



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Thou, therefore, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ

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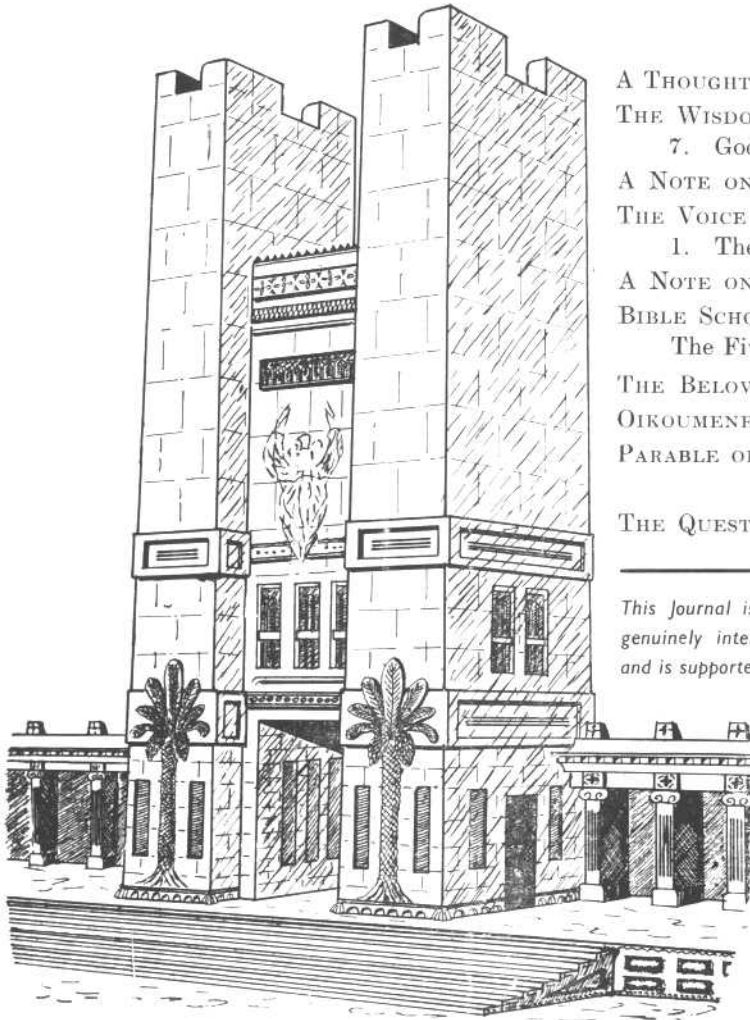
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CONTENTS

A THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	2
THE WISDOM OF ELIHU	
7. God is Love	3
A NOTE ON LUKE 11.51	6
THE VOICE OF THE MONUMENTS	
1. The Rosetto Stone	7
A NOTE ON REV. 20.10.....	8
BIBLE SCHOOL	
The Five Books of Moses	9
THE BELOVED PHYSICIAN	13
OIROUMENE—THE WORLD	16
PARABLE OF THE WICKED	
HUSBANDMEN	17
THE QUESTION BOX	20

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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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This Journal is published for the promotion of Bible knowledge and the furtherance of the Gospel of the Kingdom, its circulation being largely among independent Bible fellowships and study circles which share in varying degree the viewpoint of the Divine Plan herein set forth.

It is supported entirely by the gifts of well-wishers, and all such gifts are sincerely appreciated. Enquiries are welcomed, and all who are genuinely interested may have the journal sent regularly upon request.

BETWEEN OURSELVES

With this number we commence a Bible School, taking the first five books of the Bible, to run for the first half of the year. This is necessarily an outline, intended to stimulate study of these books. It is hoped to supplement it by one or two detailed examinations of important sections as was done with the "Garden of Eden" series last year.

"The Voice of the Monuments" is a series which will run through the year, giving the history of certain principal archaeological finds of modern times which have borne testimony to the Scripture narratives, or have rendered valuable aid to the understanding of those narratives.

During 1960 we also resume the studies in the Parables of Jesus—the last group of such studies ended in 1959 and it is thought that a return to some of those not as yet discussed will be appreciated by a good many.

At the suggestion of a reader, it is hoped to present a presentation of what Jesus had to say concerning the life and the world to come, at a not too distant date in the future.

And so to all readers, new and old, we express our sincere hope that the Bible Study Monthly may be of continuing interest and profit in the things of God. It is not to be expected that all will appreciate equally well everything that is presented in these pages; the most we can hope for is that the journal will be found helpful in the Christian way and a means of stimulating thought and understanding of the Word of God, which itself, and alone, "liveth and abideth for ever".

* * *

For the past two years pronouns referring to Divinity, when appearing in the "Monthly", have been expressed with capitals only in the nominative (He) whilst in the other cases (Him and His) small initials have been used, this practice having been adopted in consequence of a feeling in some quarters that the frequent usage of capitals gave an appearance of "overdoing it". Since then it has been suggested at times that the practice can be held to savour of irreverence; it is true that in

this country at any rate the almost universal custom in Christian journals is to use capitals in all cases and it has been decided therefore to revert to our original practice of expressing the capital in all instances, as from this issue.

A THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"The conversion of the world to Christianity is more distantly remote than ever, with only 7.7 per cent of its total population being Protestant Christians, as compared with 12 per cent in 1925. The world has only one hope left—the personal Return of the Lord Jesus Christ to reign in righteousness and peace."

That quotation is from the editorial in a recent issue of the "Life of Faith". If the percentage figures stated are correct—and the periodical concerned does not make such statements lightly—it would seem that the time is surely upon us when our Lord's question "When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" is definitely and terribly answered. Despite all the evangelism of the present and past it ought to be abundantly clear to every thinking Christian that the world is not going to be converted without some form of Divine intervention. The gospel of the Kingdom is being preached in all the world for a witness, and not one iota of the self-sacrificing work put in by Christians will be wasted; it will all bear fruit, but not so much in this day and Age as in that which is to come when the Lord Christ takes to Himself His power, and reigns in the world of men in literal fact. Then, and not until then, will the glory of the Lord cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Then, and not until

(continued on page 12)

Gone from us

Sis. M. Barrett (Leicester)
Sis. Burton (London)
Bro. J. Deauville (Nottingham)
Bro. Neesom (London)
Sis. E. Rothwell (London)

"Till the day break, and the shadows flee away".

THE WISDOM OF ELIHU

A study in
Job 32-37

7. God is Love

Elihu has completed his argument from the Wisdom of God and the Justice of God; he now takes his stand on the third of the four Divine attributes, the Love of God. The whole of chapter 35 and the first twenty-one verses of chapter 36 are devoted to this theme. The Love of God, revealed in His attitude toward, and His care for, His creatures, is evidence that a Divine purpose lies behind Job's sufferings, and all the philosophical reasonings of Job's three friends pale into insignificance before that triumphant fact. God is Love; because that is so there can be no recriminations and no complaint against that which God has permitted. The outcome will show, what the circumstance itself is quite incapable of showing, that God's way is best.

"Do you say" he demands of Job "It is my right before God that you ask 'what advantage have I? How am I better off than if I had sinned?'" (35. 2-3 RSV). The Revised Standard Version poses the question so much more forcefully than the Authorised. And what an age-old question it is? So many have asked the same thing, querulously, cynically and, sometimes, despairingly. "I have always tried to do the right thing, and what good has it done me?" "He gave his life to God but God doesn't seem to have done much for him." That is the same short-sighted view which Elihu accuses Job of taking here. The life of righteousness is viewed in terms of reward, as though the creature would strike a bargain with the Creator and serve Him in return for an agreed wage. Unfortunately that is just the attitude which characterises so many who start out in the Christian way. They expect to draw dividends at once, and payable in local currency for immediate spending at that. The fact that the life of allegiance and dedication to God is the right and proper and normal condition of every man and woman, irrespective of reward or consideration, has not penetrated. Heaven is viewed as a kind of prize to be awarded to those who fulfil the required conditions, and the fact that God is the Lord of creation is taken to be an assurance that those who render Him professed allegiance and service will get preferential treatment and freedom from adversity in this life here and now. That, of course, is by no means the case. The Lord is not looking for a retinue of time-serving parasites who come to

Him only on account of the loaves and fishes. He is seeking a body of earnest, devoted men and women who would serve and honour Him because they know that to be the whole duty of man, because they know the vast majority of mankind to be pitifully remote from any such understanding and intention, and because they intend that they themselves at least will put themselves into position for use in God's creation in the manner He intended from the start. So they have no thought of price or reward and they have no expectation that any especial material privileges will be theirs in this life. They do expect that in the world to come there will be a place where they can continue to serve God, to a degree and with a power which is transcendently greater and more effective than anything they can be or do now. They know that their espousal of the ways of righteousness is more likely to bring deprivation and adversity than the reverse, but because this is the way God has indicated; because this is the way their Lord elected to tread when He Himself was upon earth, they are well content.

It is not likely that Elihu himself saw the matter as deeply as this. The problem of righteous suffering is a very mysterious one and we ourselves in our day cannot claim to possess a full understanding of its philosophy. But Elihu certainly did see one great truth and this is prominent throughout the whole of his discourse. God is too mighty and wise to be deflected from His course by any petty action of man. The righteousness of one individual and the wickedness of another is certainly recorded in the courts of Heaven but neither the tearful pleadings of the righteous nor the scornful antagonism of the wicked can divert for one instant of time the onward progression of the Divine purpose. Elihu is able to bear this knowledge with absolute confidence and content because he knows that God is not only wise, not only just, but God is also Love, and what He is doing is for the best interests of His creatures. So he replies to his own recapitulation of Job's complaint "I will answer thee, and thy companions with thee" (35. 4). "I will truly reply unto thee" is Leeser's rendering, and that phrase brings out in striking relief the absolute conviction which inspires Elihu in all that he says.

"Look unto the heavens, and see; and behold

the clouds above thee" (35. 5). That is the hallmark of the true teacher; he does not direct attention to himself, but to the skies above, beyond which is the dwelling-place of God. "I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help . . . from the Lord" cried the Psalmist in a very similar frame of mind. Job's chief trouble was that he looked to the earth in his affliction and failed to see God. He admitted as much at the end of the story. Elihu bade him look up to the heavens and there he would see the vision which would bring enlightenment and peace. There he would, like Ezekiel in a later day, "see visions of God", and enter into the understanding his soul craved. The same precept holds good for every disciple of Jesus; "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look, not at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen" (2 Cor. 4. 17). It is only as we look at the unseen things, the things of the spirit, by what we must describe as our spiritual eyesight, that the afflictions and sufferings of life can be made to contribute to that "exceeding eternal glory" which awaits all who truly "endure to the end". That is just what Elihu is trying to tell Job; his sufferings could be made to contribute to his own development and growth in the likeness of God and his own attainment to the destiny God had planned for him, if only he would look up to the heavens instead of down to the earth.

"If thou sinnest, what dost thou effect against him? (Leeser) or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto him? (A.V.) and suppose that thou art righteous, what wilt thou give him? (LXX) or what receive he at thine hand? (A.V.). *Unto a man like thyself might thy lawlessness reach, and unto a son of the earth-born thy righteousness*" (Rotherham) (35. 6-8). A polyglot of several translators seems desirable in this particular passage in order to bring out the meaning. Suppose Job does backslide into sin on the ground that righteousness does not bring any specific reward, what effect does that have on the eternal purpose of God? Can Job hope thereby to coerce God into taking some action He would not otherwise have taken in order to reclaim his erring one and calm his troubled mind? How can such a thing be postulated of the One "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jas. 1. 17). "I am the Lord, I change not" said God to Israel to his prophet (Mal. 3. 6). And

suppose, on the other hand, that Job became a paragon of righteousness, upright and unswerving in his service for God. What then, even then, could he bring to God as a gift that would earn for him a position of high favour in the heavenly courts? What value in his righteousness that could entitle him to demand as of right a place of standing before the Most High? "When ye have done all" said Jesus "then say, we are unprofitable servants". Something like that must have been in the mind of Elihu. He knew, what every instructed Christian to-day knows, that it is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3. 5) that we are at length ushered into the Divine Presence. The Lord of all cannot be moved by threats nor cajoled by bribes. His purpose moves steadily on, effecting the purpose He ordained before the world was. So it is other men, and not God, who are affected and influenced by a man's wickedness or righteousness. And that is quite a sobering thought; sobering for Job and sobering for all of us. "*Unto a man like thyself might thy lawlessness reach, and unto a son of the earth-born thy righteousness.*" It is true that no man liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself, as Paul told the Athenians. We are all of us our brother's keeper and the lives we ourselves live, whether for good or ill, have their effect and repercussions on our fellows around us. That fact in itself effectively answers the primary question. If Job, or any man, enquires what merit resides in righteousness above iniquity; if righteousness seems to reap no immediate reward, the answer surely is that the life of righteousness cannot help but have some effect in influencing others to righteousness and thus contribute to the work of God in calling men back to Himself, whereas the life of iniquity must surely affect some among men in the direction of a wider separation from God.

It is these, men and women of the world, largely "having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2. 12) whom the servants of God can so easily influence for good or ill, by the precept of their own lives, who now gain Elihu's attention. He is under no illusion as to the sorry state of mankind in general, oppressed and down-trodden by the mighty, unable to help themselves, and yet, strange paradox, quite unheeding of the help that could be theirs did they but turn to God who waits to save. Elihu has here a most eloquent picture of hopeless humanity in their distress

and God waiting to bless if only they will open the door.

"By reason of the multitude of oppressions they cry; they cry out by reason of the arm of the mighty. But none saith, where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?" (35. 9, 10). How true that is in all ages; men suffer and cry out because of their afflictions but will not call upon God for deliverance. They will try every possible human means of extricating themselves from their troubles but God is usually the last to be called upon, if indeed He is called upon at all. There is more than a modicum of truth in the story of the old lady who made her way to the captain of an Atlantic liner during a fierce storm, seeking re-assurance. The captain was not very comforting. "Worst storm I've ever seen" he said "We can do nothing now but trust to the mercy of God". "Good gracious, captain" exclaimed the old lady "Are things as bad as all that?" There were times in the history of Israel when matters came to that pass and Israel cried to God only after they had tried everything else and everything else had failed. "Therefore he brought down their hearts with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble and he saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death" (Psa. 107. 12-14). How much better is it for Christians to go to the Lord for deliverance right at the outset instead of relying on the arm of flesh. There may be a seeming delay in delivering; it might appear that for the time being God has not heeded; but if so the answer can only be that in the Divine wisdom there is some good purpose involved in God's apparent failure to lift the burden. The truly consecrated child of God will in that case be content to leave the issue in those higher hands and believe that "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be proved above that ye are able, but with the proving will also direct the issue, that ye may be able to bear it". (1 Cor. 10. 13. "Proving" is substituted for the archaic English "tempting" which has a different meaning to-day, and "direct the issue" is Wilson's Diaglott rendering for "make a way to escape" which seems a more fitting expression).

A variant rendering of verse 10-11 in the Septuagint has it "*But none said, where is God that made me, who appoints the night watches, who makes us to differ from the four-footed beasts of the earth, and from the birds of the sky*". Whether it is that God teaches men more than the brute creation, as

in the A.V., or makes them to differ as above in the LXX, the appeal is the same. Man, of all the living creatures on the face of the earth, stands in a unique position before God. He has qualities of intelligence, reflection, reasoning, anticipation, not possessed by any other. He alone can lift his heart to God in adoration; he alone can appreciate God's purposes intellectually and enter into co-operation with God, if he will. And Elihu's complaint is that man does not remember this when in trouble. If only he did he would realise that God surely created man for some noble purpose, some destiny which sets him apart from all other terrestrial creatures, and this being so then all the troubles of man must be of concern to God; He cannot possibly remain idle in the face of such things. And if God does not act at once, if injustice and oppression seem to be retaining the mastery, it can only be because the outworking of the Divine purpose demands that temporary silence.

Verses 12 and 13 hint at the reason for such a silence. God has decreed that the evil which man chose at the beginning—a choice which most men repeat for themselves in daily life—must endure until, like Israel, men's hearts are broken down in labour and they realise there is truly none to help. And the righteous, the innocent, are involved in this; it could not be otherwise whilst all men inhabit one world. So Elihu says "*There they cry, but none giveth answer, because of the pride of evil men. Surely God will not hear vanity, neither will the Almighty regard it*" (35. 12, 13). The unbelieving man cries for help but he gets no answer because his cry is addressed to a quarter which cannot save. "Vain is the help of man." And God, who is waiting to help, can take no notice of such a cry; He cannot give regard until the man in true humility and repentance comes to Him. When Israel went for help to Baalim and Ashtaroth, God was silent; when they repented and, putting away their false gods, cried to Him, He hastened to help them and save them.

So Elihu comes again to a climax in his argument. Of all that has gone before in this chapter verses 14-15 constitute the summing-up. Leeser's translation again puts his thoughts into cogent words. "*Although thou sayest, thou canst not see him; yet the decision is before him; and do thou wait for him. But now, because his anger has punished nothing, shall he not greatly take cognisance of the multitude of sins?"* (35. 14, 15). The whole of the discussion reduces to the one inescapable

fact that man does not see what God is doing and draws the wrong conclusions therefore. Nevertheless, insists Elihu, God is a God of justice and judgment and has the situation well in hand and will act at the right time. "The decision is before him". It remains for Job, and for all men too, to do one thing. "Do thou wait for him." Despite all the seeming inconsistencies of life, the apparent failure of God to judge and curb sin and the effects of sin, the lack of protection for the righteous, the long-drawn out delay in the execution of God's promise to bring this present evil world to an end and introduce a new one "wherein dwelleth righteousness", the injunction always is "Do thou wait for him". It was said first to Job, but it is intended for all of us. "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage and he shall strengthen thine heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord". (Psa. 27. 14).

"But Job openeth wide his mouth for nought; without knowledge he heapeth up words" (35. 16). There is no doubt that Elihu

feels very keenly Job's failure to realise things which seem so crystal clear to the younger man. The trouble, he says quite plainly, is that Job has relied too much upon philosophical argument and in this his other three friends have not helped. Between the four of them there has been a great deal of heaping up of words to the detriment of quiet thinking. It were much better, Elihu thinks, that Job went quietly to God and put the entire case in His strong hands, then sat down in silence to see what God would say to him. One might almost think that Elihu was being moved by the Holy Spirit to say a lot of things which might well have had a true and direct application to Job at that time, but which certainly were intended to come with considerable force upon all Christians in these later days, for these are just the short-comings with which we are all familiar. "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass". (Psa. 37. 5).

(To be continued)

A NOTE ON LUKE 11.51

"From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple . . . it shall be required of this generation". (Luke 11. 51).

"From the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar". (Matt. 23. 35).

Who was this Zacharias? From Matthew's account it might be thought that he was the prophet whose book appears in the Old Testament "Zechariah, the son of Berechiah" (Zech. 1. 1). There is no indication in the Old Testament of the manner in which this Zechariah met his death. Josephus records the murder of a Zechariah, the son of Baruch (Berechiah) in the Temple at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, which of course, was still nearly forty years future when Jesus spoke these words. There was also a Zechariah, son of Jehoida, who was stoned to death in the court of the Temple at the command of King Joash of Judah. (2 Chron: 24. 19-22). This Zechariah, dying, cried out "The Lord look upon it, and require it" (i.e. require his blood at the hands of the murderers, and exact retribution). The Second Book of Chronicles is the last book in the Jewish arrangement of the Bible and therefore this account, which is the last occasion in that book where a righteous man is put to death, becomes the last such account in the Bible, just as that of Abel is the first. It

might well be that Jesus was referring to this Zechariah when he spoke the words of the text; the circumstances would make him the most fitting choice for the Lord's purpose. The only difficulty is the reference in Matthew to "the son of Barachias". It has been thought that this is an interpolation by some transcriber anxious to identify the one referred to by our Lord with the famous prophet of the Restoration. The Jews had no detailed tradition of the death of that Zechariah; they had preserved very vividly the recollection of the earlier martyrdom of this one in the days of King Joash, even going so far as to assert that his blood had never ceased to flow but could still be found in the Temple precincts. Jesus would obviously want to take hold of the most forceful example in His denunciation and on the whole it does seem reasonable to conclude that the incident He referred to was in fact the one that is recorded in 2 Chron. 24, and that He meant to take the first and last occasions of the shedding of innocent blood that the Jewish Bible has on record.

If the life which you have chosen is really worthy of you, it involves self-sacrifice and pain. Shall you flinch and draw back? Shall you ask for yourself another life? Oh no, not another life, but another self! Ask God to fill you with Himself, and then calmly look up and go on.

THE VOICE OF THE MONUMENTS

I. The Rosetta Stone

The tremendous flood of light shining upon Bible records from the inscriptions and relics of ancient nations is little more than a century old. One after another, discoveries are announced to-day shedding further light upon the Scriptures and confirming to an increasing degree the truth of their statements. It is not that Christians need any such confirmation to buttress their faith; our confidence in the Word of God is rooted in experience, experience of the Father's care and His faithfulness, experience of the power of the Holy Spirit and the loving shepherd-guidance of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; experience of the adequacy of the Divine Word both in the affairs of daily life and that "the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work". We do not need further confirmation for ourselves. But we do find use for this additional testimony when it comes to expounding the grand old Book to others. And much of what is being discovered to-day does illuminate and explain the historical portions of the Bible in a manner that would be impossible otherwise. The labours of archæologists and historians are really of great value to us and we do well to hold them in esteem for their work's sake and to make use of what is discovered, to our own progress in knowledge.

The history of modern archæological research in its relation to the Bible may very fairly be said to have commenced with the discovery of the "Rosetta Stone" in 1798. In the end of that year the French Emperor Napoleon was campaigning in Egypt, having just been defeated by the British Fleet under Nelson. There was nothing very creditable in Napoleon's presence there; he was unashamedly out for conquest, and he failed. But the wrath of man was made to praise God in a very remarkable way. One of Napoleon's artillery officers named Boussard was stationed at a place called Rosetta, near one of the western mouths of the Nile. Whilst there he discovered an inscribed slab of black basalt four feet long by two feet wide, bearing an inscription in three languages. The attention of Napoleon was directed to this "find". Now Napoleon, unlike many of his modern emulators, possessed a healthy respect for scientific research and knowledge. He had the inscription copied and the copies sent to various universities and learned societies in

Europe. The scholars got busy.

One of the languages on the tablet was already well known and understood—it was Greek. Another was known as the everyday language of Egypt in olden times, the "demotic" or popular writing of the people. But the third was written in the mysterious hieroglyphics of ancient Egypt, the language in which so many records had already been discovered and could not be interpreted because no man living understood the characters in which that language was written. The last writers of hieroglyphic lived in the reign of the Roman emperor Diocletian, about A.D. 290, and soon after the end of the third A.D. century the last man who knew how to read that strange writing of pictures and symbols, of crowns and little birds and mystic signs, had gone to be with his fathers and the secret was lost to mankind.

