is ascendancy; the enemy is out of court.

You come to later days, to Israel and the prophets. Take the third chapter of Zechariah. "*And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary*". Satan is in the place of power to resist. Now, Joshua represents Israel, and in that vision of the filthy garments we have Israel's unclean condition before God, resulting in Israel's utter impotence in the presence of the enemy; weakness; powerlessness, because of uncleanness. Not only are the filthy garments taken away, but a new white robe is put upon Joshua, and a fair mitre upon his head. The word is, "*The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan . . . is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?*". The rebuke to Satan is administered when the condition is changed. That is to say, in other words, Satan's power is only, but always, established where there is unholiness. Ascendancy over Satan is not something objective: it is a matter of condition.

So you find that the whole thing turns, in Israel's history, upon the priests. How is the priest? That is how the people are. Look at the situation in the days of Eli. The priests, what of them? Look at Eli's sons. The priesthood is corrupt: there is gross uncleanness. How is Israel? Utterly in defeat, captured. It is a deplorable picture of a people brought down from their excellency to lowest levels of defeat, helplessness and misery. The priesthood was the key to the situation: as with Joshua, so with Eli.

What is priesthood? What is the meaning of it? Priesthood has to do with the removal of sin,

of corruption. That is the secret of life. The priest stands for the life of God's people. But there is no life where there is corruption, and there is no power with God where there is unholiness.

We could go right on to the New Testament, to the churches in Asia. It is the same trouble over again. 'I have this against thee: thou hast there that and that and that'. What is the effect? Well, they are helpless, impotent, defeated. The one word which relates to them most is 'Overcome'. So we get the force of the words, "To him that overcometh"—'You are under; you have to get over, but you cannot take this position officially and mechanically: things have to be dealt with.'

I think I have said enough to show what the real foundation of spiritual power is, power with God, power over the enemy. It ought to be helpful to us.

THE DEFILEMENT OF SELF-INTEREST

We do go through it in our spiritual experience! How persistent the enemy is to get us somehow involved in something questionable! There is an extraordinary phrase used in relation to Israel's life—a phrase not easy to understand, and I do not profess to understand all it means; but there it is. It is this phrase: "*the iniquity of the holy things*" (*Ex. xxviii. 38*). What does it mean? Well, I can see something of what it means, and a great deal more than I am going to say now. I am only going to suggest to you that in the fuller meaning it means this—that there are holy things, and it is in the realm of the holy things that the enemy is always trying to get something that involves compromise.

Love, true love, is the most holy thing, and it is in the realm of love that the enemy is always trying to get something compromising, something wrong. We have said ambition is not a wrong thing. It is a Divinely implanted thing. God made man to have dominion. Perhaps ambition is the wrong word; aspiration is a more spiritual word—the desire, the sensing of destiny, that you were made to rise, made to attain. You were not made a worm grovelling on the earth: you were made with legs; which means that you were made to get somewhere. Interpreted spiritually and morally, God made us to rise, to reach, to attain. That mighty instinct is found in the Apostle—"Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on . . ." (*Phil. iii. 12*). Here it is at work, that kind of thing. Aspiration is a holy thing. Tell me, is it not just there that all the iniquity is found?—the self-element, the possessive, the acquisitive, the assertive, the domineering, the effort to gain dom-

inion. Then dominion becomes domination, and it has gone wrong: the very spirit of it has gone. Meekness has become pride, the glory of God has become instead our glory. It is the iniquity of holy things: and remember, that the nearer you get to the most holy, the nearer you get to the deepest perils. The deep things of Satan lie next to the deep things of God. "The iniquity of the holy things". The Lord gives something which is His gift, and it is holy; and then the enemy seeks to spoil it by bringing in something that is not holy. The Lord has ever had to do a work there of cutting in between. He gave Isaac to Abraham, a holy gift. It was God's gift, something utterly of God, very pure: in principle, God's most utter gift. Then God had to say, Offer him! Now what is happening? Abraham is in peril now, in infinite peril of the iniquity of a holy thing. What is it? To hold that personally to himself and not let it go. A self-hold may come in to spoil the holy thing. It was when the self that was there was resisted without hesitation, when in faith Abraham responded to God and let the boy go, that the boy was given back a thousandfold for ever and ever on holy ground. There must be no self-ground. What a perilous moment that was for Abraham, lest his personal love should come in and interfere with his holding everything for God! And that is a thing with which you and I are continuously confronted and assailed. Holy things; but an impingement of personal interest, and the holy things are robbed of their power. We could mention thing after thing that is holy and yet that holy thing, which is meant to be of such account, such spiritual value, can be robbed of it all because something comes in that is unholy.

THE DEFILEMENT OF AN EARTH TOUCH

Let me say again that the unholy thing need not be something that all the world would call evil. When we talk about unholiness, our thoughts fly to certain things which we call unclean and corrupt and evil, certain positive things. Oh, but it goes very much deeper than that. You see, it may only be what we have before called the earth touch. We live in a world and on an earth that is cursed. Everything in this creation lies under a curse, the proof of which is becoming more and more patent; for the higher man rises the quicker he destroys himself with his work. He cannot rule out the power of death and evil from his world however high he rises; and the further he goes, the more that power of evil and death works. It is such a vain, false thing to talk about a 'new world', a

'new order', until you have changed man's very nature. We live in a world, in a creation, like that, and the prince of this world has got things in his hands; there is no doubt about it. If you live in his world, he has you in his hands. Step across from the kingdom of God's Son to the kingdom of the enemy and you know you touch death. In many, many ways we know we touch death when we do that. The further we go with the Lord, the more we find we dare not touch that other realm. What we could touch as Christians at one time we may not touch now. We are learning. We could talk at one time in a way in which we may not now. We have learned in a very grim way that others may, but we may not. As you go on in a certain realm, you are becoming more and more limited in another realm.

That is the difficulty of going right on with the Lord, being of "the hundred and forty four thousand" company. There is a certain amount of isolation. You have gone with the Lord—"They . . . follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth"—and no one else follows you, you are very much alone; it is spiritual loneliness. We are in this world, and if we touch it in a voluntary way we become defiled. I am not saying we have to leave our business. As Paul says, if we are not going to have anything to do with this world in practical ways, we had better go right out of it (I Cor. v. 10). That is not the point. The question is that of our voluntary moral and spiritual links, our choices. It is not our business obligations that need involve us, but our heart association—the sort of things we want, like, choose. Those things bring a death touch, and we come under arrest. We find we have lost our position, our spiritual power, our ascendancy, whatever that may mean—our joy, peace, rest. We have touched the dead realm somewhere in spirit. It is a terrible thing in spirit to touch death—and that is iniquity; you have touched iniquity.

Hence the Lord has to do this work of the Cross in us. It is no use saying, Bring us not over this Jordan! Jordan has to do its work continually, to cut right in.

Let me say here, for the sake of the Lord's servants particularly, that this is the realm in which our main education takes place. You and I, as the Lord's servants who have responsibility in the things of God, are up against this question of spiritual power all the time. We find the enemy so entrenched, we find him holding the ground. We meet so much that does not yield, and our whole question is one of power, power with God and power over the enemy. Now then, listen again. It

is not always a case of flagrant wickedness, a Corinthian situation of gross moral sin, of wrong in the domestic and social life of the saints, of doubtful business dealings, and so on, with which we have to deal. Where these are found, they are, of course, holding up everything, and must be dealt with. But as we go on we find that spiritual progress, coming to a place of real increase, of spiritual ascendancy, is not just a matter of dealing with what everybody would call evils and iniquities, but it may only be an earth touch that is involved—in this sense, that a thing is too earthly, the horizon is an earthly horizon. We have come down to earth, and it is a matter now of the success of our work in the eyes of men, of all sorts of things which are earthly considerations: we are involved in something which, after all, while it means to be for the Lord and is very zealous for Him, nevertheless is itself so earthly. There is a worldly principle in this. It is only as we come to that completely heavenly position, where every earthly and natural consideration is set aside, and nothing matters to us here so long as the Lord is being glorified, that ours is a true position. What does it matter whether everybody leaves us and goes somewhere else, so long as they have gone after the Lord? It does not matter to me whether all of you get up and go, and never come back here, so long as you have found more of Christ somewhere else. If you do, I will be after you, to enjoy it with you! If you have found something more of Christ, that is all that matters. Is that true of organised Christianity today? What about the charge of sheep stealing? On what does that rest? *Our* fold, not the Lord's fold: *our* people, *our* workers, taken away. It is *ours*! If all who had responsibility would but take the attitude, 'If only they can find more of the Lord somewhere else, let them go as soon as they can: we are prepared for our whole organisation to come to an end, if only that is true; and if we cannot be the channels of meeting their need, well, the Lord save us from trying to carry on something that is not delivering the goods.' An utterly detached position, with no personal interest or consideration at all, is the only place of spiritual power. That is ascendancy, that is heavenliness. It is very real, and again I say to you, that is the realm of our education as the Lord's servants. If we are going on into fulness, we shall be learning all along the line what has to go, what we cannot touch, what the Lord cannot allow. He will allow and bless up to that point, but beyond that point something more has to be done, the question at issue being, not something of positive sinfulness, in the sense in which men speak of sinfulness, but just some

earth touch, something we have never before realised to be of the old creation. So the matter of spiritual ascendancy becomes very practical.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO PERSEVERANCE

I cannot close without going back, lest anyone should come under oppression over this. There are two sides to this matter. We have seen Israel spread abroad in the valley and Balaam looking down from the height, and what the Lord made Balaam to say, as expressive of His own attitude toward them because they were centred in His Son: and that is true. Our position in Christ through redeeming grace is so complete and perfect that there never, never can be added anything to it; it is perfect. Even to Corinthians, who are always looked at by us as the poorest specimens of Christians in the New Testament, with all that was there that was so unhappy, so unholy, the Apostle will begin by saying, "*sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints*". Not "called to be saints": the words 'to be' are not in the original text and should be left out, as they entirely upset the whole idea. "*Called saints*". When you are called saints, you are regarded as saints. "*Sanctified in Christ Jesus*". So far as our position in Christ is concerned, we shall never be any more sanctified than we were at the beginning, than we are to-day. But no one is going to settle down on that and say that nothing matters. We have now to walk according to our calling: the battle is on, the enemy is out to put us out of our position in Christ, to make it unreal. That is just where the mighty power of the Holy Spirit comes in to educate and discipline us: yes, and we pass into experiences which, but for the mighty reactions of the Holy

Spirit in us, the mercy and grace of God, would undo us as the Lord's servants, rob us of all our power, because they are compromising positions. But, while our hearts are really toward the Lord, the Spirit goes on and does the work, and brings us inwardly to the place where already in Christ we are deemed to be. We are in Zion, we are there positionally, and yet we are on the way to Zion. Do not be discouraged if the way seems difficult. It is a rising way, and that means you have to overcome something with every step. You have only to take one step at a time; do not try to take two or three. If you look right up there to the summit from the beginning, you may be discouraged. If your feet are on the way to Zion, take the next step. And don't forget, young people, that in this way the first wind is usually our zeal, and power to go only comes when the first wind comes to an end. God's power really comes when our first wind gives out. I mean this, that when we come to the place where we have to say, 'I cannot go on any further; unless something happens, I shall never go on'—that is all right. What some of us have proved in the further stages of this way to Zion is that the power of God to keep us going is altogether independent of our enthusiasm. The marvel is that we have gone on at all. We have not done it because we were so enthusiastic. All that has long since waned and dried up. Now it is something very much more than enthusiasm that keeps us going; it is nothing less than the power of His resurrection. That is the power working in us of which the Apostle speaks, when he says, "*Unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us*" (Eph. iii. 20).

T. A.S.

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“HIS GREAT LOVE”

III. LOVE SERVING

Reading: Eph. ii. 4; John xiii. 1 - 17.

“Jesus . . . having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them unto the end . . . he . . . riseth from supper, and layeth aside his garments; and he took a towel, and girded himself. Then he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.”

THE DISCIPLES—PERSONAL INTERESTS DOMINATING

HERE is the great object lesson of Divine love. We must get the setting of this scene in order to obtain something of its real effect. The atmosphere at this time was a high-tension atmosphere. It was charged with a sense of a pending crisis. It was full of expectation mingled with wonder—wonder as to exactly what was going to happen. The kingdom was in everybody's thoughts; Jesus was being hailed by the multitudes as the Messiah, palm branches were being waved, people were shouting “*Hosanna: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord*” (John xii. 13). All the Messianic thoughts and expectations now for many centred in Him, and especially so in the case of His disciples. Some great event in relation to the kingdom was on the point of taking place, and this had given a great impetus to their personal expectations. They were, of course, very much in the grip of the Jewish expectations of the kingdom on this earth, the ousting of the Roman power, and the setting up of the kingdom of the Messiah. All that was in the air and in their minds, and they were beginning to see their respective places in this kingdom. The mother of Zebedee's children had come to Jesus and, worshipping Him, had said, in reply to His interrogation of her, “*Command that these my two sons may sit, one on thy right hand, and one on thy left hand, in thy kingdom*” (Matt. xx. 20). You see the expectation: and the two sons were not ignorant of the ambition and request of their mother: they were parties to it. The other disciples were terribly provoked that this thing should have taken place, and as they went on in the way, they talked about this and discussed who should be greatest in the kingdom.

Now that is a statement, but we cannot leave it with just the thought that they were saying to one another ‘I will be greater than you’. They were

clearly going into more detail than that, and saying, ‘In the kingdom, I am going to be so-and-so’: all thinking in terms of place and position, and vying with one another, each trying to go one better than the others. This is indicated in what is recorded as having taken place. It is also recorded that Jesus knew their thoughts, and understood what was going on. So in this wrangle about place, position, personal importance and advantage in this kingdom that was about to come, they were all jangled and on edge with one another, and out of temper. Such was the atmosphere.

So they come to the upper room which Jesus had taken. In every nicely-appointed guest house or guest chamber in Jerusalem, just inside the door was a little table, and upon it a basin, with a jug of scented water and an apron and a towel. If it were the house of a wealthy or well-to-do person, there would be a servant in attendance. But when Jesus took the room He did not employ a servant, and only the things were there. And the disciples arrive in this spirit, with this mentality, in the upper room—annoyed, irritated, eyeing one another; and they pass in through the door. They look up at the ceiling, or somewhere else, but none of them sees the basin! They are not in a mood for that sort of thing at all. The supper is ready, and they sit down to supper with unwashed feet. Now when I was a young man, there were two cities which were said to be at that time the two dirtiest cities in the world, and one of them was Jerusalem; but even that had a semblance of sanitation. But there was no such thing in the days when the Lord was there. All the garbage and refuse was pitched out into the street. Think of a hot day in the east, the dust and the mess and the smell! They had come through that and gone in. That basin was not a thing that you could just pass by as though it did not mean anything—some quite unnecessary thing. There was a real need for it and for that scented water. But no, they had carefully not seen it!

That is the very strong setting of the whole scene. It is not exaggerated, it is only bringing out the details that are here, a matter of reading between the lines. They had all passed by and sat down to supper.

THE SERVANT SPIRIT LACKING

Now, let us look at these men themselves. Their feelings had been irritated and accentuated; and

you know, when we get like that, what excuses we make and how we argue and bring up all we can to support our position. Is that not human nature?

There was Matthew. Now Matthew had taken on service with the alien government in occupation and had made a lot of money out of it, so much so that when Jesus called him to discipleship, he made a great feast for all his friends. He could not have made a great feast without having money, and he could not have had an expensive feast without having servants. So Matthew was doubtless a man who had always someone to wash his feet, and who thought of himself as the big man. No servant, he!

There were James and John. They were friends of the High Priest and had access to the High Priest's court; so they were somebody in the social world, in the world of public influence and importance.

And there was Peter; and Peter could, under these conditions, argue like this—'I am one of the inner three; I have always been privileged above the rest; I have been recognized as something more than the others. Whenever the Lord has wanted something special, I have been one of the three with Him; so it is not my place to wait on the others.'

THE LORD—PROMPTED BY LOVE TO LOWLY SERVICE

I am not saying all this merely to draw an entertaining or vivid picture. It is by way of getting the right setting for our Lord. In that atmosphere, in the presence of that mentality, that attitude: false, artificial, unworthy, and oh, so petty, so mean, so contemptible: "*He . . . riseth from supper*"—to perform Himself the task they all avoided. What a significance there is in John's statement in that connection!—"knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he came forth from God, and goeth unto God". This One it is who rises from supper, and (following, no doubt, what was the usual custom) goes quietly over to the door and takes off His outer robe and lays it down, takes the apron (the servant's apron) and puts it on, ties the towel round His waist, pours water into the basin, and comes to wash His disciples' feet. "*Having loved his own that were in the world (and just now, at any rate, so very much of the world), he loved them unto the end (unto the uttermost).*"

The question immediately arises, and is answered here. What is love to the uttermost? What is the love of Christ? What is the love of God? It is not in sentimental words. No, this is it. It is

not love for the lovely and the lovable only, for those whom you cannot help loving. *This* is the love to the uttermost.

OUR CLEANSING THE OUTCOME OF SELFLESS LOVE

The rest of His explanation, His comment, His message founded upon what He had done, does bring us all up short, for He said, "*What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt understand afterward*". And what did they know afterward? They came to know that the world itself was a filthy place, deep-dyed in sin's degradation, with all the muck and refuse of hell spread over it—worse than the streets of Jerusalem—and men had to be saved from that degradation, cleansed from all that filthiness; and it was going to be done, not by a haughty Matthew nor a self-important Peter, but by the Lamb of God becoming "*obedient unto death, yea, the death of the Cross*" (Phil. ii. 8). It was going to be done by stripping, by humbling, by emptying, by the spirit of uttermost service—service of this kind, Christ's service to us. Oh, what humiliation, what emptying, lies behind our cleansing! What it has cost! That is what He calls love—not the finding of a place for ourselves in the Kingdom, being something important, giving ourselves airs. Moffat translates that fragment in I Cor. xiii.—"*Love . . . doth not behave itself unseemly*"—as 'Love giveth itself no airs'. We look at the Lord Jesus, and there we see love. To think for a moment of what any given thing is going to mean to our pride, to our influence, to our position, to our prestige, never comes in with love. Love, this love, never leaves room for such a thing as standing up for our rights, for saying they are not being recognized, that we are not being given our place. Oh no, there is none of that here. If the Lord Jesus had taken that position, He certainly would never have enacted this object lesson of love, and would never have gone to the Cross at all; and we should never have been cleansed and saved from this world. It is a sad picture, from one standpoint.

THE CALL TO FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM IN SERVANTHOOD

I do not know how you feel about it. I confess to you that, as I have been thinking about this, I have wondered whether I ought to pass it on to anyone else. I know by long experience that it is possible to turn the edge of something the Lord says to one's own heart by giving it out as a

message. Have you found that, those of you that minister? The Lord brings some thing strongly to you and you give it as a message, and it has gone from you. I take this to my heart. And as I see that my salvation and yours, in the infinite love of God, was through the spirit of lowliest service, servanthood, I have to say, Is there any other kind of service? Can we hope to see anything done by any other kind of movement of the Spirit? Oh, this is more an appeal than a profound message! It all centres in this—"having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the uttermost"—such men as they were, and as we are. I do not see them objectively, I see them subjectively. I can see a Peter, a Matthew, a Judas, in my own heart. Thank God, He loves unto the uttermost, and His love unto the uttermost is of this kind, that He does not stand on His rights and dignity and position and demand that I come down in an abject slavery to acknowledge His lordship. He comes to serve you and me. He is Lord, but for the time being a serving Lord. As He is seen in the glory, mark you, He is still girded. He is Lord, but still the great

heavenly Servant, serving us, washing away our sin, delivering us from this present evil world. All He does is in the spirit of the servant. Oh, how the spirit of service and servanthood is despised to-day! Everywhere you hear it. No one wants to be a servant to-day. That word 'servant' is hated. The spirit of service has almost gone from the earth. The spirit of Christ is a rare thing, but, when it is found, it is a heaven-blessed thing, a mighty power. Oh, do not despise the servant position! Be not ambitious for place, for recognition, for name, for reputation. Be not ambitious to have your rights recognized. God fill us with this spirit, that we are not all the time waiting for others to do something for us, but looking to see what we can do for them in Christ's name—being busy in the right sense to find out how much we can do for the Lord's people because they *are* the Lord's people, and for the unsaved because He died to save them, and for the unclean because He died to cleanse them. The Lord fill us with this spirit!

T. A. S.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

GOSPEL MESSAGES FROM THE ANTARCTIC (No. 28)

"He stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9. 51).

"... that I may know . . . the fellowship of his sufferings" (Phil. 3. 10).

A LITTLE imagination will help you to understand the feelings of the men at the base when they finally had to accept the bitter fact that Capt. Scott and his four companions must be dead. The long winter night had arrived, and nothing could be done for at least four long, weary months. All joy and enthusiasm had departed—the men were grieved and saddened, and life was grim.

But that was by no means all. Another matter was causing very real anxiety. Some weeks earlier a party of six men, under the leadership of an officer named Campbell, had gone to explore another part of the coast, and it had been planned that the expedition's ship (which had arrived again at the base from New Zealand) should pick them up at a certain point. The ship made several attempts, but owing to the difficult conditions of the ice she was unable to reach them. She had returned to the base, and had at length sailed for home before the winter set in, intending to make one more attempt at rescue as she sailed past the coast where the party should be. The men remain-

ing at the base therefore could not know whether the ship had succeeded in rescuing Campbell's party or not. If she had, all was well; but if she had not, then the six men were stranded on the bitter Antarctic coast for the whole of the winter, with no protection against the awful cold, and with food supplies sufficient for only a very few weeks. In that case the prospect was a grim one, and there was every reason for those at the base to feel anxious about their comrades.

To all the above must be added the fact that when the ship sailed for home she had on board nine of the men who had been in the expedition from the beginning, but who now for various reasons had to return home. You will appreciate that the little group of thirteen men who remained—all that were left of more than thirty who were there at the beginning—missed them very much and were saddened by their departure.

Now one great question occupied their minds as the winter dragged on. What was the best thing to do when it became possible to travel again? Should they go and look for the Polar party—all of whom must be dead—or for Campbell's party, who *might* be alive? There were not enough men available to follow both courses. There were many arguments on both sides, and our writer says, 'It

is impossible to express and almost impossible to imagine how difficult it was to make the decision'.

Remember that they knew nothing of all that we now know of the story of the Polar party. To go out and look for them might require a journey to the Pole itself—850 miles each way! And because the party might have died by falling down a crevasse it would be necessary to look for them in every crevasse passed on the way. What a prospect! It was not as if the search party would set out with all the thrill of some new experience. They had made the journey before. Most of them had travelled with the Polar party over the 350 miles of Barrier ice, and some of them had gone beyond that to the top of the dreadful Beardmore glacier, with its nightmare crevasses and other difficulties. Then they had made the same weary and perilous journey back to their base, some of them arriving almost dead, and all of them probably saying secretly in their hearts, 'Never again!' And now the prospect was before them of having to face it all afresh, with the added difficulties of the search and with none of the excitement of last time, when they were all upheld by the hope of being the first to reach the Pole. Can you imagine with what feelings they contemplated such a journey? Would it not be a great deal more attractive to set out on the very much shorter journey to the area where Campbell's party had gone—and where there was no terrible Beardmore glacier to be faced? It needed more than ordinary courage to look calmly at the two courses open to them and to come to a right decision; and yet, when the leader of the party, Dr. Atkinson, one day called all the men together to discuss the matter with them, every man except one voted for going to look for the Polar party. It was a decision that did the greatest honour to the men who made it. They knew the cost, the toil, the suffering, the risks: they would have chosen anything rather than this—but it was clear to them that their duty lay in that direction, and so, accepting all that was involved, they set their faces stedfastly to go forward. How right their decision was will appear later.

Many a man has acted in the same courageous manner when faced with the call of duty—not only great and outstanding people, but ordinary, humble folk whose lives are lived in very common circumstances, with no thrill or anything that appears very heroic. There is often great heroism in following the plain path of duty. Sometimes we find ourselves forced into a hard path, not choosing it, but because circumstances overtake us. It calls for real courage even then to go on without collapsing. But to choose deliberately the hard way when an easier way is open to us if we like to take it is still more

heroic. I shall never forget how impressed I was in reading the story of John G. Paton, the first missionary among the cannibals of the New Hebrides Islands. He went there alone, living in the midst of the greatest perils and enduring the greatest hardships, endeavouring by every means to make known the Lord Jesus Christ to the people around him. After several months a ship arrived and offered to bring him home if he wanted to come. *It would be a whole year before another vessel would call there.* What would you have done if faced with such a choice—stay and suffer, or sail away to home and comfort? It was a dreadful temptation—but John Paton knew where his duty lay; and with magnificent courage he allowed the ship to leave without him, and turned back to the dangers and sufferings of his lonely life. But he was surely not alone—he had the fellowship and companionship of the Lord Jesus who had trodden an even harder path when here on earth, and who makes known the "power of his resurrection" to those who share the "fellowship of his sufferings".

There are several men mentioned in the Bible who acted in the same way as John G. Paton. We are told of Moses who "*refused* to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, *choosing* rather to be evil entreated with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season . . . he endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11. 24–27). Then there were the three young Hebrews, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who chose to be cast into the burning, fiery furnace rather than to take the easy course of worshipping the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar had set up. (Dan. 3. 14–18). Then you all remember Daniel, who refused to cease from praying to God, even though the consequence was that he was cast into the den of lions (Daniel 6. 6–16). How easy it would have been not to pray—or at least not to let anyone see him praying! But to take that easy way would have been dishonour, and Daniel refused to do it. And Peter and John and Paul—how much suffering they could have spared themselves if they had agreed not to preach any more in the name of Jesus (Acts 4. 18; 2 Cor. 11. 23–27). All these servants of God—and thousands more since them—refused to turn away from the path of right in order to spare themselves suffering. They did what they knew to be right, cost what it would, and we are able to see, in the case of some of them at any rate, how greatly God honoured them and used them because of this. It is *always* right to do right because it *is* right.

Our Lord Jesus Christ stands out far beyond all other men, even the most heroic of them, in deliberately choosing the path of duty when a much

easier path lay before Him if He had cared to follow it. His first great choice was made when He deliberately chose to leave the purity and glory of heaven and to come and live in this sinful world. Then for thirty years He lived here, a sinless Man surrounded by wickedness; and one day, when He was upon what we call the Mount of Transfiguration, heaven was opened to Him again, and He might have entered in, to enjoy afresh the holy joys that would have been His there. In the presence of that opportunity He was seen by His watching disciples to be talking with Moses and Elijah, and they were speaking with Him about another way to heaven—the way which His Father wanted Him to follow in order to save sinners—the hard, cruel way of suffering that would lead Him first to death upon the Cross and then to heaven by way of resurrection from death (Luke 9. 28 - 36). We cannot tell what it cost Him to make His choice, but we can see without difficulty that the easier path must have been very tempting. But, thank God, He chose the harder way, not just because it was harder but because He knew it was the right path. He came down from the mountain top, to face again the cruel enmity of Satan and of sinful men, and “stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem”, knowing that there He was to die upon the Cross. There, on the Cross, the hardest test of all came to Him. He who knew no sin was made sin for us, bearing in His own body the judgment due to us sinners; and in the midst of His agony there came cruel, mocking voices that tempted Him to take an easier path, saying, “He saved others; himself he cannot save . . . Let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe on him” (Matt. 27. 42). Never was a man in worse plight than He at that time, never was suffering so great, never would escape have appeared more welcome. He could have come down from the Cross if He had chosen, for He was the Son of God and all things were possible to Him; but the path of duty required that He should bear the full agony of death upon the Cross, and so He set His face like a flint and chose the hard way. That choice meant deepest suffering for Him, but life and heaven for us who by believing on Him have entered into the results of His sufferings.

It is always like that. The right pathway is often the hard one, but it is always the way of blessing to others and of service to God. The follower of the Lord Jesus Christ should understand and accept that from the beginning. Choices have to be made almost every day. The choice very often is simply between doing or shirking our common

duty, and duty often means drudgery which we do not like. But sometimes the path of duty involves much more—suffering, difficulty, danger, self-denial, perhaps even the giving up of life itself. The choice is harder then, but that is no reason for taking the easy road. There is an unpleasant word for taking the easier road—it is ‘compromise’. Every person of honour ought to shun compromise as they would the plague. It is not honourable even among people of the world: it is exceedingly hateful to God. Our great Captain “endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Héb. 12. 2). Those who are willing to choose the right as He chose it and, trusting in Him, to share “the fellowship of his sufferings”, are upheld by “the power of his resurrection” (Phil. 3. 10), and the end of that way will be the sharing of His throne.

Our explorers at the base camp determined their course by deciding which was the path of duty and then they went forward, no matter what it cost. They were ready to pay the utmost price, though, as we shall see later, they were not required to do so in the end. It does not always follow that the cost will turn out to be as great as we anticipate, but we cannot know that in advance, and we must leave in the hands of God the consequences involved.