The fact that this one stone bore a three-fold inscription, in three languages, at once inspired the thought that the record might be the same in all three; it was in fact a "trilingual" inscription. The first task was to translate the Greek text, a matter of no difficulty; this was accomplished by several experts during the next few years, working more or less independently. It was found that the inscription was the record of a decree issued by priests of Egypt about two hundred years before Christ to commemorate the accession to the throne of Ptolemy V Epiphanes. It now remained to apply this translation to the hitherto incomprehensible hieroglyphics with the object of discovering the meaning of each different sign and so constructing an alphabet, the first step to achieving an understanding of the language. This was a work of great difficulty and it was not until about twenty years later that Prof. Young in England and Prof. Champollion in France succeeded in deciphering the majority of the signs and so laying the foundation of modern Egyptology.

The knowledge thus gained gives indirect testimony to the truth of the Scriptures. It was found, as years passed by, that the latter part of the Book of Genesis, and the other books of Moses, abound in Egyptian words, allusions and phrases, this fact helping to refute the assertion increasingly being made by the Higher Criticism that these books had

not been written until the time of the Babylonian Captivity. The expressions used are such as would naturally be employed by a man brought up and living a great part of his life in Egyptian surroundings, as was Moses. The study of ancient chronology was greatly illuminated by the deciphering of the hieroglyphics of the Rosetta stone; it became possible to read what are known as the Turin

Papyrus and the Abydos Tablets, records of Egypt's Pharaohs from the earliest times. For the first time the names of various Pharaohs of Egypt familiar to Bible readers had their historic character revealed from sources outside the Bible. In a very real sense, therefore, the discovery of this unique tablet at Rosetta in 1798 has made its contribution to our knowledge of God's ways in ancient time.

A NOTE ON REV. 20.10

"And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." (Rev. 20. 10).

Our Lord's frequent references to the valley of Genenna, outside Jerusalem, are very familiar, and that valley's fitness as a symbol of utter destruction is well known. It has often been thought that the Revelator had this same valley in mind when he spoke of the lake of fire burning with brimstone. There is, however, an even more extreme example of complete and terrible destruction which could well fit the language of Revelation with perhaps greater propriety, and indicate with greater clarity the meaning of the expression "for ever and ever".

It will be observed that in the five instances where the symbol is used (Rev. chaps. 19, 20 and 21), the picture is that of a Lake burning with fire and sulphur (brimstone). We need therefore in endeavouring to appreciate the force of the symbol to find in Scriptural history the supreme example of such an event as associated with eternal judgment.

The thought of the "smoke of the burning" going up forever and ever is intimately associated with the symbol, as witness Rev. 14. 10, and 18. 10 where the destruction of other phases of the system of evil is pictured. This conception is evidently borrowed from Isaiah 34. 9-10, where in speaking of the destruction of Edom the prophet declares that her smoke should go up for ever and ever and that none should pass through the land for ever and ever. That this latter does not carry the thought of perpetuity is evident from verse 17 where some are described who shall ultimately possess the land for ever, i.e., after its burning.

But verse 10 of Isaiah 34 indicates that he in his turn took his symbolism from a still earlier source, and the vivid words of Jude, verse 7, afford the clue when he speaks of

"Sodom and Gomorrha . . . SUFFERING THE VENGEANCE OF ETERNAL FIRE". Gen. 19. 28 tells us that Abraham looked toward Sodom and the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace. That catastrophe left such an impression upon the minds of the early progenitors of the children of Israel that the vision was never effaced—the fire from heaven that destroyed the ill-fated cities. Research has elicited with some degree of certainty that the cataclysm was at least in part of a volcanic nature, and that earth movements, or an earthquake, cleft the ground in many places so that sulphur, asphalt and petroleum vapours were released and ignited, thus completing the work of destruction. It is thought that much of this material was released under the surface of the Dead Sea and took fire upon reaching the surface, thus turning the sea into a veritable lake of fire. The allusion in Isa. 34. 9 seems to be based upon some memory of such an occurrence.

Thus seen, the expression in Revelation would mean, not the continued torment of the Devil in some state of conscious existence, but, first, his utter destruction, and secondly, the continued remembrance of that destruction, just as Jude's reference to the cities of the plain suffering the vengeance of eternal fire by no means denotes the eternal burning of that fire which died down so many centuries ago, but the indelible impression left on the minds of those who witnessed or who afterwards were told of that tremendous demonstration of the wrath which is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness.

Simon the coward became Simon the courageous. Simon who denied his Master three times before soldiers and servant, spoke to thousands of men without flinching, and declared that it was the Spirit of the living God that had been received.

Bible School **THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES (Part I)**

1. GENERAL VIEW

The first five books of the Bible—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy—are known as the Pentateuch, a word derived from Alexandrian Greek meaning the "five-fold book". They originally constituted one book, known to the earlier Jews as the "book of the Law" (Torah) divided into five books by the translators of the Septuagint Version about 250 B.C. The titles appearing in the English versions are taken from the Septuagint and are transliterations of the Hebrew equivalents of the first few lines, thus: "Genesis" "*In the beginning*"; Exodus "*These are the names*"; Leviticus "*and he called*"; Numbers "*in the wilderness*"; and Deuteronomy "*These are the words*".

The five books as we have them were compiled by Moses (Deut. 31. 24-26) who evidently completed his work with the 30th chapter of Deuteronomy. The final chapters of that book (31-34) were added by someone else, probably Joshua, following the death of Moses. Syriac copies of the Pentateuch do include a statement to that effect. It used to be thought that Moses himself originated the whole of the five books, including the early chapters of Genesis, of course under Divine inspiration, but modern study of the text in the light of present day knowledge of ancient languages reveals that his work, so far as Genesis is concerned, must have been on the basis of a number of pre-existing records. The stories of Creation, the Fall, the Flood, the Tower of Babel, up to Chapter 11 of Genesis, contain internal evidence that they existed in their present form as independent narratives in Sumerian cuneiform at least twenty-three centuries before Christ, long before Abraham lived. This of course does not alter the fact that they must have been prepared under Divine supervision even at that time.

The object of the Pentateuch is to trace the story of the Divine purpose, manifested through the Israelite nation, from the creation of the world to the arrival of the Hebrews on the borders of Canaan, the promised land in which they were to fulfil their part in the Divine purpose; and to enshrine the laws God gave for their obedience. The book is therefore a combination of history and Divine Law; intermingled with both there is a continuing theme of developing purpose which com-

mences with God's promise to Eve that a remedy for the evil of the Fall would one day be found, continues with the promise to Abraham that in his seed all families of the earth would one day be blessed, and ends with the establishment of Israel as the nation through which the promised blessing is to be effected. There are thus three distinct lines of study in the Pentateuch, viz., ancient history, the ethical requirements of Divine law in everyday practice, and the theology of human redemption working itself out over a time scale covering probably half of the time that man has existed upon the earth.

The events of Genesis, from Adam to the death of Joseph, cover a span of about three thousand five hundred years, so far as can be discerned from what is known to-day of the histories of ancient peoples and the comparison of those histories with the Genesis account. The three sources for the Old Testament, the Masoretic (on which the Authorised Version is chiefly based) the Septuagint, and the Samaritan, give widely varying data for the span of time over which the events of the first eleven chapters took place. The Septuagint presentation agrees best with what is known to-day of the histories of ancient nations and it is probably not without significance that in the days of the Apostles and the Early Church the Septuagint chronology was apparently the only one known to them, or at least accepted by them.

The remaining four books cover the period of the life of Moses, one hundred and twenty years, and include the entire story of the migration of the Israelites from Egypt to the promised land of Canaan.

2. STRUCTURE OF THE PENTATEUCH

- GENESIS 1. Development of the earth from its primitive condition to its fitness for human habitation.
- 2-4 The creation of man, sinless, capable of life unbroken by death—Fall into sin—Entrance of death—Cain and Abel—The first murderer.
- 5 Genealogical table, Adam to Noah, connecting the first historical narrative of Eden with the second one, that of the Flood.
- 6-9 Narrative of the Flood, marking the end of the first Age of human history and the first example of Divine inter-

- vention to curb sin. Probably about two thousand years from the time of Adam.
- 10-11 History of the dispersion of men over the earth after the Flood, with the story of the Tower of Babel, from Noah to Abraham, a period of anything up to about twelve hundred years.
- 12-25 History of the life of Abraham, the man through whom God commenced to work out His plans for the end of sin, from his life in the Sumerian city of Ur and subsequently in Haran in the empire of Mari, thence to Canaan the land of the promise, followed by a sojourn in Egypt and finally back to Canaan where he died.
- 21-28 The life of Isaac, son of Abraham, lived entirely in Canaan, and of Ishmael, son of Abraham, main progenitor of the Arab peoples.
- 25-49 The life of Jacob, son of Isaac, progenitor of the Israelites; his travels in Canaan and Mesopotamia and his final settlement in Egypt with his twelve sons who became ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel.
- 27-50 The life of Joseph, son of Jacob, who was sold into Egypt as a slave, rose to high position in the state, and died content in the knowledge that the nation of Israel was rapidly coming into existence.
Rather less than three centuries elapsed between the departure of Abraham from Ur and the death of Joseph in Egypt.
- EXODUS 1-11. Exodus opens, probably about a century after the death of Joseph, with Israel a nation but in servitude.
Moses is born and lives eighty years, forty in high honour in Pharaoh's court and forty in exile in the wilderness of Sinai.
- 12-19 Moses leads Israel out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, to Mount Sinai, a journey of three months.
- 20-29 Israel, encamped around Mount Sinai, receives the moral law of God (the Ten Commandments and various associated regulations).
- 30-40 Under Divine instruction, the Tabernacle in the Wilderness, a transportable sanctuary for sacrifice and worship, to represent the presence of God in Israel's midst, is constructed.
- LEVITICUS 1-27. The whole of Leviticus enshrines the "ceremonial law" which has to do with the institution of the priesthood to serve the Tabernacle, and various sacrifices which represented the means of cleansing from sin and defilements, all of which forthshows in picture or typical fashion the details of God's plan for the actual removal of sin in Christ.
The time spent at Sinai and covered by Exodus 20 - 40 and Leviticus 1 - 27 was about twelve months.
- NUMBERS 1-9. Israel prepares for the journey to Canaan (a matter of some three hundred miles) expecting to attain their objective within a few months.
- 11-12 The nation journeys through the wilderness and arrives at the southern frontier of Canaan.
- 13-14 They lose faith in God in consequence of the adverse report brought back by the scouts sent to reconnoitre the land and are condemned to remain in the wilderness forty years until the faithless generation has died out.
- 15-33 The nation settles in the wild desert south of Canaan, wandering in nomad fashion, and at the end of forty years the new generation journeys to Moab east of Canaan in readiness for the invasion.
- 34-36 The historian recapitulates Israel's journeyings and describes their preparation for entering the land.
The period covered by the Book of Numbers is approximately forty years.
- DEUTERONOMY 1-26. Moses conveys a solemn charge to Israel respecting their obligations and responsibilities on entering the land, reminding them of the history of their deliverance from Egypt and subsequent experiences, and the laws of God which are binding upon them.
- 27-30 Moses binds Israel in a covenant to keep all the commands of God, detailing the blessings resulting from obedience and the adversities resulting from disobedience.
- 31-33 The dying charge and blessing of Moses (recorded probably by Joshua).
- 34 Death of Moses and accession of Joshua as leader of Israel. The nation ready to cross Jordan and take possession of Canaan.

3 STUDY SYNOPSIS —

SUMERIAN SECTION

GENESIS — CHAPTERS 1-11

These eleven chapters are archaic in style and language and show internal evidence of Sumero-Akkadian origin. This does not mean that Genesis is merely a purified edition of ancient mythological legends as is sometimes suggested. It does lend colour to the conclusion that the true faith and understanding of God was handed down the generations from the time of the first man, was transmitted through Noah and survived among some of the peoples descended from Noah's sons who inhabited the Tigris-Euphrates plains during the centuries between the Flood and Abraham. The Sumerians were descendants of Ham and originally settled the south country near the Persian Gulf; the Semitic Akkadians, sons of Shem, descended the Euphrates from the north-west later on and settled alongside the Sumerians. Eventually the two races mingled and became the later Babylonians and Assyrians, the Semitic element preponderating. Abraham was a Semite living in the Sumerian merchant city of Ur; at the Divine call he migrated northward to Haran in the Semitic empire of Mari on the upper Euphrates. Abraham probably inherited the earlier records which now constitute chapters 1-11 and carried them with him to Canaan. They would be preserved and eventually come into the hands of Moses and form the basis for Genesis as we now have it. Evidence for this lies in the large number of words of Sumerian or Akkadian origin in these chapters; in the fact that the geography of the Eden story is that of Sumeria in the 25th century B.C., seven or eight centuries before Abraham; that the background and standpoint of the writers is Mesopotamian rather than Egyptian. The earliest known written records—apart from a few examples of archaic picture writing—go back to about 2500 B.C. and it is believed that this is when cuneiform writing came into use. The general conclusion of scholars to-day is that writing or its equivalent was invented at this time and was unknown in the world before; it is submitted here that this position is untenable in the light of Bible truth. It is known that men were highly civilised and cultured at that time; the human race had been in existence for at least a couple of thousand years and had always possessed, from the creation of Adam, intellectual and mental faculties of a high order. It is inconceivable that the idea of expressing thoughts

on some material medium for permanent record should not have occurred to men and been put into execution at some much earlier age. The construction of the Ark must on the most liberal estimate have demanded calculations and drawings. Wiseman and others have endeavoured to show that embedded in the Genesis text lie evidences of "colophons", tablet headlines and connecting links, and signatures, which are evidences of original cuneiform tablets from which, say, the present narratives were copied. Whilst it is perhaps unwise to speculate on the nature of such written records as may have been in use before the Flood or immediately thereafter, the vast quantities of inscribed tablets now in existence and dating from the 25th century B.C. onward do yield a solid basis for visualising the probable emergence at that time of a compilation of the stories of Creation, Eden the Flood, the Tower of Babel and Dispersion of the nations, substantially as we now have them in Genesis. It must be insisted that such compilation was not the unassisted work of mere man; it must have had behind it the guiding power of the Holy Spirit, if only because the records thus prepared were to endure for ever as part of the written Word of God. The writer or writers therefore must themselves have been godly men, worshippers of the true God and not idolators. This is a vital and fundamental principle.

Study 1. Creation. Genesis 1. 1-2. 4

Chapter division is in the wrong place. Ch. 2 vs. 4 is the ending of the first account, that of creation. Verse 4 has the first use of the word "*toledoth*" translated "generations" but having the meaning of history, especially family history (*Gesenius*) or origins. Thus vs. 4 is the suffix to all that has gone before. "This is the history of the origin of heaven and earth when they were created." "Heaven" in this chapter is *shamayim*, the things above, and "firmament" is *raqia*, an expanse or veil. Both words refer to what we would call the terrestrial heavens, i.e. space immediately surrounding the earth, its atmosphere and its clouds. The chapter does not speak of creation as such but only of the development of this planet. "In the beginning the earth was, (existed) formless and chaotic." Accurately describes the earth, a formless semi-molten mass.

Dr. Thomas Chalmers in 1804 originated a thesis still maintained in some quarters to the effect that Gen. 1. 1 describes a time of terrestrial devastation prior to the six creative days but following an earlier period of

unknown length in which an earlier earth manifested much of the characteristics of the present. Gen. 1 was said to describe, not the original creation of the earth, but its subsequent restoration in preparation for Adam. The idea was an attempt to reconcile the then dawning knowledge of geology requiring long ages for the earth's development with the old belief in six twenty-four hour days for the events of Gen. 1—the "disruption" provided an interval between the two. Principal basis was interpretation placed upon use of word *tohu* (formless, waste) and *bohu* (void, empty) the word "was" taken to mean "had become". Grammatically this construction is rejected by Hebrew scholars in general; with general recognition that the six days need not be twenty-four hour days, but periods or eras of any length ("*yom*" refers not only to solar days but any defined period) the apparent need for the theory disappears. The six days well indicate the stages of development of the earth from primitive beginnings even though the total should be as much as the two thousand million years claimed by some authorities.

No need to gloss over the creation chapter by suggesting as do many that the Bible is a book of spiritual values and does not profess to be a treatise on scientific subjects. If the creation story was included by the overruling power of the Holy Spirit we must expect it to be a substantially correct statement when rightly understood. If it is a misleading or inaccurate presentation we lose part of our confidence in the validity of the Old Testament as a guide. If shown to be a correct outline, since many of the facts could, apart from the Holy Spirit's revelation, become known to men only by geological and astronomical research which has only become possible in recent centuries, we have a first line evidence of Divine power in the preparation of this opening narrative of the Book, this in itself

then becoming an aid to faith.

It is probably a mistake to attempt to relate each successive day to a particular epoch of geological history. The Genesis account declares itself to be a history of origins. Each phase of God's activity has a commencement on a given "day" and then continues on into succeeding ages. The first day brought light but it was the dim light of a cloud-enshrouded planet growing brighter with successive ages. The third day saw the commencement of terrestrial plant life which is known to have been at its most luxuriant in the Devonian and Carboniferous epochs when the atmosphere was rich in carbon dioxide, but it was not until much later that most of the fruit bearing trees appeared. The appearance of the sun and moon on the fourth day was due to the clearing of the mists and clouds of the Carboniferous era then ending; no observer on earth could have seen the sun before that. The general order is that of plant life emerging first, followed by sea creatures, flying creatures (reptilian at first) then the land creatures, and at the end, man. It is true that the humbler forms of sea and land life, which appeared more or less simultaneously with plant life, are not mentioned, but then neither are many other details. Genesis gives only a bare outline.

God creates man, male and female, in "our" image and likeness. Does this mean a pre-existing pattern of life and function in the spiritual world, modified to be adapted to terrestrial conditions? In the Eden story, chapter 2, the man and woman are individuals. Here in chapter 1 man is generic—a race of beings, created to have dominion and control over all other living creatures, and to rule the earth.

* * *

Next month—Study 2—Adam to Noah—The first great age of human history.

(continued from page 2)

then, will the Lord turn to the people a pure language that they may all call upon Him to serve Him with one consent. That is why the hope of the Second Advent is so important a factor in the Christian life. The evangelising in which we are now engaged does not cease at the end of this earthly life; it enlarges and expands immeasurably in that future day when, to use the language of Revelation, the saints of this Age "live and reign with Christ a thousand years". During the whole span of

the Messianic Age every dedicated Christian, "changed" to be with Christ and like Him, seeing Him as He is, will be busier than ever he was in the present, turning men and women from sin to serve the living God. And so far from finding only a mere 7.7 per cent responsive, it is much more likely that far less than 7.7 per cent will fail to react to the call of the Gospel; the Kingdom of Christ on earth is destined to be gloriously successful in the reconciliation of "whosoever will" to God.

THE BELOVED PHYSICIAN

A portrait
of St. Luke

"Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you." (Col. 4. 14). This is one of three brief direct references to Luke in the epistles of Paul. We may glean further information about him from the two books of the New Testament which he wrote. He was a Gentile Christian, possibly a native of Antioch in Syria and it is believed that in this city he became a Christian and first met the Apostle Paul.

There has been very little doubt throughout the history of the Church, from the days of the Early Fathers until the scholarship of recent years that Luke was the writer of the third Gospel and of the book known as the Acts of the Apostles. In the "Acts" Luke provides the first clue that he was in Paul's party when it crossed into Europe. Up to this point Paul and his companions had been referred to in the third person as "they" but Acts 16. 10 reads "And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them". In Philippi a persecution broke out causing Paul and Silas to leave the city hurriedly. It appears, from the language used, that Luke remained behind to consolidate the preaching that had already been done and to build up a Church which in after years earned great praise from Paul in his letter to them. It was at Philippi where Luke rejoined Paul at the close of the apostle's third missionary journey recorded in Acts 20. 6. Except for relatively short absences Paul and Luke remained together until Luke abruptly laid down his pen in Rome never to finish his story.

As Paul travelled towards Jerusalem for the last time he gathered together those who carried the gifts from the Gentile churches to their Jewish brethren. He mentions this work in his second letter to the Corinthians and some authorities regard the reference to "the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the Gospel" to be Luke. (2 Cor. 8. 18. R.S.V.). Prior to his voyage to Rome, Paul spent two years at Cæsarea and it seems probable that during this period Luke did much of the research for writing the Gospel and first pages of the "Acts". The account of the journey to Rome is very interesting because of the many incidental details which Luke added. Like all his descriptive

passages he painted a vivid picture of their adventures in the boat and towards the end it becomes an exciting story. Finally they reached Rome together and shortly afterwards we lose sight of Luke except for two final glimpses of the "beloved physician" through the eyes of his great friend. To Philemon, Paul describes Luke as a fellowworker. At the close of his life, amid much trouble, in which his other brethren left him, Paul wrote to Timothy "Luke alone is with me". So he remained with the invalid apostle to attend his physical ailments and encourage him through his lonely detention.

As an educated man and a devout follower of the Lord, Paul would rapidly become attached to Luke. Both had forsaken worldly wealth and ambition to become disciples of Jesus and to preach the Gospel. They shared a great thirst for truth and neither spared effort to overthrow popular superstition and outdated tradition. It was for this reason that Luke commenced an orderly and accurate account of "those things which are most surely believed among us," (Luke 1. 1). Although no attempt was made to write a complete biography of the Master, Luke gives a fuller and more balanced picture of the Lord than the three Jewish evangelists. As a Gentile, he saw things in a different light from the other Gospel writers; from a broader, more universal aspect. They were concerned with showing Jesus primarily as the Messiah of Israel, He of whom the Hebrew Scriptures spoke. They looked for the restoration of their national Kingdom. Luke saw Jesus as the Saviour of the world, who could heal suffering mankind. He was interested in the pagan and outcasts as well as the favoured people of God. How much does the third Gospel reflect upon the character of the writer?

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Luke wrote the most beautiful book in the world. He was a brilliant writer and his gospel is of high literary value. He had great freedom and ability in the use of the Greek language, yet the style is simple and pure. There is a charm and earnestness in his anecdotes which appeals to the youngest reader; yet there is exactness of detail which holds the interest of the careful student.

In the third Gospel we have the setting of Christ's life in the Roman world, and histor-

ical data is given which links our Lord's life with the society in which he lived. Most of the information which we have of the birth and early years of Jesus are in Luke's record. He it is also who depicts our Master in the home and family life of his day. The religious trend of the first century was to keep women and children in a place of inferiority and it is mainly Luke who showed that Jesus ignored the fashion. He emphasises the place of the gentle and simple things in the purpose of God. All this gives evidence of Luke's wide sympathies, which extend still further when consideration is given to the parables and miracles which are peculiar to his record.

He was interested in the poor and despised, and our Lord's appearance in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4) is an appropriate opening for His ministry. But for Luke's pen we should not have had the great illustrations of compassion given in our Lord's parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. He too retold the striking contrasts between Pharisee and publican praying in the Temple, and the real life study of Simon and the "sinful woman"; Luke recognised the evil of racial and class distinction in the parable of the "rich fool" and writes of Jesus' tolerance towards the Samaritans.

As a medical doctor he would be intimately acquainted with human suffering, and his method of recording miracles of healing reflect his knowledge and his sympathy. This is apparent in his description of "a man full of leprosy" in Luke 5. 12. In writing of the woman in the crowd who touched the hem of His garment (Luke 8. 46) he uses a more professional term for the word "virtue" than does Mark although this is not clear from the English version. His reference to Peter's mother-in-law as having a "great fever" is similarly the distinguishing mark of a physician. His delicate and restrained treatment of our Lord's experience in Gethsemane is masterly and again a singularly professional reference to the "drops of blood" (Luke 22. 44). The word "Wholesome" adopted by Paul in his later epistles is peculiar to Luke's Gospel among the evangelists, (found in Luke 5. 31; 7. 10; 15. 2).

However he was not only a scientist and historian; he had great interest in the devotional aspect of the Christian life, and he has been called the first Christian hymnologist. The remarkable poems of Mary in the Magnificat, and of Zachariah at the birth of John the Baptist are a tribute to Luke's diligence. The third Gospel provides us with the greatest

insight into our Lord's prayer life, recording some of his prayers and teaching upon the subject. Several of these were at critical points in His ministry, for example when He spent all night in prayer prior to selecting the disciples. In narrating the Transfiguration on the mount, Luke alone informs us that Jesus was praying. Finally, on the cross, the prayer of forgiveness (not spurious as some have supposed) was a precious reflection of our Saviour preserved only by Luke.

In Luke's Gospel and in the "Acts" the writer adds numerous interesting facts, incidental to the main story and which could leave him open to serious criticisms if they were inaccurate. In fact, during the past hundred years, many scholars have endeavoured to discover faults in his writings. But their suspicions and suppositions have proved groundless. The more that Biblical and archaeological advances, the more evidence accumulates corroborating Luke's statements. The matter is summed up in the words of Rendle Short in his book "*Modern discovery and the Bible*", "*Luke correctly describes and gives the names of so many towns which he and Paul passed through in their travels that many of our Bibles contain maps to show the exact routes followed. He shows the true Greek love for the sea. He constantly, and for no apparent reason gives the names of islands passed, tells on which side the ship sailed by, whether they ran in a straight course before the wind or whether they tacked, whether the wind was favourable or unfavourable, what ports served inland towns, in which direction the harbour looked and so on.*" Later Rendle Short quotes from Bishop Gore "*It should, of course, be recognised that modern archaeology has almost forced upon critics of St. Luke a verdict of remarkable accuracy in all his allusions to secular facts and events. Perhaps the greatest living authority on ancient history, Eduard Meyer, has called the work of Luke 'one of the most important works which remain to us from antiquity' and Meyer has certainly no prejudices in favour of religious tradition.*"

In writing of the experiences of Paul, of much of which he was an eye-witness, Luke gives many geographical and nautical notes which richly embellish an exciting account of a thrilling story. In the first chapter of Acts we are given the Master's command to the disciples, telling them that they were to be his witnesses from Judea, to Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth. Thus the book unfolds for us the fulfilment of that

prophetic command, as the "good news" was preached along the Roman highways until it reached Rome the centre of the great empire. Several of the events of which Luke writes in the early chapters of the Acts show the impact of the Gospel on the Jewish world. The dramatic power of the Holy Spirit, the radical transformation of the first disciples, the early persecutions and martyrdom, give a clear picture of obedience within the early Church to the word of the Lord. The first message of the church was salvation through the resurrected Lord, for as Luke expresses it, they were "witnesses of the resurrection". Woven into the expanding history of the early Church, are anecdotes of healing which again bear testimony to Luke's medical interest. He uses words in "Acts" as in his Gospel which are technical terms and only normally found in standard medical works such as Hippocrates. Dr. E. H. Plumtre has shown in an interesting treatise how the vocabulary of the Apostle Paul was influenced by his companionship with Luke. In his later epistles, the Apostle introduces words which like those of

Luke would normally only be found in a medical text book. As in the Gospel which he wrote, the Acts reflects the meticulous care with which Luke wrote. Yet after nineteen centuries his narrative remains vivid and real.

Perhaps there is one lesson above all which Luke's two books teach us and is quite easily overlooked. His humility stamps him as a truly great man. He never mentions himself, and except for the evidence which he unwittingly gave together with the testimony of others, we should never have known who the worthy disciple was to whom we owe so much.

Why did he never finish his story? Why is there such an abrupt conclusion? Luke's first book speaks to us of "*those things which Jesus began to do and teach*". His second work is a treatise of those things which Jesus "*continued to do and to teach*" through his followers. That story did not end with Paul, or with Luke or with any of the first disciples. It has continued through the Christian era until this day. It is our privilege to continue those things which Jesus began to do and teach, of which Luke wrote.

MARKS GOSPEL

The Gospel of Mark was the first of the four Gospels to be committed to writing. Recent scholarship points to a date about the year A.D.65 for its composition—or about 35 years after the crucifixion of Jesus. If, as is generally thought, John Mark was a lad of about 14 at the time of Jesus' ministry he must have been nearly fifty years of age when he wrote his Gospel—and Peter, who is thought to have inspired much of Mark's writing, an old man, perhaps seventy years old. The structure of the language used in this Gospel shows it was written by one who thought and wrote in Aramaic—the common language of the peasantry of Palestine—and this fact accords with what we know of Mark. It is evident too that Matthew and Luke, who both wrote later, had Mark's gospel before them when they prepared their own. There is something appealing in the thought of this fourteen-year-old boy, probably always on the outskirts of the band of disciples surrounding our Lord, listening to all that went on and in his boyish fashion endeavouring to take it all in, becoming the one who in after years should first give to the Church of Christ a written record of the earthly life of One Who "spake as never man spake".

ON THE BIBLE

"If in these books (the Bible) I meet with anything which seems contrary to truth, I shall not hesitate to conclude either that the text is faulty, or that the translator has not expressed the meaning of the passage, or that I myself do not understand it." Those words are from the pen of Pope Leo 13th, who died in 1903. They are words of good sense and breathe the right atmosphere of Christian caution in dealing with the Word of God. So many there are who read a passage of Scripture, draw a conclusion, and immediately brand as in error all who view the matter differently. The Bible is a book to be studied, carefully, reverently, prayerfully, and always with the thought in mind that the best and ablest of men can only glean its secrets in proportion as he is led by the Holy Spirit of God. Though a man live a thousand years twice told, he will never be more than a student of the Word, and will always find new aspects and views of the old truths opening up before his vision. Not one of us will attain to full knowledge until "that which is perfect is come" and if that fact is allowed to rule our minds while we study and pray and fellowship together we shall be blessed indeed in our searching.

OIKOUMENE—THE WORLD

A note on
Heb. 2.5

Several Greek words are rendered "world" in the New Testament and each one has a distinct meaning. Sometimes to know just what meaning is intended makes all the difference to one's understanding of the text. So it is with this one in Hebrews "*Unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak*". (Heb. 2. 5). The Greek word here is *oikoumene*, and this word had a very special meaning in the days of our Lord. It denoted that part of the inhabited earth which was known to the Greeks and Romans. They knew that quite possibly there were other lands and peoples as yet unknown to them, but the "*oikoumene*" was that part which they did know. A quotation from the Greek geographer Strabo bears on this point. (Strabo lived at the same time as Christ and wrote his books on world geography whilst Jesus was a boy at Nazareth). He says "By this term" (*oikoumene*) "we mean only that portion of the temperate zone where we dwell, and with which we are acquainted. But it is quite possible that in the temperate zone there may be two or even more habitable earths (*oikoumene*) especially near the circle of latitude which is drawn through Athens and the Atlantic Ocean" (Strabo's "*Geography*". Book I, chap. 4: 6). America, Australia and the Far East were all unknown in Strabo's day; he came very near to guessing of their existence in the above quotation.

When therefore Luke tells us that there went a decree from Cæsar Augustus that *all the world* should be taxed (Luke 2. 1), he meant the Roman world. So with his statement in Acts 11. 28 that there should be great dearth throughout *all the world*; the cry of the persecutors "these men that have turned the *world* upside down are come hither" (Acts 17. 6), and of the Ephesians "Great is Diana of the Ephesians, whom Asia and *all the world* worshippeth" (Acts 19. 27). The kingdoms of the *world* shown to Jesus in his temptation (Luke 4. 5) were the kingdoms of the Roman world; likewise in Acts 24. 5 Paul's accusers declared him a "mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the *world*", and Paul, quoting from Psa. 19. 4, speaks in Rom. 10. 18 of the music of the stars being heard "to the ends of the *world*".

But where Strabo reflected the views of educated Greeks and Romans of the time of the First Advent in saying that there might

be two or three other "worlds" on the earth, *unknown to them*, the inspired writers, looking forward to the time of God's intervention in human affairs, saw that God knows only one world, the world of all mankind. So "*oikoumene*" in Hebrews and Revelation is used by them to mean much more than just the Roman world. Rev. 12. 9 speaks of Satan, who deceiveth the *whole world*, and Rev. 16. 14 of the kings of the earth and of the *whole world* being gathered to the final conflict. Jesus spoke (Matt. 24. 14) of His gospel being preached in *all the world* for a witness; the same world of which Paul spoke when, talking to the philosophers of Athens, he said that God had appointed a day in which He would judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17. 31). This application of the word to the whole earth is even more pointedly made in Luke 21. 26 where "*oikoumene*" is rendered "Things which are coming upon the *earth*". In Rev. 3. 10 the Lord speaks of the "hour of temptation which shall come upon all the *world*". The writer to the Hebrews refers first to God bringing His Son into the *world* (Heb. 1. 6), and then, coming to the text which is the subject of this note, speaks of the "*world* to come". In all of these instances the sacred writers spoke of a world vaster far than anything the Greeks and Romans of their day could possibly understand their word "*oikoumene*" to mean. They knew only of their own generation and the eight or ten centuries of Greek and Roman history enacted in those lands lying around the Mediterranean Sea. The Apostles knew of a wider sweep of history, going back to the beginning, and of prophecy, going forward into the days of the Kingdom, and they knew of past and future generations of men and women, the entire human race, all condemned in Adam, all to have opportunity of salvation in Christ. So much wider than the wisdom of this world was the vision that inspired those early disciples as they wrote and taught, and so much wider the meaning they could attach to this word "world".

These are all the cases in which "*oikoumene*" appears in the New Testament. In all other cases where "world" appears it is translated from "*ge*", the literal planet Earth, or "*kosmos*", the established order of things existing amongst men on the earth.

THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN

Matt.
21, 33-44

It was within a few days of His crucifixion that Jesus spoke this parable. There is not much doubt that He intended it to be prophetic—prophetic of His own death and prophetic of the Divine condemnation soon to fall upon those responsible for His death. But behind that there was a deeper purpose. Not many days hence a good many would be saying, sadly, to themselves what in fact two disciples did say aloud to the supposed stranger on the road to Emmaus “We trusted that it had been he that should have redeemed Israel”. Jesus meant to leave, in this parable, an explanation of the event soon to be consummated which would take the discouraged believers back to their own Scriptures, the books of the prophets, and to their own national history, and reveal to them that all this had been known and foreseen beforehand; that no other outcome was possible; that so far from being an irretrievable disaster, this crushing anti-climax to all their hopes was in fact the only manner in which those hopes would ever be fulfilled. So Jesus gave them the parable of the wicked husbandmen.

A familiar picture, this. A vineyard, leased by its owner to a group of men who would render him an agreed proportion of the fruits by way of rent. This was a common practice in Israel and usually worked very satisfactorily. In this instance the results were not so satisfactory. When the owner's servants came to collect the expected harvest they met with a hostile reception, were beaten, stoned and killed. The owner might have been justifiably incensed but it seems he was a man of long patience, not easily moved to anger. He sent more servants, giving the husbandmen another chance. Those servants were treated in similar manner to the first. So he sent his son, saying, so the story goes, “they will reverence my son”. But when the son appeared at the entrance to the vineyard and announced his mission, the husbandmen conspired together and killed him, so that they could seize the vineyard for themselves.

So far the little company around Jesus had listened with close attention, as every Eastern crowd will do when a story is being told. Swiftly Jesus threw out the question among them “*When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?*” Some of them at least must

have had a glimmering of what lay behind this everyday story, but even so, common honesty demanded the obvious and only reply. “*He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.*” And in so saying they condemned themselves out of their own mouths and gave opportunity for one of the most scathing denunciations ever to fall from the Master's lips.

Rightly to understand the force of that denunciation it is necessary to go back to the beginning of the story and look at it through Jewish eyes—and eyes of the Jews of the First Advent at that, when national feeling was at its zenith and national pride had not been crushed by centuries of Gentile oppression. “*There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen.*” As the simple yet vivid description fell from the lips of Jesus the minds of His hearers must inevitably have gone back to God's words to their fathers through the prophet Isaiah (5. 1-7) “*My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill. And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein . . . he looked that it brought forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes . . . for the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant, and he looked for judgment, but beheld oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry.*” Right at the beginning of the story Jesus' listeners realised that He was talking about them. They knew full well that their nation was symbolised by a vine or a vineyard in prophetic lore, and they must have listened with an added intensity to discern what the story was to unfold of good or ill for Israel.

Now the time of the vintage was come. The vineyard had been well planted with good vines, it was furnished with a winepress; there should be a good return for the owner. He had made rich provision for his tenants and could reasonably expect his due. He met instead with disloyalty, ingratitude and rebellion. That is how it was with Israel, not

only in the days of Jesus but almost all through their history. Brought out of Egypt by the mighty power of God, constituted a nation at Sinai under the terms of a Covenant which made them not only the chosen people of God but also custodians of a destiny which was to make them a light to the nations to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth, they nevertheless miserably failed to live up to their calling. When God sent His servants the prophets to recall them to a sense of their duty and their destiny, they ignored and persecuted and slew them. "*Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?*" demanded Stephen of the Sanhedrin before which he was on trial for his own life "*and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One*" (Acts 7. 52). "*The Lord hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear*" declared Jeremiah (Jer. 25. 4). "*They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tried, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; they wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth*". So runs the damning indictment of the writer to the Hebrews (Heb. 11. 37-38). Surely the wicked husbandmen did indeed beat, and stone, and kill the servants sent to them to collect the fruits of the vineyard.

But, said the householder, they will reverence my son—my beloved son, Luke's account of this parable has it (Luke 20. 13). So the Son of God came to earth. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life. He came to His own—but his own received him not. (John 1. 11). They looked upon Him and they said "*This is the heir; let us kill him and the inheritance will be ours*". There is a terrible truth underlying those words. The Messiah had come to claim His right, the kingship of the nation, to lead them into the light and life of the Kingdom of Heaven. The entrenched forces of priestly and aristocratic power were determined to preserve the traditional framework of Rabbinic theology which held the nation in bondage. Like the citizens in another parable they said "*We will not have this man to reign over us*", and when they realised that the power He possessed could only have come from above they resolved on the most desperate act of their desperate course—they resolved to get Him out of the way by putting Him

to death. None of the prophets of old, not even Moses whom they professed to obey, had ever come back from the dead to denounce their apostasy. No reason existed to think that this one, even though the most influential of all the prophets, would survive where Moses had failed. "*Let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.*" So it came about then, in Peter's biting words, "*him ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain*".

Now comes judgment. In Matthew's account Jesus makes His listeners pass judgment upon themselves. "*He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard to other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons*" (Matt. 21. 41). There could not be any doubt as to the outcome, either in the story or in the application. The fearful words of Moses in Leviticus 26 detailing their fate if they apostatised from their covenant with God is enough for that; no man of Israel was ignorant of the prediction, but most men of Israel trusted that by payment of formal lip-service to the name of Moses they could escape the threatened retribution. But now they are brought face to face with reality. There was to be no escape. Sin merited judgment, and judgment must inevitably come. And when they realised that, some must have cried out, as Luke says they did, "*God forbid*".

Jesus was talking still, talking with an earnest vehemence which compelled attention. "*Did ye never read in the Scriptures, the stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the headstone of the corner; this is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes?*" They knew that quotation well enough. So often had they heard Psalm 118 sung and chanted in the Temple service and their teachers expounding it as a song of rejected Israel's eventual triumph over the Gentiles. This was a new slant on an old theme. They were the builders and the stone was one which they had rejected. Uneasily they remembered the burning words of Isaiah, denouncing the arrogant men who ruled Jerusalem in certainty that the refuge of lies and falsehood they had erected would always protect them; how God had laid in Zion a tried and choice corner stone on which he who believed could rely. (Isa. 28. 15-16). They thought of Zechariah's vision of the unfaithful shepherds who were to be cut off and replaced by governors of Judah ruling in Jerusalem in the strength of the Lord their God (Zech. 11. 12), and they shivered and once

again they muttered "God forbid".

The compelling voice went on, and now it was inexorable in its cadences of judgment. "Therefore I say unto you, the Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." That nation is the Church of Christ, called out from among all nations to be a people for God's purpose. There can be no doubt whatever that there was an opportunity extended to Israel at the First Advent which, had it been accepted, would have changed the whole course of human history. Whether God, in His incomprehensible omnipotence, foreknew that they would reject and had planned accordingly, is quite beside the point. The opportunity was theirs, but they rejected the Prince of Life and desired a murderer to be granted unto them, and the opportunity passed them by forever. Within a very few weeks the faithful few who did accept Christ were being given their commission to be His witnesses not only in Jerusalem and all Judea, but to the uttermost parts of the earth; that work of witness has progressed ever since and resulted in the development of a nation which has brought and is bringing forth the fruits thereof.

St. Paul puts all this into theological language in Romans 11 when he likens Israel to the unfruitful olive branches which "because of unbelief" were "broken off" and Gentile Christians, being wild olive branches, grafted on in their place. But he goes on to show that the original branches, "if they abide not still in unbelief" shall be grafted in again, "and so all Israel shall be saved". That can only mean that in a then far future day, after God's work with the Christian Church is complete, He will turn again to the once apostate people of Israel and find them in chastened and repentant mood, and so receive them again, that they might, at the last, find a place in the administration of the Divine purpose. "For," says Paul in Romans 11 "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance". That then far future day can only be the day of the Second Advent, when

the eyes of Israel are opened, and they look upon Him whom they have pierced, and mourn for Him as for an only son (Zech. 12. 10). So we are presented, at the last, with the picture of the glorified Church of this Age, "changed" to be with Christ, resplendent in the heavens, and purified Israel, waiting before God, both being agents in God's hand for the extension of the knowledge of His glory over the earth just as the waters cover the sea. James saw this vividly when at the memorable conference at Jerusalem which is recorded in Acts 15 he declared that God was first visiting the nations to take out of them a people for His name—the Christian Church;—after that He would rebuild the dwelling place of Jacob—Israel—and re-establish it; all this in order that the residue of men,—all mankind as yet unreconciled to God—might seek after the Lord. Here is world conversion in very truth, to be undertaken and effected after, and not before, the salvation of the Church has been achieved and the purified nation of Israel has been made ready.

But the priests and Pharisees listening to Jesus knew nothing of all this. They heard only the solemn words of doom, "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken, and on whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder", and they were coldly furious. Arrogant in their fancied security and determined to maintain their privileged position, they sought means to lay hold on Him, plotting to get rid of Him and the annoyance and inconvenience of His words. They scorned His warnings and predictions, little knowing that within forty years more their own folly would have brought the armed might of Rome against them, sweeping away their city and their polity, and driving them captive among all nations until the Times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled. The words of the parable came terribly true. "He shall miserably destroy those wicked men, and shall let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons."

ANGEL'S FOOD

"Man did eat angel's food." This expression occurs in Psa. 78. 25 and refers to the manna sent as food for the Israelites in the wilderness. In the past, some thought that manna was indeed the food of angels, on the strength of this verse. The word here translated "angel", however, is "abbir" which is nowhere else rendered "angel" but is rendered "bull"

four times, "strong" or "strong one" (referring to bulls) four times, and "chiefest" "mighty", "mighty one" and "valiant". The verse in Psa. 78 appears to mean that man ate mighty or strength-giving food—the food of the mighty, thus contrasting the Divine provision for Israel with the poor provision they would have to depend upon if the power of God had not been exerted on their behalf.

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The Question Box

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Q. It is said that the Chinese story of creation is older than the Genesis story and this invalidates the claim of the Bible to possess the true story of man's origin upon earth. What can be said about this?

A. The alleged antiquity of Chinese history is a favourite resort of some who look for any argument wherewith to discredit the Bible. In point of fact Chinese history does not claim to be as old as that in Genesis. Bible chronology indicates that human history began at least 4100 years B.C., if the Masoretic text is followed; if the Septuagint is accepted the time must go back to something like 5500 B.C. Chinese history—which is more carefully documented than that of many other ancient nations—claims a date for the commencement of the matters with which it deals of 2852 B.C., thus giving the Bible an agreed lead of at least 1250 years. For the information and interest of any who may be called upon to answer this particular objection again the following points, taken from standard modern works on Chinese history, may be of interest.

The first ruler recorded is Fuh Hsi, said to have commenced his reign in 2852 B.C., over the first people, a small wandering tribe in north-west China from whom all the Chinese people afterwards sprang. Fuh Hsi is said to have instructed his people in hunting, fishing, shepherding, the use of musical instruments and the laws of marriage. His name is supposed to mean "ancestor of mankind" and he was represented in Chinese art attired in fig leaves! Archæological discoveries in western China—"Stone Age" implements, etc.—are dated by experts as belonging to the period 2000-2700 B.C. The next prominent name is that of Hwang Ti, 2637 B.C., who invented writing and introduced the decimal system (learned men in England are still debating whether it should be adopted in this country!) Later on came Yao, 2357 B.C., who had reigned sixty years when the country was overwhelmed by a Great Flood (B.C. 2297) which drowned many people, submerged the mountains and threatened to invade Heaven itself. Confucius, the Chinese philosopher, lived 522 to 479 B.C. Japan, previously uninhabited, was colonised about 220 B.C. by Chinese emigrants, from whom the present Japanese

people are descended.

Points of contact with the Genesis story can be traced up to the Emperor Yao and the Flood. They can be reasonably accounted for by supposing that a tribe of wanderers, pushing eastward from the common centre after the Flood, entered China from the west, started a national existence, and in after times identified their first ruler, Fuh Hsi, with the traditions they had brought with them concerning the first man, Adam. The Flood of Hwang-Ti's time may have been a colossal overflow of the Yellow River (known as "China's Sorrow" because of its frequent devastating floods) confused in legend with traditions of the Flood of Noah, or it may be a recollection of the latter event. When Marco Polo, the traveller of Venice, visited China in the thirteenth century A.D. (China being almost unknown to Europeans at that time) he was received by the then Emperor and shown a casket containing pictures or images of ancient Patriarchs, among whom he recognised a representation of Noah with the Ark. To his expression of surprise the Emperor responded by telling him that the Chinese people knew all about the Ark and the Flood; that it had not drowned all their people as it had the people of the west because the high mountain ranges of Western China had deflected the waters. It must be remembered that Christianity was fairly wide-spread in China during the sixth century of the present era and it is very possible that these traditions owe their introduction to Chinese history to that fact, but all this does demonstrate one thing; that Chinese history itself presupposes the existence of older and earlier history in the West, and therefore it is not correct to assert that Chinese history is "older" than Biblical history. It claims only to go back to the beginning of the Chinese people as a separate nation on the earth.

All things are possible to him who *believes*; they are less difficult to him who *hopes*, they are more easy to him who *loves*, and still more easy to him who perseveres in the practice of these three virtues.