Will you let me ask you in all kindness—are you compromising in anything? If so, that explains why your joy has departed and there is no blessing from your life. It is not too late even now to revise your choice and take up your cross and follow the Lord Jesus, bearing His reproach, sharing His sufferings—and being upheld by the power of His resurrection life. A great company of people from almost every land on the earth would say to us out of their own experience, if they could speak to us, ‘However costly it may be, follow the path of right. It is the way that leads to glory. “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him” (2 Tim. 2. 12).’

There is no doubt whatever—the boy or girl who follows the path of duty as God shows it to him or her, no matter what the cost, will be the first to reach the ‘South Pole.’

It is not *try*, but *trust* ;
 It is not *faint*, but *fight* ;
 'Tis not ‘do right’ because I must,
 But right because 'tis right.
 I must not trust myself,
 Or I shall surely fall,
 But trust to Him who died for me,
 And let Him do it all.

G. P.

THE INHERITANCE — GAINED OR FORFEITED

Reading: Rom. viii. 32; I Cor. iii. 21-23;
Phil. iii. 3-15.

AN INHERITANCE TO BE POSSESSED

IN reading passages like these, we should be strangely dull and insensitive if we were not left with the impression of much more yet to be—that there is a great prospect for the people of God. The Bible all the way through is a book of prospect; it records movement forward and then failure to attain, but with the resultant sense that that cannot be all, that must not be all, there is something very much more to be entered into. In the first of the above passages of Scripture we are told that there is already secured unto us a tremendous inheritance. "*He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?*" In giving us His Son. He gives us all things; they are ours. The Apostle says, "*All things are yours*"; they are yours, they belong to you. And yet we find him in this state, caught up in this sense of tremendous prospect and possibility, of the greatness of what is yet for the Lord's people beyond all his own vast apprehension and attainment: giving him this sense, that, though he had come into such wealth and such fulness, it was nothing compared with what he knew was his in Christ, and which was yet to become his in experience. So we have already secured unto us a great inheritance.

We have inherited with and in Christ: not by earning, by working—it is the inheritance of faith in Christ Jesus and goes far, far beyond anything that we have yet imagined. We have only sensed that there is very much more, that it is a land of far distances. It is ours.

But there is a difference between having an inheritance and enjoying it: having wealth secured unto you as yours, and experiencing all that it can bring and all that it means. "*Know ye not that Ramoth-Gilead is ours, and we are still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria?*" (I Kings xxii. 3). That is an Old Testament word. The inheritance is ours, it belongs to us, but we sit still and take it not.

So we begin at this time by reminding ourselves that in our coming into the Lord Jesus and receiving Him, we have been introduced into an inheritance far, far beyond our present knowledge and experience: and it is not only to be entered into hereafter. Do not immediately mentally relate it to the

hereafter. If our Christian lives are not characterized by a continuous apprehension of greater fulnesses in Christ, there is something very seriously wrong with us. The inheritance is to be known now. Its fulness will extend beyond all time—it must do, for life is far too short and limited for the apprehension of the 'all things' of God's fulness in Christ. Nevertheless it is all ours now—for our discovering, for our knowing, for our experiencing progressively and continuously now.

But if that is to be so, if we are to make our inheritance an actual possession and experience, there is a certain spirit needed. There is no doubt about it. This part of the letter of Paul to the Philippians is just full of the spirit necessary for this purpose.

A SPIRIT OF RENUNCIATION AND DEVOTION

Firstly, it is the spirit of renunciation. "*What things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ*". Yes, those which were gain—not bad things, not evil things to be put away, not wrong things to be given up, not things upon which the Divine veto rests to be let go, but good things to be renounced for the best. That spirit has to characterize us—that we will never be satisfied with good that is less than the best, a measure that is less than the fulness. Renunciation—yes, of good things and things which in their measure and in their way may have been gain to us; renunciation of these for the best. Devotion of heart is breathed here. Oh, how this man's heart is set upon all that has come to him in Christ! What a heart Paul had to exploit all the profound and unsearchable riches of Christ and to turn them to account! Devotion of heart.

CONCENTRATION OF PURPOSE

And then concentration of purpose. "*This one thing I do*". In all the ways, in all the aspects, in all the phases, in all the many-sided occupations—"that I may know him"; that I may know Him along this line, down this way, through this avenue, through all the avenues and ways of life, I am set to make one thing govern everything—to know Him; "*for the excellency* (that does not mean only the splendour, but the transcendence) *of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord*". Concentration of purpose—"this one thing", an un-

distracted life, an undivided interest, everything gathered and focused on one thing: whatever comes must in some way be made to serve this end—my fuller knowledge of the Lord. It is the only way to economize in life; otherwise you have a lot of waste things that count for nothing. Paul would look at everything and ask, 'What has this in it of potentiality to bring me into some further and fuller knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord?' Through sufferings—"the fellowship of his sufferings"—through conformity to His death, but always the cry, "that I may know him". This is concentration of purpose.

UNCEASING PURSUIT OF THE GOAL

And then continuation. "*I press on*". 'I am not going to be brought to a standstill, I am going on'. Now this is exactly what the Spirit that was in Jesus Christ and that is in us will do. The operations of the Holy Spirit, and the providential ways of God—strange, mysterious providences—these are all designed to keep us on the stretch. Any life that is really under the government of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, will never be allowed to settle down, will always be kept on the move—oh, yes, by strange means. The Lord knows how to deal with you and me. He knows the tendencies of our makeup, our constitution, our natures. He knows us exactly, every one of us, and (oh that we could believe it, really believe it always!) the way in which we are going is the way that the infinite, inscrutable wisdom of God knows to be the only way by which we shall come to a greater measure of the Lord. He vetoes much in order to economize, to ensure that we shall not be spreading ourselves too widely but be directed into the essential channels. Yes, He deals with us because He knows us. His providential dealings with us and the Holy Spirit's operations in us are to keep us on the move, on the stretch, with a *holy* discontent, for there is a great enemy to spiritual fulness. Do believe this, that there is no time in the life of a true child of God or servant of God when they retire, with their work at an end. We ought always to be receiving so much from the Lord that we just cannot retire and keep it all to ourselves. We ought to be like David, who said, "*I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good . . . My heart was hot within me; While I was musing the fire burned; then spake I with my tongue*" (Psa. xxxix. 2-4). No, the Spirit will keep us on the stretch, keep us in the way of the growing revelation of what is ours in Christ, so that we have more and more of Him, and cannot keep it to ourselves because it is too much.

REFUSAL OF ALL ENTICEMENTS

Well, I was saying there is a great enemy. John Bunyan can help us here. His pilgrims came to a place called the Enchanted Ground and the air in that country was so enervating and drowsy that they wanted to lie down and take a nap. It was all grown over with briars to slow up their progress and weary them so that they would succumb to the atmosphere. Mr. Feeble-mind has to be taken in hand very strongly by Greatheart, and Mr. Despondency has to be laid hold of by Mr. Valiant-for-Truth. In this Enchanted Ground there are many arbours in which you can turn aside and sleep, and some say that if you do, you may never wake up again in this life. There is one arbour which bears the name of The Slothful's Friend; in another two men are asleep—Mr. Heedless and Mr. Too-Bold—and the pilgrims do their utmost to wake these two from their sleep, but they cannot be wakened. And now note—for this is what I am getting at; Bunyan is here so full of wonderful insight and suggestion. 'This Enchanted Ground is one of the last refuges that the enemy to pilgrims has; wherefore it is, as you see, placed almost at the end of the way, and so it standeth against us with the more advantage. For when, thinks the enemy, will these fools be so desirous to sit down as when they are weary? and when so like to be weary as when almost at their journey's end? Therefore it is, I say, that the Enchanted Ground is placed so nigh to the land Beulah and so near the end of their race. Wherefore let pilgrims look to themselves, lest it happen to them as it hath done to these that are fallen asleep and none can wake them'. I say again that a spirit of energy is needed if we are to prevail.

As they journeyed over the Enchanted Ground, they espied a man upon his knees, and as they drew up closely to him, he suddenly sprang from his knees with new vigour and energy. They interrogated him and found him to be Mr. Standfast. They asked him why he was on his knees, and, a little abashed that they had seen him, he explained that having come to this Enchanted Ground, he was met by Madame Bubble who came and offered him all her enticements not to go on, inviting him to turn aside, to take a rest, to receive premature prizes before he reached the City; and, lest he should weaken under her influence, he fell to prayer and so was saved, and could go on.

What need we say more? Oh, there is the fulness. It is there, it is ours, but we need a spirit to lay hold, to persist; this spirit—"Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect:" "*I count not myself yet to have apprehended*

(laid hold)", "forgetting the things which are behind . . . I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the on-high calling". That spirit alone will bring us into the experience of what is ours. It is a terrible thing to have been heir to a very great deal

and yet never to have known what was ours. The Spirit of God would make us know. He would stir us to great earnestness in the quest that we may know, that we may possess the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.

T. A-S.

PARENTHETICAL CHRISTIANS

"And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found certain disciples: and he said unto them, Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?" (Acts xix. 1-2).

A LACK OF THE SPIRIT THAT MAY ACCOMPANY BELIEVING

I want to speak to you for this little while on what I believe to be a fact. I have no theory, no systematized doctrine, on 'a second blessing', but I believe that there is something represented by this word—indeed, I know there is something which is a fact. That Paul should ask a question in this form, "Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?" (for this is the proper translation; not, "Have ye received the Holy Spirit since ye believed?") implies that *some kind of relationship with Christ is possible without receiving the Holy Spirit*. That seems to me to be implicit in this very question. Paul at once regarded these disciples as believers, but he had a question about them and put his question to them.

There is such a thing as being a 'parenthetical' Christian—one in between two things. Here the parenthesis was between believing in Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit. Those believers were, so to speak, in brackets. But note, this is not the normal New Testament position. Again and again, right at the beginning—at the time of believing—believers received the Holy Spirit in a very definite way. The Apostles' attitude toward this matter is perfectly clear; they held that believing alone was not sufficient. They would make sure that those who had believed received the Holy Spirit. I am not stopping to give you the instances, for you know them. This situation at Ephesus is not the normal in the New Testament. Perhaps we can call it the unusual, but it can exist and I fear very often it does. I am almost inclined to say that to be in brackets, to be in a parenthesis, to be in between believing in Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit, has become the normal.

THE HOLY SPIRIT CONSUMMATES RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST

This means that there is something that consummates relationship to Christ. Apart from that something, Christian life is largely negative or neutral, in a position or state of suspension, indefinite, tentative, as though there is something more yet to happen. Those disciples had believed, but there was something yet that needed to be. That is how it works out, there is no doubt about it. There are multitudes who have believed—believed that Jesus is the Christ, believed in the facts of His birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension, and even of His coming again, and much more of the Christian doctrine—and, having believed, they have come into a certain relationship with Him; and yet there is a pause, there seems to lack something, and as time goes on that lack becomes more accentuated, more apparent, more real to those concerned and to others who know them. In the Church they are either negatives or neutrals, or somehow suspended, tentative. You feel that something has to happen to them, something is needed.

Is that what Paul found? I am very sure that it was, and he could not accept that condition. He at once sought to get to the root of it and to have it put right; and it was found to be that, though they had believed—had accepted certain truths which resulted in their accepting Jesus—they were not right out, liberated, regnant, effective. Something still had to take place. Their relationship with Christ had to be in some way brought to a fulness, a completeness.

This consummation (as we see it in every case in the New Testament, and as I have no doubt many of us know in experience) places life on an altogether new basis. Indeed, it places life upon what we call a supernatural level. There is no doubt about it in the case of those mentioned in the New Testament. Witness was borne that this does bring in supernatural features and factors, and puts life on that level.

THE EFFECTS OF THE SPIRIT

(a) TRANSFORMED PEOPLE

In the first place, the persons themselves are so different. You may meet them and see them as ordinary people amongst people, but you meet also an extra factor. You find that in them is another Presence. It is not they only whom you meet. That Other is the Holy Spirit, the Lord Himself, and He is no neutral. If the Holy Spirit is really there, a life is not negative and neutral, suspended, tentative. A certain positiveness is brought into the life itself, into the individual. Such are not just lost in a crowd. Every one of them is vital, every one of them is a life point, every one of them carries something more than himself or herself, and that extra is the Holy Spirit, it is Christ. It makes a tremendous difference to us, and the difference is that we are not just and only ourselves—what we are in ourselves. There is this Other that is met, that is touched, and that touches. So it was, so it is, so it should be. Probably Paul saw this group of believers at Ephesus, and found nothing more in them than what they were in themselves—a lot of people gathered, perhaps, with a common interest, but no registration, no 'salt'. He said—'What is the matter? Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? It is difficult to believe that you did'. Such a receiving makes a difference to the persons concerned.

(b) SUPERNATURAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE

Then it brings on to a supernatural basis as to resources—that we are not left to our own resources, to draw only upon our own life. No; when we are at an end, that is *not* the end; when we are spent, that is *not* exhaustion. Oh, let this come to us as a real challenge! So often we take ourselves as the measure of things. 'Oh, I am so tired, I feel so bad, I do not feel I can go to the meeting'—and so we stay away, taking our own condition as being all that there is to count on. There is another level on which to live, another basis; and if you like to put it to the test, if you really have received the Holy Spirit, you can lay hold of the Holy Spirit in the moment of most utter weakness and find yourself capable of meeting a tremendous demand, of standing up to something for which you are totally unable in yourself. There is no place, and it is altogether wrong, for any Christian to say, 'Well, I cannot, therefore I do not try; I am made like this and I have not got this gift and that, and I have not this qualification and that'—and thus to settle down and become neutral. I am saying to you that if you

have received the Holy Spirit such an attitude is wrong and unnecessary. When the Holy Spirit is present, we are put upon a supernatural basis for resources, and we can prove again and again that when we have absolutely nothing, and it would be utter madness and folly for us to essay, we can lay hold of God the Holy Ghost and go through triumphantly and come out at the other end with more life than we had at the beginning—contrary to nature, supernatural.

I said I am talking about a fact, not a theory of 'a second blessing'; and I can speak to you out of personal experience of the fact. I know what I am talking about. It is a fact. The Holy Spirit within does mean another level for resource, which is not just our natural level; we are not left to ourselves; so do not contemplate any proposition from the standpoint of what you are or are not in yourself. That standpoint in itself may be perfectly true; but there can be a laying hold upon the Lord by faith, saying, "*I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me*" (Phil. iv. 13). You are surprised at what you can do if you know this great reality of the indwelling Spirit; you are capable of things you never thought you would ever do. It ought to be like that. That is the romance of a true life in the Spirit.

(c) THE GIFT OF A NEW FACULTY

Then again, there is a new faculty given to us by the receiving of the Holy Spirit. It is here that wonder follows wonder. How can I illustrate that? Will you suffer a personal testimony? For many years I preached, but I had to get my material from books and all sorts of directions, and gather it together and make up something to preach; and although I preached it with all my might as my conviction, I had obtained it in that way, and the one thing I longed for through those years was something direct with and from heaven—an immediate, direct speaking of the Lord in my heart through His Word so that I could speak out what the Lord was saying to *me*. And there came that great crisis of Romans vi, and that is what issued. From that time to this, by God's grace I have been able to see in the Scriptures much more than could be known by mere intellectual effort. I can take the Word of God and see through the letter of it to meanings, to principles, into the thought of God. In saying a thing like that, I do not presume to suggest that I have ranged it all. We are lost in this boundless ocean; but it is something to have a faculty for perceiving. It gives you another world beyond your own. That is what I mean. The Holy Spirit gives that faculty for seeing the more, seeing

the deeper—not for our becoming fantastic, mystical, occult, and that sort of thing, but really giving to us an inner eye. It is a wonderful thing. Do you say that all who have believed have got that? I am far from sure whether these things are true in the case of all believers.

THE SPIRIT KNOWN ONLY THROUGH THE CROSS

You notice that there is given to us in this passage the great truth that this receiving of the Spirit, with these wonderful results that I have mentioned and, of course, many more, is the issue of Christ's death and resurrection into which we are placed by faith—what we have called identification with Christ in death, burial and resurrection: for that is what Paul here laid down in calling upon them to be baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. All the doctrine of identification with Christ in death and resurrection is gathered up in baptism. Dear believer, even though it be at a late hour in your life, you must get off the old ground of the old natural life. If that is governing, if that is controlling, if that is your main or sole sphere, you must get out of it, and you can only get out of it through death and resurrection.

The death of the Lord Jesus was His exodus. "*Moses and Elijah . . . spake of his decease (his exodus) which he was about to accomplish*" (Luke ix. 31). What an exodus! Emancipation, release from all the limitations of this life as to time, space, and everything else! All those limitations broken down by His Cross! We are released by the Cross. If we really know the Cross as an experience, as something into which, by faith, we definitely stand for the end of the control, government, and limitation (as well as of all the evil) of the old natural life, and if by faith we lay hold on Christ risen, as being ourselves risen in Him, we are released. Oh, is not that the need of so many Christians—to be

released, to be loosed, to be set free inside? They are tied up. We have to say of certain people, 'They are all tied up in themselves'. Now do not go and get into tangles and fogs about 'a second blessing'. The heart of the matter is here. The Holy Spirit comes upon the ground of resurrection-union, and all the rest follows. Let us challenge our own hearts. Are we in the realm of those still tentative, still suspended, still tied up, still governed by our natural life and make-up? Then there is something wrong; and it may be in your case, as it was in mine, that after a good many years of believing, of being the Lord's servant, *the* thing happened. I am always hesitant to say that I received the Holy Spirit then, because that would be to state a kind of doctrine to which everybody else ought to conform; but I know the thing happened. The day I apprehended in a new way the meaning of Christ in death, burial and resurrection, the Holy Spirit followed on that and did something in me. It has been going on increasingly ever since and still has to go a very long way, but that was the turning point. While I would be most sorry to create difficulties for you over this and set you worrying about your own condition, I do say to you that there is something more for a believer who is still in this limited, parenthetical position—a believer still 'in brackets'. The Lord get rid of those iron brackets and make us know what life by the Spirit really is!

There are two safeguarding words necessary in this connection as I close. The sense of this lack has sent many off into an intensive soul-force quest for an experience, and thereby the door has been opened for the most serious counterfeit work of Satan, with direful issues. Remember, it is not our soul-force that is the door, but the Cross, our death with Christ.

Then, it may very well be that many—unlike these disciples at Ephesus—have received the Spirit, but have not walked *by* the Spirit, and have consequently failed to be led by Him into all the truth.

T. A-S.

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Soest, Holland 10s.; Southbourne 10s.; Southsea 6s.; Stewartville, Minn. 7s. 1d.; Sunderland 5s., 5s.; Surbiton £5. 5s.; Tadworth 14s. 9d.; Tambaram, Southern India £1; Tetbury 5s.; Theydon Bois 2s. 6d.; Thorpe next Norwich £2 2s.; Toronto, Ont. £2. 14s., £3; Tunbridge Wells £1; Upper Gornal 10s.; Wallington 10s., 10s.; Wembley 5s.; Westmount, Que. £1 13s. 11d.;

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Asbury Park, N.J. \$1; Birmingham, Ala. \$10; Collingswood, N.J. \$1; Council Bluffs, Iowa \$5. \$1. \$2; Del Paso Heights, Cal. \$5; Fairmont, W. Va. \$5; Hollis Center, Maine \$1; La Canada, Cal. \$1; Maywood, Cal. \$5; Minneapolis, Minn. \$2; Mo. Valley, Iowa \$1; New York City \$5; Richland, Pa. \$1; St. Mary's, Ontario \$2; Sharon Hill, Pa. \$1; Upper Darby, Pa. \$2; Vivamo, Finland \$2;

Total \$53

Gumligen, Switzerland 30 francs.

THE UNCHANGING CHRIST

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea and for ever" (Heb. xiii. 8).

THIS simple verse contains a vast amount of doctrinal truth. It has also brought great comfort to many a storm-tossed soul. It was not originally given, though, for either of these purposes, but for a much more practical reason. The unchanging Christ is something more than a matter for sentiment: He is meant to be the source of real spiritual power in the life of the believer.

ETERNAL LIFE IN A MAN

This is not merely a statement of the unchangeability of the eternal Godhead, for it refers to a Man. God incarnate. The name of Jesus Christ reminds us that it is the human nature of the Lord which is kept in view, a fact which is confirmed by the reference to yesterday. As a balanced statement, if this were dealing with God the Father, the eternal future would be offset by the eternal past, whereas the first mention of His faithfulness is only concerned with yesterday. It would be impertinence, when speaking of the Eternal, to refer only to yesterday. If this treats of the incarnate Son, however, there is nothing incongruous in looking back only to yesterday, for to those living in the apostolic era it was a fitting way to describe the very recent events of the Gospel period. The writer's point, quite clearly, is that the Jesus of the days of His flesh is still the same to-day, though now He is in the glory, and that He will never change, even when the worlds fade away and time shall be no more.

This makes a very striking and significant assertion if it is reversed. The Jesus Christ who lives in the power of eternity now that He is in the glory, lived by that very same power even when He walked on the earth. When He lived here as a Man among men He was not waiting for eternal life as a future experience, but all the time lived in the present good of it. He was essentially the same yesterday as He is to-day or ever will be. In Him we see exemplified the fact that eternal life is not just a future blessing to be entered into later, but a present reality to be enjoyed here and now.

In our treatment of this verse we shall take up two considerations, first the fact, and then the im-

plications of the fact.

THE STEADFASTNESS OF ANOTHER

There are some who lay great stress on the local colour of the gospel story. So much seems to depend on the social customs and character of the Jews, on the geography of their land and the history of their times. There is no doubt that these matters are interesting, that they provide some general background for the four Gospels and that they may help to elucidate some details in the narrative, but it is possible to lay far too much stress upon them, as though they had spiritual value, and it is possible by reason of this stress to have a limited and a localised Christ.

As a matter of fact He fits into any age and any land. In a most vital and satisfying way He truly is the same throughout all time. This is one of the joys of a foreign missionary in a backward land—to find people who are quite unable to enter into any of the outward features of our usual civilised life, and yet to whom the Lord Jesus is just as real as He is to us. True believers never question that He can understand their language. They never feel that there is anything strange or foreign in their life which He cannot readily understand. In all probability they rather think of Him as being of their colour or continent. And rightly so. In many cases, if they were brought to this country they would feel that they had happened on another world, altogether strange and unreal. Even the religious practices, which often appear to people here as being of such importance, would seem bewildering or even ludicrous to their simple minds. But if in any sense they met Christ they would instantly feel at home. Christ is as much theirs as ours, for He does not belong to any earthly order. And He never did. What He is now He always was, the same yesterday as to-day.

This means that He owed nothing to this earth or to His age. He fitted into the world, as He fits into any world, but He did not belong to it. He lived, as we must live, in the good of another world, and this was the secret of His steadfastness. As a matter of fact, things have not really changed very much, for the Gospels treat of such current conditions as a census, a housing shortage, oppressive taxation, anxiety over the cost of living, easy divorce, many religious sects but no spiritual

leadership—all very up-to-date matters to-day.

STEADFASTNESS UNDER EVERY TEST

It is His unchanging character which makes the glory of the Man Jesus, but it was this, also, which brought Him many severe tests. There is no phase of human experience which He did not endure, and each in its own way sought to force Him away from steadfast faithfulness to the Father's will.

So far as we know He passed through many years of probation in a simple, even monotonous life. From a boy He had made clear His mission—to be about His Father's business—but we are not told of any openings or scope for what we should call service until He was thirty years of age. It does not need much imagination to realise the stern test of steadfast continuance under such conditions. Who of us who has chosen to live on the basis of heavenly and eternal life as He did, has not been forced to wait for the vision, and while waiting to undergo periods of apparent eclipse, to endure the trial of sheer monotony? There is no eclipse for Him in the glory now, and no monotony; we might feel that now it is easy for Him to live in perfect harmony with the heavenly counsels of the Father. But the wonder of His earthly life is that He did so then. He was no different yesterday from what He is to-day. We may well believe, though, that He found monotony and unspectacular faithfulness to home duties a very severe test to steadfastness.

Another test was that of rapid variety. Once His public ministry was commenced, there were many swift changes which threatened to carry Him away with them. He knew obscurity, and then He encountered growing popularity. His followers, by their enthusiasm, would have swept Him away. He saw this soon change to doubt, and then to suspicion. There was a sense in which He might sometimes have felt that there was hardly a soul whom He could really trust. He knew the bitterness of rejection—not by the world of ungodly men, for that would have been right and seemly, but by those who claimed to be God's people, by the upright and orthodox. Of course we know that men still re-act in these ways, but it can have no effect on Him now, for He is in the glory. Men may praise or blame, may wax enthusiastic or turn suspicious, but they cannot disturb the serene, heavenly poise of His spirit. He is far above the restless and changing world, and quite unmoved by it. Nevertheless He is not different now from what He was then. Jesus Christ is the same. This is the wonder of the earthly life that He lived—that He was no

more moved or affected by outward events and circumstances at that time than He is now.

No doubt some of that which He suffered was deliberately intended to test Him as to His steadfastness. How often do the Lord's true servants suffer suspicion, rejection and almost persecution from other of God's people! They wonder why. They long to explain and to justify themselves, but so often it seems impossible to clear away the mists of criticism and misunderstanding. May it not be that this is an essential proof of steadfastness? It is Satan's way of seeking to unsettle or to embitter. One day, in the glory, we expect to be serene and above all the pettiness of this world, yet we hardly expect to be like that now. But He always was. He gained in glory by ascending to heaven, but He did not gain in character. He was always the same as He is now. Thank God for our unchanging Christ!

STEADFASTNESS BY DEPENDENCE UPON THE FATHER

The behaviour of a compass needle is very wonderful, though to us it is quite commonplace. In some remote arctic sphere there is a magnetic pole which exerts an irresistible attraction for all magnetised needles. It is as though there is something in the needle which corresponds to the magnetic north pole, so that whenever the needle is free it swings back to that one unseen but steadfast point. Lesser magnets can deflect it, and when they do so it ceases to be a reliable guide, but when they are removed the needle hastens back to continue pointing on to its polar goal. The steadfastness of the Lord Jesus was thus directed always to the Father. Nothing deflected His heart, even for a moment. He was like a protected compass, insulated from all lesser attractions and impervious to all other influences. His heart was always true to heaven, and as a Man He drew all His steadfastness from His heavenly Father.

NOT DEPENDENT ON RELIGION

All other reliances would have been misplaced. Supposing, for instance, that He had sought stability from the Temple and its services, as the religious men of His day did. That whole system, so we are told, was waxing old and nigh unto vanishing away. It might have been argued—it doubtless was—that a religion so true at its beginnings, so hoary with antiquity, so firmly established in the life of the nation, must be allowed to control the life of this Man. Any faith which failed to be

governed by this symbol of stability would seem precarious in the extreme. And yet we know that the days of the Temple were already numbered. Not one stone was to be left upon another. It is not the Temple, but Jesus Christ, who is eternally the same. The whole argument of the epistle to the Hebrews seems to be based on this impermanence of all earthly religious associations. It is not so much that the old order is wrong as that it is unreliable; it cannot survive in spiritual life and fulness. Only Jesus Christ can do that.

NOT DEPENDENT ON THE BIBLE

It may be felt that at least the Man Jesus had the Scriptures as a ground for steadfastness. The rock of the Word of God is surely reliable. Of course it is the case that the Word of God is absolutely reliable, but even in this the Lord Jesus needed to exercise great caution. Those who attacked Him were not critics of the Scriptures; in fact they were devoutly and fanatically attached to them. The onslaughts on the Lord, the very charges made against Him, were made by those who boasted in their fidelity to the Law. Have we not seen people the very reverse of steadfast, oscillating in a veritable whirl of bewilderment, because of other Christians seeking to enforce on them their own differing interpretations of the Word? One brings his open Bible and insists that by certain actions the Word of God must be obeyed; another brings the same Bible, open at another place, and contradicts what the first has said; yet a third may deduce an altogether different line of conduct, based still upon the same Bible. This may sound impossible, and yet it is constantly happening, and was just as true in the time of our Lord as it is to-day. It is not that the Word of God contradicts itself, but that it is being used in ways for which it was never intended. The holy Book is given in order that through it we may hear the voice of God. As our Lord treasured the written Word, He had to use it not as a basis for receiving the accepted teachings of men but as the means by which a man may know God. He had to find God in the Book, and so do we. Thus we see that even the Scriptures, regarded as a book, could not in themselves provide that stability which characterised our Lord. He lived in utter dependence on the Father, and on every word which proceeded out of His mouth.

NOT DEPENDENT ON OTHER MEN

Had the Lord depended on His disciples. He certainly would not have been noted for His con-

stancy. We hardly need to mention the unreliability of their changing moods. But in our own case we do need to be warned of the danger of making fellowship the ground of character. Some of us can never thank God enough for true fellowship in Christ. We owe more than we can ever tell to the comfort, strength and correction received through fellow-members of Christ. But it would be quite wrong to rely on others—almost as bad as relying on ourselves. It is invariably a sign of spiritual weakness when Christians are governed by the opinions and ideas of others. Jesus Christ was and is the same because as a man down here He lived in constant dependence on the unchanging Father in heaven.