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Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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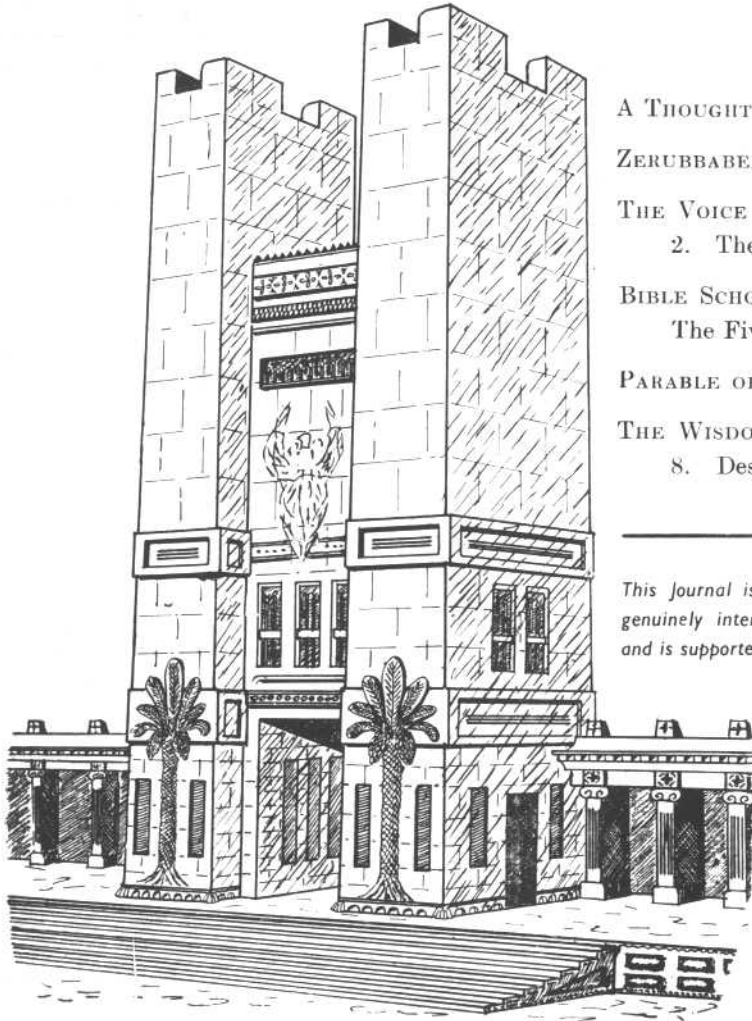
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CONTENTS

A THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	22
ZERUBBABEL'S PASSOVER	23
THE VOICE OF THE MONUMENTS	
2. The Behistun Inscription	28
BIBLE SCHOOL	
The Five Books of Moses	29
PARABLE OF THE WINESKINS	33
THE WISDOM OF ELIHU	
8. Destiny of the Wicked	36

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And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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A Thought for the Month

"There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another." (1 Cor. 15. 40).

The rapidly developing knowledge of the universe which is such a pronounced characteristic of this generation is almost sure before much longer to force some definite rethinking by reflective Christians on the traditional conception of earthly versus spiritual nature. St. Paul's momentous words in 1 Cor. 15 on this subject have been very largely ignored for many centuries past. The general idea, inherited from mediæval times, has been that there exist only two places where life is possible, with man upon earth and with God in heaven. The earth was at best a temporary living place for a limited race of creatures, descended from Adam, who would eventually be resurrected in spiritual bodies to enter upon an eternal destiny of weal or woe, in heaven or in hell, the earth itself then being destroyed. For far too long, taken over from those same mediæval times, has the spiritual body been thought of as in essence very little different from this material body, being made capable of life in a dimly visualised celestial region where the floor was all of gold and the chief occupation a devotion to music. Even to-day much too much Christian literature and preaching seems to reflect little more than this conception. In the days of the Ptolemaic cosmogony, when the wisest of men believed the earth to be the centre of the universe and the stars merely lights revolving around it, such beliefs might perhaps be excused—but not to-day. We know now that Divine creation is vaster far than anything the ancients ever conceived; this planet Earth, so far from being the centre of creation, is only one insignificant speck in the immensity of the starry skies. It is reliably estimated that in our own particular group of stars, our own galaxy, to use the technical term, there are at least one million planets so like our Earth that life such as we know could flourish on their

surfaces. And the question must eventually come before us for answer: has God created all these Earth-like planets—and others more unlike the Earth—to waste? Or is there some mightier aspect of His creative design as yet unrevealed to us, the possibilities of which we might at least dimly visualise?

That is not all. Beyond this material creation, composed, as we now know, of innumerable atoms fused into the ninety-two God-made elements, atoms which some astronomers tell us are even still coming into existence by a power unknown to scientists and incapable of perception by scientific means, there exists another creation, one which St. Paul calls the spiritual or the celestial, fundamentally apart from this material one that we know. That spiritual world is incapable of discernment by the five human senses or by any scientific measuring or detecting instrument devised by man. But it is a real world, and the society of angels is a real society, and the presence of Deity in the midst of that society is a real Presence. Now, says Paul, the glory of the terrestrial is one thing and the glory of the celestial is another. The terrestrial body is one kind of body and the celestial another, and because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven it is essential that those who pass from the one to the other do so, not by the physical transference of their material human bodies, but by what Paul calls a "change", a metamorphosis. The material is changed into the spiritual. He elaborates this theme in 2 Cor. 5 by explaining that we must lay aside this "tabernacle"—dwelling-place—of this body in order to be "clothed upon" with a completely new dwelling-place which is from, and there-

(Concluded on page 32)

For the benefit of those who wish to keep the memorial of our Lord's death at the time nearest to the anniversary, it is suggested that Thursday, 30 March is the appropriate date.

ZERUBBABEL'S PASSOVER

A Story of a
Great Awakening

Somewhere in the Book of Isaiah there is a passage that describes the spirit in which the Jewish exiles, returning from Babylon to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem, in the days of Cyrus king of Persia, journeyed across the desert and climbed the steep, ragged Judean hills to their ruined city. *"Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion. . . . Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. . . . The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations: and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. . . . Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence . . . ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rereward."* (Isa. 52. 8-12). That deliverance from the Babylonian captivity was a very different thing from the Exodus out of Egypt. Under Moses the earlier Israelites had gone out in haste and by flight, first eating the Passover girded as for a journey and with every evidence of urgency. They had gone out without the consent and against the wishes of the Egypt that had held them captive for four generations. But this time things were different. *"Ye shall not go out with haste, nor yet by flight."* Cyrus king of Persia had issued a decree encouraging them to go, and had given them necessities for the journey and the wherewithal to commence a new life in an empty and desolate land. He had restored to them the holy treasures that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple and brought to Babylon fifty years previously, and had commanded them to build again the magnificent building that his predecessor had destroyed. No wonder they rejoiced! No wonder that, in the words of the Psalmist, singing of this very event, *"When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing; then said they among the nations, The Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us; we are glad."* (Psa. 126. 1-3).

It was in this spirit that fifty thousand immigrants came into the land and immedi-

ately set about raising the walls of the Temple. The enthusiasm was great at first, for the influence of Daniel, the saintly man who had once been Nebuchadnezzar's Prime Minister, and a tower of strength to the captive exiles, was still strong upon them. Daniel, too old now to come back to Judea, had blessed their going and told them of the opportunity that was theirs. Now in the seventh month, the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, the feast that commemorated their journeying in the wilderness for forty years after their departure from Egypt, they were gathered together in Jerusalem. From all the villages and hamlets of Judea they had come to worship before God at the first ceremonial to be conducted on the sacred site since Nebuzar-Adan the commander-in-chief of Nebuchadnezzar's army had set fire to the Temple, and burned it to the ground, at the time of the Captivity. That had been a time of disaster and sorrow; this was one of hope and expectation. The house of the Lord was to be rebuilt and the ancient ceremonies restored, and Israel would once more bear a name among the nations. That was the faith that burned brightly in every breast.

The little community had two leaders of sterling worth, Zerubbabel the prince and Joshua the High Priest. Zerubbabel was of the kingly line; he traced his natural descent from Nathan the son of David. The royal pedigree from Solomon had become extinct in Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, and the humbler line of Nathan took its place after the Captivity; thus Zerubbabel was its present representative. Through him, though he knew it not, the line of Christ was to be carried on until of his descendants, one day, Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. Joshua the son of Jehozadek was a High Priest for the times. Nothing is known of his father, who was Israel's High Priest during the Babylonian captivity. His grandfather, Seraiah, High Priest in the days of Zedekiah, was executed by the victorious Babylonians at the capture of the city. Jeremiah's picture of the political intrigues of that period indicate that the priests were hand in glove with the king and very possibly Seraiah was entangled with politics more than he should have been and suffered a fate he might have avoided had he been more devoted to his own commission before God. Nebuchad-

nezzar had a shrewd insight into the honesty or otherwise of men and it is impossible not to notice the difference between the respective treatments he meted out to Seraiah and to Jeremiah, who had kept out of politics and maintained, very faithfully, his witness to God. (Jer. 39. 11-14 and 52. 24-27). But it is evident that Joshua was of sterling worth. The approving tone of Zechariah's third chapter shows that he was a man the Lord could use. Under these two men, Zerubbabel and Joshua, Israel could have risen very quickly to a place of honour and power among the nations.

The people failed them. The people, who had come back from Babylon with songs of praise on their lips for so great deliverance, in exultation at the fall of "that great city", in joy that the Lord had turned again their captivity and done great things for them, began to lose their first fine enthusiasm, began to care more for their own farms and gardens and houses than for the house of the Lord. The affairs of daily life loomed as of greater moment than the service of God, and when the adversaries of Judah began to put obstacles in the way of the restoration work it is plain that Israel in the mass were not at all averse to letting the case go by default.

While Cyrus lived, the work went on, but not at the pace originally planned. The Samaritans, even then bitter enemies of Judah, hindered and frustrated the work. It was not entirely stopped, but neither was it pressed ahead with zeal and expedition. And they made one great and grievous mistake.

If the Samaritan complaint to Cambyses, the successor of Cyrus, as recorded in Ezra 4, was true, and not a malicious misrepresentation on their part, then the Jews were at that time engaged in building, not only the Temple, but also the walls and foundations of the city. Now it is an important thing to notice that the decree of Cyrus gave no mandate to build the city; it was to build the Temple only. There was a deep truth here for Israel to learn. Their Temple was to rise, undefended, in the midst of a hostile population. The Lord Himself would defend both His Temple and His people—but they would not. They fell after the same example of unbelief that has been seen so often in world history—resource to material means of defence, to carnal weapons, to defend Divine interests. They would not understand that God is able to defend His own.

That was a test on the people. Now, at all events, they could have said, as did some of

their descendants on a certain memorable occasion "*Whether it be right to hearken unto men rather than unto God, judge ye; but as for us . . .*" They could have defied both the Samaritans and the king's edict, and taken themselves in prayer to God for His leading and His protection, and gone forward in faith that His purposes would be accomplished. But they did not. Therefore in consequence "*then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.*" (Ezra 4. 24).

So the whole glorious dream faded and the golden hopes with which the exiles had set out to return to their own land were in less than a decade dashed to the ground. At the first breath of opposition the people had wilted and laid down their tools, and turned themselves to the secular pursuits of every day, the tilling of the land and the gaining of livelihoods, the building of houses and organising of communal life, the buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage, the while the deserted, half-finished house of God stood on Mount Moriah, a crumbling monument to the fickleness of man and the weakness of his faith.

But in the second year of Darius, nineteen years after the exiles had returned from Babylon and ten years after work on the Temple had been completely stopped, something momentous happened.

Two young men, Haggai and Zechariah, suddenly came into the public eye and commenced preaching in Jerusalem and Judea. Haggai started first; two months later he was joined by his fellow-prophet Zechariah. These two young men, without any material resources, accomplished in the short space of four years what twenty years of time backed by all the material wealth of the thousands of Israel, the influence of Zerubbabel and Joshua, the authority of the decree of Cyrus, had failed to do. They achieved the rebuilding and the dedication of the Temple!

If the Zechariah and Iddo of Neh. 12 are the same as the prophet and his forebear of those names mentioned in Zech. 1. 1, which is a very probable thing, then Zechariah must have been a very young man, certainly at most in his early twenties, for Iddo his grandfather would then have returned to Judea in the first year of Cyrus, probably an old man. On this assumption, it is likely that Haggai, about whose antecedents we know nothing, was a young man also. There is a freshness and vigour about both their

prophecies that seems to suggest as much. Zerubbabel the prince and Joshua the High Priest would by this time, twenty years after the Return, be getting on in years, at the very least in late middle-age; Neh. 12. 16 indicates that later on Zechariah held office in the priesthood under Joiakim, the High Priest who succeeded Joshua. The two older men would probably be to some extent dispirited and discouraged at the failure of all their high hopes, the adverse decision of Artaxerxes and the apathy of the people of Israel combining to dissuade them from any considerable activity in the direction of restoring the Temple of God. Then like a thunder-bolt came the message declaimed in the streets and squares of the city, told in the ears of shepherds and peasants in the countryside, brought to the notice of the prince and the High Priest, word that prophets were arisen again in Israel. A message for the times, a message that told with decision and conviction to what cause was due their unhappy condition and the failure of their one-time high ideals and hopes. "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?" demanded Haggai. "Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts. Consider your ways!" Scarcely had the tones of his accusation died upon the air than the equally penetrating voice of his brother-prophet Zechariah commanded attention. "The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers. Therefore . . . thus saith the Lord of hosts 'Turn ye unto me . . . and I will turn unto you'." Then Haggai again "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord." To Joshua, the people's High Priest, Zechariah addressed himself deliberately "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; if thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts"; with Haggai rejoining "Be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord, and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the High Priest, and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work; for I am with you."

Haggai and Zechariah had put their fingers upon the source of the trouble. Faith and zeal had sunk to a low ebb: there was no longer that heavenly vision which had inspired the first emigrants to wend their way across the desert with songs and thanksgiving on their lips, and their faces turned toward Zion. Because faith and zeal had waned, the enemies of Israel and of God had loomed

nearer and more menacing, and in fear and doubt the work of God had been stopped.

Behold now the difference! The prohibition of the Persian king was still in force. "Cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until commandment shall be given from me." (Ezra 4. 21). The wrath of the king could still be backed by the military might of Persia if this handful of Jews dared to rebel against his express decree. The Samaritans, the ancient enemies at whose instigation the work had been stopped ten years previously, were still there, malignantly watchful, and would not hesitate to report any new activity to the king without delay. There was no change in the circumstances; no reason from the outward and material point of view why any fresh endeavour would not meet the same fate as past ones. And yet, most remarkable of happenings, the fervent preaching of these two youngsters so wrought upon the minds and hearts of the people that they forgot all their fears and apathy, regained their faith, and without so much as giving a thought to the king of Persia, rose up as one man to resume the building of their Temple. "Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel . . . then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem, and with them were the prophets of God helping them." (Ezra 5. 1). That is only the bald historical note of the happening; let the books of Haggai and Zechariah tell the splendid story in their own way, how that the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, and Joshua, the high priest, and all the people, so that they came and did work in the house of the Lord (Hag. 1. 14) how the Lord promised "the glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former" (Hag. 2. 9) and that wonderful award, set as a gem in this inspiring prophecy "from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid . . . FROM THIS DAY WILL I BLESS YOU." (Hag. 2. 18-19). Let the splendid imagery of Zechariah's visions illuminate those joyful days, the view of Jerusalem inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle therein, of Joshua rescued from the accusers, of the prosperity of Judah and ultimately the defeat of all her enemies, and the kingship of the Lord established over all the earth. "At evening time it shall be light." The wonderful inspiration that we ourselves

draw from this thrilling book we owe to the days when those two young men stood in the markets of Jerusalem and bade the people forget their fears, pay no heed to the mandates of that heathen king, and enter the service of the Lord their God in the building of His sanctuary.

Of course it was not long before the Samaritans were there again, taking particulars from the leaders, and sitting down to write another report to the Persian king—Darius this time—at Babylon. Note the difference in the spirit with which their questioning was met on this occasion. *"We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago. . . ."* (Ezra 5. 11). There was no fear and hesitation now; the same Zerubbabel and Joshua, the same builders and labourers, the same citizens, who ten years ago had laid down their tools at the king's behest now proudly declared their determination to continue. Last time they ran away from the lion; this time they faced the lion and defied him, in the strength of the Lord their God.

And the sequel? Let Darius answer for himself, in his reply to the complainants *"Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place. Moreover I make a decree . . ."* and Darius went on to command that assistance be given to these Jews in their work, with materials and money, and offerings to be made to God on the king's behalf; that any who hindered the work or violated the king's word should himself be put to death. The king personally invoked the wrath of the God of Israel upon all who would harm this house of God at Jerusalem. *"I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed."* (Ezra 6).

How often do we repeat to each other the old saying "Fear knocked at the door; faith opened it; and no one was there!" Here is an instance where that principle was put into practice and a whole people reaped the reward of faith. But there was much more involved than the building of a house of prayer for that generation. It was from this day, when the Temple began to be built, that there was commenced the development of that Jewish people, with its distinctive worship, to which Jesus came nearly five centuries later. It was at this time that the Old Testament as we know it was completed, in the sayings and writings of Haggai and Zechariah and Malachi, to be welded into an authoritative

canon of Scripture by Ezra the pious priest fifty years later. Those enthusiastic and zealous Jews under Zerubbabel and Joshua, Haggai and Zechariah, builded better than they knew when they defied the powers of this world and laid their hands to the Lord's work. They brought the work and the story of the Old Testament to its consummation and prepared the way for the New.

"And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king" (Ezra 6. 15). Four short years. In that brief space of time they had built the sanctuary, erected the great altar, set the golden vessels of Solomon's Temple, brought back from Babylon, in place, and were ready to reinstate the ceremonial and offerings that were commanded by Moses. It was nearly the season of the Passover. Nisan followed Adar, and from the third day of Adar there would only be some six weeks to the fourteenth day of Nisan and the celebration of Israel's most solemn feast.

It was in the spirit of this great awakening of faith and zeal that they kept the Passover—perhaps one of the most memorable that Israel had ever known. It was memorable because it made so deep an impression upon the minds of all who participated. It made that impression because it meant so much more to them than did an ordinary Passover. The usual year-by-year celebration reminded them in a perfunctory sort of way of their ancestors' deliverance from Egypt, but it had grown to be a custom having some historical interest but that did not touch daily life very closely. This Passover was different. It denoted something more than their nation's deliverance from Egypt. It denoted something more than their own more recent deliverance from Babylon. It denoted each one's individual deliverance from the bonds of apathy and indifference which had wellnigh cost them the loss of their favoured standing before God. It marked their entrance into a new life, a life in which God and His holiness was to be placed first and become the centre around which all of life's actions and activities were to circle. The glowing words of Zechariah had taken firm root in their hearts, and they could not wait for the then far-distant Millennial Age to realise their fulfilment, even although the real application of those words is to that Age. They must apply them to themselves at once, and they did. *"In that day"* he had said *"shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE*

LORD; and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar." Everything in life, whether normally finding its place in secular or sacred use, is to be holy to God. "Whatsoever ye do" said the inspired Apostle at a later date "do all to the glory of God." So that Passover became a time of renewed dedication of life, consecration of heart, to the service of the Lord of Hosts.

There is a great lesson for us in all of this, great doctrinal truth that we must needs take to ourselves. It is that cleansing must precede consecration, faith and zeal precede entrance into Divine favour and a place in Divine purposes. Not for nothing did the Apostles exhort the generation that witnessed Pentecost to repent and be converted *so that* times of refreshing might come from the presence of the Lord. (Acts 3, 19). There is a great work of Temple building going on during this Age but God cannot use any in this work except they first be cleansed from all contact with the people of the land, separated completely to His service, and then be animated by that spirit of faith and belief, zeal and enthusiasm, which alone can make them mighty through God in the doing of His work. The powers of this world may threaten and forbid; it is the spirit that trusts in the over-abounding power of God Most High, that will defy the forces of unrighteousness and lay hands to God's work, in full confidence that He will defend and prosper, that is triumphant at last. Once let us be fully persuaded, as Israel was persuaded by Haggai and Zechariah, that God's righteousness must assuredly prevail at the end and all the forces of evil be vanquished and flee away, and the battle, so far as we are concerned, is won. We shall stand and see the Temple completed, and know that in that Sanctuary the Lord of all will find a dwelling-place and a place of meeting with all nations.

Zerubbabel, and Joshua, and Haggai, and Zechariah, and all the people with them "*kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy; for the Lord had made them joyful . . . to strengthen their hands in the work of the*

house of God, the God of Israel." So the story ends, at the last verse of that eventful sixth chapter of the Book of Ezra. "The joy of the Lord shall be your strength" said another upon another occasion. How true it is! The joy that comes from a full and sincere consecration of heart and life to the Lord, and a clear and definite separation from the interests and distractions of earth, the "people of the land", and a firm, unyielding resistance to every opposing and seductive influence, the enemies of our faith, this joy it is that will give us the strength to overcome. Like Elijah, who partook of the heaven-provided sustenance in his time of extremity, and in the strength of that meat went forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God, we, reaching out to take to ourselves every spiritual provision that is made for our needs, and maintaining faith, zeal and determination, will remain unshaken by all those things wherewith the earth to-day is being shaken. We shall perceive, at the last, the fruits of our faith in the coming to earth of that heavenly Jerusalem under the beneficent rule of which death is to cease and all sorrow and sighing is to flee away.

The feast of joy in accomplishment, therefore, follows faith and zeal, never doubt and unbelief. We who have been set free from a great bondage are given the privilege of becoming Temple-builders. It is in the strength of God that we play our part in that work of building the Temple which is to be a house of prayer for all nations; as we share together in Passover let us remember that there was a time when the powers of this Age, the powers of evil, had to be defied before God's protection could be manifested and his work go forward. It may be so again. God grant that in such case we are found, not like those who weakly acquiesced in the command to stop work, but those who joyfully and zealously went forward to the execution of their Divine commission, trusting their God for defence while they laboured in the interests of His work in the earth.

FROM THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

If we are indeed building upon that Rock which is Christ, there can be no disappointment, no disillusionment, no discouragement, for we shall be in very truth continually beholding, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, and are being changed into the same

image, not because our idols do not have feet of clay, but because of that very fact. Not because there is nothing in our life that saddens and wearies us, but because by means of these very things we are inspired to lay hold the more tenaciously to that which entereth as an anchor, within the Veil.

THE VOICE OF THE MONUMENTS

2. The Behistun Inscription

The traveller, going eastward from Bagdad (near ancient Babylon) into Persia, is confronted at one stage of his journey by a stupendous precipice of rock, four thousand feet high—the blunt end of a range of hills. The rock is called Behistun, a name which means in the native tongue “the place of God” and from time immemorial it has been accounted holy. Babylonian, Persian and Greek armies have passed and repassed that sheer cliff on their missions of conquest or in hasty retreat. Merchants from days when the world was young have pitched their camps at its foot. And about five hundred years before Christ the great Persian king Darius—the one who gave permission for the Temple building operations to be resumed in the days of the return from Babylon (Ezra 5. 1-17) caused a long inscription recounting his military victories to be chiselled upon the smooth face of the rock a hundred feet above the ground. He had the work executed with great care, for he wanted his inscription to endure for many years. The rock was carefully smoothed and polished, the lines of writing and the curving sculptures done by skilled craftsmen: then the finished work was painted over with a varnish so hard and enduring that it has protected the greater part of the inscription for over two thousand years, unto this day.

It was in the year 1835 that Henry Rawlinson, a political assistant to the Governor of Kermanshah, a Persian town not far from Behistun, set to work to copy the inscription. The young enthusiast was destined to become one of the world's greatest archæologists in after days, but the service he rendered the world in this, his first great achievement, is one of the most momentous in all the history of research in Eastern lands. Having climbed to the inscription, a matter of some difficulty, he found that it was written in three languages, like the Rosetta stone which had been discovered forty years earlier, but whereas that stone had been written in Greek and Egyptian and became the means of unlocking the secrets of Egyptian hieroglyphics to the modern world, this inscription at Behistun was written in Persian, Median and Babylonian. In 1835 only Persian was understood and that very imperfectly. The Babylonian inscriptions and tablets which were being found in such profusion in all the lands of the East

were still completely unreadable; it was Rawlinson's work on that day that afforded the clues necessary to an understanding of the Babylonian cuneiform alphabet and symbols and so made possible the facility with which those tablets are read to-day.

By the year 1847 the task of decipherment was complete and from then on the knowledge gained was applied to thousands of cuneiform tablets already existing in the world's museums and the collections of scholars. Progress was slow; the correct translation of many signs and terms has been arrived at only in quite recent years; but for a full century now it has been possible to read of the lives and achievements of the fellow citizens of Shem, of Abraham, of Moses and of Daniel, for Babylonian cuneiform was the written language of all Western Asia for a span of three thousand years and the histories of the times were written down in those queer little wedge-shaped characters. It is certain that much of the early part of the book of Genesis was thus written, and when Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees he would assuredly have taken many such tablets with him.

Rawlinson had to copy the inscription by hand, for photography had not been invented in his day. In 1904 two twentieth century archæologists, R. Campbell Thompson and L. W. King, of the British Museum, climbed the rock and photographed the writing. They found remarkably few errors in Rawlinson's work of sixty years previously. In 1946 an American expedition revisited the place but added no further information to that already known. The Behistun inscription had done its work in making it possible for men to read the voluminous written records of Assyria and Babylonia which, recovered from the burning sands and ruined cities of Mesopotamia, have done so much to make the Bible a living book to us.

To-day we have the Babylonian stories of the Flood and of the Creation; the Assyrian record of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah; the invasion of Canaan by Joshua and the Israelites; Nebuchadnezzar's building of great Babylon, and many others, indelibly impressed on imperishable clay tablets, safely reposing in the world's museums and colleges, giving their testimony to the truth of the Bible story. And the Bible

accounts stand as purer, nobler, and more exact and accurate, by contrast. Our knowledge of earth's history has been immeasurably extended until we can now trace the movements of the sons of Shem and Ham back to within a few centuries of the Flood. We can appreciate more vividly the atmosphere in which the lives of Abram, Daniel, Ezekiel, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther were spent. And this knowledge that has come to us had its beginning a hundred years ago when young Rawlinson scaled that cliff out in Persia and copied the writing that had defied the wind and rain of twenty-four centuries.

Small wonder then that a nineteenth century writer, Dr. Samuel Kinns, wrote in 1891, "There cannot be the least doubt that Sir Henry Rawlinson was raised up by the Almighty to be the pioneer in this great and glorious work, and was specially endowed with courage and wisdom for the undertaking, combined as they were with a belief that the Bible is a revelation from God to man". That is an important point. Rawlinson was a Christian; what he did, he did to the glory of God, knowing that his work would make the Bible better understood, and God blessed his endeavours.

Bible School **THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES**

Part 2. Gen. 1-5

STUDY 2 *The Coming of Man* Genesis 1. 26-30; 2. 5 - 3. 24

Creation or Evolution The narrative demands that the first man was directly created and awoke to consciousness a fully matured human being, possessed of the power of endless life the while the link with God remained unbroken. Man was made "in our image and likeness" (1. 26). This is not necessarily a physical copy of the lineaments of God; this is unthinkable in view of present-day conception of the nature of God. It may be an indication that man is in the spiritual and mental image of God and physical image of earth or earthly beings, i.e. a combination of the heavenly and the earthly patterns. In no case can Evolution as generally expounded to-day offer a true picture of man's appearance on earth. The Evolution hypothesis took shape in consequence of an increasing conflict between traditional theology and unfolding scientific knowledge, arising first in the 17th century and reaching its peak in the 19th. More careful study of Biblical narratives and testimony of 20th century archaeological research has blunted the edge of many scientific objections to the Christian standpoint. The historical verity of the creation of the first man from which all humanity is descended and the fall of that man into sin and his condemnation to death therefore, is essential to the Christian faith since the entire philosophy of the redemption that is in Christ hinges on this. There can be no compromise between Special Creation and Evolution. The latter has no conceivable place for a Saviour Christ in whom resides the power to restore all that

was lost by Adam.

Genesis 1 shows the earth being prepared over long ages for man: Genesis 2 tells of man's creation and introduction to the earth. First important doctrinal truth emerges in 2. 7. Man is composed of the elements of the earth as to his physical body, but God inbreathes the power of life, and man, thus vivified and alive, is constituted a living soul. Later on it is shown (2. 17) that it is possible for that life to be withdrawn and the man die: he is a living soul no longer, the body returning to dust and the spirit of life to God who gave it. Man is thus shown to be a mortal being, capable of sentient life only whilst that life is conferred and supported by God. Death is the antithesis of life.

Man is intended to be lord of terrestrial creation, to control the lower animals (1. 28) and to administer and maintain the amenities and resources of the earth for his own benefit and as a steward of this aspect of Divine creation (2. 15). Nothing in the Eden story lends support to the idea that the earth is only a temporary home for man; rather the impression is that the earth is an essential part of ultimate creation intended to subsist everlastingly, and man a creature expressly designed to inhabit it and so fulfil a place in the Divine scheme.

The Garden The description of the Garden of Eden is expressed in geographical terms current in 2300 B.C. and bears evidence of having been written in its present form at about that time in Sumerian cuneiform. Eden, Ethiopia (*Heb.* Cush) Havilah and Assyria (Asshur) were all names of nearby lands at

that time and the rivers bore the names quoted in Genesis. The aim of the narrator was to show that the Garden was situated below the confluence of four rivers well known to his readers but in a locality which in his time, as in ours, was, and is, covered by the waters of the Persian Gulf. If the great valley which is now the Persian Gulf was in fact dry land at the time of man's creation, it would, surrounded on all sides by mountains and watered by a great river, constitute an ideal spot for the early development of the human race. Many generations could have lived comfortably in this valley before increasing population induced men to migrate into the outer world and by then their numbers would have rendered the cultivation and development of less favoured regions an easier task than it was for Adam and Eve, banished to the outside world on account of their sin and so compelled to labour in the sweat of their brow. The word for "garden" is one meaning parkland and well suited to such fertile valley: the river names were well known in the writer's day and three of the rivers still flow in Iraq; Hiddekel is the modern Tigris but Gihon is the Wady-el-Batin which has almost dried up due to the gradual rising of the Arabian peninsula through the ages. Ethiopia (Cush) is not the modern land of that name but the earlier Cush in northern Arabia which gave its name to the modern land when the Cushites migrated into Africa from Asia at a much later date than that of the writer of Genesis 2.

Man Genesis 2. 7, 8, 15, 18, and the whole of the subsequent narrative demands that the man was specially created by Divine power, coming immediately into existence, not evolved or developed from any pre-existing sentient creature. No different principle is involved than in the creation of wine where only water formerly existed in the miracle at Cana, or the instantaneous creation of live, healthy flesh to replace that of a corrupting corpse as in the case of Lazarus. In each case surrounding elements of the earth are transmuted in a moment of time to assume a new combination and form. There should be no difficulty in accepting this to-day when the transmuting of one element to another or the production of new elements by nuclear processes is a commonplace among scientists. The Christian faith rests upon the foundation doctrine of future life through a resurrection from the dead and the accomplishment of such resurrection will involve the creation of physical bodies by Divine power just as in

the case of Adam. As a digression, St. Paul explains in 1 Cor. 15. and 2 Cor. 5 that those who in this Age have become "footstep followers" of Christ, devoted and dedicated to His service will experience a resurrection to heavenly conditions and a celestial body instead of a terrestrial one—this conception only lays additional stress upon the fact that for the non-elect of mankind the resurrection at the Last Day is to earthly and physical conditions, and this agrees with the Scriptural presentation of the Messianic earthly kingdom which comes at the end of this age of sin and death.

Woman The woman was not created directly from the elements of the earth as was the man; she was biologically of the man and achieved separate existence by some process of development and separation which is not much more than hinted at in Gen. 2. 21-23. "Rib" in vs. 21 is not an anatomical but a constructional term referring to small rooms or cavities flanking the sides of buildings, or the beams or pillars for the same. "Made he a woman" is correctly "built". The whole idea is that of a gradual development until Eve stood before Adam, as a creature like himself in a sense that no other living creature he knew could be like him. Chap. 1. 28 contains the Divine admonition to the pair to be fruitful and populate the earth as one of the three commissions; the other two were to subdue the earth, i.e. to bring into orderly use for their needs and comfort; and to exercise control (dominion) over the brute creation. It is probable that Adam and Eve possessed powers of control over the animals which have been lost on account of sin. In any case this dominion over the lower creation is said elsewhere to be a characteristic of the Messianic Age when sin is to be eliminated from the nature of mankind.

This commission to be fruitful effectually disposes of the old idea that the sin which led to the fall was in some way connected with the marital relation. It also demonstrates that it was—and is—the Divine intention that this planet shall be properly and completely inhabited by intelligent creatures, rendering due allegiance to God. Traditional objections to the idea of the entire race being descended from one pair have no weight; on the affirmative side what is known of world population and tribal migration in past ages is consonant with the gradual increase of the race from such a starting-point. St. Paul's theology demands that all men are physically descended from one man that they might all be

ransomed in one, Christ, having been condemned in one, Adam.

Antiquity of man and date of creation. There are differences in the Old Testament versions. In all cases genealogies are given in Gen. 5 and 11 which purport to cover the span of time between Adam and Abraham (after which there is plenty of independent material on which to construct historical periods). But the three versions do not agree. The Masoretic text gives a much shorter period than the Septuagint; Babylonian and Sumerian records agree best with the Septuagint. In any case the Bible systems of dating cannot be made to suggest that the creation of Adam took place more than about 7000 years ago. Geologists claim a much greater antiquity for the relics they study, but their methods involve a great deal of assumption and their conclusions are frequently upset. Archæologists are tending steadily to reduce their claims for the antiquity of their finds and the records they decipher. Forty years ago, Sargon of Agade, early military conqueror, was dated at 5500 B.C.; he is now more reliably placed at 2200 B.C. The earliest Pharaohs of Egypt, once dated at 11,000 B.C. are now fixed not earlier than about 2700 B.C. and this has been supported by the modern method known as the "Carbon 14" test. This same test has given numerous confirmations of human remains dated back as far as four or five thousand years, and a very few which are claimed to extend back as much as nine thousand. On the whole, every field of scientific investigation is gradually and steadily coming nearer to the Biblical statements as to the duration of man's existence upon earth.

The Fall Genesis 3 introduces two salient factors, the serpent and the tree. Still remembering that this narrative in its present form was apparently written in Sumeria in 2300 B.C. the mention of serpent should be viewed in the light of that period. To the Sumerians the serpent was the symbol of life; they identified it in its mythological form with supernatural beings of surpassing beauty. The Genesis reference might well mean that Eve was visited by an angelic being and if so the story is more rational; temptation by such a visitant is much more understandable. The two trees, one the tree of life and the other the tree of death, bring to mind the fact that worship in ancient times was intimately associated with trees; before the days of temples men used groves of trees to symbolise to them the place where their gods dwelt and

where they could worship their gods. The story of the temptation and the Fall may well be the story of the seduction of the woman and then of the man from allegiance to, and worship of, God, to allegiance to and the worship of the Devil. Such an act would cut the mystic link which bound man to God, the life-line by which continuing supplies of life reached man, and so the processes of death commenced, to culminate many years later in the physical death of the body. The only gleam of hope in an apparent story of tragedy is the cryptic promise that the seed of the woman should eventually bruise the serpent's head; this commences a theme which runs right through the Bible, the development of the "Seed of Promise". Abraham's son Isaac, the nation of Israel, eventually Christ and His Church, all appear in turn as fulfillments of the further promise that in Abraham's seed will all families of the earth be blessed. Adam and Eve were debarred from the Tree of Life but later prophetic vision shows all repentant humanity eventually awarded full access to the Tree of Life, when sin has been conquered and death is no more in the new and renovated earth God will create.

Cain and Abel Genesis 4 tells of the first family. Cain in jealousy, kills his brother and with his wife is banished from among men to the land of Nod; this is the Hebrew transliteration of the Sumerian term for a territory on the eastern side of the Persian Gulf. The penalty of Cain's crime is that henceforward the land which he tills shall no longer yield; he is to be a nomad and wanderer. It is noteworthy that following this decree Cain and his descendants are said to have developed the characteristics of city-dwellers (4. 16) nomad cattle raisers (4. 20) musicians (4. 21) and metal-workers (4. 22) but not agriculturists. Cain's "city" of 4. 17 is "*ir*" meaning primarily a walled place and might only have been a stockaded fort built for protection. The six generations of Cain's descendants include four names which are somewhat similar to four of Seth's descendants in the line leading to Noah but there is no need to suppose on this account that there is any connection between the two lines. The implication in chapter 4 is that Cain's descendants were godless and Seth's were Godfearing, at least for the first few generations. Tubal-cain in 4. 22, in the eighth generation from Adam, is the first metal worker, in copper (not brass) and iron. This implies that the art of mining metallic ores and smelting them into work-

able metals was developed at this time, some thousand to fifteen hundred years from the creation of Adam. The name of Tubal-cain reappears in classical mythology as Vulcan the god of thunderbolts and lightning, imagined working his bellows and anvil in a cave within the recesses of a mountain, and from this comes the word volcano. Eve's continued faith in God is shown in 4. 26 at the birth of Seth who she described as another "seed" given by God to replace the slain Abel.

Antediluvian genealogy — Genesis 5.

The increase of the human race was probably very slow at this time; the Bible is very definite as to the long lives, judged by modern ideas, of the patriarchs whose names are mentioned, but it does not do hastily to dismiss these lives of seven or eight centuries as fictitious, nor yet to adopt the totally unfounded hypothesis of some to the effect that these periods were those of "dynasties" bearing the names of their individual founders. All through Biblical history the span of human life is shown progressively to decrease, from many centuries at the first to a few centuries in Abraham's time, to a hundred and twenty years in Moses' time, and to the present "three score and ten".

Genesis 5 is a straightforward genealogy of one branch of the Adamic race, from Adam through his son Seth, to Noah. There is a difference between the Masoretic, Septuagint and Samaritan texts in the age of some of the patriarchs at the birth of their successors; the total period is variously given as: Hebrew 1656 Septuagint 2262 Samaritan 1307. No data

of any kind exists to explain the reason for the differences. So far as the Masoretic Hebrew is concerned, it might well be that the Masorites (8th Century A.D.) deliberately altered the Septuagint figures to conceal the fact that six thousand years from Adam, according to the Septuagint chronology, had already expired and this fact lent support to the Christian claim for Christ, who had thus appeared just before the close of the six thousand. The Jewish belief was that the Messiah would appear at the end of six thousand years from creation and usher in the seventh thousand years of peace, the Millennium.

No details are given concerning the events and history of the antediluvian world. The story is resumed with the prelude to the Flood, in chapter 6. During the entire period between Adam and Noah we have only the casual allusions to the Cainite Lamech and his sons, the musician and the metalworker; the Sethite Lamech and his son Noah, who should bring relief from the sin-cursed earth, and the brief intimation of the saintly Enoch's translation that "he should not see death", halfway through the period. Chapter 6 prefixes the narrative of the Flood by reference to the violence and destruction brought to the earth by the mysterious "Nephilim" but with no indication how long before the Flood this invasion took place. Jewish tradition places it in the days of Jared and hence about a thousand years before the Flood.

Next month: *From the Flood to Abraham.*

Continued from page 22 (Thought for the Month)

fore of, heaven—the celestial. That world is in every respect as real to its citizens as this earth is to us, but in another sphere of being, a sphere which men, as men, can never reach even though their space ships range through every recess of the physical universe. A world as full of abounding activity as this, albeit one in which sin and the effects of sin find no place. A world in which God is known and revered, in which every knee bows to the Name of Jesus, and every tongue confesses Him to be King of kings and Lord of lords—and not content with lip service, is ceaselessly and eternally active in some allotted duty, serving the interests of God's creation.

But that still leaves those million or so planets, potential centres of what we must call terrestrial life. Are they to be eternally waste, or does God create only to destroy?

Even this earth of ours has life and living beings in a variety of environments—on the land, in the air, down in the depths of the seas. Even in the subterranean oil deposits, sealed thousands of feet below the surface for unnumbered ages, life has been found. In the light; in the darkness; in the Arctic ice; in desert sand; under almost every conceivable condition, God's creative activity in the production of abundant life is to be found. So many Christians, following tradition, would limit the ultimate purpose of God to the development of one race of ultimately celestial creatures to surround His throne in one celestial environment, relegating all other creation either to annihilation or eternal desolation. Here surely is a subject, important to the Christian faith, which warrants thought.

THE PARABLE OF THE WINESKINS

Luke
5, 31-37

Matthew Levi the tax collector was a proud man and a happy one this day. This was not the first time he had entertained his fellow collectors and his other friends to a feast in his house, but it was unusual for his regular guests to find themselves seated in the same room with members of a totally dissimilar social class, the Scribes and the Pharisees. And they were rather intrigued by the purpose for which they had assembled. They were there to do honour to the new prophet who had arisen in Israel. Tax collectors usually had no time for prophets; they left that department of life to the men whose business it was, the priests and the doctors of the Law. The business of a tax-collector in Israel did not usually permit of much else than observing one's financial obligations to the Roman government in paying all accounts promptly, and taking care to extract enough from the unwilling taxpayers to keep the business out of the red, with a suitable profit left over to make it all worth while. A tax-collector had to be a practical man and must not concern himself too closely with religion.

Apparently though their highly respected colleague was not keeping to tradition. His business was sound enough, sufficiently so to maintain his known standard of entertainment and hospitality, yet most inexplicably he had avowed himself a follower of the Nazarene prophet, closed down his business, settled his account with the Roman Chancellor of the Exchequer, and invited his erstwhile business associates to this feast where they were to meet his new Master. It might not have been so bad had they found themselves seated at the table only with this new young visionary and His personal disciples. They were all fishermen and peasantry and there would be no feeling of constraint with them. The real trouble was that Matthew had also invited some of the respectable religious fraternity, who in business life customarily suffered much at the hands of these same tax collectors, and in any case heartily despised them as willing tools of Rome. Both groups had come with equal curiosity to see and hear this new prophet about whom so much was being said, but there was a coolness between the two parties which led the respectable ones at length to voice their irritation in a question to the guest of honour which exceeded all the

bounds of breeding and good taste in view of the fact that they were there as the guests of a tax collector. "Why" they demanded of Jesus "do ye eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

Jesus regarded them gravely. He knew the sense of outrage that filled their hearts. For four hundred years past the Pharisees had preserved the ancient traditions of Israel and maintained that standard of rigid righteousness which had to be preserved if Israel was to remain separate and undefiled from Roman influence, and so be fit to receive Messiah when He should appear. The tax-collectors, having no regard for God or Moses, traitors to their own nation and its national destiny, made their bargains with Rome for the privilege of extracting what they could of taxation from their own countrymen. They were universally despised and hated. Yet Jesus and His disciples, ignoring all this, were content to accept their hospitality and treat them as though they stood on the same level in the sight of God as the Scribes and Pharisees themselves, when all Israel knew the latter to be the favoured ones in God's sight. Jesus looked into those eyes of outraged righteousness with His own eyes of infinite understanding, and smiled. He gave them His answer. It was a totally unexpected answer too. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

This was a poser. Some faces were thoughtful, others angry and frustrated. They could not dispute the reply without denying their own claim to righteousness. Jesus had put them in a position from which they could not extricate themselves. They ate in silence whilst they digested the implication of His words.

Some of those at table had been disciples of John the Baptist. They had much in common with the better minded of the Pharisees—it may be, were Pharisees themselves. Perhaps to tide over an awkward moment they put a question of their own; a little more sincerity in this one, and no suspicion of bad taste. "We, as John's disciples, are ascetics—so are the Pharisees; we, and they, lead pious lives and keep aloof from the common man. Your disciples are not ascetics; they eat and drink in the same manner as all men and generally

mix with all men irrespective of class or creed, careless of possible defilement or contagion. Why?" That is a fair paraphrase of their question. Jesus looked at their earnest faces with eyes of quiet gravity. "If you go to the wedding of one of your number", He said, "you who are the friends of the bridegroom do not abstain from food and drink and merrymaking while you are in his presence and the feast is proceeding. You enjoy to the full all that is provided. It is later, when the feast is over and the bridegroom has departed, and you yourselves are back in your customary place, that you resume the self-denial and asceticism of your normal life." Perhaps there was a gentle reminder here that despite their claim of asceticism and fasting, in contrast with Jesus' disciples, they were in fact doing themselves very well indeed at that moment in a manner far removed from fasting. Luke says that Matthew had provided a "great feast" and that a "great company" sat down to it. Fasting or no fasting, these Scribes and Pharisees and disciples of John were disposing of Matthew's best viands and choicest wines at an appreciable rate and enjoying themselves hugely in the process. They had probably, for so many years, taken themselves so seriously that the absurdity of asking such a question in the present situation did not occur to them.

But Jesus saw the absurdity and in the silence which followed His second reply He channelled their thoughts into position for receiving the principle He wanted to inculcate, a principle which is just as important to us to-day as it was to them, for we often fall short in precisely the same respect. "No man" He said, "*putteth new wine into old bottles, else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottle will perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles, and both are preserved. No man having drunk old wine straightway desireth new; for he saith, the old is better*". His gaze must have fallen upon the wineskins stacked in the outer room, waiting their turn for use at the feast, and His hearers must have looked at them too and begun to sense a glimmer of the truth He was about to expound.

The most common receptacle for wines and oils in Jesus' day was a suitably dressed and prepared goatskin. The rich possessed store jars, large earthenware containers with a wide neck, but although these were ideal for dry goods such as grain or dried fruits they were not so useful for wine which needed to be kept closely sealed. A goatskin, open only

at the neck, could be filled with wine and the opening tied up tightly. Thus contained, the wine could be equally conveniently transported on donkey or camel back or hung up in the store room until required. One precaution was necessary. Until the wine was matured and old, the pressure inside the skin was likely to increase. With a new goatskin this was nothing to be concerned about; the skin itself was resilient and to a certain extent elastic, and would stretch and accommodate itself to the increased pressure. A skin which had already done appreciable service, however, would eventually reach the limit of its stretch, and if then used again for new wine would be liable to rupture and lose its contents. Such a skin would however be quite suitable for wine which had already matured. The allusion was one which would be readily understood by all those present at the feast, and those among them who were sincerely desirous of giving heed to Jesus' words would immediately start casting around in their minds for a clue to His object in giving such an illustration. What did Jesus mean. What was His object in speaking thus?