A CALL TO STEADFASTNESS

We make no claim to be stable or constant in ourselves. Only Christ is that. But we do claim to have received even now the same eternal life which was in Him, by the indwelling of the same Spirit. What, then, should it mean to us that "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea and for ever*"?

In the first place this constitutes a solemn call to us to be steadfast in our spiritual aims. The immediate exhortation of the next verse is, "*Be not carried away . . . for it is good that the heart be established . . .*" There is no possibility of steady progress in spiritual growth unless we are able to appropriate by faith the values of the unchanging Christ.

There are those who make a great deal of the Jesus of history. They are tremendously impressed with the earthly life and walk of the Man of Nazareth, and with His teaching. They take Him as their pattern, seeking to imitate Him and follow His precepts. Such passages as the sermon on the mount are continually before them. They hold Him up as an example. Their text would be, 'As He was, so are we in this world'. Now that is not a scriptural text, though it sounds like it. It is typical of much that sounds very spiritual and Christian but is not.

Those who go to the other extreme make everything of the Christ of glory. They hardly stop to read most of the Gospels, for they must always hasten on to the doctrines which tell of the risen Christ, of His offering for sin and His intercession for the saints. Their hearts glow with every contemplation of the One who is now in the highest heaven; they sing rapturously of His vicarious death and life, but they give no heed to the practical implications of His life and teaching when He

was here among men, often dismissing them as Jewish! Somehow things relating to the moral law and to practical righteousness appear to belong to another kingdom and not to the experience of those who are saved by grace alone. Their text would probably be, 'As He is, so shall we be when we are out of this world'. This is certainly true, but it is not the present and practical aspect of the truth.

The Spirit's comment on this matter is "*... as he IS, even so are we in this world*" (1 John iv. 17). The Jesus of history is the Christ of glory. Christ is not divided. We can never be true to God in a changing world as He was, without a present knowledge of Him in His risen power; and we do not really know the spiritual meaning of that power if it does not make us like Jesus of Nazareth.

We have spoken of the steadfastness of the compass needle, remarking that there must be magnetism in the needle as well as in the pole. Is not this a parable of true Christian steadfastness? The unchanging Christ in the glory is the same unchanging Christ who lives in the hearts of His Own. One of the great purposes of His death and resurrection was that only thus could His very character be communicated to those who believe in Him. This is why the emphasis is placed not on the unchanging God so much as on the unchanging Saviour, for it means not only that there is One remote and above us who will never vary, but that the same One dwells in our hearts by faith, to make them steadfast and true.

STEADFASTNESS IN SPITE OF CHANGES

We, too, have our yesterdays and our to-days. For some of us the past is glorious with memories of God's presence and power. We can look back to days of blessing, of prosperous activity in spiritual things, and think wistfully of the glories that are past. It is not the same to-day. Things are not the same. We ourselves are not the same. It is just at this point that we are faced by the challenge of the Word. Has Christ changed? Is He not the same to-day as yesterday? How dare we be governed by the changing scene without or within? Faith must rise above, asserting that He is the same, and we—praise God—are in Him, the unchanging One.

For some of us it may be to-day is the time of great fulness and blessing. This may mark something of a mountain top experience for us. In the days which lie ahead there will be the valleys, and perhaps some great tests of faith. We shall be tempted to look back on this time and place, and wish that the clock could be put back, or that from

wherever the will of God has taken us we could return to this place of blessing. Such desires will bring spiritual weakness and vacillation. Our life does not depend on a locality, nor on any special time; it is united to Christ, the unchanging, who will be the same then as He is to-day.

A CALL TO ADJUSTABILITY

Now in the case of the compass needle, its stability is not due to a mechanical fixture but depends on its swift adjustability to the unseen goal. The compass may be twisted and turned in all directions, but in all these movements the needle must be ready to respond immediately and always to the power of the magnetic pole.

We must be careful how we interpret the assertion that Jesus Christ is just the same to-day. His sameness is spiritual, finding expression in His character and not in the mechanical repetition of His past acts. It is possible to read of some miracle of His, and then expect Him to do just the same for us, since He has not changed. This may lead us into perplexity and even to despair. It is quite true that He can do the same things over and over again, that there is no lessening of His power through the years or by reason of His ascending to heaven. But are we right in claiming that He will here and now, at any moment decided by us, repeat the same actions with which the Gospels have made us familiar?

It seems abundantly clear that the disciples could never foresee what He would do next. Even after three years of life with Him they had no idea that Jesus would raise Lazarus from the dead, although they knew very well that He was able to do it. Does not this argue that nobody could predict what would be our Lord's reactions in any given situation? If the disciples learned one thing it was that He would never do the expected. This, of course, is a part of His very unchanging nature. He is the same, not in always doing the same things, but in always seeking the highest spiritual values. In this realm we are all ignorant and foolish. Like the disciples, we presume to think that we know what would best glorify God, and that the Lord would be well advised to fall in with our suggestions. The disciples had to learn to be adjustable, not taking anything for granted, except the absolute wisdom and love of their Master. The same feature of almost surprise seems to be everywhere apparent in the Acts. The Apostles could never dictate to the Lord, they could not even foresee His will; they found that they were committed to a life of constant adjustment. They, too, had to be like compass needles, not pointing to any idea

or experience or precedent as here on earth, but swinging always back to their Lord in heaven.

One thing is certain; He will not conform to us. There is only One of whom it can be said that He is always the same, and until we are perfectly like Him, every day must see changes, corrections and transformations in us. There are few things more pathetic than an attempt in a carnal way to be consistent, to be outwardly fixed, determined not to learn any new lessons. It is like a compass needle which has become jammed in its case: nothing can move it from its absolute rigidity. It may deserve attention for its unusual firmness, but it is quite useless for its real purpose. It does not point to the pole. Even so it is easy for us to be proud of our unbending and unyielding orthodoxy, and yet only draw attention to ourselves, and never point a troubled traveller to Christ, the heavenly goal.

Spiritual growth must necessarily involve constant adaptability. We must be prepared to move on with the Lord. Sometimes young people who are greatly exercised about baptism have to face the question of their christening as infants. Parents who acted for them in that matter may have done so from the best of motives, and with much prayer and true faith. These parents are therefore deeply grieved by this new step, which seems to set at nought all their spiritual concern for their child. Does this mean a repudiation of their dedication of this child to Christ? the parents ask. Does it mean a condemnation, as wholly wrong, of what they did in the fear of God and for the glory of Christ? My own answer is that it is not a question now of right or wrong, but rather of adjustability to further light. One who is being exercised to give

his own testimony by baptism, while he may truly thank God for every helpful influence that in the past has operated upon his life, cannot remain fixed and bound by reason of a past act but must move on with Christ to new steps of obedience. The rigidity of an ecclesiastical system must not be mistaken for the unchangeability of Christ.

A CALL TO LIVE FOR CHRIST

We have already seen that the Lord Jesus brought the power of eternity into the earthly day of human life. It is also true that He took into eternity all the values of His life here among men. He is the same to-day as He was yesterday; He was able to take all the values of His earthly life up into the eternal realm of glory.

How much of that which interests and occupies us now will have no lasting value! It was not so with Christ. Without being strained or unnatural, every day of His life He lived for eternity. When we keep Him truly in view all our decisions will also have eternal significance. Before we were Christians we made our choices according to our own hearts. We based our decisions on what we liked or disliked. As Christians we no longer choose in this way, but seek to be governed by what is right and what is wrong, choosing the former and avoiding the other. There is still higher ground for us to tread. Our choices should be governed by what is eternal as against what is of time. Many things may be right enough, but without eternal value. The spiritual man, like the unchanging Christ, seeks always to be occupied with that which in the end God can glorify and preserve in His eternal kingdom.

H. F.

THE IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF EXPERIENCE

"And not only so, but we also rejoice in our tribulations: knowing that tribulation worketh steadfastness; and steadfastness, approvedness; and approvedness, hope: and hope putteth not to shame; because the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which was given unto us" (Rom. v. 3-5).

EXPERIENCE GAINED THROUGH TRIBULATION

"STEDFASTNESS (worketh) approvedness". There are different translations of the word which is here rendered 'approvedness'—in the Authorized Version it is 'experience', in the Revised it is

'probation' and in the American Revised it is 'approvedness'—showing that it must be a rich word, a word of some meaning and content. It really means approvedness as the result of testing, and I really think that the Authorized Version gives the best rendering in using the word 'experience', because from the same root we get our word 'experiment'—a try-out and the result; and that is just the essence of the word here. *"Tribulation worketh steadfastness"* (or patience, if you like); *"and steadfastness (or patience), experience"*.

In the New Testament, not only in statements but in many ways, experience has a very high place indeed in the work of God and is of very great importance and value in God's sight. Experience

really is the quality or essence of stature, of maturity. There is a grave absence of outstanding leaders in our time in every realm, leaders of whom we could say that they are head and shoulders above their fellows. There was a time when it was otherwise. In politics and statesmanship, in art and literature and music, there are great names, but they very largely belong to a past generation. Such men are not with us to-day, and there is this serious lack of leadership, of men of stature, men who count. The Lord places such great importance upon experience, and shows that there is nothing that can be a substitute for it, and that He Himself is prepared to take very great and serious risks with lives in order to work experience into them.

It does sometimes seem that the Lord is experimenting with us. Whether that is a right way to put it or not, what I mean is right. Because of its very great value and importance, the Lord is prepared to put us into situations in which the most serious consequences may develop, in order to get this one thing; for here is the heart of usefulness and value to Him—experience.

EXPERIENCE CANNOT BE TRANSFERRED

Experience with God is much more than knowledge. We may be very greatly informed, and have a great deal of knowledge, but, lacking experience, our knowledge will remain purely technical information. Experience is more than knowledge. It is also far more than human cleverness. Clever people may be able to do a lot of things and seem to be successful. The absence of this quality of experience will find that their structures will sooner or later come crashing down, for there is no body there. Experience is something that we can never inherit, nor can it be transferred from one to another in any other way; it has to be bought. It is therefore the sole possession and property of the individual who has it. It is something very personal. If it had been possible for the Father to bring His own Son, the Lord Jesus, to the designed and determined end in any other way, He would have done it. The only way was experience: “. . . yet learned (he) obedience by the things which he suffered” (Heb. v. 8); He was made “perfect through sufferings” (Heb. ii. 10). Even Jesus Christ (and I speak in a certain sense) had to buy His experience. He had to come to the full end, or the end of fulness, to be made perfect, made complete, by the way of experience.

The Holy Spirit, with all that the gift of the Spirit means of enduement and endowment and instruction and strengthening, is not a substitute

for experience. We are very often found asking that certain things shall be done for us by the Holy Spirit which the Holy Spirit will never do. He has to lead us into experience. It is the only way in which He can answer our prayers. Many prayers are answered through experience. You ask the Lord to do something, and He takes you through experience, and you arrive at the answer in that way. You had not meant that, of course: you wanted the Lord to do the thing there and then as a gift, as an act; but that would have been merely objective, something given, whereas He wants to make it a part of yourself, and so He answers prayer by some experience. ‘Stedfastness worketh experience’, and if there is no experience, what is the good of anybody or anything?

So then, experience is of greater importance than being delivered from tribulation. ‘Tribulation worketh experience’. Oh, how often we have asked the Lord why He allowed this and that, or why He did not do this or that. Why did He not hinder Adam from sinning? Why has He not stopped the world in so many things that have had most terrible results? Experience is very largely the answer.

EXPERIENCE THE VERY QUALITY OF SERVICE

Experience is very important because, after all, it is the very quality of service. When we come to real life, and we are really up against things and the issues are of the greatest consequence, we do not want just information, we want experience, and we go where experience can help us. Is that not so? Thus experience is the very body and quality of service and usefulness to the Lord.

Bunyan, in his allegory, has a man called Experience, one of four shepherds on the Delectable Mountains—Knowledge, Experience, Watchful and Sincere—all, of course, parts of one whole ministry, and not to be regarded as separate. There is a knowledge which, if it is in the hands of or in company with experience, is all right, and one does not discount the value of knowledge; but it has to be experimental knowledge, it has to be in the company of experience. And of this Experience, the shepherd, what does Bunyan say? A visitor to the country of the four shepherds described him like this: ‘Firmly knit in form and face, a shrewd but kindly eye, a happy readiness in his bearing, and all his hard-earned wisdom most evidently on foot within him as a capability for work and for control’ That is a good definition of experience: ‘capability for work and for control’, ‘hard-

earned wisdom'. He was a shepherd, and we know that the Bible idea of the shepherd is different from ours. A shepherd in our land has to go scouring for sheep to try to get them together, using dogs and other means to collect them. A shepherd in Syria only had to go to a certain spot and begin to sing a psalm and the sheep knew his voice and gathered to him, and he could lead them anywhere while he was praying his prayer or singing his psalm. They knew his voice and followed him. And so it is to-day: leadership is shepherdhood; shepherdhood is leadership. But experience is the shepherd, therefore experience is the leader.

Of course, it will entirely depend upon whether we are concerned to be of the greatest value to the Lord and to others, or whether we are self-centred. If we are thus concerned, this matter of experience will make appeal to us, but if otherwise, then what I am saying will not amount to anything. But here it is, the Lord puts value upon the matter of usefulness, and whether we are mentally interested in it or not, and whether or not our hearts have become as yet bound up with it, we cannot get away from the fact that the Lord is actively engaged on this work; He is seeking to make us useful. What is the why and wherefore of experiences, of the difficult and hard way that God takes us, and of the way in which He, so to speak, takes terrible risks with us? He does indeed seem to take risks. He risks our rebellion, He risks our bitterness, He risks our misinterpretations of His dealings with us, He risks our 'kicking over the traces' and breaking away and running off. He risks a lot when He puts us into difficult situations, but He thinks it is worth while for experience; for even our wrong reactions will make for experience in the long run. Even our rebellion and bitterness He will sovereignly control, and we shall come to know we can learn something along that line; we shall be able to help, instruct and advise where such help is acceptable and needed. Yes, He is doing it all to get experience, to make of us not professional pastors but men who are shepherds, 'firmly knit in form and face', with that 'shrewd but kindly eye', that readiness, with all the 'hard-earned wisdom', to be of help to those who need it. That is what the Lord is doing with us, to bring experience.

EXPERIENCE PRACTICAL, NOT THEORETICAL

So experience is the very sum of what is practical. It is experiential, experimental; it is the practical side of knowledge. That is almost too

obvious to need saying. Tribulation is very practical, very real, you cannot get away from that. The demand for patience in tribulation is very practical; that is no theory. And if the object of the tribulation in its working of patience is steadfastness, is experience, it is exceedingly good. We may lack many other things, we may not have great knowledge or learning, great capabilities or cleverness, by which the world sets such store. Should it come to our being tested by this world's standards of ability, and we were to answer and say, 'I have only experience', it would not go down at all. They would say, 'What degrees have you, what examinations have you passed?' To say that we have had some experience would not be sufficient, whereas if we had all the other without experience, we should very likely be acceptable in this world. But it is not like that with God. The examinations that are held are on another basis altogether. We may not have many things, we may not be very much, we may be despised when it comes to what we have accomplished in the academic way, what titles we carry, what degrees we have—we may not be much in that world, but remember that God puts a very great deal more importance upon experience than upon all the rest, and that is a thing we can all have. From the least to the greatest, we can all have experience, and because in the sight of the Lord it is so important, He sees fit to let us know a good deal of tribulation. "*Tribulation worketh . . . experience*".

Have you got the full meaning of that word that is translated into our English word 'tribulation'? Tribulation is a picture word in the Greek—the picture of a farm instrument that we call the harrow; and you know what we mean when we say we have had a harrowing experience. Oh, the tearing and the cutting and the lacerating from the harrow! That is the word here, literally, actually; the harrow going over our backs, and it works experience. Experience is of such value.

EXPERIENCE OF ETERNAL VALUE

What more can one say other than that it must be of *eternal* value? The value must be eternal, otherwise life is an inexplicable mystery and an enigma. The time may come when you young people, having passed through deep experiences and having bought your experience at great price, and thus having in your possession something of very great value, find that younger people do not want your experience, nor think anything at all of it, and never consult you. When what you have through deep experience has very little outlet in

this world, a very limited scope for expression, what an enigma! All this you have gone through, all you have bought at so great a price, what is the value of it? It must be eternal. God must be working to get something with a longer range than this poor life. With tribulations increasing perhaps as you get older, what is it all for? Well, He is

working with a longer view, and there must be something that counts with Him beyond time, and so He allows the tribulation to produce patience, and patience experience; "Whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away"; but experience shall abide and serve in the eternal ages.

T. A-S.

The work of the Kingdom of God has often been likened to building. The Holy Spirit Himself uses the illustration. It is good for us to remember that an essential part of building is the scaffolding, and to recognize that our work must perforce be as passing and as unadmired as scaffolding generally is. Its only beauty lies in its purpose and its adequacy. It must be strong, for lives will depend on it, and it must be built to fit the plan of the house, else the house cannot grow according to the plan. And at last, of course, it must be removed altogether.

There are ardent souls who refuse to have anything to do with mere scaffolding. "I want to work on the building," they say. "I must give my life to that which is permanent and spiritual." However much that "must" throbs in a life, we must all, in this time, work on a scaffolding. As yet our lives are "hid with Christ in God," and our service must be given in ways which will be superseded when that which is perfect is come.

The building has gone up a long way now. How can we work upon it on those high towered places without ladders and ropes and planks and pulleys, we who have no wings? Angels may do

otherwise, but not such as we.

But most of us are content enough with the scaffolding and need rather the reminder that the things which are seen are temporal. "Our little systems have their day, they have their day and cease to be." Yes, the best of them must cease to be when the King comes and His house is perfected. Those who have worked faithfully on their scaffolding will be just as eager to pull it down then as they once were to put it up. It will have served His purpose, and that is blessedness enough for any human labour. (Pages 291-2).

§ § § § § § §

Amy Carmichael has said: "Always that which gives imperishable gold to a life (as to a book) is . . . not its success, *never* its success. It is the steadfastness and the integrity of its spirit, the love that inspires it, the note of the eternal which dominates it." (Page 290).

A comment upon the two volumes of the Life of Hudson Taylor:

Extracts from "Mrs. Howard Taylor, Her Web of Time" by Joy Guinness.

SPECIAL GATHERINGS

will be held at HONOR OAK, if the Lord wills, on

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LORD'S DAY, AUG. 5, at 11 a.m., 3. 30 & 6.30 p.m.

MONDAY, AUG. 6, at 11 a.m., 3. 30 & 6. 30 p.m.

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Exodus 25, 31.

"The Testimony of Jesus" Rev. 1, 9.

Vol. 29. No. 5.

September, 1951.



THIS MINISTRY

THE OBJECT OF THE MINISTRY of this little paper, issued bi-monthly, is to contribute to the Divine end which is presented in the words of Ephesians iv. 13 — "... till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge (lit. full knowledge) of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we be no longer children . . . "

It is not connected with any "Movement", "Organization", "Mission" or separate body of Christians, but is just a ministry to "all saints". Its going forth is with the prayer and hope that it will so result in a fuller measure of Christ, a richer and higher level of spiritual life, that, while bringing the Church of God into a growing approximation to His revealed will as to its 'attainment' it may be better qualified to be used of Him in testimony in the nations, and to the completing of its own number by the salvation of those yet to be added by the Lord.

This ministry is maintained by the Lord through the stewardship of those who value it. There is no "subscription", but gifts can be sent to the Editor, "A Witness and A Testimony", 13, Honor Oak Road, Forest Hill, London, S.E. 23, England. All cheques should be made payable to "Witness and Testimony A/c". The paper is sent only to those who personally desire it, and we count on friends to advise us if this is no longer the case, or if they change their address.

"Personal" letters should be addressed to Mr. T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.



SEPTEMBER—OCTOBER, 1951.

No. 5. Vol. 29.

EDITOR'S LETTER

Beloved of God,

Having returned from the visit to the U.S.A., I want to thank all those friends who so faithfully prayed for us during that time, and to accord our deepest gratitude to all those there who showed us so much love and fellowship.

I am not going to report here in any fulness upon the time in America. The Lord graciously carried us along and gave us a real sense that He was with us. If there was any weakness, it was that we tried to cover too much ground and put too much into the limited time. This meant that we had to leave much undone where we did go, and are sorry that many requests for ministry had to be left unfilled for the present.

As to the general impression? well—need—need—need! Deep and appealing, sometimes heart-breaking need!

I have returned with a very heavy heart and a strong cry to the Lord. I suppose this burden and distress is because of some vision of the Lord's fuller purpose for His people, and therefore, inability to accept or accommodate to the so much less which seems to exist *everywhere*; not only in the U.S.A. Only the Lord can do what is necessary to reach and realise His full end, but we are compelled to a stronger-than-ever seeking those acts of sovereignty and grace unto something much more. Pray with us that, yet, He may have His "eternal purpose" brought into fuller expression in a concrete way in many places. Unto this we are made to search our own hearts and to seek a clearer way in ourselves for the Lord; and, of course, all who share the desire for "the fulness of Christ" must have the same exercise. It will be nothing short of His travail, "the fellowship of his sufferings". Surely Paul meant the sufferings which lead to fulness, not our salvation! "The sufferings of Christ for his body's sake, which is the Church".

One thing has surely come out of this extensive touch with the spiritual situation: it is the *necessity* of the ministry entrusted to us. More than ever I feel that we have that which would touch this situation, and, although I have no illusions as to how many may receive it, there are not a few evidences that it is recognized as that which answers to the deep sense of need. Do pray much about the enlargement of this ministry in every way, not forgetting that we labour under severe and many restrictions in this country, which the Lord can overcome, and will do so as you pray. We feel that a next phase is at our door, and we are much before Him as to what it is.

A wide and needy door is open to us which could extend us for all our days, but we need the economising wisdom of God. Again we say, "Brethren, pray for us".

We assure you that you are much in our hearts; not for the success of *our* ministry, but truly for the fuller satisfaction of the Lord; that "He may see of the travail of *his* soul, and be *satisfied*".

With love in Him, and warmest greetings,

Yours in His bonds,

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS

SPIRITUAL ASCENDENCY

VII. THE NAME OF THE LORD IN ZION

"*Thou in thy lovingkindness hast led the people that thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength to thy holy habitation . . . Thou wilt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, the sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established*" (Ex. xv. 13, 17).

"*Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?*" (Ps. xxiv. 3).

"*And I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on the mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty and four thousand, having his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads*" (Rev. xiv. 1).

"*For the Lord hath built up Zion; he hath appeared in his glory . . . that men may declare the name of the Lord in Zion*" (Ps. cii. 16, 21).

A PRESENT FORETASTE OF GLORY

THE above passage in the book of Exodus is very remarkable in this respect, that the reaching of Zion, the holy habitation, the hill of the Lord—for so it proved to be eventually—is spoken of as though it were already an accomplished fact at the beginning of the history of Israel as a nation; for Exodus xv occurs when Israel is only just out of Egypt and just over the Red Sea. The inspired song sees the end at once and brings it right forward, and the people are, in spirit, in the good of the end right at the outset. It is the language of accomplished fact. "*Thou hast led . . . thou hast guided . . . to thy holy habitation . . .*" There you have New Testament history crammed into a very small compass of words; because right at the beginning of the Church's history, when the book of the Acts opens, you are only just past Calvary, you are just out of the authority of darkness, but the whole spirit and atmosphere is of present at-

tainment of the end. The Lord's people there are undoubtedly, in spirit and enjoyment, at the end of the journey. They have arrived, they have come to Zion, they have ascended into the hill of the Lord, and it is with glory men may declare the name of the Lord in Zion. Thus it was right at the beginning. Whenever the Lord brings in part of His purpose of the ages, He always brings it in with glory. The bringing in is always accompanied by a sense of fulness, attainment and realisation. It has always been like that, and those who were there at the time felt, 'We have reached the end, we are there!' That was the spirit of it.

You know that is how you feel when you get truly and soundly born again. At the time you feel there is nothing more to be done; you are ready for glory, heaven has arrived! No one can tell you anything, teach you anything! It is that spirit of youth which says, I have more understanding than all my teachers! It is all glory; God has broken in so far as you are concerned; it is the coming of the great purpose of the ages, and you have arrived. So it is whenever the Lord comes in like that. He gives at the beginning an experience, a vision, a consciousness, a realisation, of the greatness and the glory of His purpose; we are just full of it. That is how they were in those first days of the Church's history.

A PROCESS BEGUN

But then the tense changes—"Thou wilt bring them in . . ."—and it is not long before you discover that it is not only that you have a present foretaste, but also you are in a process begun—you have arrived, but you have to go yet some way before you do arrive. There is a glorious paradox about it all. The Holy Spirit has touched the end at the beginning, and then He has taken up that end to make it more than just a

sensation, just an ecstasy—to make it an inward reality. Although on that day, when they were just over the Red Sea, Israel did sing so lustily about having arrived, they had to learn that in spiritual geography there was a long way to go for that to become something more than just a sense of things, however great that sense might be.

What is the Lord doing when He combines these tenses, bringing these two things together—the realisation that we are come to Mount Zion and yet that we have a long way to go, and something has yet to be done? Well, the Lord knows us very well: He knows realities. He does not build upon nebulous, abstract foundations. He is going to have real people—very real people. As we said earlier, the Lord's spiritual people are the greatest realists on earth. They know increasingly how real everything is that is spiritual; such things become almost desperately real. This is not merely something in the mind, this is something tremendously real. Those forces of evil are very, very real. The ground which they have in the broken down humanity which is ours is very, very real ground. Everything that has to do with the spiritual life is very real indeed, and the Lord is the great Realist where we are concerned. He is going to have nothing that is merely an emotion. He gives the foretaste, the earnest, and then He says, 'Now I am going to set to work to make that your real position'. When at length the hundred and forty four thousand are found with the Lamb on Mount Zion, you notice by the context that they are not a people who have come there merely on an emotion or an ecstasy or a teaching: they have come through things. They are not only in the truth, the truth is in them.

That brings us at once to this further spoke in the wheel of which we were speaking earlier, the very hub of which is Zion; it brings us to this, the name of the Lord in Zion. Looking at the actual spiritual counterpart of all this Old Testament teaching about Zion—Pentecost, the Lord Jesus—what is the thing that is so very much in evidence from that moment; the thing that is more on the lips of the Apostles than anything else, and which constitutes the dynamic of their ministry, their testimony, their work? Is it not the name of Jesus? And this is no mere designation, this is a mighty registration. That name carries with it all the impact and force of heaven. Nothing can stand before that name. World powers will seek to withstand, but they will be broken. Herod may seek to destroy the servants of the Lord and the Church, but he will be destroyed out of hand. The Lord in every realm in the book of the Acts gives evidence that the name of Jesus is no ordinary name. "God

highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name." It is the name of exaltation, ascension.

ZION THE EMBODIMENT OF THE NAME

Zion is the embodiment of the Name. Take the history of Zion again. It is the city of David, "the city of the great King"; it is the greatest name in Israel's history. It embodies the greatest glory of their national life. The greater than David has ascended up on high, the angelic hosts have burst forth in their festal song—"Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory will come in" (Ps. xxiv. 7). In the New Testament we have a very similar title given to the Lord Jesus—"they . . . crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. ii. 18); and, again, we read, "Ye . . . killed the Prince of life; whom God raised from the dead" (Acts iii. 15). "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion". Zion is the name of supreme power, supreme glory; and in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, "of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth" (Phil. ii. 10). Zion then means the power and glory and sovereignty of the name of the Lord Jesus as a mighty working power, registering itself upon things spiritual and sometimes upon things temporal, a name which carries with it all authority in heaven and in earth. It is the name of authority.

THE NEED TO RECOVER THE AUTHORITY OF THE NAME

Now I suggest to you—and I expect I have your immediate agreement—that what is needed to-day is the recovery of the authority of the name of Jesus in the Church. We use it so frequently, it comes into our language and phraseology, but we know all too little of its virtue. I am not suggesting to you now that we should seek after demonstrations in physical and temporal realms of the power and authority of the name of the Lord Jesus, but rather that what we need is the presence of the power of the Name, as something which weakens all other powers: and for me that means something very much more than just demonstrations in the temporal realm. What we really do need is a power (I was going to say a force) at work which goes right on, persists and overcomes in a quiet, silent, steady way—when all the adverse forces are at work to frustrate, we go right on and become irresistible in a spiritual way. The thing goes on, the work is done. You marvel that it is so, when you take account of all that is set against it. That which is of interest to the Lord really does hold on

its way, and not only maintains its existence, but increases, and there is nothing to account for this in any other realm than that there is somewhere a mighty Divine force at work; and do what they may and will, neither the naked powers of evil nor their instrumentalities can stop it.