The Scribes and Pharisees there present were men who had spent the whole of their lives in the study of a systematic theology which was already completely documented and defined before they commenced. Judaism comprised a rigid and dogmatic presentation of Divine Truth which, based upon the Mosaic Covenant and every revealed word of God recorded from ancient times, had been overlaid by a mass of Rabbinic interpretation and exposition. With all its faults, its shortcomings, and its insufficiency, it was, nevertheless, the Truth in which they had been brought up. It had sufficed for them. In that faith they had been born and in that faith they were prepared to die. It was old wine, and it was very comfortably contained in old bottles.

Now Jesus came with something new and revolutionary. True, He had said, "*Think not that I am come to destroy the Law and the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil*" (Matt. 5. 17) but in that process of fulfilment He must of necessity cast a new light upon many old and long-cherished beliefs. He must needs show Himself as the reality of which much that had gone before was the shadow. He was very definitely going to remove "*the handwriting of ordinances, nailing it to his cross*" (Col. 2. 14) even although in so doing, He would in fact "*magnify the law and make it honourable*" (Isa. 42. 21). Some at least of those Pharisees were sincere

men; they wanted to know and do the will of God; but how so to present the unfolding purpose of God to their dubious minds as rightly to convince them of its truth? Jesus knew that He had come in humiliation to die as a malefactor on the Cross; they were expecting a victorious military leader who would expel the Romans and establish his throne in Jerusalem. Jesus knew that a long, long time must elapse before God's visible kingdom on earth would come; they expected it there and then. Jesus knew that Israel as a nation would reject Him, and His call to discipleship would go out to all the nations to draw out a spiritual people for God's Name, a Church whose members would at the last be exalted to be with Him in the celestial sphere; they expected to see Israel exalted forever upon earth above all the Gentiles and thus to rule all the peoples everlastingly with an autocratic even though righteous rule. How were they ever going to be persuaded that a new light was now to be shed upon the Divine purpose and those who would be God's ministers must be ready to advance in the light?

The Master knew that, in the main, they would not. The introduction of the new wine of His teachings into the old bottles of Judaism would, in almost every case, wreck the bottles and waste the wine. The message He preached was received, in the main, by the younger and fresher minds who were themselves more resilient and less hide-bound—fitting word—in the old traditions. Even though they must themselves become, in the course of time, as it were “old bottles”, they were for the present fitting bottles for the Master's use. Some there were, old in years but new bottles in spirit, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Simeon, Anna, who did receive and retain the new wine without disaster. In every generation there are those to whom advancing years proves no handicap to progress in increasing light. There are always those who can weld the revelation of the present to the knowledge of the past and in that fusion perceive a clear vision of the out-working purpose of God. But in the main the old wine must remain in the old bottles and new bottles must be found for the new wine.

Perhaps all this is part of the tenderness and compassion of God for His servants. “He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are but dust”. A faithful disciple has served his God to the limit of the light he had, throughout the span of a long life; why should his failing powers at the last be called upon to receive and assimilate conceptions and

definitions of truth which, however superior to the older definitions they may be in the light of more modern knowledge and understanding, might seem to him, in comparison with the things he was taught of old, the rankest heresy. It is not as though there is any finality to truth in this life, for the new wine of to-day becomes the old wine of to-morrow. He was a farsighted man who coined the oft-quoted phrase “*the heresy of to-day is the orthodoxy of tomorrow*”. And no single vessel can contain the whole of Divine truth; as soon seek to scoop up the entire ocean in one little pannier.

Whenever Jesus talked like this He included a special word for the “hearing ear”. This time was no exception. He left on record His own knowledge of the conflict which must take place in the minds of some before they can accept Him and His claims and His message. “No man,” He said “*having drunk old wine straightway desireth new; for, he saith, the old is better.*” The determining word there, the one that implies so much, is “straightway”. Many there are who come into contact with some striking advance in the progressive unfolding of the Divine purpose who will not have it at any price. “The old” they say “is better”. Later on, when the force of the new presentation has begun to make itself felt, they look upon the new with a less unfriendly eye. Saul of Tarsus was one such. He would not accept the new wine straightway. He kicked, at first, against the ox-goad. But the New Testament abundantly manifests how completely the new wine of Christianity did fill that chosen vessel to the Lord, rigid and hard as it may originally have been in the unyielding mould of Judaism.

That is how the parable affects individuals, now as well as then. There is no doubt that Jesus meant it to have a dispensational application also. He knew that Israel would not accept His message, that the rulers would put Him to death that the old order might remain. He was yet to pass upon them that irrevocable sentence “*The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*” (Matt. 21. 43). He knew that new bottles, those disciples who in after ages, even to this present, would constitute the Christian Church, must be selected to receive and contain the new wine of His teachings and His mission. So it has been, and so it must be, for it is that same new wine which, so preserved in those new wineskins, is to be brought forth in the greatest feast of all, that all mankind may partake, at the end.

THE WISDOM OF ELIHU

A study in
Job 32—37

8. Destiny of the Wicked

Although chapter 35 is a wonderful exposition of the love of God, Elihu has more to say on this aspect of the Divine character before he passes on to the final one, the power of God. Here in the first twenty-one verses of chapter 36 he takes up the theme again; even although a kind of climax was reached at the end of chapter 35 with his reproof of Job's lack of spiritual insight into this matter, he returns to his discourse and now relates the love of God to the greatest mystery of all—the consequence and penalty of wilful, deliberate, incorrigible sin. The story of the Prodigal Son is sufficient to show that God will never shut the door against any whilst there is still hope of repentance and reconciliation; even though the prodigal be gone completely out of the life of his Father and his place be not known, and all his resources and possessions dissipated and vanished, so that he has nothing, he has but to say "I will arise and go to my Father" and put that resolve into execution, and the Father will go out to meet him. But even so, it remains that some may be found who resolutely reject all that God can do to bring them back to Himself, will deliberately turn away from the Saviour's appeal and elect wilfully and determinedly to continue in sin for sin's own sake. When, in the infinite wisdom of God, He sees that there is no possible hope, that the sinner has destroyed within himself his own capacity for repentance, that sin has become a fundamental part of his being, then, says Elihu, the love of God is manifested even here in withdrawing the life of which the recipient can make no proper use. There is no escape from the Divine law "the wages of sin is death", and that death, when the sinner is irreclaimable, means the absence of life—merciful oblivion.

"Suffer me a little" says Elihu "and I will show thee that I have yet to speak on God's behalf" (36. 1). Rotherham discerns something else in the Hebrew; he renders "I will show thee that yet—for God—there is justification". On either rendering the young man is God's champion; he maintains stoutly that God is right in what He does and it is the part of man quietly and reverently to observe His works and accept them in confidence of faith. In that settled conviction he still ascribes all that he knows and can say, to God his maker,

"I will fetch my knowledge from afar; and will ascribe righteousness to my Maker: for truly my words shall not be false; one of competent knowledge is with thee" (36. 3. 4). The last half sentence is from Rotherham; the Authorised Version "he that is perfect in knowledge is with thee" does not convey the intention with the modern sense of "perfect" read into the verse. Once more Elihu stresses the fact that his words and his philosophy come, not from his own intellectual reasoning, but from a great distance away, from heaven where God dwells, and come clothed in the raiment of truth and righteousness. That, and that alone, is the reason he can claim so confidently that he is "one with competent knowledge". In that he joins hands with that whole gallery of Bible heroes who, each in his own day and circumstance, has spoken the message of God in full conviction and assurance, knowing of whom he has received it. Noah, a preacher of righteousness, knew the verity of the things he preached when as yet no outward evidence existed of the imminent, tremendous convulsion of Nature which ended the first great epoch of human history. Joseph and Daniel, each in the presence of human greatness in the persons of powerful monarchs, spoke forth with clarity and simplicity the unalterable decree of Almighty God. The Apostle Paul, renowned for his forthright, authoritative, almost dogmatic, ministry, declared the basis of his assurance at the last when he said "I know him whom I have believed, and am persuaded . . ." Every Christian ought to be like that, convinced in his own heart of the verity of the things he has accepted as truth. Whether there is power in the lips and tongue to make these things known or not is of lesser consequence. What is of importance is the being sure in one's own heart and holding on steadfastly throughout life to "those things which are most surely believed amongst us."

"Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not (better, not to be despised) mighty in strength and wisdom (better, mighty in strength of wisdom) He will not preserve the life of the wicked, but giveth right to the poor" (36. 5. 6). A quiet affirmation of confidence in the supremacy of God, that, coupled with a simple expression of basic Divine law. The one is the guarantor of the other. Because God is omni-

potent in both power and wisdom, that which He has ordained as the basic principle of this creation will surely stand. Evil will not continue for ever; the evil-doer must certainly come to an end. Righteousness will assuredly be exalted to its proper place; the righteous man is destined to enjoy life in God's creation forever. It may not be without reason that Elihu makes righteousness more or less synonymous with poverty; Jesus Himself said that the poor in spirit are heirs of the kingdom of heaven. It may well be that in both cases the idea of poverty is used more as an antithesis to the arrogance and pride of the wicked than as a reference to the paucity of material possessions—the poor of this world, rich in faith, heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to them that love Him.

There follows now a relatively lengthy passage, right down to verse 18, in which Elihu seems to be at pains to stress what he has already dwelt upon time and time again in his discourse, the mercy and favour of God showered in abundance upon those who have come into heart harmony with His righteousness and the inevitability of the judgment of death upon all who elect to continue in sin. He has said so much about this before that its repetition begins to seem almost wearisome; yet there must be a reason for the continued repetition of this one theme, this constant harking back to the relative destinies of saint and sinner. Perhaps it is not so very strange after all; even to-day the orthodox Christian evangelist is just as unwearied in constant appeal to his listeners to avoid the pitfalls of sin and come into a state of reconciliation with God. Elihu believed, no less than do the modern preachers, that the first essential for any man is to "get right with God" and to that end he was never tired of repeating his burden; the ultimate penalty of sin, the ultimate fruit of righteousness.

"He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous; but with kings are they on the throne; yea, he doth establish them forever, and they are exalted." (36. 7). The instructed Christian cannot mistake the meaning of this allusion: Kings, exalted and established for ever upon thrones; these can be none other than those who in the Book of Revelation are kings and priests unto God, reigning with Christ a thousand years. The New Testament presentation of Christian discipleship is that of a steady progress out of the weakness and humiliation of the present to a future destiny which involves exaltation to the heavens, in

association with Christ, to reign as kings over the world for the blessing of mankind. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13. 43) was the expression Jesus used to define that happy state. The disciples were promised that they would sit on twelve thrones, judging the tribes of Israel (Matt. 19. 28). All the way through the New Testament this idea of a future reign of the Church over the nations, for the blessing of those nations, is stressed, and here in the Book of Job we have the first early glimmering of what afterwards blazed out as a shining truth. God, who turns His eyes away from the wicked and will not preserve their lives in perpetuity, does not so withdraw His eyes from the righteous. To the contrary, He sets them as kings on thrones; He exalts them to heavenly glory and establishes them forever. Some words spoken by the revealing angel to the aged Daniel, more than a thousand years after Elihu had gone to be with his fathers, are very apposite here. *"And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him."* (Dan. 7. 27). That kingdom is the Messianic Age of prophecy, and the "saints of the Most High" are the Christian Church, exalted forever to a perpetual kingdom which, as verse 14 of the same chapter states, is "an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away; a kingdom that shall not be destroyed".

"But they that are bound in fetters shall be holden in cords of poverty. Then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity. If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures. But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and" (as Rotherham puts it) *"breathe their last, no one knowing."* (37. 8-12).

The first sentence in verse 8 is from the Septuagint, the "but" being more accurate than the Authorised Version "and if they be" which latter rendering, grammatically, would identify the evil-doer of these verses with the righteous of verse 7, a palpable absurdity. The LXX rendering puts the evil-doers in contrast to the righteous and so brings to the fore-front the second great phase of the Divine Plan. Whereas in verse 7 the Christian Church of this present Age is represented, and the prom-

ise given that they will reign as kings on thrones, verses 8-12 point to the remainder of mankind, the nations, over which the Church will reign during the thousand years of the Millennium. And the law of that Messianic era is here plainly stated. It could hardly be put more succinctly. First of all, those nations and all the individuals of those nations, in bondage still to sin, unreconciled to God, children of wrath, blinded by the "god of this world" (2 Cor. 4. 4) are truly "bound in fetters" and therefore "holden in cords of poverty". That is their condition at the time the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Rev. 11. 15) and the time of the fulfilment of Isaiah's glowing words "to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house." (Isa. 42. 7). According to the twentieth chapter of the Book of Revelation the Devil is to be bound for a thousand years "that he should deceive the nations no more". Then comes the time, the blessed reign of Christ and His Church, when God moves to the enlightenment and the education and the conversion of the nations. In Elihu's words, God "sheweth them their work and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline and commandeth that they return from iniquity". This is the whole principle of the Millennial Age; God will show mankind what a sorry mess they have made of the world during this whole long period during which they have had their way without interference. He will show them how that the blame for their failure is laid fairly and squarely against their sin,—their transgression. Then He will bring them into what Ezekiel calls the "bond of the covenant" (Ezek. 20. 37), although that prophet's reference is to regathered Israel in the End Time rather than to the entire world in the Millennial Age. But the principle is the same; all mankind will be subject to the discipline of that Age, a discipline which encourages and urges their return from sin and iniquity, their sincere repentance and conversion, and at the same time, by virtue of the absolute righteous and equitable rule of Christ and His Church, will demonstrate the blessings and benefits of righteousness. For the first time in the history of mankind, the righteous will flourish undisturbed by the machinations of the evilly disposed. The thirty-second chapter of Isaiah is only one of the many passages that describe the glories of that transcendent day; in that chapter Isaiah

declares "*a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment . . . and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever*". This is the promise to those who respond to the Divine leading. "*If they obey and serve him*" says Elihu "*they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures*". That is the blissful state of everlasting life in a state of sinlessness amid the glory of a perfect society, the society of the redeemed. "Come, ye blessed of my Father" invites the King when He has, at the end of that Age, separated the sheep from the goats "inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world". (Matt. 25. 34). "The ransomed of the Lord shall return" sings Isaiah "and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away". (Isa. 35. 10).

What if the man does not respond? The blessed destiny is for those who enter wholeheartedly into the Divine arrangement, who by way of repentance, conversion, acceptance of Christ, reconciliation with God, turn their backs on sin and walk hereafter in the ways of God. Some there may be who will not repent. Elihu has a word for them also "*But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and breathe their last, no one knowing*". There is a terrible finality about those words. The sword of the Lord is swift and very powerful and descends unerringly to execute Divine judgment. There is a vivid picture in Rev. 19 of the final conflict at the end of this world when the rider on the White Horse descends from Heaven to overthrow all enemies and establish His Kingdom on earth. The name of that Rider, says the prophet with awe, is "The Word of God" and out of his mouth goes a sharp sword with which He is to smite all opposing forces—the wild beast, the false prophet, the kings of the earth, and their armies —; the victory is utter and complete. So with all who pit their evil against God's holiness. It is not that the Divine patience is exhausted; not that the Father of all has ceased to be merciful. It is that He perceives, in His infinite wisdom, that these particular recipients of His goodness can never make rightful use of the life He has given, can never take their place in His eternal creation or fulfil the function for which they were created. So life is withdrawn; quietly, unobtrusively. They slip away from among men. They breathe their last, no one knowing, says Elihu. Jesus had this same withdrawal of conscious

life from the incorrigibly impenitent in mind when He exhorted His disciples not to fear men who could only kill the body and after that could do no more, but rather to fear God who is able not only to destroy the body, but also to destroy the soul in Gehenna. (Matt. 10. 28). Gehenna is the Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem where all the city refuse was burned to ashes—fitting symbol of the utter destruction of the wicked.

Elihu has his own comment on all this; he wants to show that he himself fully endorses that which God has decreed. "*The hypocrites in heart heap up wrath; they cry not when he bindeth them*" (36. 13) he says. These are they who deliberately flout the decrees of God; they continue in their own way, storing up wrath against a day of reckoning, taking no heed, or pretending to take no heed, of the constraints (binding) God is putting around their freedom to work the works of evil. So, says Elihu, endorsing and declaiming the inevitable judgment "*Therefore let their soul die in youth, and their life be wounded by messengers of death; because they afflicted the weak and helpless; and he will vindicate the judgment of the meek*" (36. 14-15 LXX). This is a strange expression, the unregenerate soul dying in youth, but it is founded upon the idea that, compared with the everlasting ages of life stretching out before the righteous, the death of the wilfully wicked at the end of the Messianic Age of trial will assuredly seem like a "dying in youth". Isaiah uses a similar expression, speaking of the same thing, when he says (Isa. 65. 20) "As a child shall one die a hundred years old; the sinner at a hundred years old shall be accursed". It is noteworthy too, that Elihu attaches a prominent reason for the condition of heart which leads to the judgment "they afflicted the weak and helpless" which was later to be repeated by our Lord himself. Reverting again to the parable of the Sheep and Goats, which pictures this same division between righteous and unrighteous in the Last Judgment, the unrighteous question the cause of their condemnation and the King tells them that they failed to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to visit the captive. (Matt. 25. 41-45). The prime fault of those who lose life at the last is their failure to accept and live up to the fact that all men are interdependent, living not unto themselves but unto others, and without thus taking their place in the community of life God has ordained they have left no basis for the continuance of their conscious existence.

There now comes another passage (36.

16-21) which has given the translators a great deal of trouble; several of the best versions render from diametrically opposite stand-points and this largely because it is difficult to discern from the verses themselves whom Elihu is addressing or to whom he is referring. The result is that verse 16 at least is almost unintelligible. The clue to Elihu's meaning comes with the realisation that verse 21 concludes his discourse on the Love of God and verse 22 commences his fourth discourse, that on the Power of God. Since both the previous discourses concluded with a direct warning and injunction to Job himself it would seem reasonable to expect the same climax here, and this assumption opens the door to the understanding of 36. 16-21. Ewald and Cook in their time—a long time ago now—have each played their part in the elucidation of this rather difficult part of the text, and the rendering here adopted is theirs, with the assistance of Leeser, and a partial retrogression to the Authorised Version. "*And thou also hast been seduced from listening to the voice of affliction by thy boundless prosperity, and by the ease of thy table which was full of fatness. But if thou art full of the judgment of the wicked, judgment and decree will support each other. Because there is wrath, let it not seduce thee in thine affliction and let not the great riches which thou couldst offer in atonement turn thee aside. Will he esteem thy riches? No, not gold, nor all the forces of strength. Desire then not eagerly the night, when nations pass away in their place. Take heed, turn not thyself to wrong-doing, so that thou wouldst choose this because of thine affliction*". (36. 16-21).

Here is Elihu's injunction to Job as he concludes his eulogy on the Love of God. Job, he says, has allowed himself to become oblivious to the presence of sin and suffering in the world by reason of his own prosperity and richness of possessions. The fact that Job is said to have done many good works among the poor and unfortunate during the time of his prosperity need not be thought to deny that fact. Many a man distributes from his store to mitigate the evil in the world with sincerity and true sympathy for the unfortunate without that evil and that distress really cutting him to the heart as an intolerable thing which God Himself abominates and is working to eliminate from His creation. Many of us are like that to-day, rich in good works and generous with our talents and opportunities but still not sensing the inherent evil of this world order under which such evil

things are possible. Now Elihu is trying to point out that this attitude of mind is one which is likely to win a good man over to the side of evil, even though unwittingly. Many an upright Christian, blessed with this world's goods, has used his wealth mightily in the relief of pain, suffering, insufficiency and at the same time has gone on supporting the established institutions of this world which are themselves largely responsible for that pain, suffering and insufficiency. To that extent he is hindering the powers of the world to come. And to that extent also such an one will suffer loss when the kingdoms of this world give place to the Kingdom of Our Lord and of His Christ, as they surely will. That is what Elihu meant when he went on to say "*But if thou art full of the judgment of the wicked, judgment and decree will support each other*". The judgment is the Divine expression of condemnation against the institutions and kingdoms of this present evil world; the decree is the Divine command which goes forth to replace this world by the next, under the kingship of Christ. Condemnation; command; the one supports the other and the Divine sentence is put forthwith into execution. Job is warned against finding himself, even in measure, on the side of anti-God—we would say antichrist—when that time comes. Although this condition does now exist in the world, says Elihu, do not allow the thought of the great riches you can expend on godly works blind your mind to the fact that God will not esteem such gifts to anything like the extent He will esteem an intelligent self-surrender of heart and life to know and do the will of God. "Hath the Lord as great delight in sacrifices and burnt offerings as in obeying the voice of the Lord?" asked Samuel scornfully of Saul. Neither gold nor all the forces of strength, all the means of power and influence a man may possess, are of any interest to God, says Elihu. He might have said, as the Psalmist did on a later occasion, that all the silver and gold is God's, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. So Job must not turn his thoughts and bend his interests to the affairs of this world of darkness, so soon to pass away. "*Desire not eagerly the night, when nations pass away in their place*". Job's desire, and ours too, must rather be for the new day, the new world of light and life, when the nations will walk in the light of the New Jerusalem and enter, undefiled and clean, through its gates to enjoy the everlast-

ing felicity of the eternal city. "*Take heed*" is Elihu's solemn warning in the face of all this, "*turn not thyself to wrong-doing, so that thou wouldest choose this because of thy affliction*". Job had known prosperity and ease, and served God even if, as Elihu seems to infer, he had not plumbed the depths of God's love for man and appreciated what is involved in the sin of the world. Now he was plunged into affliction and penury himself; take heed, urges the younger man, that you do not forsake your earlier faith because of this adversity, but on the contrary use it as a means of realising, as you never could realise before, the depths of suffering and sin in which this dark world is sunk, and the necessity for stern allegiance to the things of God that you may become an instrument in His hand for the recovery of the world from that sin and that suffering.

Here Elihu rests his case. He has now discoursed on three of the Divine attributes. Wisdom, Justice and Love. Later he takes up his fourth and last thesis, and interprets to Job the philosophy of suffering against the background of the Fourth Divine attribute, God's Power.

(To be continued)

The natural man lives to be ministered unto—he lays his imposts upon others. He buys slaves that they may fan him to sleep, bring him the jewelled cup, dance before him, and die in the arena for his sport. Into such a world there came a King, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister". The rough winds fanned His sleep; He drank of the mountain brook and made not the water wine for Himself; would not use His power to stay His own hunger, but had compassion on the multitude. He called them He had bought with a great price no more servants but friends. He entered the bloody arena alone, and, dying, broke all chains and brought life and immortality to light.

* * *

The inclination we all have to settle down and make things comfortable for ourselves has directed very much of Christian effort into a wrong channel. The importance of things seen and temporal has overshadowed the unseen and eternal.