I believe that was the outworking of things at the beginning. You have demonstrations in the book of the Acts, but that book is a book of principles; that is, it is a book in which the Lord in the foundation of the Church, in the beginning of the dispensation, is making it very plain that certain spiritual things are very real. He may remove the ways in which He does make that plain, but the reality goes on: and when you think about it, you would prefer it like that. No one wants to have a continuous, everyday repetition of the incident of Ananias and Sapphira. Do you want to see in any of the companies of the Lord's people men and women literally stricken down and carried out because they sinned against the Holy Ghost? No; but what we do want to know is that people are made aware of the fact that they cannot withstand the Holy Ghost with impunity, that it is a very dangerous thing to spiritual life and it may be to the physical also—to stand in the way of the exalted Christ. What we want is to see that Christ is Lord in His house—but not by just physical and temporal demonstrations. It is the mighty working of a spiritual power, where everything is very real and the Lord is Lord.

That is the principle of the Name. It is a great spiritual authority at work and nothing can withstand the goings. Oh, it is a great thing! I often think that Gamaliel was more inspired than we have imagined or than he knew. He did indeed utter a great truth when he said, "*If it is of God, ye will not be able to overthrow them; lest haply ye be found even to be fighting against God*" (Acts v. 39). It is a hopeless thing to get in God's way. "*If it be of God . . .*". Dear friends, that is the only assurance you and I want—that a thing is of God. If it be not of God, then our prayer is, The Lord save us from it! But if it be of God, well, let all forces combine, let all tongues wag, let all devices be resorted to—it will go on! Why? Because the name of the Lord is going to be declared in Zion. It is this mighty meaning of the name of the Lord. It is the name of transcendent power. Well, that is the fact, and that is what we are concerned with.

Then, of course, there comes the challenge. They did not actually stay on mount Zion very long, even in the book of the Acts. Positionally, of course, the Church is always there, but actually not always so. We were saying in our previous meditation that

the Church made the earth-touch all too soon. So at Corinth you find believers at strife, and saying, "*I am of Paul, and I of Apollos*" (1 Cor. i. 12). This is making something of other names, and even bringing the exalted Name down in spirit to the level of an earthly party—"I am of Christ". Human likes and dislikes, preferences, antipathies and sympathies, and all the activities of human judgment, an earth touch with a fallen creation, have made something of other names, and the glory of the Name is veiled.

Or you go to Galatia, and you find they have come down from Zion and have gone to Sinai; that is to say, they have brought everything to the level of legalistic Old Testament religion—Judaism again with its legal bondage—and the glory and the power of the Name are once more suspended. Wherever this is found to be the case, the underlying cause is ever the same. You can only know the mighty operation of that ascension power of the exalted Lord, as represented by His name, if you stay up with Him in Zion. Come down to earth in spirit, and you lose it, you forfeit it.

THE NEED TO GET ON TO HIGHER GROUND

Now, that is capable of such wide and varied application that we could never cover the ground. But we can say this in an inclusive, comprehensive way: for all the laws of spiritual power, effectiveness and glory, the need is higher ground. I would say that of almost every situation of which I know where the glory is veiled, the power has gone, and anything but Zion conditions prevail. Corinthians, you are all divided up against one another, suspecting one another, preferring, choosing: and what is your state? You are in a state of chaos and defeat. Your need is higher ground. As believers, you have to get off this ground of mankind. If you and I, as the Lord's people who bear His name, come down on to human ground with one another, we forsake the power and glory and working of that name. It is not that we are going to live a make-believe life. We are very real people, and the people we have to do with are very real people too. They are very awkward, they have their weaknesses, their flaws, their faults, and many things difficult to put up with, even though they be the Lord's people. And you know quite well that, while you are taking account of people as they are in nature it is keeping you down, and keeping everything down, and the glory is being excluded and the power is suspended. The Holy Spirit, being within all the truly born-again children of God, constitutes and provides another kind of ground

upon which we have definitely to place our feet. We have deliberately and persistently to regard the matter in this way: 'So-and-so is of such a kind, and there is this and that about him, and if I proceed on purely natural grounds I shall not go on far with him; I shall eliminate him, and not have any fellowship with him. He is a child of God, the Holy Spirit is as much in him: as in me by new birth; and he might find just as many wrongs and faults and weaknesses about me as I do about him. But we have a common ground, which is not that natural ground at all; it is the ground of Christ, and I have deliberately to trust Christ in my brother. It may be some time before He gets the upper hand there and gets what He is after, but I trust the Lord concerning him and take my hands off, and believe that the Lord can do a great thing there'. Some of us would never have gone on very long with some people but for a deliberate taking of that attitude. Do you think that my brethren would have continued with me during all these years if they had not taken that attitude? They have had much to put up with, but there is something that God has done which transcends that. It is an inwrought love of God and it is an inwrought determination not to allow the natural side of things to be the ultimate criterion. There is a recognition that, however little there is, there is something of the Lord to reckon upon, and we are in His hands, and we are just going on trusting Him. That is very practical, and it is only in that way that the enemy is defeated and the Lord is glorified. Do you think the name of the Lord is glorified by divisions and strivings and conflicts, which come about because of natural conditions of temperament, disposition, and so on? No, there has been more dishonour brought to the name of the Lord in that way than perhaps in any other. The name of the Lord has to be glorified in Zion; that means spiritual ascendancy, the taking of higher ground. That is the personal application of it.

I will carry you much more easily with me when I make the corporate application. You will agree when I say that, speaking generally, the glory and power of the name of the Lord Jesus are not to be found in the Church to-day as they should be, simply because the Church has come down to such an earthly level, and is so largely a thing of this world. It has lost the heavenly vision and its heavenly position. It has become a thing of orders and rites. As a matter of fact, the Church very largely—of course, with notable and blessed exceptions—has tried to reconstruct an Old Testament situation in this age. You have a thing that is seen down here on the earth, with all its accom-

paniments, its system of vestments and what-not, a reconstruction of the whole Jewish system in the Christian age, and called 'Christian'. No wonder the Name has gone out, and the power; it is no longer a heavenly thing. And so, however you look at it, and wherever you touch it, the Lord has shown right at the beginning that, if the Church is to be in the mighty power of the name of the Lord Jesus, it has to leave its low levels and be in the place of the Name spiritually. The picture is quite simple, the picture of this going up to Jerusalem three times in a year of a representative company in the old dispensation.

GOD GOVERNS BY SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Well, the day came when the going up was due, and what happened? They left their own hamlets and villages and towns and cities wherever they were, as insular, as apart, as distant; they left it all and came away from their insularity, their dividedness, their separateness, and all came up on to one mount, where their oneness in a heavenly place was the great reality. And how blessed a thing it was for them! And the Lord established that as a testimony three times in every year, saying to them thereby, 'Israel, you are not so many isolated, separate units, scattered everywhere, living your own little village life or even your own great city life; you are one people belonging to another city which is above: your names are enrolled in heaven, you are the Church of the first-born ones.'

Oh, the amount there is in the Word of God to bear this out! Take Joshua xxi, for example. There you have the forty-eight Levitical cities. The Levites took the place of the firstborn in all Israel, and so became in type the Church of the firstborn ones. They were given cities. What are the cities? They are the local representations of *the* city, that is all. They have no meaning except in their central relatedness to *the* city. They are, so to speak, just microcosms of the one city of God. They are the city everywhere expressed; forty-eight—four times twelve—governmental order. Twelve is the number of government, and twelve is all the time found associated with God's people. Israel—twelve tribes. Twelve runs right through to the twenty-first chapter of the book of the Revelation. And firstborn *sons*, the Church of the firstborn ones, signify that. Sonship is the full thought of God. When you touch sonship in God's thought, you touch maturity in fulness, completeness of spiritual realisation. "*Ye are come unto mount Zion . . . to the church of the firstborn*" (Heb. xii. 22, 23).

Well now, the Levites of Joshua xxi and their forty-eight Levitical cities are just one of the many types of this great truth, that God's thought for His people is spiritual maturity, spiritual fulness, by which He governs the world. It is a spiritual government. Oh, do I need to stop with it? You know as well as I do that the people who have gone on most with the Lord, who are most spiritually mature, are the people who really govern. They may be thoroughly inadequate in this world, they may have none of the advantages that others have here, but they know the Lord, and they are the people who in spiritual matters come to the fore. Here we have the whole principle of leadership, which is not official at all. Government is vested in spiritual measure, it is a spiritual thing. Firstborn sons, the forty-eight cities—it is all an expression of Zion. Zion gathers it all up. It is spiritual fulness, spiritual maturity by which God will govern.

THE POWER OF THE NAME

It is very impressive to remember that when a name is given in the Bible, it always means something. You know the cities of the Pharaohs, and how they gave their names to their cities—Rameses for example. The city is the work of a man, it is produced by that man, and the name given means that the man is thoroughly well satisfied with his work, and he can give his name to the city. We do not, as a rule, let our names go on things of which we do not approve.

Now here in Rev. xiv is Zion, and a company standing thereon, "*having his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads*". That means that God has no hesitation whatever in putting His Name there; He is thoroughly satisfied. Now the name of Jesus simply means that God is completely and perfectly satisfied with the work that the Lord Jesus has done and has given Him "the name which is above every name". In the hundred and forty four thousand on mount Zion you have a company who have entered so thoroughly into the work of God in Christ that God does not hesitate to put His name upon them. They bear His name. It is Zion, with the name of the Lord.

You see what that means. We have to come to the place where God is satisfied. And where is that? God is satisfied with nothing on this earth. It is only there in His Son in heaven, as not belonging at all to this world, that God finds His satisfaction. The Name is there, and it is out from that perfect satisfaction of God that the Holy Spirit comes with all the power of the Name. And

how mighty that Name has proved to be!

But something has happened. What is it? Look at the people concerned in Acts ii. First look back a few days. "*They all left him, and fled*" (Mark xiv. 50). They did not like to have themselves associated with His name. 'Are you one of His disciples? No, I am not, I have no connection with Him!' Ashamed of His name. Then those two as they went on the way to Emmaus, how miserable they were, utterly in despair. Why? The answer is in one word—earthliness. Their whole horizon had been earthly. They had looked for the kingdom of God in terms of earthly, temporal power, prosperity, and position. Everything for them had been a matter of this earth, this present life down here and how things would affect them here and now; and that had proved their undoing. The Cross had put an end to all their hopes. But then something happened. When Christ arose, by the space of forty days He repeatedly appeared unto them. The thing was happening; they were getting a new heavenly vision, a spiritual conception of things, a transformation of outlook: and then the Spirit came and put His great seal upon it all. "*My kingdom is not of this world*" (John xviii. 36) the Lord had said, and now they knew how true that was. All was heavenly, and no longer did that old idea of theirs hold them. When the Spirit came, they were men emancipated from this world, emancipated from the very strongest ties of which it is possible for man to conceive—religious ties. Oh, how powerful were their Judaistic bonds! But they were emancipated now. The vision of Christ in glory did what no combined forces on this earth could have done with Saul of Tarsus. It emancipated him from his Judaism. I consider that one of the greatest miracles of the New Testament—the translation in spirit of a man from earth to heaven in an instant by revelation; complete emancipation. That is the realm of the power of the Name. That is the nature of things where the glory of the Name is manifested. We need a new apprehension of what it means to be seated together with Christ in the heavenlies, a real spiritual experience of emancipation from things here in all our concerns and anxieties: so free from things here that we are in possession of everything! Paul said, "*All (things) are yours*". Life is yours, death is yours, the world is yours, all things are yours (I Cor. iii. 21-23). To understand what that means is tremendous spiritual uplift. It means, in a word, that you have come into the place where the heavens do rule, and whatever the Lord wants you to have, you will have it: no matter what men or devils say about it, it is yours. Priorities? You will not get any priorities here, but you can have priorities

every time if the Lord wants you to. No one knows how it is done. You may be at the bottom of the waiting list, but if the Lord requires it you go to the top. Transport or anything is yours if the Lord wants it. That is a glorious position to be in. We are quite content not to have a thing if the Lord does not want it, but if we have it in our hearts that the Lord wants it, we have a right to go to heaven and take it; it is ours. You find it works out like that. Somehow or other it comes about when everybody says that it is impossible—it just comes about, it happens. The heavens do rule for

those who belong to heaven, and live in heaven. We need to know there is a mighty authority in the Name; but in all its forms of manifestation it demands that you are in the heavenly position. The Name is impotent when you are touching this earth in voluntary association. But be in the place of the Name, then ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done. If we only know the place of the Name with regard to everything, we have the key to the whole situation. The Lord make us understand more what the Name of the Lord is in Zion.

T. A-S.

“ HIS GREAT LOVE ”

IV. THE CHALLENGE OF LOVE

“ . . . his great love, wherewith he loved us ” (Eph. ii. 4).

“ The love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which was given unto us ” (Rom. v. 5).

“ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another . . . We love, because he first loved us ” (I John iv. 11, 19).

THE challenge of love, Divine love—“ Beloved if . . . ” then . . . “ If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another ”. There is a tremendous challenge in that. We have, I trust I can say, been seeing that Divine love, the love of God, is the key to everything from Genesis to Revelation; and if that is true, as we have said before, that the sum of all Divine revelation is vital union with God in Christ, if it is a matter from first to last of relationship with God as Father, then here in this fragment in John’s letter, we are at once brought face to face with the test of our relationship with God. The test of that relationship is here resolved into a matter of love. There follows immediately another of the several “ ifs ” of John’s letter—“ If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar ” (I John iv. 20), he does not love God. The test of our relationship with God is this matter of love. It all hangs upon “ if ”.

The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. The relationship with God in Christ is brought about by an act of the Holy Spirit’s incoming, in our receiving Him. He is given to us, and He brings about the relatedness, and the immediate result and seal of that relationship by the indwelling Spirit is that the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts. It is the test of relationship. The very basis of our

organic spiritual and vital union with God is this matter of the Divine love in us, and John will challenge us with this in his letter and say, “ We know that we have passed out of death into life (i.e. that we are in vital union with God) because we love the brethren ” (I John iii. 14). The Word of God makes this love a test of our having received the Spirit.

DIVINE LOVE DEMANDS LOVE OF THE BRETHREN

Well, of course, on the simple basis of our conversion we know that to be true at the beginning—that whereas, before, we had no particular love for Christians, afterward, when we had come to the Lord, we found we had an altogether new feeling toward other children of God. That was the simple beginning. But it is the beginning, the basis. John is carrying us beyond the beginning. He is speaking to us, as in the case of those to whom he wrote, as to people who know the Lord, to people of God who have the Spirit. He says, “ The anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and you need not that any one teach you ; but . . . his anointing teacheth you concerning all things . . . ” (I John ii. 27). He is writing to those who are getting on in the spiritual life. When we come there, it is possible that in some way a root of bitterness may spring up in us toward our brother. It is possible that you may fail of the love of God. It is possible that this very basic nature of your relationship with the Lord should be numbed for want of love, that your whole spiritual life should come under arrest and be paralysed, and you cease to be a vital factor and have a real living communion with your Lord day by day, all because

the basic love in some way has been arrested or injured. What was the mark of your initial relationship with the Lord? It was the love of God shed abroad in your heart, and you loved other Christians tremendously. That can be changed in such a way that you do not love other Christians as at the beginning. You thought then that all Christians were very wonderful: no questions were asked; they simply belonged to the Lord and that was all that mattered. Since then, you have begun to have questions about Christians, and not only Christians in general, but sometimes Christians in particular. You have come to know that Christians are still human beings and not angels, not that consummate thing you perhaps thought Christians were at the beginning. You have come to some disappointment about them and are really up against something now in them, and your basic relationship with God is being touched. If you do not somehow get over that and find a way through, if you do not have a new accession of Divine love, your very walk with God is going to be arrested, you are going to lose your precious and joyous communion with your Lord, and there will come a shadow between you and your Father. You will find that the only way to get rid of the shadow is to get victory over that un-love toward those of His children who are concerned.

HOW WE KNOW GOD'S LOVE FOR US

How do we know God's love for us? Well, that is a pertinent question. There are many difficulties and much mystery connected with His love—why, in the first place He should love us at all. But then He has said that He does love us. He has given us exceeding great and precious promises and assurances. We have, in what He has done for us, a very great amount of proof from God's side that He loves us. But even so, with all the doctrine of the gift of God, the great redemptive activity of God, with all the words that tell us that He loves us, there are times when all that is just something in the Book, something of the doctrine. But is it true? Does He love me? It may be true everywhere else, but does He love *me*?

Now come back to that word in Romans v. 5 and you have the answer in principle and in substance. Let us ask the question—How can you and I know that God loves us, know in a way extra to our being told, to having an intellectual presentation of the truth of the love of God for man? I will tell you of one way in which you can know, and know very surely. If you are a child of God and have received the Holy Spirit in you (and remember that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Divine love) then if

you should have a reservation of love toward another child or other children of God, some attitude of criticism, suspicion, or prejudice, within you something dies or seems to die. Your joy goes, you feel something has gone wrong, and within you there is a sense of grief. You know what it is to grieve, to have that awful feeling of grieving somewhere inside. But in this case it is not you at all who are grieving over that unlove, but there is Someone within you who is grieving: there is a sob at the centre of your being. That is how we know that God loves us, that "the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts". When we grieve that love, we know that in us the Spirit says, 'I cannot go on in happy fellowship with you, I am grieved, I am pained'. It is only love that can be grieved. People who have no love never grieve, they are never pained, never hurt. You need to have love, and the more sensitive the love the more you register and are grieved when things are not right. The Holy Spirit is exceedingly sensitive in this matter of love, because that is His supreme characteristic. Remember, that is His inclusive characteristic. Paul wrote, "The fruit of the Spirit is love" (Gal. v. 22). He put it in the singular. It would have been wrong grammar to have said, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, etc." He would have had to say, "The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace . . ." But he said, "The fruit of the Spirit is—"love" and then he went on to tell you what love is—"joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control". Kill love and you kill all the rest; injure love and you injure all the rest. You cannot have the others, without the inclusive thing—love.

The Spirit, therefore, is inclusively and pre-eminently the Spirit of Divine love, and as such He is very sensitive and easily grieved. "*Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God*" (Eph. iv. 30) is the exhortation. That is how we know that God loves us—that the love of God in us by the Holy Spirit suffers grief when love is injured.

Again, there is so much that the enemy points to and tells us is a mark that the Lord does not love us. For my part, I have to have some inward proof, a living proof, something right inside of me that proves He loves me; and this is one of the ways in which I have learned that God loves me—that if I say or do anything that is contrary to love, I have a terribly bad time. God's love for me is touched, grieved, when I violate that love, and I am at once conscious of the fact. Everything is bound up with that. We do not get anywhere until we say, 'Lord, forgive me that, I go back on that. I confess that sin; and so get it all cleared up and

have no repetition of it. It involves the whole walk with God, it touches the very relationship with God. We need to be made sensitive to the Spirit of love so that our lips and hearts are purged by the fire of love, and so that it is not easy for us to be superior and pass superior judgments and to be of a criticising and suspicious spirit. We shall never get anywhere with God if there is anything like that.

THE PRAYER LIFE AFFECTED BY LACK OF LOVE

It touches every aspect of our lives. It touches our prayer life. We cannot get on in prayer if it is like that; and what a need there is to-day of men and women who can pray; not of people who say prayers and yet do not pray. One does not want to despise any prayer, but oh, we do need men and women who can pray through, who can lead us into the presence of God, and take right hold on Him, and get a situation established by prayer. We shall never be able to do that unless this basic relationship with God is established, expressing itself in love for all those whom He loves, no matter what they are nor who they are. Prayer life will be interfered with, and the Word of God will be closed to us. The Lord will not go on if the foundation is hurt.

WE LOVE BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED

"If God SO loved . . ." Can you fathom that "so"? Can you understand that "so"? No, we cannot. "God so loved"—then "we also ought to love"; and we love, says John here, because He first loved us. As I pointed out earlier, the putting in of the word 'him' in the Authorized Version is unfortunate. It is not in most of the original manuscripts. I am not sure that it would not be bad doctrine; it certainly is out of keeping with the context. John did not say that in his letter. He said, "*We love, because He first loved us*". You say you do not quite grasp that, and that it would be quite true to put the 'him' in and to say, "We love him, because he first loved us". There are literally teeming millions in this world whom God first loved and they do not love Him; there are multitudes of the Lord's people whom He so loved but they do not love Him as they would. Is not the cry 'I have not the love I ought to have, even for God, to say nothing of His people and the unsaved'? Not necessarily do we love Him, because He first loved us. When we come to a fuller apprehension of His love for us, then love for Him does flow out, but here the whole emphasis is upon the fact of

love—"We love, because he first loved us". The challenge is there. The measure of my love for others is the measure of my apprehension of God's love for me. I could never have anything like an adequate apprehension of His love for me, and not love others. Oh, if we were really overwhelmed with the greatness of God's love for us, how could we take an attitude of judgment toward some other erring, mistaken, perhaps sinning, child of God? Not at all! It is herein that we know the love of God, in that we love the brethren. There is the test of our apprehension, the test of our relationship, and it is the basis of everything for the child of God.

GROWTH ON THE BASIS OF LOVE

If I am going to grow spiritually, I shall only do so on the basis of love. I shall never grow because I get a lot more teaching. You do not grow by teaching. That is the tragedy of attending conferences—that you may attend them for years and years and still be of the same spiritual measure afterward, and never grow: still making no greater contribution to the measure of Christ in the Church, still not counting any more than you did years ago in the spiritual battle. No, all the teaching does not necessarily mean that you grow. It is necessary as a background, but we grow by love. Do not let anybody think we can dispense with the teaching and have the love and get on all right. That would be a contradiction of the Word altogether. The teaching has its place, it is absolutely necessary; but though I have everything and have not love, I am nothing (I Cor. xiii). So all is based on this.

THE LOVE OF GOD, NOT NATURAL LOVE

But lest you should inadvertently misapprehend what I am saying, I must emphasize that I am talking about the love of God. You must not think I am talking about a generous disposition, a magnanimous temperament, of the kind of people who are made that way, and who cannot bear to be across someone else, even if there is a tremendous spiritual issue at stake. Such never 'truth it in love' (Eph. iv. 15) for fear of anything unpleasant. That is not the love I am talking about. This love is not temperamental love. The people who may be of that kindly, magnanimous, large-hearted disposition may find that they have to have that smashed up and broken by coming up against a spiritual situation for which no natural temperament is sufficient. They may have to be provoked to get on their feet. People who have never been angry may have to be stirred to anger. People who are

always compromising rather than have unpleasantness may have to make a clean cut. The love of God may demand something like that. On the other hand, those who may not be at all of that generous, magnanimous disposition, by the love of God and an altogether new heart and nature become what they are not temperamentally. This of which we speak is not on a natural ground at all—what we are or what we are not.

THE LOVE OF GOD TRIUMPHANT OVER EVIL

What I am trying to say is that God's love is a mighty, triumphant love that has triumphed over something immense. The love of God which now comes to us from Christ comes from Him as crucified. It flows to us from the Cross, from His wounds, from His riven side. That love came up against the most awful things in this universe which withstood it, and overcame them. It was not just a nice disposition that looked benignly upon everything wrong and excused it. Oh no! It came up against the fierceness of anti-love, anti-love of God in this universe, and overcame it. Calvary was the mighty triumph of God's love over everything contrary to it, and it is that kind of love we are to have, an overcoming love, a triumphant love.

It is, in a sense, an awful love. Come up against that, and it breaks and shatters; things have to go down before it. Things will not go down before our human niceness, things of the devil, things that are positively evil and antagonistic to God; but they will go down before tested, proved, enduring, patient, longsuffering love. You may have to wait a long time, suffer a lot, put up with a lot, have your love ignored, even resisted. Give it time, and all may go right down before Divine love. It is the longsuffering love of God that has won us. Is not that the deepest thing in your heart?—it is in mine—the infinite patience of Divine love, the

bearing and forbearing of that love. It is a tremendous love. It is a power, it is a conquering love—something so much more than this (may I use the word?) sloppy kind of 'love' which is always smoothing things over. Oh no, that is not God's love. God's love is overcoming love.

NO TRUE MINISTRY WITHOUT LOVE

There is challenge in this love of God to us. 'We also ought . . .'. It is a challenge. Nothing can be except as the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Let us come back to where we started. If you have ever had exercise with God on any matter, do so on this matter. If you are concerned about being of any use to the Lord at all, in any capacity, —as a preacher, a teacher, a personal witness, as a life lived here without any public place at all—let me tell you (and it is the ripening knowledge of a life that has not much further to go but has for forty years been concerned with this matter of being useful to the Lord) let me tell you that nothing of usefulness to the Lord is possible except on the basis of God's love shed abroad in our hearts. It must be this Holy Ghost love for the people to whom we would minister: love for them even to the laying down of our lives for them, suffering unto death for their sakes: love to the point of being brokenhearted—I use that word quite deliberately—over people for whom you have spiritual concern and in whom you have spiritual interest: love like that. No ministry will be ministry to the Lord that is not born of that: no testimony, no life, except as rooted and grounded in the love of God. You can have all the rest, a mass of Bible knowledge, a wealth of Biblical instruction and doctrinal information and all that, but it is all without any value unless its exercise is in a love, a passion, a heart beating with the heart of God for His great love wherewith He loved us.

T. A-S.

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AT THE POTTER'S HOUSE

Reading: *Jeremiah xviii. 1-6.*

THE vision at the potter's house is probably the best known section in Jeremiah's prophecies, and it is typical of his whole ministry. The message is a solemn one, but it is full of hope, showing that the thoughts which the Lord thinks towards His people are thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give them "hope in their latter end".

GOD'S UNCHANGING PURPOSE OF GRACE

The vision refers primarily to the nation of Israel, but it can be enlarged to cover the dealings of God with all mankind. Like the potter, the Lord set out to make from human clay a creation pleasing and satisfying to Himself. Tragedy ensued, and very serious tragedy, for the vessel was marred and became a thing ugly and misshapen, quite different from the Divine pattern. There were only two alternatives, reconstruction or destruction. Justice might have brought an immediate end to the race, might have cast away the faulty material and disowned it. God's dealings, however, are always in grace as well as in truth, so in Christ He has fashioned an entirely new creation.

We need to understand that grace does not lower God's standard; it finds a way to realise it. Some people's idea of grace is to suggest that the potter contents himself with the faulty creation, overlooking its twisted form and disappointing failure with a kindly indulgence due to such poor clay. Let there be no mistake about this. God's highest and holiest standards must be adhered to. His purposes are eternal; His ideals unchangeable; He can never be persuaded to accept human failures and shortcomings, however graciously He may deal with those who are involved. It is a complete misunderstanding of the grace of God to imagine that the Lord accommodates Himself to fallen man, and tolerates something inferior to His original pattern. Such an idea would surely be a misinterpretation of our vision. The Lord did not suggest that Israel should be accepted in their corrupt condition. What He did say was that He was still able and willing to realise His original purpose in their case.

This is what He has done in Christ. It is "another vessel", although it is still made from human clay, and it is the vessel which from the first it has seemed good to Him to make. At the end of the first creation He pronounced everything "very good". This verdict could not stand, for sin

entered into the race and the vessel became marred beyond any possibility of correction. The new creation in Christ is not an attempt to better the old, but a starting all over again, and this time there will be no disappointments. In Christ the perfect Potter has a perfect work, "as seemed good to the potter to make it".

Our purpose now is not to consider the race or the nation, but the individual, for this vision has a very clear message for each one of us. God is dealing with us in grace. This means that all His actions are governed by everlasting love and infinite patience, yet that does not imply that He can rest satisfied with the marred condition of our natural state, for it is ugly and unacceptable to Him. Grace does not lower God's standard to our level; it raises us up to His. He does not demand righteousness from us, but He does demand faith. "Cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord."

FACTORS IN THE REALIZATION OF THE PURPOSE

Let us consider the three factors in the vision.

(I) THE CLAY

This surely speaks of our humanity. Isaiah had previously used this very relationship of the potter and the clay, both to reprove the perversity of Israel (Isa. xxix. 16) and also as an argument in prayer, appealing to the Lord to take responsibility for their sad state and need (Isa. lxiv. 8).

The clay was selected by the potter. He knew that however hopeless it might be in itself his hands could fashion it aright. "Ye did not choose me, but I chose you . . ." were the words of the Lord Jesus. The potter's confidence was never in the clay, but only in his own ability to handle it. The tragic failure was not his fault, but even after this calamity there is no question as to his ability to realise his end. We wrong the Lord when we despair. He knew what we were made of when He chose us in Christ. He knew, and yet He chose us. As we progress in sanctification we get terrible disappointments with ourselves, and are shocked to discover how deep and obstinate is our crooked nature. God is never disappointed with that. He knew it from the beginning. He is only disappointed when we do not trust Him, when we let our lives be governed by what we are, instead of sub-

mitting to His skilful and loving hands.

The clay, of course, was not really responsible; this is where the parable is limited, as all parables must be. We are different for we *are* responsible—not so much for what we are as for the way in which we react to the Lord. He chose us: He takes full responsibility for us in Christ; but He must have the active co-operation of faith.

The clay can be too hard: it can resist the hand that would mould it. It is never easy to yield to the will of God. Jeremiah himself found it most painful and difficult, as the more intimate revelations of his prophecies show. He often complained to the Lord, and had many a bitter struggle in his soul before he completely let go to God. The will of God was full of perplexities for him, as it often is for us. But, unlike the people around him, Jeremiah did not harden himself against the will of God, he yielded a full obedience.

The clay can also be too soft. It can seem so quickly responsive at first, and then afterwards fail to continue, and lack steadfastness. In Josiah's reign there were great popular movements in religious matters (revival we should call it) but Jeremiah knew that there was no deep heart response to the hand of God. This softness will mar the vessel just as effectively as stubbornness. The fact that we are the clay does not mean that we wait inertly and in passivity until God does something for us apart from our co-operation. God requires constant and active faith-obedience if He is really to conform us to Christ.

We cannot be satisfied with the mere fact that we have been chosen by the Lord, although we shall never cease to thank Him for His great grace in selecting us as material for His heavenly vessel. Our concern must surely be to find out why He has thus chosen us, what is the purpose which He had in view in so doing. It is not enough to be the clay; it is not even enough to be in the Lord's hands; there is a moulding and fashioning, a design, which represents the true destiny of the clay and also the pleasure of the potter. God knows what He wants to do, and He knows how to do it, but He must have intelligent responsiveness and obedience from His chosen people.

(II) THE WHEELS

The wheels seem to speak of the daily circumstances and experiences in which we learn and prove the Lord. The earth carries us round and round as it rotates. We speak familiarly of the daily round. I wonder if we realise how necessary to the Lord is this constant turning of the wheel of life. We gain spiritual instruction when we listen

to the ministry of the Word, and we make new and deeper contacts with the Lord by meditation and prayer, but the real work of shaping can only be performed on the wheels of practical tests and activities. Those who are responsible do not imagine, when they call the people of God together for Conferences, that all the spiritual work will be done by preaching or Bible teaching. Even our Lord would not allow His disciples to tarry too long in the transfiguration mount. Vision, instruction, interpretation and communion are essential, for by them we learn the ways and the will of God, but for the work of development and maturing we need to know His hand upon us as we are found on the wheel of daily experience.

The wheels go round and round, and often the poor clay is so pressed that it longs to be taken off them, but this cannot be. Even the potter's hand, for all its skilfulness, requires the movement of the wheel to effect his purposes. It is he who placed the clay there, and if his design is to be achieved he will insist on its remaining there. In the potter's house Jeremiah doubtless saw that the same man who held the clay also rotated the wheel. The Lord is lord of the wheels as well as lord of the clay. If we try to escape from the wheel we shall really be trying to escape from His hand upon us.

We are all too often tempted to seek another wheel, feeling that our spiritual progress and development can never be realised where we are. This is, of course, a delusion. It is the hand which shapes, and not the wheel. Circumstances, of themselves, cannot mar the chosen vessel, though they can often be the means by which the Divine hand fashions it. Like the wheel, the daily events of life precipitate that movement by which our actions and reactions under the hand of God can produce such great and lasting values. How constant and how persistent is our longing to flee from the present environment, and seek relief in some more congenial sphere—some self-chosen wheel. This will only take us away from the potter's hand. There may be many wheels, and the Lord may move us from one set of circumstances to another in order to perfect the work, but this must be in His own time and way and not by our restlessness or impatience. So often our wisdom lies in submission to Him, rather than in making efforts to avoid the painful pressure of His hand.

(III) THE POTTER

This is one of the truly great designations of our Saviour. Scripture has a good deal to say about the dignity of labour. No Christian has any cause to be ashamed of doing manual work. It is very

striking, however, that the Lord should describe Himself in terms of a working man. Yet He does. He is the Vine-dresser, the Husbandman. He is also the Shepherd. And in this vision He is likened to the patient potter. He is, indeed, more than a thorough labourer, His work is a matter of supreme moral and spiritual beauty. He has planned, and He is working to His plan. Before ever He took up the clay He knew the one end which alone would satisfy Him, conformity to the image of His Son.

It is this singleness of purpose on the part of the Lord which makes His actions seem so harsh to us at times. He will not accept a faulty product, but will crush it anew into a shapeless mass that He may begin to mould it all over again. If we had our way we would prop up the vessel so that its unevenness might not be too obvious, or we would paint over a defect to cover it up from the eyes of men. He will never adopt any of these methods, but with great patience and perseverance will continue His Divine task. "*Can I not . . . ?*" He asks, and again, "*Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for me?*" (Jer. xxxii. 27). Only unbelief will question His ability.

As a matter of fact, it was in unbelief that Jeremiah's message was received. The people's reply was "*There is no hope: for we will walk after our own devices, and we will do every one after the stubbornness of his evil heart*" (verse 12). In other words, they told God that He must accept them as they were. They demanded that He should honour them, though they refused to honour Him: that grace should overlook their crookedness without being permitted to remedy it by breaking down and re-modelling. It is sad when we have to mourn our imperfections, but it is infinitely more serious when we condone them and expect God to be satisfied with our carnality.

He will never do this. He insists that all His dealings with us should be on the basis of the Cross, that the old and unsatisfactory should be smashed up, reduced to nothing, and the work be an altogether new one in Christ. The Cross governs all His dealings with those who want to please Him. Just when we feel that we are shaping so well, when we imagine that we are almost ready to be taken off the wheel and placed on a pedestal, the heavy hand of the Cross comes newly upon us, to break down the marred and imperfect form of our own natural life, so that the image of Christ may the more truly be wrought in us.

THE CHALLENGE TO FAITH

When children are modelling with clay they often find it best not to announce what the finished arti-

cle will be. If anything goes wrong with the shaping, a certain adaptation may be necessary to make use of the malformation and turn the projected model into something else. One must wait until the work is done, and then a name can be put to the object modelled. This is the way in which we sometimes expect God to work with us. We talk about His second best, as though He had been foiled of His original purpose, and must now adapt the vessel to something less than He had intended. This does not seem to be the meaning of Jeremiah's vision. As I understand it, God was offering so to take His people in hand that the original purpose should yet emerge in all its perfection. He had been delayed and hindered, but not thwarted. Sin and failure can mar the vessel in many ways; nevertheless God can still proceed and make a full recovery, provided that He has the co-operation of our faith. It may be that many have missed some earthly way of usefulness because of their disobedience or waywardness. They know now that they received a Divine call, did not respond, and so have forfeited an opportunity of fruitfulness. So far as the particular task or sphere is concerned, that chance may have gone beyond recovery. But we are speaking of the heavenly goal, the spiritual end of full conformity to Christ. Whatever may be our past failures and shortcomings, God still offers to remake us altogether according to Christ. He can still produce in us that eternal design which He had in mind when first He chose us. However, it will not be a question of patching up, of accommodating or altering. It can only be by a drastic and total reconstruction. The Cross must have its way to bring us down to a shapeless mass in the hand of our Lord. We must again allow Him to place us on the wheel, and to proceed with the work of shaping and developing according to His own mind. We must lay aside all our preconceived patterns, all religious traditions, however sacred, and all merely human conceptions of how things should be. The potter is mighty, but He must have a free hand. How much coming short in spiritual attainment is due to the fact that people will not wholly let go to God!

While Jeremiah's message was full of hope, it was also a very solemn challenge, God was not defining different spheres or degrees of His will: He was saying, all or nothing. It was not too late, though much that was earthly in Judah and Jerusalem was now destined for destruction. God brings recovery by resurrection. Redemption does not stave off the judgment; rather does it recover all for God after the judgment has fallen.

The bulk of the Israelites would not accept this. They clung to their own ideas, they sought to save

their earthly treasure, and they lost it all. Only the remnant remained patiently on the wheel trusting in the absolute ability of the heavenly Potter. In our days it seems again that the mass of God's people expect Him to accept their own imperfect standards. They are not prepared for the whole form of their lives to be broken up by the Cross, so

that the Spirit may have liberty to order everything according to Christ. We must not be influenced by this. Like Jeremiah we must go anew to the potter's house, not merely to see what God can do, but to give Him the co-operation of faith's obedience so that He may do it in us.

H. F.

“AND SO WE CAME TO ROME”

*Reading: Rom. i. 10-15; xv. 22-24, 32;
Acts xix. 21; Acts xxvii, xxviii.*

“And so we came to Rome” (Acts xxviii. 14).

AN EARTHLY OBJECTIVE WITH HEAVENLY SIGNIFICANCE

IT is not a new idea that Paul's journey to Rome can be taken as not only the record of a journey but as representing spiritual factors in relation to the way of God with His Church in this dispensation, and perhaps especially the closing phase of the Church's history on earth, in that this journey represents the closing phase of the Apostle Paul's life. The interpretations vary, but the key to most of them is that the ship in which Paul travelled to Rome is a type of the Church and of its ultimate disintegration at the end of the dispensation. I do not find myself able to accept that interpretation, though not discountenancing altogether a typical interpretation of the journey. However, let us move to the positive side.

I will mention five aspects of this account which may be taken as typical of the Church's history. First of all, there are Paul and his companions—Aristarchus of Macedonia, and Luke—and I think they represent the Church. Then there is the ship, and that to my mind represents all such man-made means employed by God for the reaching of His ends. Then there is the sea, and frequently in the Word of God the sea is symbolical of the world of mankind. Further, there is the ship's company, and undoubtedly they speak of men of the world more or less affected by the Church, and affecting the Church. Finally there are the elements, which sometimes are very stormy and openly malignant, and sometimes apparently very benign; but whether in open revolt or quiet and apparently helpful, they are always hostile. That sums up the features of this story, but we come to the real message which lies in the heart of it.

THE OBJECTIVE—THE CHURCH AND ITS HEAVENLY FUNCTION

We have first of all to get its setting in the large

realm of Divine thoughts, and that is related to the end in view for the Church. The objective here literally was Rome—the long-standing and intense desire of the Apostle to see Rome and to be with the saints there for spiritual values. Now we know that it was from Rome that he wrote those letters which, perhaps more than anything else in all the dispensations, have been for the enrichment of God's people. It was from Rome that he wrote the letters to the Ephesians, Colossians and Philipians, and there is little doubt, I think, that much in those letters was derived from Paul's visit to Rome itself. A man of such alertness to everything that was going on around him, of such keen interest and so observant, was not likely to fail to be impressed by Rome as the capital city and centre of that great world-wide empire, with all that Rome actually meant and represented on this earth and in this world. He was, I think, without doubt greatly impressed, and was taking up a very great deal of what he saw there and with which he came into touch, passing it through that wonderful spiritual mind of his, and converting it to spiritual account; for when we find him writing from Rome, his letters have so much in them, in the spiritual and vaster realm, of what was, in its limited and earthly way, true of Rome itself.

There, for instance, was the great centre of government for this world. Rule was world-wide in Rome. There was a universality about that centre of government, there was a great imperialism seated there. Rome was pre-eminent among the nations and was the place of dominion, and we know that there was great pride in being a Roman citizen. The chief captain said to Paul, “*With a great sum obtained I this citizenship*” (this freedom” A.V.): Paul replied, “*But I am a Roman born*” (“*I was free born*” A.V.). And that made the man who had paid a great price for his citizenship recognize the superiority of this man before him.

If you look into these letters written from Rome, you see all those features related to the Church. Its universality: its absolute supremacy in the

counsels of God: dominion centred in it for the ages to come; all this is in his letter to the Ephesians. And is there not a touch of that pride of citizenship in those words of his to the Philipians—" *Our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Saviour*" (Phil. iii. 20)? Yes, Rome has made its impression upon him, but in every connection (such as with his jailor, the soldier-keeper and his armour) he is changing it all into spiritual values.

What is the end in view? It is not just to journey to see this temporal Rome. The end which looms up out of that visit is the great calling and destiny of the Church in union with Christ who in all things has the pre-eminence. That is the sum of the letters to the Ephesians, Colossians and Philipians—the pre-eminence of Christ, and the Church united with Him therein. That is the end of the journey, that is what is in view beyond.

THE OBJECTIVE DIVINELY CONCEIVED

Then look at the way to the end. Paul's reaching Rome was the outcome of numerous details of different kinds. We will try to focus them, to gather them up. To begin with, there was that in Paul's heart which was not just a natural and earthly desire, but proved to be of God, the will of the Lord. There were many things in Paul's interpretation of his desire which proved to be different from the Lord's thought, but the desire itself was all right—this longing to see the saints in Rome, and to get into Rome for spiritual ends. Desires are put into our hearts by the Lord. We misinterpret them and think of them in our own way, and the Lord has to sift things out for us and adjust us, but in the end the desires often prove to be all right. The Lord has His way of realising, but the desire is there.

This began, then, with a desire in the heart of a man who was wholly for the Lord. Remember that. In all that we shall see, it is important to remember that this applies to a man who is utter for God. There was the longing, the purpose, and the expectation.

MISTAKEN HUMAN ATTEMPTS TO REACH THE OBJECTIVE

Then came the differences. There was the crisis of the long-drawn-out trial in Jerusalem, that crisis when Paul, knowing that there was a dead-set made against his life, suddenly said, "I appeal unto Caesar". That was the crisis. Now, was Paul precipitate, was he impulsive? Agrippa later said

of him, " *This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar*" (Acts xxvii. 32). We may say, What a pity Paul made that appeal! Was he impulsive?—or was he artful? Did he see that even if he were released then, there were those lying in wait for his life? More than forty men had bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed him. (Acts xxiii. 12). But Paul perhaps saw that his quickest way to Rome was to appeal to Caesar, and that he would make the Roman empire to pay his fare! I do not know, it may be. But whether he made a mistake or not, whether he was precipitate or impulsive or—may I use the word again?—artful, what I do know is that this whole matter was in the hands of the Lord. We may make mistakes, we may be caught on an impulse, we may be precipitate, but provided our hearts are utterly for God, as utterly for God as was Paul's, the Lord can look after our mistakes and overrule our blunders.

Well, there were differences, you see, in the way in which Paul went to Rome from that in which he expected to go. He had made his plans, he had arranged his course; he was going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints that which had been entrusted to him, and then he was going to take his farewell of them and go off on the journey to Rome. His expectation was all very nice—but how differently everything turned out!

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY RULING AND OVERRULING

Now the point is this: the Church does not proceed, even toward Divinely-fixed and appointed ends, by a protected course. Even with the Lord's end in view, we do not go by a way that is completely immune either from our weaknesses or from difficulties and adversities, and things which seem to upset completely all our plans. Our whole course will always be that of Divine overruling: not only ruling as in the unseen, but overruling in the seen. You must ever remember that those two things go hand in hand. God is ruling in the unseen: He is overruling in the seen. In the course there will always be plenty of room for an argument as to misadventure, calamity, defeat, tragedy, giving rise to regret, doubt and even condemnation. If we are so disposed, we can say, 'Oh, this is a calamity, this is defeat! This is due to my mistake, and everything is wrecked!' Had Paul been of another kind, like some of us, he would have said, 'I wish I had not appealed to Caesar! See what trouble I have got myself into! I am going to

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the bottom of the sea, and all my work is finished! There is always room for that if we are so disposed, and thus to get under condemnation because we have made mistakes. The Lord has never so acted with His people that there was no room for anything like that. If we want to doubt, we shall have plenty of occasion for doubting. If we want to speak of tragedy, we shall have plenty of tragic experience. If we are disposed to get under condemnation, there will be plenty to take on. The way to the end is not a way free from these elements or from the possibility of so interpreting things. It will be that, in all and through all, God overrules, and at last we shall be able to exclaim, "and so we came to Rome"; the end reached through so much.

GOD'S OBJECTIVE NOT FRUSTRATED BY HUMAN FRAILTY

You need to read the whole story again, and note every detail in the light of what I am saying. What a voyage, what a journey! How everything was threatened with complete destruction and loss! But the end was reached; and Paul, Aristarchus and Luke, representing the Church, were all there at the end. They were not disintegrated in any way, and the Church, as in them, was fully vindicated. They had made declarations, they had given warnings, they had given promises and assurances, and they had given commands. What they had said was at first flouted, ridiculed, set aside. Later, under duress, they were taken note of, and in the end perfectly vindicated. And have no doubt about it, the Church is going to be vindicated at length. Its testimony is going to be established and proved sure. Its word is going to be justified, its authority is going to be recognized. The testimony was fulfilled and the ministry enlarged to the whole scope of the universe from what looked like a narrowing down through straitening chains and imprisonment. The whole range of the eternities, of the heavenlies, and of the nations, was touched by the ministry from that imprisonment in Rome. Vindicated, established, enlarged: that will be the end of the way for those who are one with Him who is in the Throne, even though the way so often offers ground for real arguments about tragedy and disaster and for real questionings and fear because of mistakes. †

THE BREAK-UP OF ALL THAT IS OF MAN

But on the way to that enlargement and vindication, while on the one side there seemed to be so

much that was working in opposition and reverse and contradiction, on the other side it was a case of the stripping off of all the works of men. The ship did go to pieces, the man-made thing employed by the sovereignty of God to reach His ends was thrown away when His ends were in the way of realisation. There are a lot of things made by men, and godly men at that, which the Lord makes use of, but they will go, e.g. places of meeting, institutions, societies, organisations: they are made by men, they are useful, they help toward God's end, but like the ship, they are but means to the end. You must not put all your faith in the ship; you must not ascribe final values to the place, the means, the instrument. We shall find that the Lord has not committed Himself to keep the means intact, to hold the instrument for eternity. It is His Church that He is after, which He is preserving, which is to come out alive; and on the way, the *things* will have to go, they will have to be broken up, they cannot meet the full impact of the forces of evil in this terrific storm. The forces of evil are too much for anything made by man, but they are not the equal of what God has made: His Church will come out all right. Be careful that you do not put too much upon God's means, God's instrument, the ship. Keep your eye on God's real object. The framework of things may break up, but God's spiritual values will be eternally preserved. And let us not worry too much if God sees the time has come for the stripping off of things. They may have served a very good purpose and our hearts may be very much linked with them, with that place or that instrumentality; but if the Lord begins to break it up and take it from us, do not think everything of value is going. No, it is the spiritual values upon which our hearts must be set.

GOD'S OBJECTIVE CERTAIN OF ULTIMATE ATTAINMENT

The Lord is eventually triumphant, as we see outstandingly in this account—and triumphant in His Church. "And so we came to Rome". What a "so" it was, and what a "so" it is! How much is packed into that little word "so"! It was something given into the heart by the Lord, something around which all kinds of expectations and imaginations were woven, all of which were entirely disappointed, undone, brought to disintegration and changed; but the purpose of God stood. That which God had put into the heart went through and was found at last to be not of man but of God. I wonder what Paul felt like as he entered Rome;

remembering when long ago the thing came into his heart, and all his visions and expectations and hope, and all his thoughts of going beyond Rome to Spain—and now this is how things have worked out! And so it is with us: not as we thought, not as we expected and planned, but we are here! That is the thing that matters; we are here!

We can transfer that to the large issue of the course of the child of God as well as of the Church. How many times have we looked at the storm, looked at situations, looked at our own faults and mistakes, at what the enemy has called our blunders, and have said, 'Oh, it is hopeless, we shall never get there!' And yet despite all that has happened, we are still going on, even though we cannot yet say that we have arrived. It will be like that if our hearts are as knit to the Lord and His

eternal purpose as was that of this dear man Paul. When we get to heaven, we shall say, 'And so we came to heaven! Here we are!' We shall look at one another and say, 'Well, brother, you did not think you were going to be here, but here you are!' Believe me, that is God's sovereign part; and if any responsibility on our part comes in at all, it is that we should be of the spirit of this man who said, "*One thing I do*" (*Phil. iii. 13*)—not, 'I hope to do', or, 'I am going to do when my present phase of life is passed, when my college years are finished'; not 'to-morrow', not 'presently', not 'when I am trained'. No. "*One thing I do*"; I am doing it now. If we are like that, we can count on this sovereignty of God, which may upset our plans and change our expectations; but we shall be there, and heaven will triumph in getting us there.

T. A-S.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS

Reading: II Cor. i. 3-5; vi. 8-13; ii. 4; xi. 23-28; I Cor. iv. 9-13; II Cor. i. 8-10.

"*The sufferings of Christ abound unto us*" (*II Cor. i. 5*).

THERE is a very great deal summed up in the passages we have just read, but what I have on my heart to say will be confined to two things; firstly, the sufferings and the suffering, and secondly, the need and the values of suffering.

THE FACT AND RANGE OF SUFFERING

Little need be said, I think, as to the fact of the sufferings. We know the people of God are not exempt from sufferings. That, I think, need not be laboured. But there are many sufferings into which they enter *because they are the people of God*; and that, perhaps, needs a little thinking about. There are sufferings we may bring upon ourselves, sufferings which need not be, but I am not thinking about those. I am speaking about the sufferings of Christ, of the fact of these, and that they are the common lot of the people of God, and that when they come upon us, there is nothing wrong in that. Indeed, we shall see before we are through that it is quite to the contrary.

But when you think about these sufferings, with Paul as the great example and interpreter, you are led to see that these are not just incidents, local or earthly things. Even when they take legal and earthly form and colouring by reason of situations and circumstances and events, they have a far

greater range than anything incidental, local, temporal, earthly. The range of these sufferings is no less than the spiritually universal. They reach out beyond ourselves, our circle, our lives, our time, and beyond anything here and now. I would use the word 'dispensational' but for its being perhaps misunderstood. Paul's sufferings comprehended the dispensation and are virtuous to-day after so many centuries, and have touched every realm of the celestial and the diabolical. These sufferings are more than just incidents in life, painful as they may be. They are set within a vast realm of significance and effectiveness. They are, in the main, the 'kick-back' of a vast and mighty system of antagonism to everything that is of Christ.

We must therefore accept the fact of such sufferings, and adjust to the spiritual significance of it. If you and I ever do get the idea that the Christian life is to be a perpetual picnic, we shall get ourselves into all kinds of difficulties and perplexities and disappointments. If we seek to escape from the sufferings of Christ, we are going to cut the very vitals of our spiritual worth-whileness. Take heed to that. We have to accept the fact that, being the Lord's here, our inheritance is an inheritance of the sufferings of Christ, and we must not seek to avoid them.

THE SUFFERING WITHIN THE SUFFERINGS

But then I used the words, the sufferings and the suffering; the plural and the singular. The

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suffering—that is, the suffering which is within the sufferings. Sometimes it is the suffering which brings about the sufferings. Take Paul, for instance, and the suffering to which he refers in II Cor. i. 8-10—“*our affliction which befell us in Asia*”. The word ‘affliction’ there is from a Latin root which means ‘a flail’, and it pictures the wielding of a flail upon the naked body of a bound man, bruising and breaking and battering; it is a strong word. Paul says that is what happened to him in Asia. “*Weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power, insomuch that we despaired even of life: yea, we ourselves have had the sentence of death within ourselves . . .*” ‘We had the answer to our enquiry; the answer was—It is death!’

Now, that is the suffering within the sufferings. You do not think for a moment that that was just a physical matter. A man who could go through all those experiences which are recorded of Paul, and who could say that to depart and be with Christ was far better, was not afraid of dying. Not at all! There must have been some suffering within the sufferings. “*Weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power*”: that was something inward; it was not because he was desperately ill and might die at any moment. What then is this? It may have been due to the report that came to him of conditions in Corinth, for it was at this time that he received the news of the terrible state of things in Corinth recorded in these letters, and he speaks of “*that which presseth upon me daily, anxiety for all the churches*” (II Cor. xi. 28). Even if it was physical sickness that assailed him, we know that sickness in the body is very often caused by grief of heart; the outward sufferings are sometimes the result of inward distress. Thus we have the suffering within the sufferings.

There is a spiritual suffering for Christ’s sake; and that which Paul speaks of in this portion as “the sentence of death”, though beyond our explanation, yet does seem to suggest that he got into a terrible state spiritually because of certain conditions. If I were to try to reshape this situation, I should say, Paul had received this terribly bad news about the state of things in the church at Corinth, with more perhaps from other directions as well, and he had gone down under his suffering and said, ‘Is it worth it? Is it not all in vain? Is it not an utterly hopeless situation? Am I not wasting my life in pouring it out for such people?’ When you start like that, there is no end. You can go down and down until waters of despair gradually close over you. You try to pray and you cannot, for a doubting man can never

pray. He may cry, but he cannot pray. A man who has let go to that sort of thing cannot pray; heaven is closed. And Paul, so to speak, interrogates himself and says, ‘What is the meaning of this?’ The answer is ‘It is death; along that line it is death; if you get down there, there is no way through and no way up; that is the end of everything—death!’

I am not going further with that to see how Paul came to the turning point and to the so great deliverance. That is not in our present consideration. My point at the moment is that death here was spiritual, not physical. He was tasting something of the real nature of death. Death is a sense of being excluded from God, of heaven being closed, of there being no way through and no way out, shut up and shut in, at the end of everything; and that registered in or upon your soul. That is more than physical death. Some of us more than once would have been glad to die physically. But this other thing is spiritual death, and it is terrible, it is awful: there is no gladness about that. To taste that is to know something of the sufferings of Christ. Those sufferings may be known along other lines, but we are not attempting here to define in detail the whole range of Christ’s sufferings, but only to stress the fact of them.

THE NEED AND VALUES OF THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

What is the point for us? Everyone of you will have to make your own application, for I do not know why I am led to this message: the Lord only knows His own wisdom. But there are some very practical matters bound up with this; and so we come to the second part of our subject, namely, the need and the values of this kind of suffering. Let it be settled with us once for all that the sufferings of Christ are an absolute necessity. I am going to say a very strong thing, and it is this—that if you know nothing about the sufferings of Christ, there is something wrong with you as a Christian. I am not, of course, speaking of such as have only just entered upon the Christian life, though suffering is sometimes encountered right from the first. But obedience and faithfulness soon lead to the experience of some form of Christ’s sufferings. If you are avoiding those sufferings, if you are rebelling against them, you are taking an entirely wrong line. They are the true lot of children of God. I do not say that you will each have them in the same measure or of the same kind, but you will have them. Ask the Lord if your bad times may not, after all, fit into this. You have been

thinking of them merely as circumstances, as disappointments, working out to your misfortune, your disadvantage. But wait; see whether these are not, after all, bound up with your spiritual life, whether they do not bear a relationship to your spiritual growth. Interrogate yourself, examine this question.

REALITY BY SUFFERING

They are necessary for several things; first of all, to keep things real, practical and up-to-date. The Lord is not going to allow any one of us to live upon a past, upon a theory, upon a tradition, upon a doctrine as a doctrine. He will allow us to live only on what is real and practical and up-to-date, and, being made as we are, we do not so live unless we are made to. I could make a lot of personal confessions now, but they would not be of very much value except by way of illustration. If I know even a little about the Lord and the Lord's things, I can tell you perfectly frankly it is because of suffering. I could not and would not have learned unless the Lord had made me learn, and taught me in a very deep and practical school where things were kept right up to date, and where every bit of ministry sprang out of some new experience. It is a law which applies to us all. The fact is that these sufferings are absolutely essential to keep things real; and you know as well as I do that people want reality. They have a right to say, 'How did you get to know that? Have you proved that? How much has that been to you in the deepest hours of life, when things were beyond your power? Did that prove to be true then?' If we are not able to say with all our heart in utter sincerity, 'I found the Lord to be like that in my actual experience; I have put that truth to a thorough test and proved it', then we are frauds. The Lord has no place for frauds; therefore He keeps us up to date. Reality is by suffering.

GROWTH BY SUFFERING

Progress and growth are also secured by this means. All nature declares it. Growth, development, increase, is by that expanding power which creates a creak and a groan and an ache within the organism; and in the spiritual life it is like that. We speak about growing pains. I believe that is considered to be unscientific now, but it is a very useful phrase. Yes, there are growing pains, and the sufferings of Christ in the members of His Body are related to growth. The difference is this, that in what we have called growing pains it is the grow-

ing that is actually taking place which causes the pains, while here, in what we have before us, it is the pains which produce the growth afterward. We grow by means of suffering, there is no doubt about it. Show me a mature spiritual life, and you show me the embodiment of much suffering of some kind—not always physical—a life which has gone through things. Paul found his turning point there—"that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead"; a new discovery from the depths. Where he touched bottom, he discovered God in a new way—"God who raiseth the dead". Such knowing of Him comes along that line. The values of suffering are there.

ABILITY BY SUFFERING

But then note what he says in this first chapter again—"God . . . who comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able . . ." Oh, there is a lot in that! That speaks of stock in trade, the means for service, does it not? We may often have bad times about our lack of ability in many ways, comparing ourselves with other people and exploring our lack of ability in this and that. Oh, for ability! But what is the greatest ability after all? The best and most fruitful ability is to be able to help people in the deep experiences of spiritual life; to be able to explain to them the meaning of God's dealings with them, to be able to show them what is intended to be the outcome of it all, to be able to give them some support by counsel which comes from real knowledge—some of that comfort which we ourselves have received of God. That is real service, that is building up the Body of Christ, the House of God—being really able, in a spiritual way, to strengthen the sorrowing. That comes through suffering.