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Thou, therefore, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ

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CONTENTS

A THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	42
THE PARABLE OF THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT	43
A NOTE ON MARK 4. 11-12	46
THE VOICE OF THE MONUMENTS 3. The Tel-el-Amarna Tablets	47
BIBLE SCHOOL The Five Books of Moses, Gen 6-11	49
A NOTE ON 2 COR. 2. 15-16	52
THE WISDOM OF ELIHU 9. The Power of God	53
ROUSSEAU'S EULOGY OF CHRIST	55
ONE SHALL BE TAKEN AND THE OTHER LEFT	56
THE TEST OF ENDURANCE	60

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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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A Thought for the Month

In every aspect and phase of our Christian life and our activity in the service of Jesus Christ there is nothing of greater moment than absolute sincerity and the ability to judge our own motives aright. Some of the greatest and noblest of men have ruined their life's work just because in the enthusiasm of success they have allowed their own motives to go more and more unquestioned until the influence of self-desire and the policy of expediency has usurped the place once held by selflessness and true sincerity. One whose early life is spent in unselfish service for others and whose native zeal is used to bring happiness and inspiration to his fellows, may in later life become a veritable barrier to progress, without at any time so much as suspecting that any inward change has taken place.

Particularly is this true in respect to our standing as believers in Christ Jesus. The very intensity of one's personal conviction of the teaching of Scripture inspires a zealous desire to "preach the Word, instant in season and out of season"; and to carry the flaming torch of Truth into every place where it has not as yet penetrated. And in the power of that zeal and confidence great things have ever been done. It is in later years, when the wonder of the Truth, and the joys of its service, have become more familiar to us and begin to be regarded as the normal setting of life, that the temptation to adopt worldly methods for the furtherance of our work comes in. Fully justifying our attitude to ourselves, and fully desirous of doing our Master acceptable service, we become less tolerant to others, more arrogant in insistence upon our own way, and progressively we become blinded to that great secret enunciated by Jesus; "I came . . . not to do mine own will . . ."

Ah yes—here is a secret thing indeed. We who are as servants waiting for their Lord need to be very watchful, very, very prayer-

ful, that when He cometh He shall find us ready in every respect—not only armed with the knowledge which is fitting in those who "know what their Lord doeth" but also in that attitude of mind and heart which belongs to an "Israelite indeed". If it can be said of us, not only at the beginning but at the end of our Christian life, that there is in our hearts unselfishness, kindness, true brotherliness, we shall indeed be "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light". The children of Israel came short because they put their trust in the Egyptians, who were "*men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit*" and we too, if we become blinded to that spiritual guidance which comes from God alone, will fail in the same manner. Clear-sighted sincerity and tolerant unselfishness will keep us ever true sons of Him who is worshipped only in spirit and in truth.

* * *

Advice is to hand of the usual August Bible convention at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, from Saturday afternoon, August 5 to Monday afternoon, August 7. Details can be obtained from the convention secretary, Bro. D. Walton, 25 Brushwood Drive, Chorleywood, Herts. A baptismal service will be arranged in connection with this convention only if those desiring to be baptised signify their desire to Bro. Walton before the end of May.

Gone from us

Sis. A. Cattan (*Leicester*)
 Sis. A. Pollock (*Gravesend*)
 Bro. E. T. Smith (*Brixham*)

"Till the day break, and the shadows flee away"

THE PARABLE OF THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT

Matt. 18. 21-35

It must have been after that breath-taking declaration of Jesus "the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Matt. 18. 11) that the train of thought was set up in Peter's mind which led to his asking that question about forgiveness. "*How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?*" (18. 21). Forgiveness was very much an alien thought to an orthodox Jew; the law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth did not easily square with forgiveness of enemies or those who do injury to one. And the popular conception of the Son of Man was one that pictured Him as coming in the clouds and tempest to execute judgment upon sinners, not to reclaim and forgive them. A Messiah who would punish and destroy the Gentiles and the rebellious, and exalt righteous Israel to everlasting felicity they could understand; one whose mission was to convert and reconcile the wayward and the sinful, to seek and find the lost ones, was a new kind of Messiah altogether and such ideas must inevitably have started new trains of thought altogether in the disciples' minds. As usual, it was Peter the impetuous who put into words the questions which probably came to all their minds. "*How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?*" Even then the range of forgiveness was to be narrow; they were perhaps prepared to tolerate forgiveness of their own brethren whilst as yet the idea of forgiving enemies was not entertained.

According to Matthew, the parable of the lost sheep was spoken at this time. Luke in his Gospel groups the three parables of the lost, the lost sheep, the lost piece of silver, and the lost son (the prodigal son) together, but this does not necessarily demand that they were all spoken together. More likely they, and perhaps many others like them which have not been recorded, were spoken at different times in the Saviour's ministry. It may be that a fairly frequent repetition of this seeking and saving and forgiving aspect of Jesus' mission had given cause for enquiry in the minds of the disciples for some time past, and now, at last, it came out into the open. "*How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?*"

Jesus took advantage of the opportunity thus created. It was necessary that they come

to understand this vital principle in the Divine purpose. The incident of the Samaritan villagers, upon whom they wanted to call down fire from heaven and destroy them, in the manner of Elijah of old time, showed how far they were from understanding the purpose of the coming of Christ to earth. "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth" God had told their fathers in times gone by but they had forgotten that. They were not really concerned with the Samaritans' conversion; only with revenge for the slight the villagers had offered the message of Jesus by rejecting His messengers. They still had much to learn. We ought to sympathise with them for the lesson is even now only very imperfectly realised. Far too many Christians still think in terms of the punishment of the wicked rather than their conversion and reconciliation. Jesus, looking upon the serious questioning faces around Him, knew that they were ripe for this advance in the knowledge of God and His ways.

First of all, a direct answer, "*I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.*" That came as a bit of a stunner. Peter had thought he was being pretty generous in going so far as seven successive acts of forgiveness. Jesus surpassed all expectation by naming a figure so fantastic in the circumstances that He might just as well have said "to infinity". At any rate, His ruling implied that forgiveness would become such a habit that they never would be able to stop forgiving, and that is most likely exactly the idea He intended to instil. Our God is a forgiving God, and we, to be like Him, must be forgiving also. Having made that point, Jesus proceeded to tell them by means of this parable exactly why men should be forgiving in their relationships with each other in the affairs and the wrongs and enmities of daily life.

A certain king had the auditors in to bring his financial affairs up to date. During the course of the ensuing investigation it was found that a debt of ten thousand talents owed by one of his servants had been outstanding for considerably more than the statutory period. The unlucky man was summoned into the king's presence and immediate payment was demanded. But the sum was so enormous that payment was impossible and the unfortunate debtor found

that he, his wife and children, were to be sold into slavery and all his property confiscated in order to pay off at least part of the debt. This practice was a usual custom although in Israel the maximum period for which such unfortunates could be sold into slavery was six years. But the man's life was ruined; he would have to start all over again at the end of the six years. In utter despair he fell on his knees and begged for mercy. "*Have patience with me*" he pleaded, "*and I will pay thee all*". Whether he honestly expected ever to be in a position to clear off the debt is not stated and perhaps he knew within himself that the amount was far too great for him ever to be able to pay, but in his extremity he could do no other than beg for mercy.

His hope was realised beyond his wildest dreams. "*Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.*" Not only did he grant his plea for time to pay, but he went even further and in compassion for the man's hopeless position he forgave him the entire debt and the servant went out from the king's presence lightened for ever from a load which had burdened him for a long time in the past but would never burden him again.

The story was half told; the other half is of darker hue. As the rejoicing servant went on his way he met one of his fellows who owed him a hundred denarii ("pence" in the A.V.). *For the moment all thought of his own recent marvellous deliverance vanished from his mind; here was someone who owed him some money and he wanted that money.* Laying hold of the other man, he demanded payment. "*Pay me that thou owest.*" This debtor, however, was in no better position to meet his obligations than his creditor had been a few minutes before, and he asked for time and patience on exactly the same terms that the other had so recently desired of the king.

This time, however, the creditor was not so accommodating. Heedless of the fate he had himself so narrowly escaped, he invoked the full rigour of the law and had his hapless comrade cast into prison, there to remain until he should find some means of paying his debt.

The force of the Saviour's simile in this parable can be better appreciated if the import of the sums of money involved is realised. The "talent" was equivalent to three thousand silver shekels, and the silver shekel had just about the same intrinsic value as the silver in an English half-crown. One talent would therefore be worth intrinsically

about £375. The Roman denarius was, on the same basis, worth about sevenpence-halfpenny and a hundred denarii amounted to £3 . 2 . 6. (In American currency the equivalent would be about one thousand dollars and eight dollars respectively). But this is not what these amounts meant to men in our Lord's day. The value of money has steadily declined throughout human history so that both the prices of goods and rates of wages have continuously increased, a phenomenon that is not by any means confined to this post-war era nor to be blamed in its entirety upon the activities of the trade unions. Whilst the intrinsic value of the shekel has remained at about half a crown since the days of the early Sumerians the number of shekels, or half-crowns, needed to buy any given quantity of goods, or to pay the rent, or to fill the wage-pocket, has increased to a fantastic degree. In the year 530 B.C., which would be just about the time of the death of Daniel in Babylon, one Nabu-nasir-aplu signed a contract to rent a house in Babylon from Itti-marduk-balatu for the sum of five shekels a year, equal to about twelve shillings and sixpence. (Landlord, tenant and house alike are dust these many years, but the contract remains, safely preserved in the British Museum). But since the wage rate for a working man at the time was about thirty shekels a year, about £4 . 5 . 0, the worthy Nabu-nasir-aplu spent one-sixth of his income on rent just as does the average working man to-day. Of course prices in Daniel's day were considered very high compared with earlier times—in the days of Abraham a house could be purchased outright for seven or eight shekels, less than one pound or three dollars, but since in those days a man was well paid if he got five shekels a year, house purchase was no less of a problem then than now. The intriguing thing is that the relation between current wage rates and the cost of living seems to have remained the same from Abraham's time to now but perhaps only the financial kings of this world can explain why this should be so.

Applying this to our Lord's day and the parable in question we have to set this ten thousand talents and hundred denarii against the background of their value to the creditors and debtors in the story. A labouring man could earn six denarii in a week's work—these servants would probably enjoy about the same financial status. A hundred denarii was equivalent to four month's wages; the same class of labour in this post-war world would expect say £150 in wages for that same period.

On the same scale the ten thousand talents represents a truly fantastic sum. To buy what £375 would purchase at the First Advent would require the respectable sum of eighteen thousand pounds to-day, so that the servant faced with a debt of ten thousand talents was in the same position as a man to-day who owes someone a hundred and eighty million pounds, (five hundred million dollars). No wonder he could not pay!

Why did Jesus name so fantastic a sum? No servant could ever in practice have accumulated so great a debt. "*Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all*". If he paid over the whole of his wages every week, leaving nothing for himself, and the king charged no interest, it would still take him 400,000 years to pay off ten thousand talents. Was it that Jesus indulged in the Eastern passion for exaggeration in order to heighten the dramatic appeal of the story? That is not very likely. More probably this tremendous sum was deliberately chosen in order to suggest the truth underlying the parable. This debt is one that no man could ever possibly pay. He is completely helpless unless One greater than himself extends a full, free forgiveness and sets him on his way, freed from his burden. And that, of course, is the meaning of the parable. The servant owing ten thousand talents is every man, standing helpless before God, completely unable to do anything that will justify him in God's sight and earn for himself the title of God's freeman. "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him" (Psa. 49. 8). All that the man can do is to ask for God's patience. "*Have patience with me . . .*" The publican, standing afar off in the Temple, smote his breast and cried "God be merciful to me a sinner". There is the key. God is patient and will wait while the slightest gleam of hope remains that the man can be restored to his upright standing. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job" says James (5. 11) "and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." So the provision is made; "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved". Repentance, conversion, reconciliation; and the ten thousand talents are remitted, the debt forgiven. "Being justified freely by his grace through the deliverance that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3. 24).

But the repentance must be sincere, the conversion sincere. Faith must be demonstrated by works (Jas. 3. 17-24). The man who has received "so great salvation" must needs

reflect towards his fellows the glory that has come into his own life. Unless he in turn is prepared to extend mercy and forgiveness towards his fellows in everyday affairs, he has received the grace of God in vain, giving evidence that he has not properly understood or appreciated the purpose and the nature of his standing before God. So he loses that standing. In the story the freed servant threw his own debtor into prison, refusing to extend to him the same mercy he himself had received, and the consequence was that the king rescinded his former decree, summoned the unforgiving one into his presence, and reproved him, and then delivered him into that same prison into which the servant had cast his own debtor. In a moment he lost all, and his fate, because of the magnitude of his debt, was final, hopeless.

"*So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses.*" (18. 35). That is how Jesus concluded the parable. A strange—in some ways paradoxical—ending to a story devoted to extolling the virtues of forgiveness. Does this mean that even God will be unforgiving at the last in token of revenge for the unforgiving attitude of some recipients of His favour? Are we, following such a lead, to withdraw forgiveness from those of our fellows who show themselves unworthy of our forgiveness? Elucidation of the subject would become a little confusing if we allowed ourselves to argue on that basis. The truth is that we must set this statement against the fundamental principles on which God builds His purpose. The statement says nothing about God's forgiveness; it does say that the unforgiving man forfeits all the benefits he had attained by virtue of God's forgiveness, all that he could have had of salvation and life, and having forfeited that, loses all. God "will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2. 4). He is "long suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3. 9). "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways. . . ." (Ezek. 33. 11). That is the Divine wish, but it is contingent upon the willing compliance of the subject, and although God is patient and long-suffering and will not let go of the sinner whilst the slightest chance remains that he can be converted from his ways, the time must come when in His infinite wisdom God

sees that the "point of no return" has been passed. The man will not and will never respond to the Divine Spirit, he will not and will never assume his rightful place in Divine creation, and so, with infinite sorrow, we must be sure, God lets him go to his chosen fate. The principle upon which God has built creation, the principle upon which alone that creation can endure, decrees such consequence in the case of such an one. The door to life stood open, but the man refused to enter

in. That is what Jesus meant when He said that God would do to the unforgiving man just what that man did to his fellow. Divine forgiveness, reconciliation with God, eternal life, are for the repentant, and this man was not truly repentant. The everlasting continuance of creation requires that every man shall give as well as take. This man took, but he would not give, and so there was no place for him in all that God has made.

A NOTE ON MARK 4. 11-12

Mark 4. 11-12 "... unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables, that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sin should be forgiven them." At first reading this seems to be alien to the known character of God. Did Jesus really hide His teaching in parables in order deliberately to prevent the people from hearing and so being converted? Absurd, of course; it cannot possibly be so! His very purpose in coming to earth was to convince and save men, "whosoever will". The parallel passage in Matt. 13. 13-15 has it "Therefore speak I unto them in parables; because they seeing, see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias 'By hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them'". What is the explanation? The word "that" in Mark is the Greek word *hina* which has a wide range of meaning in the New Testament, and is sometimes used to denote cause rather than purpose. An instance is John 17. 3; "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God" which can equally well be expressed "to know thee is life eternal". The Lord quoted from Isaiah 6. 9-10 but when reference is made to that passage we are once again faced with an apparent contradiction to our view of the Divine Plan. "... Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes" etc. By comparing Isaiah with Matthew

it will be seen that the quotation differs considerably; the explanation is that Jesus quoted from the Septuagint, which was in common use in His day, and the Septuagint of Isaiah 6. 9-10 runs "Go, and say to this people, Ye shall hear indeed, but ye shall not understand; and ye shall see indeed, but ye shall not perceive.' For the heart of this people has become gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them". This, which evidently better preserves the original Hebrew of the Old Testament, is quite in line with what we should expect. The message is to be preached but the people will deliberately shut their eyes and ears to it, refusing to listen, in case they should be converted. They do not want to be converted and they willingly turn away from the word of life. That is the true situation as we ourselves well know. But not for ever. "How long?" asked Isaiah. Until a time of great desolation and judgment. was the Divine answer (Isa. 6. 11-13). "Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the land be utterly desolate." The great Time of Trouble with which this Age will end, the time in which we now live, will have the effect, in conjunction with the softening influences of the Millennial reign which will follow it, of inducing men to listen to the message against which they formerly shut their eyes and ears; and this time they will turn and be converted, and will be healed.

"God's people never meet for the last time."

"If you become His man" said one old saint to an early British king "you will come upon wonder upon wonder in His call—and every wonder true."

THE VOICE OF THE MONUMENTS

3. The Tel-el-Amarna Tablets

In 1887 an old Egyptian peasant woman was working in the fields of Tel-el-Amarna, two hundred miles south of Cairo, when she turned up some inscribed clay tablets that lay buried in the soil. The first ones were disposed of to local antique dealers for a few coins, but it was not long before the scholarly world became aware of the importance of the discovery and systematic excavations began at Tel-el-Amarna. The old woman had unwittingly brought to light the official records of the Egyptian government of the time that Joshua was leading Israel into the Promised Land, and the tablets included letters from the kings and governors of the Canaanitish cities appealing to Egypt for help against the invading Israelites.

The archæologists were chiefly interested because this discovery afforded them an opportunity of reading the actual official government correspondence which passed between the kings of Babylon, Assyria, Mesopotamia and Syria on the one hand and Egypt on the other, during the reigns of two Pharaohs, Amenhetep III, who reigned while Israel was in the wilderness and for a few years after they entered Canaan, and Amenhetep IV (Akhnaten, the renowned "pacifist" Pharaoh) who reigned while they were subduing the Canaanites and dividing the land. The student of Scripture finds his interest in the latter fact, that this "Tel-el-Amarna correspondence", as it is called, gives the story of Israel's entry into the Promised Land under Joshua from the standpoint of the other parties, the Canaanites. Canaan was, at that time, an Egyptian province. When Moses looked from the top of Mount Pisgah and viewed the land that stretched from Dan to Beer-sheba, from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean, the goodly land that God had promised to give His people, he looked upon a land that had for many centuries given political allegiance to the Pharaohs. Egyptian governors resided in many of its cities. Canaanite kings in others paid regular tribute. When Jordan was "driven back", and the hosts of Israel surrounded Jericho, it was an Egyptian garrison town that they stormed and destroyed. In harmony with this, much of this "Tel-el-Amarna correspondence" consists of letters from various notabilities telling

Pharaoh of the progress of the invading Israelites, and imploring his help for their defence, a help that never came. Egypt was beset with other enemies at that time and Pharaoh preferred to let his possessions in Canaan slip out of his grasp rather than risk sending soldiers for their defence.

That is the scholars' view. There is also the possibility that Amenhetep III remembered only too well the disasters that had come upon his country only forty years previously when his grandfather had said to Moses "I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go". Perhaps Pharaoh considered it politic to turn a deaf ear to the entreaties of his apprehensive subjects in Canaan. The God of Israel had already shown that He was not a God to be trifled with. *That* may conceivably explain why so many letters now lie in more than one of the world's museums—some in the British Museum in London—from Zimrida of Lachish, and Yapakhi of Gaza, and above all from Abdi-Khiba of Jerusalem, pleading for the help that was never to come.

One letter reports the destruction of Hazor; the Book of Joshua, chap. 11, vs. 10-14, tells of the same event from the Israelites' standpoint. In another the name of Joshua appears; it is strongly presumed that the great leader of the hosts of Israel is referred to in that letter. The fall of Zelah (Josh. 18. 28) is the burden of another letter; time and time again there occur these references to incidents which are recorded in the Book of Joshua, a wonderful independent testimony to the veracity of that wonderful book.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Tel-el-Amarna tablets is the correspondence from Abdi-Khiba, King of Jerusalem. Many times, in writing to Pharaoh, he mentions the fact that he does not hold his office by virtue of Pharaoh's permission, like the other kings around him, but by decree of the Most High. Neither by his father or his mother, nor by Pharaoh, but by the Most High, he is priest and king of Jerusalem. The mind goes back to Melchisedek, who, six centuries previously, held office in this same city as Priest and King of the Most High God, having neither father nor mother, but abiding a priest continually. Discoveries made in 1929 at Ras Shamra on the Syrian coast have shown that at the time

of the Exodus the worship of the "Most High God" prevailed extensively in Canaan; it might well be that Abdi Khiba was the last of a long line of priest-kings of which Melchisedek may have been the first, or at least an early representative.

Joshua 10 relates how the children of Israel captured and killed Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem. The likeness of the name Adoni-zedek (Lord of righteousness) to Melchi-zedek (King of righteousness) is worth noting in passing; if Adoni-zedek of the Book of Joshua and Abdi-Khiba of the Tel-el-Amarna tablets are not one and the same person the latter must have succeeded upon the death of the former and then in turn been slain. It is more likely perhaps that they are one and the same, and that the frantic appeals recorded on those little clay tablets now safely reposing in glass cases came to an abrupt end when the forces of Joshua overtook the five royal fugitives and put an end to the life of Jerusalem's last Priest-King.

Here are a few extracts from some of Abdi-Khiba's letters to Pharaoh. They show to what extremity of fear the native Canaanites were reduced when Joshua was laying waste their land.

"To the king my lord; thus speaks Abdi-Khiba thy servant The country of the king is being destroyed, all of it. Hostilities are being carried on against me as far as the mountains of Seir and the city of Gath-Carmel" (See Josh. 25. 10 and 55). "The Hebrews are capturing the fortresses of the king.

Not a single governor remains among them to the king my lord; all have perished. Behold, Turbaza has fallen in the great gate of the city of Zelah" (See Josh. 18. 28) "If no troops come this year, all the countries of the king my lord will be utterly destroyed . . . No provinces remain unto the king; the Hebrews have wasted all the provinces of the king."

These letters also illustrate the origin of the name of Jerusalem. That the word means "city of peace" is well known. Frequently in the Tel-el-Amarna letters it is referred to as the city of the god Salim—and Salim was the Babylonian god of peace. The city at that time had both a strong fortress and a temple. Nothing is mentioned in the Scriptures regarding the temple; it would of course have been a temple to the "Most High God" but the Israelites probably viewed it as an idolatrous building and made short work of it so soon as they had the opportunity. It was many years later that they really occupied Jerusalem; in the meantime it was held by the Jebusites for a while and in Josh. 18. 16 and 28 it is called Jebusi. Perhaps the saddest feature of the Tel-el-Amarna letters is the revelation they make that the noble worship of the "Most High God" in Abraham's time, when Melchisedek was Priest and King, a "priest upon his throne", had degenerated in the time of Joshua to an idolatrous faith which retained nothing of its former glory but the name. Abraham paid tithes to the first "Priest of the Most High God"; Joshua slew the last.