Now, are you going through it, having a bad time? What are you putting it down to? Are you the Lord's? Is your life committed to Him? Then see if you really can rightly and properly separate between your bad time and your spiritual life. If you can, all right, just write it all off as the common lot of anybody else who is not a Christian. No, you cannot disentangle this. It is all bound up together. It is going to have an effect upon you, one way or other, either to spiritual increase or spiritual loss. But oh, let us adjust. If the sufferings of Christ abound unto us, they are the sufferings of Christ. They may be soul sufferings, they may be in the physical realm, they may be both combined, but the Lord is sovereign in these sufferings, to great, beneficial, valuable ends.

SUFFERING AND LOVE

I close by reminding you of this other word which the Apostle addressed to those Corinthians —“I wrote unto you . . . not that ye should be made sorry, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you” (II Cor. ii. 4). You cannot have love without suffering. The two things go together; and mark you, your willingness to suffer, your attitude toward suffering, will prove your love for the Lord. Many people are not experiencing the sufferings of Christ because they have not enough love for His people. If you

really have a heart love for a child of God, you are going to suffer for that child of God. If you have a heart love for the people of God, you are going to suffer for the people of God. If you have a heart love for a company of the Lord's people to which He has joined you, you are going to suffer for that company. If you have a heart love for your Lord, you are going to suffer with your Lord when you see His Name dishonoured and His interests reversed. Our love is the measure of our suffering. If our suffering is little, it may be the great wrong is that our love is too small.

T. A-S.

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of Beaten Work”

Exodus 25, 31.

“The Testimony of Jesus”

Rev. 1, 9.

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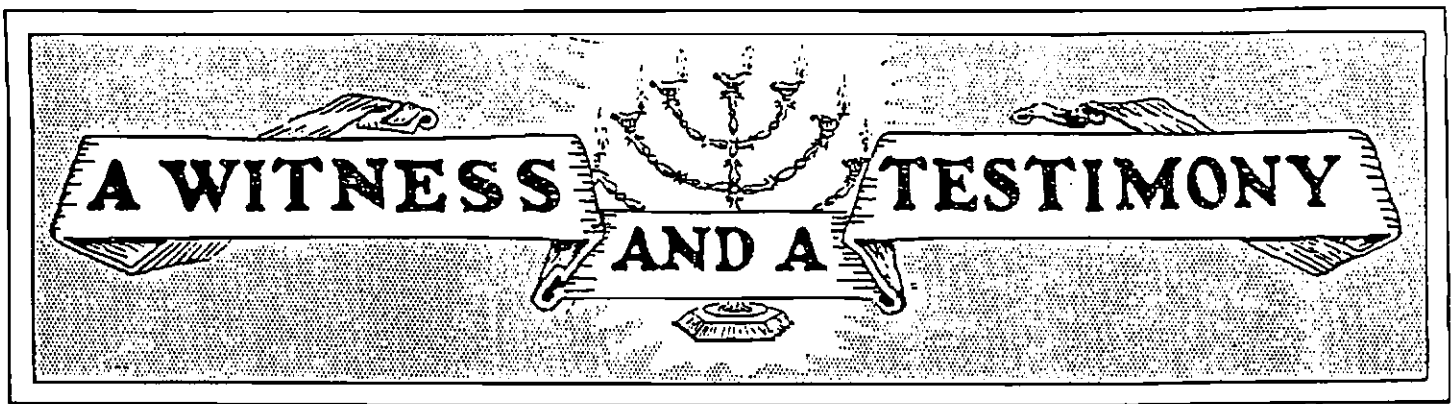
THIS MINISTRY

THE OBJECT OF THE MINISTRY of this little paper, issued bi-monthly, is to contribute to the Divine end which is presented in the words of Ephesians iv. 13 — "... till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge (lit. full knowledge) of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we be no longer children . . ."

It is not connected with any "Movement", "Organization", "Mission" or separate body of Christians, but is just a ministry to "all saints". Its going forth is with the prayer and hope that it will so result in a fuller measure of Christ, a richer and higher level of spiritual life, that, while bringing the Church of God into a growing approximation to His revealed will as to its 'attainment' it may be better qualified to be used of Him in testimony in the nations, and to the completing of its own number by the salvation of those yet to be added by the Lord.

This ministry is maintained by the Lord through the stewardship of those who value it. There is no "subscription", but gifts can be sent to the Editor, "A Witness and A Testimony", 13, Honor Oak Road, Forest Hill, London, S.E. 23, England. All cheques should be made payable to "Witness and Testimony A/c". The paper is sent only to those who personally desire it, and we count on friends to advise us if this is no longer the case, or if they change their address.

"Personal" letters should be addressed to Mr. T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.



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CONVINCING EVIDENCE

THIS MATTER OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

"By this shall all men know . . ." (John xiii. 35).
 "That the world may believe . . ." (John xvii. 21).

UNITY AS A PRIORITY IN WITNESS

SOME battles are lost before a blow is struck or a shot fired. Others are only partly won and much enemy territory unoccupied because of sabotage behind the campaign. To change the metaphor, which is quite in keeping with the matter in hand, some buildings which have cost much in time, labour, and means, become leaky, discredited and sometimes disintegrate, because of—as Ruskin puts it—a lie in the foundations. Sooner or later it finds the builders out. It is therefore a matter of considerable, if not absolute, importance that we have a right and adequate basis of assurance for certain success *before we start*. For, if a start is made without this basis, early reverse or arrest may take place, or at most some way will be made only to find that crippling troubles bring serious limitations and heartbreaks. The *full* end can never be reached if the beginning or basis is faulty.

Let us firstly look at this matter of Christian Unity as it is viewed to-day. That there is a real and considerable regret for the existing condition needs no arguing: there is! But while that is so, there are different or various reactions to it. Many feel that the situation is so far gone and established that it is just pure idealism and a counsel of perfection to think and hope for an adequate change. They have therefore surrendered to a counsel of despair and taken the attitude that we must do the

best we can under the circumstances and make the best of a bad job. Others have resolved the problem—to their own satisfaction—by saying that there is good in every part, however divided the parts may be, and we must take the good, make the most of it, and try to ignore the bad. Such a position carried to its logical issue could result in a rapprochement in the most diverse realms, and there is no end to it. There are yet others who take a purely spiritual position and say that we are "All one in Christ", and the earthly situation must be ignored. This is an unreal, unsubstantial position which evades or bypasses facts which are a contradiction to it, and still leaves the world without what Christ said is needed "that the world may believe". This does not mean that the last mentioned position is not the true starting point for the rest, it is, but it is not enough, and falls short of the world-convincing evidence. There are other more or less definite reactions to this situation, but they are all as superficial as those mentioned.

Many, taking one or other of these attitudes, because of the immensity of the difficulty, have decided that the thing to do is to get on with the job, be 'practical', and leave these matters to those whose inclination it is to spend time on them. For such it is not 'practical', but a waste of time, to go back to the chart room and make sure that, with all the good motive, the labour, cost, and devotion, we are after all on the right course or in a position to achieve the purpose. To return to the metaphor used earlier, it is of *some* consequence that we do not carry in our very make-up, though

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

not realised, the elements of defeat and disintegration.

Through the centuries and at this time in a very saddening way the work of God is handicapped in so many of its fresh efforts even before they are launched. In his sermon class, when students were preaching sermons with a view to advice and instruction on how to preach or *not* to preach, Mr. Spurgeon listened while a young man built up a sermon on "The Whole Armour of God". Graphically and with some zest the student pictured himself as taking up and putting on the armour piece by piece, and waxing more and more pleased with his effort he flauntingly cried at last, 'Now, where is the devil?' Mr. Spurgeon cupped his hands round his mouth and called in an audible whisper—'He is inside the armour!'

Is this not so very much the case in the Church on this earth? With all the grandeur of her message, the truth of her doctrine, the cost of her work, she is so largely defeated. There is something inside telling against her. The convincingness of oneness, real unity, is sabotaged.

The fact is that the Church—by which is meant Christians in their relatedness—is much more ready to do, launch out in, and undertake Christian work, than she is to secure the essential for its success.

But we must get to grips with the situation, for this is not an accusation, or mere statement of a case; we have to do something to at least indicate ways of healing of this open sore.

Let us look closely at the situation at the beginning. It is clear and needs no stressing that the mission and commission of Christ was to all the world. That means that, whether all the world would believe or not, the appeal was that "*all* should come to a knowledge of the truth". There were few, if any, new facts of an objective kind added to potential witnesses once the resurrection and ascension or glorifying of Christ were established realities. All the essentials of the message were in hand and a full Gospel could there and then have been preached. But the Lord "commanded them that they should wait . . ." The reason given was until the Holy Spirit should come and they should be empowered for witness. Yes, true, but we may be too superficial as to our apprehension of what that meant. We hurry on with a 'power' mentality, and do not look deeply enough to see what it means. The obvious things are taken to be all. Tongues, boldness, convincingness in proclamation, and such like things are regarded as being the chief marks of the Pentecostal baptism. But there was something more than pub-

lic ministry or verbal testimony with its manifestations bound up with the tarrying issue—the advent of the Holy Spirit.

THE PRAYER OF CHRIST

Christ had prayed about this witness to the world. The issue involved was the proof that He had been sent from the Father. He knew what the subsequent centuries have proved, that it would not get far with men—the world—to just preach that God sent His Son into the world; stupendous a fact as that was with all its implications. And whatever may be the other and accompanying features of the Holy Spirit's coming upon them, the fact is that, in His prayer, Christ concentrated upon one factor as fundamental to effective witness—the oneness of His own.

The convincingness of testimony, the impact and registration of heavenly truth, the evidence by which reactions would be judged, was—in His heart—behind the things said or how they were said; behind their courage and their ecstasies (which would sooner or later be turned down as fanaticism, psychological, etc.). That background to all else was—with Him—this, "that they may be one". His prayer went deeper and to the very root of all else. It is not good enough to say that He meant something that was a basic, spiritual, and heavenly fact without any manifestation and evidence to the world, or concrete earthly expression. We cannot, in all honesty, take refuge from the problem in such construing of His words. No, we have got to face the truth and the present problem and be perfectly honest in our dealing with it. The primary work of the Holy Spirit would be to constitute a "Body", and to *manifest* its organic oneness. All else would come out of this, and hang upon it. Apart from this all else would fail of fullness, and the measure of life and power, therefore of effectiveness and fruitfulness, would be governed by this oneness. Any injury to this would be a challenge to, and arrest of, life, and a contradiction to an undivided Christ.

When we take the deeper look we see how very true this was in those first months of the Church's testimony, and we are not surprised that to arrest or weaken this mighty campaign of victory—to say nothing of bringing reproach upon Christ—the great enemy saw that discord, division, and internal disaffection was the essential strategy. The more he succeeded along this line, so the more difficult became the work, the weaker the testimony, the less the authoritative, the more unconvincing the doctrine, the fuller the self-occupa-

tion, and so the straitening of resources, and the creeping in of other unspiritual methods and institutions. Men have had to take responsibility for, and bear the burden of, a whole fabric of organisation and its maintenance extra to that for which the Holy Spirit once took custodianship. Questions which arise and must be answered are—Did the Lord only mean a spiritual or ‘mystical’ oneness apart from—so far as the Church is concerned—an expression of it? When, at special times the Spirit has given a wonderful and convincing manifestation of this oneness and something akin to the beginning has taken place, many souls saved, all barriers between Christians completely out of sight as though they had never been, is this to be taken as the Divine idea for all time, or is it meant to be only in periodic visitations? Is it the heavenly normal, or abnormal?

Sooner or later such a situation arises, either between two, a local company, a wider body, or in the world at large, where *everything* for any future at all hangs upon a *manifestation* of mutual love, *spiritual* and expressed unity (not organised union!). Preaching and the “Work” may have to be suspended. Public meetings may have to discontinue. All the external may be driven from public procedure. Persecution and national laws may suppress all forms of organised activity. The very life and continuance of the testimony will then hang upon this one thing, spiritual and practical unity.

Having said that, we are committed to the main business in the present situation of assailing the problem, and here we must summon up all the honesty and courage possible. There never was a matter in the Church’s history which called for more honest and courageous facing than this one, for it makes the most stupendous demands; no less are these demands than is the magnitude of the established system which contradicts the Lord’s mind as expressed in His prayer. To proceed to the practical demands of the situation without defining the real basis of unity, and securing an adequate dynamic for action, would be foolish and futile. Therefore we must look at the spiritual foundation as we have it in the New Testament.

We have seen that the coming of the Holy Spirit upon or into the first nucleus of the Church, or the Church at its beginning, brought about an inward and organic unity and oneness which was more than—and basic to—any outward and objective expressions. The statement that Peter stood up with the eleven is more significant than perhaps we have recognized. It may have been spontaneous and undesigned; or it may have been the custom when preaching, but it at least indicates the dis-

missal of all reserve on the part of any one, and that they were really moving together in a spontaneous way. It was the impromptu expression of a common and corporate power and principle which had taken up inward residence and control. Given this inwardness of union by “one Spirit”, and fully recognizing that, before all else, they were baptized in one Spirit, and therefore themselves of one Spirit, we have our starting point. There is no hope for Christian unity, and Christ’s prayer cannot find its answer, apart from every Christian being definitely in possession of, and possessed by, the Holy Spirit. The absolute lordship of the Holy Spirit sets aside all other lordship. The meaning of this we have yet to show in our consideration of practical demands, but it will be hopeless unless this inclusive starting point is accepted and experienced. Too much is taken for granted on this matter, and sufficient concern must be felt for unity as to lead to real exercise of heart before the Lord that the Holy Spirit shall really be Lord and produce the fruit of His lordship. Thus, before all else, Christian unity is the result of a definite and mighty work of the Spirit of God in believers. When this is granted we look to see the first and predominant feature of this unity as manifested at the beginning. Is there one thing that can be seen and recognized as the hallmark of the primal oneness? We think that there is. It was

THE GLORY OF THE NAME OF JESUS

Spontaneously the one expression, unifying passion, concerted action, and characterizing feature was enshrined in “The Name”. Christianity was

NOT A NEW TEACHING

There is nothing in the whole story upon which to rest an argument or affirmation that the Apostles went out to the world with “The Teaching of Jesus”. They were not propagating new doctrines or a system of truth. Although they were charged with preaching a “strange doctrine”, they were really only affirming certain facts. To Jews they expounded the Scriptures. The doctrinal parts of the New Testament mainly come out of the acceptance of Christ, and were for the instruction of believers. Ninety per cent of the New Testament is for believers. The teaching was a result not a cause. The most the Apostles ever did was to substantiate their testimony from the Scriptures, and affirm certain facts concerning the person of Christ.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

NOT A NEW RELIGION

Christianity was not set over against or alongside of other religions and made 'comparative'. It was some time before some of the Apostles themselves realised the implications of their testimony in the matter of their being emancipated from Judaism. Great as the change was, they did not realise that they had changed their religion. They found themselves out and committed against their own prejudices, and had to do their thinking and discussing after the thing had become a fact in embarrassing experience. See Peter in the house of Cornelius, and the events of Acts x, xi, xv, etc.

NOT A NEW 'MOVEMENT'

No plans were laid. There was no policy. Pre-organisation was entirely absent, and any which subsequently had to be admitted was forced upon them by the embarrassment of the very vitality of things, and then it was of the simplest, and always spiritual, not merely official.

A thought-out campaign did not exist. To set up, launch, form, bring into being, or found a new society, sect, 'church', community, was not in mind. They did not set out for such, and although their testimony gave distinctiveness to all who believed, and outsiders labelled them and misinterpreted their motive and purpose, the distinguishing feature was life, producing an organism.

All-inclusively it was the proclamation and affirmation of a fact. That fact was—and is—the universal sovereignty and lordship of Jesus Christ as the Son of God established and vindicated by the resurrection from the dead; and this was, and is, all summed up in 'The Name'. Everything was "in the Name of Jesus".

The issue of the first preaching and response thereto was the command to "Repent, and be baptized . . . in the Name of Jesus". James seems to indicate that this was the time—i.e. the time of their entering into Christ—when that name was called upon them (James ii. 7, margin). This is in keeping with much in both Old and New Testaments as to the Church—or House of God—having His name put there. From that point onward there is a very comprehensive range of activities in the Name. Healing, prayer, preaching, agreement, being gathered together, authority over Satan and demons. It was "for the sake of the Name (that) they went forth". They rejoiced "that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name".

But with all the activity there was firstly the fundamental unifying bond of the Name, and then

the living, working, and having their conduct governed by the honour and glory of the Name. Our point here is that if the passion for the honour of the Name were as it was then there would be no room for other names which divide—whether of people or things, and there would be the most powerful dynamic for dealing with everything contrary thereto, especially division. The question which would decide every issue would be, 'Does this glorify the Name of Jesus?' If not, *nothing* must stand in the way of that glory. The Holy Spirit—the Custodian of the Name and its glory—would signalize His good pleasure by doing again what He did then.

Reverting to the prayer of the Lord in John xvii it is important to note that the matter of oneness has two phases. Verse 11—"that they may be one". Literally it is—"that they may keep on being one" (present active subjunctive). Verse 23—"that they may be perfected into one" = perfect state as the goal. There is a basic present state of oneness which is to be known, recognized, cherished, diligently preserved, by "all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love", for "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling" (Eph. iv. 2, 4). This procedure upon the basic oneness will issue in a being "perfected into one"; "till we all attain . . ." (Eph. iv. 13).

It is at this point that all the difficulty and trouble begins. Right here we find the gap in which the whole history of divisions began and has its occasion. Few will disagree as to the *basic* unity "In Christ", but few will agree that the *manifest* unity is as it should be. Between the two there certainly is a big gap with a tragic and grievous history. Argue as we may to justify much of it, if we are spiritually minded and honest we shall have to acknowledge that one thing is responsible for it: that is that

DIVISIONS ARE THE RESULT OF SPIRITUAL IMMATURITY

That can be said in different ways: delayed or arrested spiritual growth; a low and weak spiritual condition; a state of spiritual ignorance or unenlightenment; a failure to walk in the Spirit; a living in the "flesh"; a misapprehension, or a limited apprehension of the real nature and meaning of the new birth; a blindness to the real heavenly and spiritual nature of the Church; and, inclusively, not seeing the meaning and significance of Christ as in the eternal conception of God and heaven. These

are all matters of the most profound and vital importance, and they touch the issue of spiritual oneness in manifestation most positively. While in the Letters to the Ephesians and Colossians we have the Church presented as in completeness, and with regard to its calling, conduct, and conflict; with certain practical features of its life here: when we want to know something about its building we have to visit a locality like Corinth, for there we shall find all the cause of the situation in which the Church so largely is in our time, and the principles by which alone that situation can be changed. That divisions, contentions, jealousies, etc. are due to spiritual immaturity, or unduly prolonged spiritual babyhood, is definitely and positively stated there. The whole section of chapters one to four of the first letter to the Corinthians has to do with this; and chapter twelve is its remedy.

But when we have noted all the features of this condition, one thing is shown to be the key to everything—malady and symptoms. That fundamental factor and principle is the mind or mentality of those concerned, and the upshot or issue resolves itself into

THE DEMAND FOR A MENTAL REVOLUTION

what Paul calls 'the renewing of the mind'. It was the mindedness of the believers in Corinth that resulted in *all* the spiritual arrest and painful disorders. It was Jewish mindedness and Gentile mindedness, i.e. nationalistic (I Cor. i. 22, 23). It was man-mindedness, i.e. the mind of the natural (soulical) man (ch. iii. 3, 4; ch. ii. 14). The natural and carnal mind is continually set over against the spiritual mind in this letter. It is all a matter of the "earthly" man overshadowing the "heavenly" Man. It has not yet been sufficiently realised by the Lord's people that the natural mind is the realm in which the evil powers—Satan himself—have the foothold.

In Matthew xvi we have a most startling example. Peter, on affirming Christ to be "the Son of the living God" had been told that "flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father, which is in heaven". Only a few verses further on Jesus is found addressing the same Peter thus—"Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art a stumblingblock unto me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men". What a crash from heaven to hell! "My Father"—"Heaven"—"Satan"—"Men"—"Flesh and

blood". In this Letter to Corinth Paul contrasts the natural man with the spiritual, and the natural and "earthly" with the heavenly (ch. ii and xv), and says, "flesh and blood" cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. ("Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee.")

Satan is allied to the natural man, and when we live on that basis Satan can do his work of blinding and dividing. But we must remember that Paul was writing to *believers*, which means that believers can live on that "natural" level and therefore give Satan his ground for his evil work. What a large field of spiritual instruction this opens up! But we must come to practical points. It is the entire mentality which is responsible for the state of Christianity to-day, and evangelical Christianity as much as any other.

Let us be perfectly frank. The present organised system which Christianity has come to be has involved Christians and their leaders in a set of situations which make it—to say the least of it—exceedingly difficult to escape a false, totally false, conception of unity and division. The work of God has become very largely sectional under names, titles, and designations, which represent either doctrine, technique, country, method, or nation. It would not be difficult to arrange 'Churches', 'Missions' and 'Faiths' under such headings, but we refrain. If the reader will do it, the situation becomes obvious. But that is not all. The sections have their own clientèle. They must have their own personal and financial support. Funds must be obtained for their maintenance and development. There are many in them as 'ministers' and officers whose livelihood hangs upon the increase of the number of 'supporters'. The piece of work, the church, the undertaking just *must* be supported and kept going. Clientèle is a tremendous factor, relating to many other factors.

It is this crystallisation of Christian work into a fixed system, settled, and so generally recognized and accepted, *as to leave no place for any other*—any other being at once suspect—that has set up an entirely wrong and pernicious situation with regard to unity. It is the 'church', i.e. the denomination, sect, local congregation, mission, movement, form, order, doctrine (extra to the basic essentials of salvation) which now determine unity or schism. To leave one and go to another, altogether without a consideration for spiritual values is immediately named division, 'sheep stealing', etc. We are going to pursue this to its roots, and seek to lay the axe there.

T. A-S.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

"HIS GREAT LOVE"

V. GOD'S EVERLASTING, UNCHANGING LOVE

WE have been moving round a centre and viewing it from different angles, in different relationships. The centre is given to us in Eph. ii. 4—*"His great love wherewith he loved us"*.

GOD'S GREAT DECLARATION

We are now coming to look at one of the most amazing statements ever made.

"The Lord appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" or, as the margin gives the alternative rendering, *"therefore have I continued lovingkindness unto thee"* (Jer. xxxi. 3).

I repeat, that is one of the most astounding statements that has ever been made. To verify that, to realise something of that fact, you need to read all that leads up to it and that follows afterward. That is to say, you need to read the prophecies of Jeremiah throughout, and then to add to them some of the prophecies of other prophets. For the work of the prophet was very largely to point out how far, how terribly and tragically far, those being addressed had gone from God's mind, God's thought, God's will, God's way, and in what a terrible state of hardness of heart and rebellion—and worse than that—they were toward God. All that—and it is a terrible and dark story—gathers round this statement. "I have loved thee". At the time when they were in the very worst condition that ever they had been or would be in spiritually and morally, it was then He said *"I have loved thee with an everlasting love"*. Viewed in its setting, you must agree it is one of the most amazing statements ever made.

"His great love wherewith he loved us". We are baffled and almost rendered silent when we try to fathom and comprehend the word 'grace' in reference to the love of God. How great is God's love? Were we to spend our lives trying, we could never utter its depth or content. Yet here is a statement, and we have to do something about it. We have to approach it, to try to grasp something, be it very small, of this incomprehensible love of God, the mystery of it. So I shall adopt the very simplest method of trying to get into this word, just breaking up the statement into its component words.

THE ONE WHO MAKES THE DECLARATION

We will begin then: "I". You notice here the statement is really governed by the words "Thus saith Jehovah" (verse 2). Who is it speaking? To begin with, it is the One whose name is Jehovah. By that name He made Himself known to the Hebrews through Moses. But later that name became so sacred to Israel that they would not use it, and it was mentioned but once in the year, the great day of atonement, by the High Priest, as he went into the Most Holy Place. Just once in a year in the Most Holy Place by the High Priest the name was pronounced, so great, so awful, was that name to them. But what does it mean? Jehovah, the unchanging One, the eternal One, the self-existent One, existing not by anybody else's act or power or support, perfectly self-existent—that is Jehovah, that is the One who says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love".

But look again. It is the name of the One of infinite holiness, whose eyes are too pure to behold iniquity, whose nature is too pure and holy and altogether right to have any association with sin. You see how helpless we are when we try to deal with God and explain Him and define Him. These are statements, but if you and I, apart from some great provision of God to cover our sinfulness, were to come into the presence of that infinitely holy God, we should be shattered beyond repair. The infinitely holy God! It is He who says, *"I have loved thee with an everlasting love"*.

It is the name of infinite majesty, glory, might, dominion, power. He is very terrible in majesty, in glory, in power; and that One says, *"I have loved thee with an everlasting love"*.

And still we press in to this name. It is the name of infinite self-sufficiency. From time to time He has found it necessary to state that in various ways. *"If I were hungry, I would not tell thee"* (Ps. l. 12). He said to them of old. *"Every beast . . . is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills"* (Ps. l. 10). *"I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens"* (Isa. xlv. 12). *"The nations are as a drop of a bucket"* (Isa. xl. 15). 'Do I need anything or anyone? Am I, the creator of the universe, in need? Am I suffering want? Am I not utterly and abso-

lutely independent, self-sufficient, the only One in this universe who is self-sufficient? And that One, out of it all—His holiness, His majesty, His self-sufficiency—says, “*I have loved thee with an everlasting love*”. It is a mystery. Can you explain that? Can you understand that?

“ I have loved ”

“ *I have loved* ”. The very essence of love is ‘ I must have. I cannot do without ’. Here the word ‘ love ’ is just the common word that was used in all true human relationships. It is the word used of parents for children, of children for parents, of husband for wife and wife for husband, of friend for friend. Of the classic instance of the love between David and Jonathan, it says, “ *Jonathan loved him as his own soul* ” (*I Sam. xviii. 1*). “ *Thy love* ”, said David of Jonathan after his tragic end, “ *thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women* ” (*II Sam. i. 26*). That is the word here. Jehovah, infinitely self-sufficient, used that word concerning Israel. As the friend’s love for the friend must have the friend, and, as in every other true relationship, true love must have the one loved, must have the companionship, the fellowship, the nearness, so is Jehovah speaking about Israel. “ *I have LOVED thee* ”. Amazing love!

“ I have loved thee ”

Ah, but still more inward—“ *I have loved THEE* ”. Now we are at the end of wonder. At the beginning I pointed out the state of these people. Not only were they in a deplorable state morally and spiritually, deeply in sin; not only were they in this tragic plight; but they were in positive antagonism, rebellion, repudiation, killing the very prophets of the Lord who would tell them of their wrong. “ *I have loved THEE* ”.

Without anything positive in the way of opposition or antagonism or rebellion or stubbornness on our part, it is still the greatest mystery and wonder that He should love us. But think of this—‘ *thee* ’! Think again of whom that is said, to whom it applies. “ *I have loved thee* ”; and that, moreover, coming at the point where it did and at the time it did.

“ An everlasting love ”

“ *I have loved thee with an everlasting love* ”. You can never translate that word ‘ everlasting ’ into English. It simply means that you have got into the spaceless, boundless realm, you have fallen out of time to where time is no more. You have gone out into that mysterious something where nothing can be taken hold of as tangible, it is all

beyond you, beyond your grasp, beyond your calculation, beyond your power to cope with it and bring it into some kind of dimensions. That is the word: beyond you, beyond your time, beyond your world, beyond all your ways of thinking and working. ‘ I have loved thee with an everlasting, timeless, spaceless love ’.

Did you notice the alternative marginal reading to the phrase? “ Jehovah appeared of old unto me ”? It is, “ from afar appeared unto me ”—outside of our world altogether. He says, ‘ I have loved you with a love altogether outside your dimensions of time and space ’.

“ *I have loved thee with an everlasting love* ”. And strangely, the repetition of the word ‘ love ’ here adds an extra feature or factor. It is in the feminine, and it means mother-love. ‘ I have loved thee with an everlasting mother-love ’. Now, mother-love is one of the most mysterious things with which in ordinary human life we have to deal. You cannot always understand mother-love. You may look at a baby and you may see much that is not lovely about the child, but the mother of that child simply adores it. That is mother-love. That is the word the Lord is using here. The world would see nothing lovable—everything to the contrary—but the Lord says, “ I have loved thee with an everlasting mother-love ”.

HIS LOVE FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE NEW COVENANT

Well, we are touching the fringe of this thing, but you are perhaps asking a question. You are not gripped yet, because you say, ‘ That may be quite true as to Israel, but can we rightly and properly appropriate that? Can we step into that and say it is ours; that this same One says that to us? ’ You have only to read on to verse 31 of this same chapter to find your answer.

“ *The days come, saith Jehovah, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they break, although I was a husband unto them, saith Jehovah . . . I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it* ” (*Jer. xx xi. 31 - 33*).

Now do you not know that is taken up in the New Testament, in the letter to the Hebrews, and applied to the Church in this dispensation? Its fulfilment is there said to be not in the Jewish dispensation, but in the New Testament dispensation. That applies to those to whom the gospel of the grace of God has been preached, the new covenant:

and it is the new covenant, not in the blood of bulls and goats, but the blood of the Lamb of God, God's Son, who said, in the night in which He was betrayed, when He took the cup—" *This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many unto remission of sins*" (Matt. xxvi. 28). Are we in this? Oh yes, it is for us, the people of the new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ. Oh, if He could say such a thing to Israel, then if it is possible to say it with fuller meaning and greater strength at all, so He says it to us.

We have so much to confirm this in the New Testament. " *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life*" (John iii. 16)—that mysterious word, that age-outlasting life. " *His great love wherewith he loved US*"—that word was said not to Jews only but to Gentiles, and comes in the letter to the Ephesians, the letter for all men, Jew and Gentile alike. Or again, " *who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love*" (Col. i. 13). I could go on piling up Scripture to show that it is the same love as that love in Jeremiah xxxi. 3. It is the same God and it is the same love, and now it has expanded beyond Israel to embrace us.

Listen again then. This same God, no less holy, no less majestic and glorious, no less self-sufficient, says to you, to me, " *I have loved thee, I have LOVED THEE with an everlasting love*". " *His great love wherewith he loved us*". Are you impressed, do you believe it?

HIS CONTINUED LOVINGKINDNESS

What then? There follows the second half of the statement—" *therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee*" or " *therefore have I continued lovingkindness unto thee*". 'I have borne with you all this time because I love you; anything could have happened to you, but I have not let it, I have shown you infinite longsuffering and patience, and earnest solicitude for your eternal well-being: because I love you, I have kept you alive, and have brought you to this time and to this place; I have not let you go'. Oh, that this might come home to us! We may, all unconsciously be hearing this message now simply because of this infinite love of God which has been preserving us unto this hour to let us know it. You may think it is quite fortuitous that you are hearing it—just one of the chance happenings of life; but if you knew the truth it is this infinite love of God which has held you to this time in relation to the infinite purposes

of that love to let you know it. There is nothing casual about it, there is sovereign love here. 'Because I have so loved, because, self-sufficient as I am, I cannot do without you'—oh, mystery of Divine love!—'because I so much wanted you I created you, and now at this moment I am drawing you.' We cannot take that in, but that is the teaching of the Word of God.

We started these messages by pointing out that behind the universe, behind the mind, the reason, the plan, the design, there is a heart. The universe exists as an answer to that heart. To-day that heart in its love is bleeding. It has suffered a great deal of disappointment, deprivation; it has been robbed of its object—the wife has been unfaithful. But the Lord comes out in the presence of it all and says, 'I loved you and I still love you; My love is an everlasting love: therefore I have kept, I have preserved, and I have brought you to this very hour and I am telling you now that this is the position; there is no breach of love on My part'.

LOVE PERSISTING THOUGH SPURNED

But Israel went into a great deal of suffering and distress because they did not respond to that love of God thus expressed, and it looked very much as though the everlasting love was lasting no longer. But not so, it has never changed. You see, love has sometimes to change its form of expression, although in itself it does not change, and so we have another side to the revelation of God's ways with wayward and wilful man. Suffering, affliction and adversity to individuals and to nations and to the world is not because of a contradiction of the statement, that God so loved the world. It is the only way in which that love stands any chance of getting a response of the kind God wants. God does not want that kind of love that is not love at all because it gets everything that it wants to satiate its own lusts. That is not love. This love of God must make us like itself, it must be after its own kind.

And so, strangely enough, many have come to find the love of God through the dark way of suffering—to discover that God was not their enemy but their friend, when they thought that He was pursuing with the object of destroying them. But I am not going to follow that out just now.

I want to be content now with making that great declaration with which we started, doing the little I can to try to bring it home to you—who it is that says it, what it is that He says, the people to whom He says it, with the assurance that, so far as He is concerned, He will never take another attitude but love, even if it is disappointed love and

we ourselves should lose all that that love meant for us. To lose that and to know it would be our hell of hells. There could be no deeper hell than to discover all that was meant for you by infinite love, and to realise that by your own folly and your own stubbornness it has gone beyond your reach forever. What more of a hell can you imagine than that? I think that is the only kind of hell we need contemplate, whatever may be the full truth about it. For any one to wake up and have to say, 'Oh, what might have been, if only, if only I had done so and so! If only I had taken that opportunity! It is too late now!'—that is agony of soul, that is misery, that is despair. You see, it is the effect of love, Divine love's immense purposes, and we discover that it is now all impossible because we have foolishly rejected, refused, repudiated, gone our own way, stubbornly said No! to the Divine love. That is the dark side of this, but I am not going on to the dark side now.

Listen again, whoever you may be. If you know yourself only a little you must be amazed at this

statement, but if it does not come to you as the most wonderful thing that ever was or could be, there is something grievously the matter with you; that such a One should say to such as we, "*I have loved THEE, with an everlasting love*". May God Himself bring that home to us with something of its implication, something of its meaning and value, its glory, its wonder. If He should graciously do that, we shall be worshippers for the rest of our lives; there will be something about us that is in the nature of awe and wonder and we shall go softly. The realization of it will smite all our pride to the dust. There is no room for pride here. This will remove all those horrible things—pride, avarice, covetousness, self-interest, worldly ambition—and we shall be very humble, very grateful people, full of a great longing somehow to requite that love, somehow to win for that One His rights. This has been the motive and passion of many who have given themselves in the far places of the earth in a daily suffering for their Lord's sake. Love—a little return for this so great love wherewith He loved us.

T. A-S.

THE CHILDREN OF THY BEREAVEMENT

Reading : Isaiah xlix. 3 - 6, 14, 15, 18 - 21.

"For, as for thy waste and thy desolate places, and thy land that hath been destroyed, surely now shalt thou be too strait for the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away. THE CHILDREN OF THY BEREAVEMENT shall yet say in thine ears, The place is too strait for me; give place to me that I may dwell. Then shalt thou say in thy heart, Who hath begotten me these, seeing I have been bereaved of my children, and am solitary, an exile, and wandering to and fro? and who hath brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where were they?"

THE children of thy bereavement" is a striking phrase. It calls our attention to the wonderful way in which the grace of God can bring enlargement to us, even out of our deepest trials. Isaiah's words tell of terrible distress and desolation, so great that there seems no possibility of comfort, let alone recovery. Yet out of it all emerges an altogether new fulness and fruitfulness, so great as to be almost incredible to the one concerned.

FULFILLED FIRSTLY IN CHRIST

As in most cases of spiritual lessons, the first example of this is to be found in the experience of

the Lord Jesus. There is no path of sorrow along which we have to go that has not first been trodden by Him, and it is in Him that such prophecies as these find their true fulfilment. The opening words of the chapter can only refer to Christ, the chosen and faithful Servant of Jehovah, knowing that He has been called to do a work for God, assured of it, and yet, in His hour of trial and testing, when all seems to be darkness and failure, crying out, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and vanity". It is not likely that the Lord Jesus ever uttered those words, but they are very expressive of what He might have said at the time of His deep anguish. At that time everything which had been prophesied, *everything*, seemed quite impossible; it truly appeared that He had laboured and suffered in vain, that everything was lost, and even the Father had forsaken Him. Yet we now know that the darkest hour was followed, and followed almost at once, by the greatest and most glorious expression of Divine triumph that has ever been. Solitary, downcast, forsaken, almost in despair! God's answer comes back, 'No! Far from it! His sufferings were the birth-pangs of a large and satisfying family—the children of His bereavement.' It is not enough that He should only have realised the immediate task to be accomplished; there are bigger possibilities, nay cer-

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ainties, to emerge as the fruit of this dark hour. God's power is to be seen to the ends of the earth, and it is to be done through this very One who seems to be so empty and forsaken. Great enlargement is to come to this desolate, suffering Servant of Jehovah. This is the great resurrection 'afterward' of the Cross. It is a Divine principle. What a marvellous family Christ will have; a family, by the way, brought into being not by His teaching, not even by His working of miracles, but by His suffering. They are the children of His bereavement.

EXPERIENCED BY ZION

It causes us great joy and gladness to remember the wonderful fruitfulness which has issued from the trials and sufferings of our Saviour. The first verses of this chapter rejoice our hearts as we think of Him. As we move further into the chapter, however, we find that there is a nation following in the footsteps of its Lord. It is not now the solitary Servant but Zion which utters the sad complaint—"Jehovah has forsaken me; the Lord has forgotten me". The picture is one of a desperately lonely woman, abandoned by her husband, having lost all her children, crushed by the misery of her empty and desolated home. All is bitter sorrow and loss, she is completely forsaken. This is indeed the day of her bereavement.

Then, breaking in on the silence, there are voices, many voices; there is movement, much movement. Instead of the house being empty it is full, it is crowded, there is an enormous family. They are all on top of one another, eager, active, strong; all calling out, Mother, this! Mother, that! and Mother, the other! and then laughingly complaining, Mother you will have to have a new house, there is no room to move here, the place where we dwell has become too strait for us! Is she dreaming? With wide-open eyes she exclaims, Where have all these come from? "*Who hath begotten me these?*" I was solitary and bereft, where have all these children come from? "*Behold, I was left alone; these, where were they?*" Moffat translates this last question—"Can these be really mine?" Oh, yes, they are yours all right. They are 'resurrection' children, "*the children of thy bereavement*".

GOD'S SERVANTS NOT FORSAKEN

All who truly seek to serve the Lord will pass through something of this nature. They, too, will be sorely tempted to complain, "*The Lord hath*

forsaken me, and the Lord hath forgotten me". Of course it is not true. There are many promises in the Word which assure us that the Lord will never on any account forsake us. Even a mother's love is not to be compared with His love for us. "*Yea, these may forget, yet will not I forget thee*" (verse 15).

Why then does it seem that the Lord has forsaken us, for at times it certainly does? It is because the Lord is always the enemy of superficiality. When Zion is surrounded by her happy little family, with a certain sense of security and prosperity, there is a danger of her being content with a shallow experience of the Lord. Just to be enjoying the blessings of the Lord in a selfish and limited way, to be satisfied with a certain measure of fruitfulness, to be complacent about our knowledge of the Lord and our spiritual attainments, these are perils to which we are all exposed. The Lord does not willingly afflict us, but He does want us to have depth, inward spiritual depth, in our knowledge of Him, and He wants us to be much more fruitful. This explains why He often seems to deal so harshly and ruthlessly with us, even taking away from us the evidences of His blessing. We have a measure of success or fruitfulness which gives us great pleasure, and when these are taken away we feel very bereft and desolate. Has the Lord forgotten us? Has He forsaken us? For the time it may almost seem so, but it never is so in reality.

THE LORD'S PURPOSE OF ENLARGEMENT

And now the chapter goes on to speak of the gracious 'afterward' of enlargement beyond our wildest dreams. It is not only true that the Lord is remembering us, but that He has special purposes of love which He is pursuing. He is working in secret and in the darkness, and will one day surprise us with the glorious outcome of our trials. Like Zion we shall be amazed at the fulness and fruitfulness which the Lord has prepared when we thought it no longer possible. When we are tempted to feel that the Lord has forgotten us because the Cross is bearing upon our lives in a way which can only be described as bereavement, let us remember that the Lord's purpose is increase, there are to be children of our bereavement. He is not only seeking to move us away from a shallow life, with its little happenings and blessings, into a fuller and deeper knowledge of Himself, but He desires enlargement. His aim is an enlarged family. He wants the very walls, as it were, to bulge, and the cry to go forth for more room, more space for the Lord's bigger things. This is always the Lord's

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purpose in His dealings with His people—spiritual enlargement.

THE CROSS THE ONLY WAY

His means to this end is always the Cross. We cannot produce spiritual increase by our own efforts. Zion had her own little family and her own house. That represented the limit of all that was possible in her case unless the Lord took the matter up, and took it right out of her hands. The same is true in our case. With all our desire, with all our sincerity and effort we cannot bring about spiritual enlargement. This is a truth which has been largely lost sight of by God's people, who imagine that with more effort—if you like, with more prayer—it can be done. Zion herself could do nothing. When the children did come in their great numbers, with a glorious revelation of new and abundant life, it was not because of Zion's effort, not even because of her prayer in itself, but it was the fruit of her suffering and desolation. They were the children of her bereavement. Did not our Lord Jesus say, "*Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone*"? (John xii. 24). Did He not also say that if a branch bear fruit, it must be purged before it can bear more fruit (John xv. 2). And yet we are always so slow to enter into faith's appreciation of the Lord's purpose in sending us bereavement, namely that one day we may open our eyes with amazement, saying, Where did all this fruitfulness come from? How has all this been made possible? What is the explanation of all this new life, this mighty activity, this extension and enlargement? The answer will be that this can only be the work of the God of resurrection. Out of all our experience of death and desolation He has brought this new fullness. "Can these really be mine?" Perhaps there would be much more glory for the Lord in such surprises. We are pleased with what we are able to do. Are we ever surprised at what the Lord did when we could do nothing at all?

It is true that the way of the Cross is painful. This very fact so often hinders the Lord from pursuing His will in our case, because of our attitude to trial and bereavement. Apart from His grace, our attitude to testing is twofold. Firstly we hope and pray to be delivered from it, to avoid the suffering. Then when we cannot avoid the trial, we struggle and pray to get out of it as soon as possible. These are our two concerns, and while they are very natural they fail to appreciate the Lord's mind in the matter. His first concern is to get children of the bereavement. We are so slow to

trust Him concerning this. *It is not that the Cross is the better way than other ways; it is the only way.* So often circumstances and our reasoning seem to contradict this, but the Word of God is most emphatic on this point, and the example of the Lord Jesus is equally plain. This handing over to death is the only way of real fruitfulness, the only way of real enlargement, the only way of producing spiritual values which shall be great in the sight of the Lord. It means a breaking and an emptying. It may mean that like Zion we shall be reduced to nothing, but this will give opportunity for God to bring forth that which is wholly of Himself. Nobody will be more surprised than we ourselves. "Can these be really mine?" Yes, thank God, they are; and yet in a sense they are not, for they are all of Him. The Lord has shown us what great things He can do through our emptying. These are the children of our bereavement.

THE CALL TO FAITH

Baptism is placed at the beginning of the Christian life, and is really more than a mere declaration that now we belong to Christ; it is the basic, fundamental setting forth of committal to the way of the Cross. The one concerned not only comes forward to declare that now his only hope of salvation is in Christ, but in effect he says that he expects that henceforth his life will be fruitful for God, and that this fruitfulness will be the Lord's doing, and not the result of his own efforts. In order that it may be all of the Lord he willingly accepts the death of the Cross, which puts him out of the way and so makes room for that which is of God. From the beginning, then, we are really committed to this principle of bereavement of ourselves in order that there may be much fruit for the glory of God. Most of us have been baptised, yet how strange it seems to us, and how surprising, when we discover that in actual experience and in quite practical ways our lives become marked by sorrow and loss, that faithfulness to the Lord leads us to trial and suffering. How ready we are to think that there is some mistake, that the Lord has forgotten us. It is not that we doubt our salvation, but that we feel that something must have gone wrong in our Christian life. We offered ourselves to the Lord, to work for Him, and now we feel that we have worked for nothing, we have laboured in vain. We wanted to spend our strength for the glory of Christ and now we feel ready to complain that we have spent our strength for nought and vanity. It all seems so wrong, and yet perhaps it is all so very right. This is the way which the Lord intended

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from the first. It is not our labour which can produce the fruit, nor the spending of our strength which will bring about enlargement; it is our emptying, our undoing, our bereavement. The resurrection fruit will be the children of our bereavement.

This is a call for us to trust the Lord implicitly, and it is also a call for us to be uncompromising in our obedience to the Lord. It is always possible for us to refuse the way of emptying and apparent limitation. We may sit comfortable in our own

little house with our own little family, and never give the Lord the opportunity to bring us into His enlargement. We shall still be the Lord's people, but we shall never know the supreme joy described here for us by the prophet. On the other hand we may suffer the Lord to lead us into fellowship with Christ in His sufferings, to have a real experience of sharing something of His bereavement, and then to rejoice with Him over the fruitfulness and fullness of His resurrection. 'This is the way the Master went. shall not the servant tread it still'.

H. F.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

THE GOSPEL OF THIS HOUSE CALLED "ME"

I. THE WALL

DO you know what an idea is? Sometimes, when boys and girls are wondering what to do, one bright boy says, "I've got an idea". Then all that they say and do is the working out of that "idea". The book that tells us the meaning of words says that an idea is a plan, or aim, or intention that begins in the mind. Very few things have come from nowhere. Most things have some mind behind them. That is, most things have come from someone having an idea; someone thinking about them before they were made. Men have thought of a great many things and then made them. There are not many things started off just to see what will come. Wise people don't do that. There are many things that man has not made, and yet those things are just full of ideas. Someone must have thought about them, and if it was not man, who was it?

Now, I want you to begin these talks with an idea. It is this. These things which man has not made are just like riddles, or parables, or illustrations: that is, what you see is not all that there is in them. They mean a lot more than what we see. They are like sign-posts. When you see a sign-post pointing to some place, you have to go there in order to know what it is about; you don't say, 'I have got the sign-post, therefore I know the place'. Perhaps you like asking or being asked riddles. Sometimes you guess and guess, and then have to 'give it up', and when you are told the answer you say, 'Oh, how silly of me, I can see it now; and it was there quite simple all the time!' Well now, that is the idea with which we start.

But what is it all going to be about? Well, it is

going to be all about these bodies of ours; what the Apostle Paul calls "the earthly house of our tent" (II Cor. v. 1). Did you know that our bodies are just a great big bundle of hidden ideas? Did you know that they were just made to be object lessons? Did you know that every part of these bodies in which we live is not only something in itself, but has a secret meaning? Did you know that the One who made these bodies made them to teach us what He Himself is like, and therefore what He would have us to be? Of course, sin has upset God's order in our bodies, and made for many disorders, but still the body is a very wonderful thing and can teach us many things about God and God's idea for us.

In the old days men used to build cities like big forts. There were the houses and people and gardens, and all that; but there was everything provided to keep the city safe from enemies. A big wall all round: watch-towers, ramparts, draw-bridges, etc. I sometimes think that our bodies are like such a city, and so I am going to begin with the outer wall that goes all round us.

THE WALL OF OUR SKIN

There are a lot of very important and valuable things inside our bodies, and these have to be protected. Outside, there are millions and millions of enemies which, if they got inside, would soon do a lot of damage, and even kill us. These enemies are called 'germs'. (Doctors have another big name for them.) So, first of all our skin has been given to

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us as a great covering protection. It is tough, and will allow quite a bit of rubbing or knocking before it gives way. If it is broken by too much rubbing, as when you do some hard work with a spade, or with oars in rowing; or by a tumble, when you cut yourself; millions of little 'people' inside the skin, whose business it is to look after the wall, all get together and say, 'Look here, this won't do, the enemy will get in there, we must do something about this. We must mend that, and make good that weak spot with extra wall!' And so, if the damaged place has been washed and covered over, after a little while we find that the little 'people' have put a nice strong covering over the damage (we call it a scab). If we pull it off, the little 'people' get busy again and build up something harder still. That is why people who work hard with their hands have what we call 'corns' on their hands. Those enemies *just must* be kept out.

Then, again, the enemies are in the air and water. They come in the rain and the dust. So the skin is like a waterproof and dust-proof covering and keeps these evil things from getting in.

The skin has several other good jobs to do. One of these is to tell us how hot or cold it is outside. It just acts as a register of temperature. Thousands of little nerve-endings are in the skin, and so we feel everything there. A shock by burn or chill, and everything that we can feel is registered through the skin. In this way we get a continuous stream of communications and information from our 'Wall'. Warnings, advice, and a whole lot of knowledge for our safety coming to us every moment, so much so that, unless it is painful, we just don't give it serious attention.

We shall say more about this wonderful 'Wall', but let us get the 'idea'. What does this point to? Well, you see, the 'house' is not ourselves; we only live in it. We are the much more important people; just as the people who live in a house are more important than the house. This 'house' will go back to dust one day, and, if we really belong to Jesus, we shall have another house which will be different and never go to dust.

What the 'wall' of our 'house' is to our body, our mind is to us. I am not going to give you the words of the Bible on this matter; there is a lot about our minds, but I will just explain it quite simply. When we come to the Lord Jesus and ask Him to come into our hearts, He gives us a new

mind, like a new 'wall'. But it is just like Himself being like the 'Wall' to us. Through this new mind He tells us of the dangers to our real selves; of the evil and enemies that are wanting to get in and spoil us. If we have a 'tumble' and an opening is made for the enemies to get in, He gets things going to make us stronger at that weak spot than we were before. If there is extra hard rubbing and knocking about, He so works that we shall become 'tough' in those directions, so that our sufferings only make us stronger and able to resist the enemy more powerfully. In this way we are made to know His victory over our spiritual foes, and we come to understand those words—"The mind of the spirit is life and peace", and "Resist the devil and he will flee from you".

I am going to talk about telephones in our house later, but here let me just say

(1) Just as our skin is such a wonderful thing, and tells us that there is a marvellous mind behind our creation, so, when we are "born again", that is when Jesus comes to live in our hearts, there is a "new creation", and we are given this other wonderful mind, and behind it are all the marvellous thoughts and plans of God.

(2) Just as we should take notice of what our skin tells us: danger, hurt, evil; whether it comes gently as in "a still small voice" of 'a bit too warm' or 'a bit too cold'; or in the loud voice of a knock, a fall, a wicked attack; so we must take notice of that other voice in our hearts. We shall only let the enemy in to do his serious damage if we do not take heed to the warning; the watchman on the wall.

(3) But there are accidents, and just as we may receive a blow, or have a tumble, or in some other way be hurt; so, if we will take notice and learn the lesson of suffering, Jesus will get all His forces to work to make us stronger at that point, and build up a stronger defence, so that, what might have been our destruction is turned to be our strength, and we shall find that "All things work together for good to them that love God".

*'He will turn what seems to harm us,
Into everlasting joy'.*

'Interpreter'

(To be continued)

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

THE SERVICE OF GOD

"To serve the living . . . God" (1 Thess. i. 9)

I. THE SERVICE — WHAT IT IS

IF the service of God is to be as immediately and fully fruitful and effectual as it can be it is essential that we should have its nature clearly defined. If asked what the service of God is, many different answers would be given. Christianity has—on its practical side—been resolved into certain particular lines and forms of work, with their peculiar objects governing. Because the conception of Christian service has become so large and general it has become necessary to reconsider the matter and ask—What is really the Divine object in the service of God ?

(a) THE OBJECT

If we look carefully at the Bible as a whole with this question before us, we shall see that there is but one all-inclusive and all-governing answer. The work of God may move along many and various lines and have different aspects but the object is one. This one object determines whether the work is really the work of God, and also determines the measure of permanence and eternal value of what is done in the Name of the Lord. Even with the best intention of doing God service, there is very much that misses the mark and fails of the Divine object.

The one object is Christ. God has, all-inclusively, committed Himself to fill His Son with all things, and to fill all things with His Son. To bring Christ in, and to increase the measure of Christ, both extensively and intensively, is God's sole object, and co-operation with Him in this is the only true service of God. That "*he may fill all things*"; that "*in all things he might have the preeminence*"; that "*Christ (may be) all, and in all*", is the only service which answers to God's heart. This is a statement of fact, and it is also a test of work. In the Old Testament, everything points to Christ, and He is implicit in all things there. The significance of Christ governs all. In the New Testament this is explicit. Conversions are not ends and objects in themselves. Every new believer is a vessel of Christ. The fact in every "new birth" is that Christ has come in. But the Scriptures do not leave it there. The greater part of the New Testament is occupied with the increase of Christ in believers. That is the personal aspect. Beyond this

the Church as a whole is brought into view as that which is to be "*the fulness of him*". Then local churches are represented as vessels and vehicles of Christ beyond individual possibility and capacity. The whole idea of the Holy Spirit is to make the fulness of Christ a reality. All the conflict is related to this, for the Adversary knows that his kingdom is weakened and narrowed in proportion to the increase of Christ. The test of all Christian work will be its effectiveness in really enlarging the measure of Christ in this universe.

(b) ITS NATURE

In this dispensation Christ is not on this earth physically, but is only here in and by His Spirit. Christ cannot, therefore, be known in any other way than spiritually. Further: Christ is not, in this dispensation, seeking to set up something on this earth as attached to it. He is detaching a people from the world and the nations, and attaching them to Himself in an entirely spiritual way. Their birth is spiritual—John iii. 6. Their sustenance is spiritual—John vi. 33. Their knowledge of God and of His things is spiritual—I Cor. ii. 9 - 16. Their consummation is spiritual—I Cor. xv. 35 - 38. Everything is now a matter of spiritual measure and value.

So the service of God in this age is essentially spiritual. Not what can be seen, counted, or in any way appraised by the natural senses; but what is the pure and alone work of the Spirit of God is the criterion.

The trend of things since Apostolic times has almost entirely been to set up a world-system of Christianity; a Church that is something of temporal account and position. The immediate result of touching this cursed earth is discord and division. Only a Church on heavenly ground is the "*one body*" (see *Ephesians i and iv*). As is the Church of "*the eternal purpose*", so is its ministry, spiritual and heavenly; not 'ecclesiastical', formal, and ritualistic.

II. THE SERVANT

If the work of God is essentially spiritual, then it demands spiritual people for its doing; and the measure of their spirituality will determine the measure of their value to the Lord. Because this is so, in God's mind the servant is more than the work. If we are going to come truly into the hands

of God for His purpose, then we shall be dealt with by Him in such a way as to continually increase our spiritual measure. Not our interest in Christian work; our enthusiasms, ambitions, energies, or abilities; not our academic qualifications, or anything that we are in ourselves, but simply our spiritual life is the basis of the beginning and growth of our service to God. Even the work, when we are in it, is used by Him to increase our spiritual measure. Any Christian work which does not have the effect of adding to the measure of Christ in the worker is either not the true Divine service, or is itself working to his or her condemnation and injury. The Apostle Paul is a great example of how much increase of true spiritual knowledge and Christly measure is resultant from the very service of God itself, when the servant is a truly spiritual man. There are numerous other instances of this, both in and out of the Bible.

The Apostle's word "*not a novice*" (1 Tim. iii. 6) as to "*overseers*" would—if applied to all taking responsibility in the things of God—correct much that is weak and painful in organized Christian work. The lack of an essential measure of maturity has resulted in tragedy in many lives under strain, and many defeats in the work. Too often the devil has either weakened or destroyed the work and the worker by making the activities too heavy and exacting for the spiritual life to measure up. It is not truths stated, ideas set forth, doctrines preached, etc.; but the spiritual life, power, and measure behind it all that settles its real value and fruitfulness.

Again, because this is true, there is no end to spiritual growth in this life. We are really only getting to a position to be of some value, because of experience and understanding, when we are taken away. This would make life an enigma and something of a mockery were it not that the greater measure and nature of our service was to be afterward when and where "*his servants shall serve him. And they shall see his face*".

There is a dangerous tendency to commit the interests of God to the hands of those who do not really know Him in a deep way, and to regard those who have measure through much experience as incapable of meeting the needs of the younger generation. The New Testament would soundly trounce this superficial tendency as a peril to the Church of God. Years may not be the criterion, either way, but spiritual degree most certainly is!

III. THE TRAINING

Because what we have said about the servant and the service is so true, the training must be

above all things that which will produce spiritual men and women. Of course we recognize that this applies to all children of God who would serve Him in any way; but we are now having in mind such as may serve Him in more than a general way.

a. It is essential that there is a strong and sound grounding in the knowledge of the Scriptures. For every obvious reason this is so. But when we have given this matter all the place that it must have, it is necessary to point out that the letter of the Word is not enough. Lectures on the Bible, and analyses of its books will never make a true servant of Christ. The need is for a *spiritual* knowledge of the Word of God; it must be spiritually taught and apprehended. That which lies behind the letter as to the Divine mind must be seen. The teaching and study of the Scriptures must have immediate spiritual effect in the life of those concerned. The Word of God will only profit in so far as it comes to us in spiritual power.

b. There must be a practical life running side by side with the study work. This practical side should have two aspects at least.

1. There must be life as in a spiritual family, so that all the lessons of forbearance, patience, and co-operation are learned. The Cross must be known in the numerous and frequent occasions when the flesh in ourselves and in others rises because of human failures and faults. The great value of fellowship has to be learned in the testing conditions of life at close quarters over a sufficient period. The reality of the laws of "the body of Christ" has to be established. Dependence, interdependence, inter-relatedness, as over against independence, individualism, and detachment, are some of these laws which will mean in their observance or violation life or death, fulness or limitation in the Lord's service. Our object must not be to get adherents to Christianity, but to build a spiritual "body", therefore we must know 'body' life, order, and function.

2. There must be practical spiritual expression in our training, and the best and most directly fruitful way for this is assembly life. The training of 'workers' should be in close relationship with 'church' life as constituted and formed on the true organic basis of the Body of Christ. Not just a preaching place, or one where meetings are held and attended; but where there is true corporate life and mutuality in building up. In such, and out from such corporate life, ministry and service should be developed; not just technicians from an institute. No one should really be allowed to go out into whole time Christian service who has not had a true 'church' training and learnt the mean-

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ing and value of corporate life. God is not wanting so many units, either for salvation or service. He is set upon His Church as the corporate expression of Christ. Everything, therefore, if fulness is to be attained, must be on that basis.

To sum up. God is working in relation to His eternal purpose concerning His Son, Jesus Christ. The Church which is His (Christ's) Body is the predestined "fulness of him". This personal and corporate expression of Christ is not earthly, temporal, 'ecclesiastical'; not national, or sectarian, but heavenly, spiritual, eternal. The ministry of *this* corporate representation of Christ is essentially and

solely a spiritual thing, determined by its spiritual measure. (Spirituality is what is of God and not of man—even religious man.) While there are those things which are of value in furnishing the Lord's servants for the human aspects of their work, the real training is spiritual, i.e. the knowledge of God vitally, and of His Son, in the Word of God and in experience. Training for the service of God should therefore be solely governed by the object of producing men and women of a sound and strong spiritual life, with a background of a deep knowledge of Him. "the word of God" dwelling in them "richly in all wisdom and spiritual understanding".

T. A-S.

THE SILENCE OF SOVEREIGNTY AND THE ACTION OF FAITH

"And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before Jehovah. And, behold, Jehovah passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before Jehovah; but Jehovah was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but Jehovah was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but Jehovah was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice" (I Kings xix. 11-12).

"And he said, Thus saith Jehovah, Make this valley full of trenches. . . Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, and ye shall drink, both ye and your cattle and your beasts. And this is but a light thing in the sight of Jehovah: he will also deliver the Moabites into your hand" (II Kings iii. 16-18).

THESE extracts relate to two very well-known incidents upon which many messages from the Lord have been based, and there are truly many things in them of considerable spiritual value. But I want just now to concentrate upon one thing alone, and that not a new thing to you, but one which is with me in a new and stronger emphasis in my own heart in these days. It is, I believe, something of great value and preciousness.

A CRISIS RESULTING FROM HUMAN FAILURE MET BY DIVINE GRACE

In each of the instances of which we have read there was a crisis. In the first it was a crisis in the life of a prophet, and in the second a crisis in the life of a king. In both cases the crisis had been brought about by human weakness and failure. Elijah had inwardly collapsed and asked the Lord

to take away his life. In the second case, Jehoshaphat had made an alliance with Ahab's son. While Jehoshaphat himself was a man almost blameless in his own character, one of the outstanding men of God in the difficult years of the divided kingdom, yet he did some unwise things, one of which was this allowing of himself to be drawn into this agreement to go out in campaign against the Moabites. It was human failure which brought about the great difficulty, resulting in that which threatened absolute disaster.

But while that is true, and while the crisis in both cases was brought about by the weakness of humanity we have the triumph of the grace of God—a glorious issue from all, just because of Divine grace.

THE SILENCE OF SOVEREIGNTY

Now the point upon which I am focusing at the moment is the silence of sovereignty—the sovereignty in Divine silence—when the Lord's people are involved. There are times, of course, when the Lord breaks silence and comes out in a terrible manifestation of majesty and might unto destruction. But that is not His normal way, and particularly when a matter concerns His people and His servants. His normal way is silence. In both of these instances, as you see, there was a great silence which embodied tremendous power, and in which the mighty sovereignty of God was bound up. Really it is all a matter of the Holy Spirit in relation to the covenant purpose of God and to the Lord's honour; for I take it that that still, small voice, (or, as the margin has it, that voice of gentle stillness) is very typical of the Holy Spirit, if it was not the

Holy Spirit Himself. Then those waters which came down to save the situation in that terrible crisis in the life of Jehoshaphat are also typical of the Holy Spirit. But mark how silently they came. Not as in a whirlwind, an earthquake, a fire, but as in the voice of gentle stillness. "*Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain*"; indeed, they will see nothing until the event has happened.

How typical of very much of the mighty sovereign activity of the Holy Spirit! Take each of these instances. In Elijah's case the situation did seem to demand some tremendous demonstration of Divine power. Although there had been that wonderful manifestation on Mount Carmel, it did seem that Jezebel was in the place of greater power than Elijah at the moment. But how strange a thing this human nature is, how deceptive and desperately sick these human hearts are! When we have seen much of the mighty works of God, how utterly despondent we can become after all! and it is true, as James says, "*Elijah was a man of like passions with us*" (James v. 17). But put it round the other way, and it is just as true; we are people of the same infirmities as Elijah. Human nature is the same everywhere, and at this point at any rate it did seem as though a mighty demonstration of Divine power was the only thing that could result in the survival of the servant of God and of what he represented, the Lord's covenant purpose—yes, some sovereign act, unmistakable in its clearness of definition, something that no one could fail to acknowledge as an act of God that had saved the situation. Sometimes it seems that such a thing is the indispensable necessity and irreducible minimum. God must now do something that perhaps He has never done before. It can be true of our own personal spiritual experience, true of the work of God with which we are bound up, and true as to the whole testimony of the Lord involved in the world. It might just now be something like that with many people on this earth, that all is going to the enemy, all is being lost, and a mighty inbreaking on God's part seems the only hope.

A CRISIS OF ENLARGEMENT

Well, it seemed like an end for Elijah—and I would not like to have been the man to argue with him at that point; I am perfectly sure I should not have moved him or persuaded him that things were not as bad as he believed. No, it was settled for him that this was the end: the best thing would be for him to die. But what so strongly and desperately seemed like an end was really a crisis of enlargement, as represented in the emergence of

Elisha. There is no doubt about it that Elisha was an enlargement here upon Elijah, receiving the double portion of his spirit and carrying on his work in a mighty enlargement, and it all issued from this very point of apparent hopelessness.

Well, how was this really a crisis of enlargement? It was not by a hurricane; God did not just sweep in at this point with the irresistible wind carrying all before it. It was not in an earthquake, upheaving and overturning everything, shattering and breaking. It was not in a fire, consuming and burning and destroying. The crisis of enlargement did not come in any of those ways, or in anything like those things. It came in a voice of gentle stillness, a still small voice.

Pass on to the other incident in the life of Elisha. Here we have the emergency which had arisen by reason of those who were the Lord's embarking upon this campaign against the Moabites, through the foolishness of an unequal yoke, a forbidden association, an alliance with the household of Ahab and Samaria. Well, Jehoshaphat and Jehoram went to the battle, and in the wilderness their water supplies gave out and disaster was imminent. The whole of their army—and it would seem that Israel and Judah had put all their available resources into the field—was involved in this terrible threat. You know what happened. Jehoram exclaimed, 'God has brought us out to destroy us'. That is the reaction of unbelief. When we get into situations such as this, there is always that within us which will say, 'The Lord is against us, He intends to make an end of us now'. Jehoram took that attitude; but Jehoshaphat, a man of God, turned to the Lord. He called for a prophet, and through the prophet the Lord gave His instructions regarding the digging of ditches, and a promise of deliverance.

THE CALL TO FAITH TO ACT

In such a situation the call is to faith to act. Faith is called upon to act when all seems hopeless. Here God is not accepting passive 'faith'. He calls for action, the action of faith. But the valley was there, and what do you want more than a valley if you are going to have a river? The natural situation seemed to be sufficient to provide God with a channel. But no, God is not just accepting it like that. He says, 'You dig, even in the valley; there is something extra called for from you; make ditches in the valley'. That seems superfluous and unnecessary: the situation itself is surely enough and provides the Lord with a ground. No, that is a passive attitude. You have to do

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something in faith in this situation. You see the point. So often we are in a situation which seems to provide a most suitable opportunity for anything the Lord can do, which itself constitutes ground for His intervention. What more does the Lord want? He wants some action on our part right in the midst of it—faith's action.

How often a new, practical committal has been God's way when all seemed lost. Some of us remember in the first World War, when the whole situation was desperate, when the French were well-nigh overrun, when the enemy was carrying everything before him, and the slaughter was terrible. Field-Marshal Haig was asked, 'What are you going to do?' and his answer was, 'I am going to take the offensive'. He did so, and turned the whole course of the battle. When it seemed hopeless, he took the offensive: and very often that is what the Lord calls for, when things are like that. He calls upon us to do something; not to throw up our hands and say that the day is lost, but in faith to do something. They had to make ditches in the valley.

FAITH NOT SET ASIDE BY GRACE

The lesson of these incidents is very patent. Do we face a seemingly hopeless situation—and one which can even be put down to our foolishness or weakness or failure, and in which there is a good deal for which we can blame ourselves if we are inclined to? Well, the grace of God still abounds, and says, 'Nothing is hopeless if you are Mine. However badly you may feel about your own weaknesses and mistakes, and however impossible and hopeless you may feel the situation to be, you are Mine, and My covenant purpose is bound up with you, and therefore nothing is finally hopeless.' But you have to believe that, and you have to do something about your belief; you have to rise up and act in faith.

So these soldiers turned to digging, digging ditches in a valley, doing something that seemed to be unnecessary; and the result was that there came waters. From where? Well, there came waters, that is all. No sound or sight of rain, no sound of wind, nothing ocular and nothing aural, but a quiet, silent movement of the Spirit of God. It just happened, as we say; and our history is going to be very largely like that.

Why am I saying this? Because we are so often found looking for, praying for, expecting, some

mighty, shattering intervention of God in our situation, something that is evidence and proof that God is with us, something we can lay hold of, to which we can point and on which we can report; and such does not happen. Again and again when we have passed most critical points in our history and turned most serious corners, we have had to say, 'How did we do it, how did it come to pass?' Well, it just happened. It undoubtedly involved very great power on the part of God, and there is no doubt that, if God had not done it, that there would have been disaster; yet it is done. But how? We thought the Lord must come this way and that, and we were telling Him what He must do; but He never came by our way, never did it like that at all. It, so to speak, just happened. We are going on like that. It may be from time to time the Lord will show His hand. He is the God of the sudden leap as much as He is the God of the long process, but normally the way of faith is this way. Silently, almost imperceptibly, without any power to detect that He is doing it, the needed thing is being done.

And it is not just that we get over the stile and continue across another field until we come to another difficulty; it is a way of enlargement, and God is enlarging in this way, silently, almost imperceptibly. He is going on with His covenant purpose. That is the larger part of the Church's history. If we could read the whole history of the Church now, we should find that while there have been times when God intervened in wonderful ways, they are much fewer than those periods in which He silently and hiddenly worked and did marvellous things, both keeping His Church from destruction and also maintaining it in the way of enlargement. That is the story of our own inner experiences also.

If you are expecting the Lord to do some extraordinary, miraculous thing in your situation, it may never happen. But what God does intend will happen if we will believe Him and act on our belief. That does sometimes mean a launching out on to water where it would be easy to sink if it were not for the Lord. "*Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, and ye shall drink*". And "*there came water*". That is all. Not in the hurricane, the earthquake and the fire, but the voice of gentle stillness. They turned the corner, they got through the crisis. "*Go, return . . . Elisha . . . shalt thou anoint . . .*" (1 Kings xix. 15, 16). The answer of God to such a situation is not less but more.

T. A-S.

FOR THE SAKE OF THE NAME

"For the sake of the Name they went forth" (III John 7).

"... the world hateth you ... they will also persecute you ... But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me" (John xv. 19 - 21).

THAT portion in the Gospel throws light on the statement in the epistle, and shows that it was ignorance as to who it was that bore the Name that led to the persecution of the servants who sought to honour the Name.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAME

We do not realise how little that name Jesus meant to the world, and especially to the Jews, in those days. It was a very common name, and for the people of those days there was little to discriminate between one Jesus and another. How different it is with us! What a shock we should have if to-day a father named his boy Jesus! We should say it was blasphemy! Why is this? Well, what a lot has come to be known as included in that name! What a lot that name now represents for so many in this world! The result is that we can hardly think of anybody else being allowed to have that name. We now reserve it for One only; but not so then. That which you and I know to be compassed by that name had to be made known, had to be established. It was entirely unknown and unrecognized, and it was the whole work of the Church to make known what lay behind a common name held by an uncommon person; for there was nothing common about One who was called by that name at that time.

Now Christianity as a whole, its full content, has been gathered up in small phrases. In New Testament times it was like that. For instance, the very name Christian was a most comprehensive thing. It came about also that they summed up the whole of Christianity in a little phrase, "the Way". Paul went on his journey to Damascus with authority from the High Priest to arrest any he found that were of "the Way" (Acts ix. 2). He said, "I persecuted this Way" (Acts xxii. 4), and again, "After the Way which they call a sect, so serve I the God of our fathers" (Acts xxiv. 14). At Ephesus "there arose no small stir concerning the Way" (Acts xix. 23). So you see, everything of Christianity in those days was gathered up into this phrase, "the Way".

In exactly the same manner Christianity became

gathered up into this phrase, "the Name". It was Christianity. "The Name" carried everything that Christianity meant for the world in those days. It became therefore the very concern of Christians to make known the fulness of the meaning of that name, the uncommonness which lay behind it. Yes, that was the great concern—not to make a name, not to seek a name, not to have a name, but to make known *the* Name. This we find they did in several ways.

TESTIMONY TO THE NAME

Firstly, by testimony. Everywhere they testified in the name and to the name of Jesus. It was the universal and spontaneous ministry of the Church. So much had they found in Him who bore the Name, so much had it become to them, that it was to them an exclusive name, a unique name, no matter how many others might be called by that name. For them there was really only One who had that name, and so much was it so, that everywhere they were bearing testimony to Him who bore it. They were saying, "This Jesus"; "Jesus of Nazareth". How something very common and well-known became invested with something beyond all knowledge, beyond all that is ordinary! How heaven became bound up with something which amongst men was nothing in particular!—and they had seen what heaven's estimate of the Name was. Yes, truly for them they could say 'How sweet the name of Jesus sounds!' Everything for them in their own hearts and lives was bound up with the Name, and so it broke out in testimony everywhere.

That is a simple statement, but what I am really throwing out by way of challenge to our own hearts is this, that all real ministry is testimony, and there is no particular class set apart for that. The ministry springs out of the preciousness of the Name, the value that has been brought to our own hearts and lives in the name of Jesus. If you and I have no ministry and no testimony, then it is because He is not as precious to us as He should be. It cannot be otherwise. Oh, no, this is not a legal obligation, something put upon us that we must do—that if we are Christians we must confess Jesus, we must speak about Him, we must tell people, and have a bad time if we fail to do so. That is a wrong realm of things. With them, the very heart-union with Him and the preciousness of His name resulted in testimony. It was spontaneous.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

SUFFERING FOR THE NAME

Then it expresses itself in suffering. It was said concerning Paul at his conversion, "*I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake*" (Acts ix. 16). Again, of the disciples it is recorded that they rejoiced "*that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name*" (Acts v. 41). You may know something of suffering for the Name, but it is here that our heart-relationship to the Lord is really put to the test. There are numerous ways in which we may suffer, but suffer we shall if that name is upon us. Whether we accept the suffering or shirk it may be another matter. Whether or not we yield under the pressure, and compromise and lower our standard, will prove how much the Name is to us after all. For the sake of the Name they went forth in testimony. For the sake of the Name they went forth in suffering. It came upon them: they were called to suffer for the Name.

LIVING ACCORDING TO THE NAME

Then the Name determined their manner of life. What a strength it was to them that the Name was so much, what a safeguard, what an inspiration! This lay behind their manner of life, their character, their conduct. I think we often need to be checked up here. You see, our very character, demeanour, behaviour, everything about us, can either honour or dishonour the Name. This is not too low a level upon which to speak. We want to watch, because there are always those who, inspired by the great defamer whose sole object is to dishonour our Lord, defame Him by any possible means. Satan is always provoking people to watch those who bear the Name and to come at once upon anything that they judge to be out of keeping with it. This can touch us in countless ways and at countless points. To be slovenly, slipshod, careless, in our behaviour, our talk, our dress, our deportment before people, all of this touches the Name. There is so much that tells us that we are to commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God (II Cor. iv. 2). We are not to order our conduct merely in the light of what we think to be all right and unharmed, but in the light of what the world looking on may say about it, and of how others may interpret what we do. It is the Name that is involved.

I said this is a great strengthening and safeguarding thing. It is also an objective thing which can take us out of ourselves. We may have our bad times spiritually and go badly down under trial—

it may be physical, it may be circumstantial, it may be a direct assault by the devil himself; but then how often have we taken ourselves in hand and said, 'Look here, now, do not forget the Lord's name! Other people are watching, they are taking note. It is the Lord's name that is at stake. Pull yourself together, however badly you may be feeling; anoint your face, appear before people as though it were otherwise.' We have to slay out of hand that element of self-pity, that drawing of attention to ourselves. There are times when for the sake of the Name we are to go before people with our faces anointed while our hearts are breaking. Otherwise others may lose heart, may despair, may find something in us which they are looking for to support some doubt of theirs; and we must not feed that sort of thing. God help us, it is not easy; but that is suffering inwardly for the sake of the Name. How many tragedies there are in the background of lives which no one else knows anything about except the Lord. The face is kept strong for the sake of the Name, by the grace of God. It must be like that.

JEALOUSY FOR THE NAME

I am trying to emphasize one thing, namely that "*for the sake of the Name they went forth*"; and for them that meant that before men they were going to be a credit to their Lord. They were going to live and conduct themselves so that no one should be able to cast dishonour upon the Name because of them. They were going to suffer much persecution for His name's sake, but in their meekness, their unoffendedness, in their selflessness under suffering, yes, in the triumphant joy of their Lord even when their hearts were very heavy, they would all the time be firstly considering the Name; not, 'How bad I am feeling, how hard my lot is', but, 'I must be careful for the sake of the Name'. That is the message.

It is an attempt—as I think the Lord has laid it on my heart—to bring us in a new way to a place where the name which is called upon us is seen to be a glorious name, a triumphant name, a beautiful name. I could say very much more from the New Testament about that name. It is the name of supreme authority, and so they went forth to make known its authority. Their proclamation was, Jesus Christ is Lord! They did not use the Name merely as a charm or a talisman with which to do things, or for their own glory. No, it was through faith in the Name that the Holy Spirit worked wonderful things for the glory of Him whose name it was. It was the name of authority; it was the name of matchless beauty; and oh, so much more!

SOME PRINCIPLES OF THE HOUSE OF GOD

Reading: Psalm cxxxii.

"Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem on mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto David his father, which he made ready in the place that David had appointed, in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite" (II Chron. iii. 1).

THERE is much related Scripture which we ought to read, but must only refer to as we proceed, because of our limited space.

It needs no arguing amongst us, I think, that the centre of God's presence among men, namely, the house of God, is a matter of first importance. I have said the centre of God's presence, for the house of God embraces and relates to everything else which is of concern or interest to the Lord. The house of God is within a wider range of God's interests and concerns. Ultimately there will be wide ranges to which it ministers, to which God manifests Himself through it. It is the centre of His presence.

From a consideration of its great type here in the Old Testament, the temple, we are able to learn something of the principles which constitute the foundation and basis of that central dwelling place of God.

THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

The passage which we have just read is a key to so much, both historically and spiritually. I begin by pointing out again that the first principle of the house of God, the dwelling place of the Lord, is the triumph of faith and obedience when all else has been brought down to the dust. All Abraham's hopes and expectations, and the promises of God and the covenant of God with him, centred in Isaac. Beyond and apart from Isaac, Abraham had nothing. And then God said, "*Take now thy son . . . Isaac . . . and offer him . . . for a burnt offering*" (Gen xxii. 2). In the words from Job: "*Lay thou thy treasure in the dust*" (Job xxii. 24). And the writer to the Hebrews makes a point of that—that he in whom all the covenant and promises were centred was being offered up by Abraham (Heb. xi. 17, 18). Looked at from one side only, Abraham was severing the very arteries of life, parting with everything of hope, prospect, possibility; all was, from that standpoint, brought to ashes. But for the intervention of God, Isaac would very soon have been reduced to ashes. In effect he was. So far as Abraham's heart attitude and obedience were concerned, Isaac was already in ashes. The

wood was there for kindling, the altar and the knife were ready. But faith triumphed through obedience, and that very mount Moriah subsequently became the site of the temple, the house of God. The house of God is built on that sort of thing.

This foreshadows Calvary. From purely earthly standpoints Calvary was the end of all hope. It was a laying of treasure in the dust; it was ashes; it was an end. We know how it was for those around that Cross: it seemed the end of everything. But on the part of the one central figure of that great universal drama it was faith's obedience unto death, yea, the death of the Cross; and the house of God was and is built upon that. It is a principle. It is the great reality, the great doctrine of Christ. But it is of practical application, namely, that the house of God can only be grounded and founded and built as that sort of thing goes on.

THE LAYING DOWN OF LIFE

A related principle is the continuous laying down of its own soul by the Church, letting go of its own life in obedience and in faith, when all is dark, when all seems hopeless beyond. Some course of obedience is required, calling for us to do that which seems to be without prospect or hope, and which involves, therefore, the laying down of our lives, of our souls. It is the way of building. It has ever been like that. When young men and women have given up all the prospects of this world and laid their treasures in the dust and gone forth at the command of the Lord, they have laid everything in ashes so far as this world's hopes and prospects are concerned. The Church has been built in that way. Even when it is not like that in great acts of life's vocation, it is a daily thing, a letting go of our own interests in obedience to the Lord, in faith in the Lord. It is thus the building goes on. I could work that down to very fine points and show how often the house of God is delayed and arrested in its progress by the withholding of something on which the Lord has laid His finger and said, 'I want that'. However, there is the general principle, the triumph of faith through obedience when all is in the dust. Abraham believed God, and that great triumph provided God with the site for His temple, the great example and type of that spiritual house which is central to the fulfilment of all His purposes. God dwells in that sort of thing. But that central thing has to go through the depths. That which is the very heart of God's

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

presence, to which He commits Himself, has to know stripping more than others. This involves a deep work where faith is brought to perfection through very deep testing.

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD
IN HIS SACRIFICIAL LOVE

Alongside of that there is that factor of perfect fellowship with God in His sacrificial love. We have often made that point when speaking of Abraham's great step into the heart of the One who withheld not His Son, His Well-beloved, but freely gave Him up for us all. It was indeed a movement right into fellowship with the sacrificial nature, the giving unto cost, of the love of God. That is the only way in which the house of God is established. There has to be a giving unto cost because of love. It is quite evident that Abraham loved God more than he loved Isaac, dear and important though Isaac was. Abraham saw that to obey was of greater importance than even to keep this tremendous treasure; and that is love. That is what the Bible calls the fear of the Lord—that element of fear in love. I am sure you know what that means. If there is someone of great account to you, and whose love you esteem very highly, you are always very sensitive about causing that one disappointment. That is the nature of the fear of the Lord. Abraham feared God. The house of God is built upon that kind of fear. It is of very practical and everyday meaning—the love of God in our hearts leading to costliness in our sacrifice, our giving.

THE GLORY OF MAN ABASED

Then passing from Abraham to David; this threshing floor of Ornan, the site of the temple, represented and stood for the undercutting of Satan's man-glorifying work and the deep abasement of man himself. You remember that Satan incited David to number Israel—a thing which even a carnal man like Joab could see through, for he said, "*The Lord make his people a hundred times as many as they are: but, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? why doth my lord require this thing? why will he be a cause of guilt unto Israel?*" (1 Chron. xxi. 3). The Lord has done very much, and will do more, but do not begin to count heads, to take account of how big your resources are and to glory in the greatness of your kingdom. Joab was a carnal man, but it seems that some carnal men sometimes see more than Christians do as to principles. But David set aside Divine wisdom and good human wisdom,

and insisted on the numbering of Israel. You know the result. All came from Satan's prompting of David to do something which would glorify man and make much of his resources and achievements. The Lord came out and smote it hip and thigh, and that Satanic work of glorifying man was undercut and man was deeply abased. David was a sorry picture when he came to the threshing floor of Ornan. Oh, that man is now humbled to the dust! This has to be done before there can be any building of God's house. Satan's work to make much of man has to be completely undercut. The glory of man, and man's desire for any kind of glory for himself, have to be abased. This is a house for the name of the Lord and for no other name in heaven, in earth, or in hell. "*My glory*", says the Lord, "*will I not give to another*" (Isa. xlii. 8). The Lord does that all the time. Oh, the horrible display of human flesh in the realm of Divine things! Oh, the reputations made in the realm of what is of God! Oh, the delight to have a place in the Church! Oh, how often this flesh is active for its own pleasure and gratification! The Lord is hitting it hard all the time, driving hard blows to ensure that His house is on the right foundation, not on anything that is of ourselves. It does come home to us.

"*Lord, remember for David all his humiliations*" (Ps. cxxxii. 1). That last word is more accurate than the one used in our translation. "Afflictions" is the word in the text, but that does not convey the true meaning unless you add other words and say, 'The afflictions with which he afflicted himself'. He is saying, 'How I humiliated myself! I would not allow my eyes to have sleep, I would not allow my bed to entice me, I would not enjoy my own house; I humiliated myself, deprived myself, in order to find a place for the Lord'. And the Lord does require that humiliation. He brings about this breaking down of man in order that the house should be rightly based. That explains His dealings with us. He will not let us be anything. If we are really to be the dwelling-place of God, then we are to be nothing in ourselves. Do not look for reputation, do not try to make an impression, do not stand on your own dignity, do not do any of those things in any way whatever which will give you prominence, with people and make them think something of you. It will not pass with the Lord. So let us get rid of it, every bit of it, and recognize what we are in God's sight. He is going to bring that about; so if we try to make people think we are other than we are in order to get an advantage, we are contradicting the principle of the house of God. All self-impor-

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tance must go, and all desire for recognition. All that sort of thing has to be wiped out. The house of God is not founded on that. God will not have it. Man is abased, and all the other is the devil's work. It comes from him in whose heart pride was found.

THE MEETING OF MERCY AND JUDGMENT

Then, let me remind you that the threshing floor of Ornan, the site of the temple, was the place where judgment and mercy met. We sing

'With mercy and with judgment
My web of time He wove'.

There must be judgment. It was so in the case of David. But judgment is only one side. Judgment and mercy met on that threshing floor that day and kissed each other, and the temple resulted. Judgment has to begin at the house of God, but, thank God, it is not judgment unto utter destruction. It is mercy mingled with judgment, and the end is the triumph of mercy over judgment. That is Calvary, that is the house of God. We shall find it like that all the time. There will be judgment; it has to be; we know it quite well. The Lord does not let pass things that are contrary to the principles of His house. If we only knew it, as Paul tried to make the Corinthians know it, many are suffering to-day in numerous ways because they are not observing the principles of the house of God (I Cor. xi. 30). There is that side; it goes on. But oh, God only does that in order to have mercy. It is mercy that is His end. So He founds and so He builds His house.

GOD UNDER NO DEBT TO MAN

No indebtedness to man is allowed to be represented by God's house. How insistent David was, how alive now to Divine principles! The refining fires wake us up to principles. It was so with David

on another occasion. You remember how the ark was put on the cart. David had forgotten the Scripture. He went through a time of suffering until at last he came to see the Divine principle in the Word of God and put things right (I Chron. xiii, xv). Here he is alive to principles again. When Ornan wanted to give David the threshing floor, David said, 'No, I will pay you in full. No man shall ever say that the house of God is in debt to men; no other shall ever be able to say afterward, "Yes, I gave God that; the site of that temple is my gift"'. No, Ornan is bought out of all holding. Man has no place as a creditor in the house of God; there is no debt to man, he is bought right out. You can apply that.

THE THRESHING OF THE CORN

This was a threshing-floor, the place where all is threshed out before the Lord. No chaff here; nothing that is not real, genuine, true, solid; nothing that will not contribute to building up. It must be the true corn. God is always seeking to do this. The house of God is a threshing floor. All our chaff, our vanity, our emptiness, is being got rid of, all that really does not count. God is after that which builds His house, or, to change the metaphor, the Body. He is after the corn. The chaff must go. In our very relationship to the Lord amongst His people, as forming His house, we find He is winnowing, threshing, getting rid of our vanity, our unreality, our chaff. But in so doing He is getting reality, He is getting what is solid, what will stand, what will feed. This is the basis of His building.

All that we have said should work out in very practical ways. The figures employed are but types and symbols, but the realities are in the hands of the Holy Spirit, and He will unceasingly press for their fulfilment in the lives of God's people. Let us see to it that as He works in our case He has our full co-operation.

T. A-S.

THE LORD'S FULLEST PURPOSE governs everything with Him. This FULL purpose has been revealed, and is sealed in a Book which He has given to Christians.

While He will bless everything that is really a part of that purpose, the intrinsic value of it and the committal of the Lord to it, will always be according to the measure of the whole. The measure of the Lord and of ETERNAL, HEAVENLY values will be according to the measure of the full revelation of His purpose.

This is the position from which the Lord judges and commits Himself, as see in the judgment of the churches in Revelation i to iii.

The comparative is not enough for Him; it is the absolute. Do not let us pride or prime ourselves upon what is good, and has His blessing as such; but let us keep the best, or the fullest revealed by Him, always in view, as He does.