PREJUDICE

Prejudice is pre-judgment. It is forming an opinion without examining the facts; it is hastily accepting a conclusion without investigating the evidence upon which it rests; it is allowing ourselves to be hood-winked and deceived, when the slightest reflection would keep us from such a mistake; it is being satisfied with hearsay, when we should demand the proof; it is rejecting everything at first sight, which does not confirm our former convictions or suit our former tastes or agree with our preconceived ideas; it is a revolt against the unpalatable and distasteful; it is a deep-seated reluctance to part with that to which we have been accustomed—a persistent hesitation to accept as true what we have not hitherto believed; a wicked unwillingness to admit that we can be wrong and others right. It favours or condemns upon the slightest pretext; it recoils or embraces as it is moved

by caprice. It is not limited to persons—has to do with places, and creeds, and parties, and systems: hence its influence is extensive, and its evils manifold. Prejudice does not hold opinions: it is held by them. Its views are like plants that grow upon the rocks, that stick fast, though they have no rooting. It looks through jaundiced eyes; it listens with itching ears; it speaks in partial and biased accents. It clings to that which it should relinquish and relinquishes that to which it should cling. When beaten it remains defiant; when disproved and vanquished it is sullen and obstinate. There is nothing too low for its love, or too noble for its hatred; nothing is too sacred for its attacks, or too deserving for its aspersions. It is cruel as it is universal, as unjust as it is relentless, as unforgiving as it is conceited and ill-informed. (*Selected*)

Bible School **THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES**

Part 3. Gen. 6-11

Chapter 6 opens with what is probably the strangest story in all the Bible, the marriages of the sons of God with the daughters of men. There is no justification for taking the expression "sons of God" in this setting to mean other than angelic, heavenly beings. This was the constant opinion of antiquity and the apocryphal "*Book of Enoch*" and "*Book of Jubilees*", both dating within a century or so of the First Advent, reflect this opinion. The apparent incongruity of such unions has inspired various endeavours to find another interpretation of the expression and a favourite one is that the "sons of God" refer to men of the line of Cain and "daughters of men" to women of the line of Seth. The nature of verse 4 seems to demand something much more noteworthy and productive of untoward consequences than normal intermarriage between the two branches of the human race. Jude 6 and 2 Pet. 2, 4-5 taken in conjunction with current Jewish belief as shown by "*Enoch*" and "*Jubilees*" can only refer to the events of Genesis 6 and in such case there is Apostolic authority for the plain interpretation of the passage. To understand how an angelic being could consort with a human mother to produce terrestrial offspring probably requires a much more complete knowledge of the celestial nature than we now possess but it is related in Old Testament history that angelic beings did on occasions assume human form and even eat and drink like human beings. The books of Enoch and Jubilees suggest that the angels came to earth to assist mankind in the acquirement of knowledge, but then rebelled against God, forsaking their celestial life to live on earth as human beings to rule over the native human race in tyranny and oppression. "*Enoch*" pictures humanity as defenceless against the Satanic power of these "fallen angels" but Genesis describes mankind themselves as being altogether sunk in evil. The first five verses of the chapter are intended to give the reason for God's drastic decision to send the Flood. Verse 3 gives a ray of hope amid the universal corruption; God's Spirit will not always strive with man, and this evidence of His foreknowledge that humanity would eventually respond to Him is demonstrated by His finding Noah, an upright man, in whom He would start again in the new world after the Flood. The repentance of the

Lord in verse 6 does not imply regret at having created man; repentance means a changed course of action on account of regret at what had occurred in the past. In this instance it implies that at this point God commenced an entirely new course of dealing with humanity and this is evidenced by the covenant made with Noah when the Flood was over.

That part of the narrative dealing with the building of the Ark has been the subject of much intended humour and not a little scepticism, but sober consideration of the account reveals nothing unreasonable. Comparison of Genesis with Sumerian traditions yields a probable size for the vessel of 540 feet long by 90 feet wide by 54 feet high. Nothing impossible in this for a people reasonably civilised; it is probable that in two thousand years the human race had developed a high degree of civilisation and excelled in mechanical knowledge. The Egyptians three hundred years before Christ were building ships nearly as large as this. The description implies an enclosed structure, triangular in cross-section, so that the major portion lay below the water-line when afloat. It has been calculated that 6000 tons of timber would be needed to construct such a vessel and that it would carry 21,000 tons of cargo.

It is well known that Gen. 6-9 enshrine two separate Flood stories intermingled. The fact that one uses "*elohim*" and the other "*yahveh*" ("GOD" and "LORD" in capitals in the A.V.) for the Divine name has been given unnecessary prominence. The origin of the separate accounts is quite unknown; they evidently come from distinct sources and it would be quite natural for one writer to choose one name and the other writer another. The two accounts appear to have been combined in their present form at or before the time of Moses, for the appearance of certain Egyptian words betrays an editorial hand not later than the leader of the Exodus.

Each account is tolerably complete in itself but each gives details not given by the other so that the fusion of the two gives a more complete story.

It should be noted that on this basis there is good reason for reading 6, 1, 2, 4 and the first sentences of 6, 9 as the conclusion of the narrative in chap. 5. This puts the story of the fallen angels where it occurs historically, viz. in the closing period of the antediluvian age,

with Noah's colophon or signature "This is the history of Noah". The two Flood stories then commence with 6. 3 and 6. 9 respectively, each a natural introductory verse.

The apparent disharmony of various statements concerning the beasts taken into the Ark, the length of time the Flood persisted, and so on, are made luminous and reconciled when examined in the light of the two parallel accounts. What is more obscure is the nature of the event itself. The Bible gives no clue as to the cause. Woolley in 1930 found evidence of a great flood at Ur of the Chaldees in the form of an eight foot bank of clean water-laid clay deep below the present surface of the ground. This was later shown to exist all over Iraq and is evidence at least of a flood similar to that in the Bible story. Sumerian records speak of a great Flood preceding their strictly historical period and the date of their flood in relation to the records of their king; and dynasties agrees well with the Bible date of the Flood as given by the Septuagint chronology. A great many theories have been formulated as to the cause of the Flood; the account describes a torrential downpour from the heavens associated with an inrush from the sea without giving any further explanation. When the waters subsided the Ark was left stranded upon "the mountains of Ararat", which was the Sumerian name for the mountainous district immediately north of the Euphrates-Tigris plain.

Immediately after the Flood comes the establishment of a new relationship between God and man, based upon a Divine promise that the earth will not again be destroyed. Ch. 8, 20-22, from the "Yahveh" account describes a formal altar and a burnt offering, which was accepted by God. Never again will God smite all living things. Ch. 9, 1-17 describe the making of a covenant between God and all living creatures, including man. This is the first covenant in the Bible. Never again will God destroy all flesh. The sign of this covenant is the rainbow. The Adamic commission, to be fruitful and multiply, is renewed; a pledge given that the brute creation shall not terrorise men; this may be in contrast to the fear and dread men felt for the antediluvian "giants" or "nephilim" mentioned in ch. 6 and who according to legend partook of the nature of wild beasts. The sanctity of human life is stressed and the fact that God will hold men who slay their fellows to account. It is God who gives life to man

for His own purposes and no man can take that life away without being called before God to answer for his action. The narrative concludes with the story of Noah's intoxication and its consequence. Ham was the guilty party in the resultant episode but it was Ham's son Canaan who received the patriarchal curse; this probably because Ham was one of those saved in the Ark and therefore stamped with Divine protection.

DIVISION OF THE NATIONS Genesis 10

Chapter 10 has always been recognised as an important document. It purports to describe the derivation of the nations and tribes of the writer's day from the three sons of Noah, and appears as though written by a Semite, descendant of Shem, six generations from the Flood. This corresponds roughly to the period of the First Dynasty of Ur of the Chaldees, something like five hundred years before Abraham left that city, and about the time that cuneiform writing first developed. The writer knows about the descendants of Shem in great detail up to his own day; has a general knowledge of the tribal divisions of the posterity of Ham and an intimate acquaintance with the principal Hamitic (Sumerian) cities of the time; and knows least of all about the descendants of Japheth. To what extent the names appearing in this chapter purport to denote individuals or tribes is not very important; it is fashionable to assume that the entire chapter is a catalogue of tribes but there are certainly a number of names such as Cush, Canaan, Nimrod, Asshur, Arphaxad, who are most certainly individuals and sometimes referred to elsewhere in Scripture as such. Likewise there are others, particularly in vss. 13-18 where the names are equally definitely tribal. The account presupposes that all others of the human race perished in the Flood and that the whole of humankind known to the writer were descended from one or other of these three sons of Noah. Many of the names survived as those of peoples or of localities into later Old Testament history; many appear also in the native histories of ancient nations; and a few of the names persist as those of countries, districts or Arab tribes to our own day. The arguments for the literal accuracy of this ancient document are very strong and the more that is discovered about the spread of the races of mankind over the earth the more is this chapter of the Bible found intelligently to have anticipated those discoveries.

THE TOWER OF BABEL Chapter 11. 1-9

The period between the Flood and Abraham's entry into Canaan was about 430 years according to the Masoretic and 1200 years according to the Septuagint. The latter period is the only one which can be defended in the light of modern knowledge and corresponds reasonably well with the present understanding of Sumerian and Egyptian history, which indicate the first Sumerian cities arising about B.C. 2700, approximately three or four centuries after the Flood, and the first organised rulership in Egypt at about the same time. The story of the Tower of Babel is the only historical event recorded in the whole of this period and it must have occurred very soon after the Flood for it assumes a time when cities had not been built and the descendants of Noah were still migrating more or less as a body in one direction. The story has it they were travelling eastward (see A.V. margin) and in so doing came upon the plain of Shinar (Hebrew form of Sumer) and dwelt there. It has to be remembered that the Sumerian points of the compass were not the same as the modern; their east was our south-east and their north our north-east. The story then is consistent with the idea, characteristic of all Genesis up to chapter 11, of a writer living in the lower Euphrates plain and visualising the survivors of the Flood making their way from the mountains of Ararat—the Sumerians believed that Mount Argurd in Khurdistan was the place indicated—coming down to the Euphrates or the Tigris and then making their way along the courses of these rivers, which flow south easterly, until they came to the spot where Babylon (native name Babil) afterwards stood. Modern archaeological research shows a chain of primitive settlements preceding the earliest cities which might quite reasonably be found to illustrate this migration.

The tower was built to serve as a rallying place and centre, a means of holding the community together by a sense of loyalty and oneness. The word "city" only means a walled enclosure and it may be that the tower was intended only to have religious significance. The project failed because of a confusion of language induced by God who came down for the purpose and work was abandoned, the builders thereupon becoming scattered over the earth.

It is easy to dismiss the story as do some, as an attempt to explain the origin of the diversity of language. The story cannot be explained away like that. In any case the tower itself was a very real thing. It endured

for something like twenty-two centuries and detailed descriptions of its construction are extant on a clay tablet still in existence. Herodotus saw and described the tower as it appeared in his own day, about 400 B.C., when it was apparently six hundred feet high and three hundred feet square at the base. What now remains of it amid the ruins of Babylon, was examined and described by Koldewey following his excavations there in 1914. The story is really a sequel to that of the Flood, interrupted only by the intervening table of racial distribution in chapter 10, and should be accepted as a commentary on that story. Although God had cleansed the earth by the Flood and as it were started out afresh with a loyal nucleus of men, it was not long before impiety and rebellion became manifest once more. Hence the necessity for the Divine call to Abraham, another man of faith, to make possible the next positive step in the Divine plan for the elimination of evil.

CHRONICLE OF THE PERIOD Genesis 11. 10-26.

A plain genealogical table connecting Shem, who survived the Flood, with Terah and Abraham. The period in the A.V. cannot be squared with the time required for Sumerian and Egyptian history but there is not much doubt that these figures were corrupted by the Masorites in the Christian Era and that the Septuagint has preserved the original figures. Probably the same reason accounts for the omission of Cainan the son of Arphaxad and father of Salah. (11.12) The Septuagint includes Cainan and Luke 1. 36 repeats the name; Luke evidently had no reason for doubting it.

Here the first section of the Bible, covering three thousand five hundred years of human history, nearly half the time between Eden and the present, comes to an end. The narrative is extremely abbreviated, recording only a few important events, but sufficient to show how the hearts of men tended constantly toward evil. So far there is no hint of a redeemer; nothing but the forbearance of God in the face of evil but no outwardly recognisable steps to deal with it. Now the scene changes. In Abraham there is introduced a man whose influence on all future history was profound, whose name became a synonym for sterling, unyielding faith. The nature of the Bible narrative changes here. Instead of a broad view of the entire world, with men merely midgets on the stage, the story surrounds one particular man after another—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses—all

men destined to leave their mark upon subsequent times. The whole tempo of the Bible story quickens, as scene follows scene in rapid succession. The Divine purpose

begins to move into action.

Next month — *Abraham the Friend of God*

A NOTE ON 2 COR. 2. 15,16

"We are unto God a sweet savour in Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one we are the savour of death unto death, and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Cor. 2. 15-16).

The customary exegesis interprets this passage more or less in line with the known fact that the message of Christ has two receptions and two effects; it is the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believeth and it is a stone of stumbling and rock of offence to those who do not believe. Thus, say the expositors, it is a savour of life to those who believe and a savour of death to those who do not believe. This involves reversing the clauses in verse 16 so that the "death" clause which comes first, relates to those that perish in verse 15, which comes last, and similarly with the "life" clause. To make this clear, some translators render verse 16 "To these" (i.e. "them that perish" in verse 15) "we are the savour of death unto death" and "to those" ("them that are saved" in verse 15) "the savour of life unto life" but this is not a fair rendering. There is no real distinction in the Greek showing grammatically which clause in verse 16 applies to which clause in verse 15 so that the decision as to whether the expression "savour of death", for example, applies to them that are saved or to them that perish has to be made on the basis of the interpretation.

It is much more likely that St. Paul was thinking of the fact that those who believe, those who have been justified by faith and thereafter come into Christ and become members of His Church, are themselves said to be dead. Paul's argument in the sixth chapter of Romans is that we are dead to this world and alive unto God. We who are baptised into Christ are baptised into His death; we are buried with Him by that baptism and we rise to walk with him in newness of life. In all of this he is thinking of the Levitical sacrifices in which the bullock and the goat of the sin-offering went into death in order that release from sin might be credited to the people. Hence in Rom. 12. 1 the Apostle exhorts all

believers to present their bodies a living sacrifice, devoted to God as irrevocably as were those slain beasts but without the actual cutting off of life. From the Divine viewpoint, then, believers are sacrificially dead that through them, as through Christ their Head, life might ultimately flow to all people, "whosoever will", when Christ reigns over the nations. Hence it can quite logically be said that we are a "sweet savour of death unto death" insofar as those who believe are concerned, for the death of which we are a "sweet savour" is a thing of joy and exultation, and becomes a means in the Divine purpose of bringing life. Likewise we are a "savour of life unto life" toward those who do not believe in that a day is to come in which God will restrain the Devil that he deceives the nations no more (Rev. 20. 1) and remove all excuse for unbelief. The call of the Spirit and the Bride to "whosoever will" (Rev. 22. 17) going out in that day to all men will result in the gift of eternal life to those who avail themselves of the opportunities of reconciliation with God. Jesus called that still future day the "regeneration", meaning the time of new life (Matt. 19. 28). When Paul said "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?" (1 Cor. 6. 2) he was thinking of exactly the same thing—for that judgment includes the whole process of bringing the willing of mankind up to the standard of God's righteousness before final sentence is passed. "When thy judgments are abroad in the earth the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isa. 26. 9). It is true therefore that the saints, believers, go into death *now* that one day mankind in general may enter into *life*, and it was probably this fact which inspired St. Paul's words in this text.

Face the work of every day with the influence of a few thoughtful, quiet moments. Do not meet other people, even those of your own home, until you have first met the great Guest and honoured Companion of your life—Jesus Christ.

THE WISDOM OF ELIHU

A study in
Job 32-37

9 The Power of God

"Behold, the Mighty One shall prevail by his strength; who is so powerful as he is?" (36. 22. LXX). The commencement of Elihu's fourth discourse marks his final plea on God's behalf. He has already appealed to the wisdom, the justice and the love of God. Now he appeals to His power and shows that no evil thing can stand against that. Wisdom may permit evil to flourish for a span of time unchecked; justice seem tardy in being executed; love very long suffering and offering every opportunity for repentance; but at the last Divine power operates swiftly and effectually to overcome all resistance to God's righteousness and to institute a new heavens and new earth in place of this present world of sin and death. The unbounded power of God is the ultimate guarantee that at length and in His own pre-destined time, the will of God will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And no man will be able ever to question either the rightness of His words or the effectiveness of His acts. "Who is he that examines his works" asks Elihu "or who can say, He has wrought injustice? Remember that his works are great beyond those which men have attempted." (36. 23-24 LXX). That last declaration is one that ought to come very closely home to us today, for we live in an age when men have attempted many very wonderful things, and are destined in the near future to attempt a great many more. Who would have thought only a generation ago, that men would sit before contrivances of knobs and dials, of wires and coils, devices born of their own ingenuity, and by such aid control the course of man-made satellites circling the earth hundreds of miles above its surface, or send space cruisers speeding millions of miles on a vast course round the sun? Scientists today are receiving radio signals from the depths of outer space which started on their long journey to the earth eight thousands of millions of years ago. And now Elihu tells us that the works of God are great beyond anything that man has attempted. Of course they are. Men may discover, as they do claim to have discovered, how long ago the universe was created and what were the characteristics of the universe at the moment it was created. What they cannot tell us is how it was created and who created it. That is why the works of God are greater than anything man has

attempted or even imagined. With that knowledge we have confidence that God is omnipotent.

There is a serious word attached to this. "Every man may see it" proceeds Elihu "man may behold it afar off." (36. 25). The meaning only emerges after thinking about this a little. Every man may behold these evidences of the power of God; every manifestation of the power of man tells of the far greater power of God which is behind it. The manifest power of man is a shadow of the hidden power of God. But the second clause of the verse has the greater force. Man beholds the power of God only, as it were, afar off. We see as through a glass, darkly, beholding the glory and the power of the Almighty as from a vast distance.

"Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his years be searched out." (36. 26). There seems to be something of reverence and awe in the young man's voice as he utters these words. "God is greater than we can know" is Rotherham's way of putting it. The more that scientists and astronomers delve into the mysteries of Nature the greater and more unknowable does God become. In these our days intense efforts are being made to uncover the hidden secrets of the universe. Radio telescopes probe the distant recesses of space, bringing back evidence of starry clusters which lie far beyond the range of the largest optical telescope. Astronomers exultantly proclaim that they are penetrating to the "edge of space"; but they do not know what lies beyond that edge. They talk of the beginning of the universe at a finite time so many thousands of millions of years ago; but they do not know what was the condition of things before that beginning. They describe atoms coming into existence and fusing together to form mighty stars; but they have no suggestion whatever to offer as to what power created those atoms. Here is a sphere which man cannot penetrate, perhaps will never penetrate. God is greater than we can know. There appears at this point something worth thinking about. Elihu has made this statement regarding the greatness of God's power and the impossibility of knowing or understanding those mighty works of God, but he does not stop there. He goes on to speak of the mighty works of God

which man can see and in measure understand. He does not waste time philosophising on the unknowable; he turns instead to the things that are, in part at least, known. In this field he finds abundant evidence of the power of God and to this field he turns for support in the development of his argument.

"He withdraweth drops from the sea; he filtereth them through as rain from his mist, which the clouds do drop and distil upon man abundantly." (36. 27-28) Driver's rendering is adopted for verse 27 to make the sense plain. The wonderful thing about this passage is Elihu's apparent understanding of the circulation of water by evaporation from the sea, forming clouds which are carried in the upper air until they condense into mist and finally fall as rain upon the earth, so completing the circuit. Did ancient man understand this, or is Elihu here purely an instrument of the Holy Spirit, speaking words he understood only partially or not at all? Solomon seemed to have the same knowledge for he said *"All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers came, thither they return to go."* (Eccl. 1. 7). Without this ever continuing circulation of water life on earth would be impossible; here, says Elihu, is one evidence of the mighty power of God exerted for human welfare. It is not until we experience a tropical downpour resulting in widespread floods that we realise how that millions of tons of water are floating serenely over our heads a mile or so up; it is by the power of God vested in Nature that these waters remain up there until they are needed for the welfare of all that lives and moves upon the earth.

Now comes a greater and more spectacular demonstration of Divine power in Nature—the thunderstorm. *"Can anyone understand the spreading of the clouds, the thunderings of his pavilion? Behold, he scatters his lightning about him, and covers the tops of the mountain."* (36. 29-30 SRV). The Masoretic has "bottom of the sea" instead of "tops of the mountains" in verse 30 and this appears in the Authorised Version, but Driver has shown that "tops of the mountains" is intended. This is a vivid picture of the gathering storm—it is developed to its full fury in chapter 37—and the storm is seen as a manifestation of Divine power. God is in the storm. The heavy storm clouds are described as the tabernacle or pavilion of God; He dwells within them, shrouded from mortal sight. Now the clouds spread over the sky, appearing to grow menacingly larger and heavier as they

approach. The lightning is seen flashing ("he scatters his lightning about him") and the mountain tops themselves disappear in the gloom and are covered by the lowering clouds. This is something with which man cannot contend. The power in the storm must be left to work its will for no man can resist it or divert its course. Naturally enough then Elihu sees it as an instrument of Divine judgment *"By those things he executeth judgment on people, he giveth food in abundance"* (36. 31 Rotherham). There seems at first sight something incongruous in this combination of cursing and blessing, in the coming of judgment at the same time as giving of food, both by the same instrument. It is not really incongruous. The power which executes judgment on the evil-doer is the same power that preserves the righteous. That which is out of accord with the Divine ways is destroyed; that which is in accord is preserved. "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him". Even in the natural order the same thunderstorm which brings fire and death by its lightning stroke is also a means of purifying the air and vivifying the crops that life may be preserved upon earth. On the larger scale of God's dealings with man the same thing is true. Times of judgment always have associated with them times of refreshing and of new life. It was so at the Flood; judgment came upon the world but there was salvation and new life in consequence. Judgment came upon Egypt in the days of Moses but Israel began a new life. Judgment came upon Israel at the First Advent but the Christian Church was born. And in the last great cataclysm with which this age will end, Armageddon will pass and give place to the light and life of the Millennial Kingdom where Christ is King. So it is not surprising that Elihu should picture the storm as bringing both judgment and food in abundance.

Now the approaching storm becomes a symbol of Divine power moving in to the execution of God's judgment. In a sense this is a fitting climax to Elihu's long discourse, the picture of the utter devastation of all that sets itself in opposition to God. Elihu pictures God as riding the storm clouds and taking the lightning in both His strong hands to hurl it upon the objects of His condemnation. The A.V. translation is not very good and by no means lucid in these two final verses of chapter 36. Rotherham renders it better. *"Upon both hands he putteth a covering of lightning*

and layeth command upon it against an assailant." (36. 32) Then as Driver has it "The thunder declareth his indignation and the storm proclaimeth his anger." (36. 33) That rendering is so plain that it needs no exposition. Perhaps the RS Version is worth adding "Its crashing declares concerning him who is jealous with anger against iniquity". The prophet Habakkuk saw something very similar in his vision of the End Time. He says that the sun and moon stood still (*Heb.*—were silent, obscured, hidden) in their habitation, the sky, at what he called the light of God's arrows and the shining of His glittering spear. (Hab. 3. 11) And the Psalmist declares that God's lightnings enlightened the world; the earth trembled, ". . . the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad. The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook". (Psa. 77. 18). Of all the metaphors used by the writers of the Old Testament to represent the power of God none is used more frequently and tellingly than this one of the thunderstorm.

At this point Elihu calls his listeners to reflect. It is unfortunate that the chapter division occurs at this point, for Elihu has not finished speaking. The first four verses of chapter 37 ought by rights to have been included in chapter 36. "At this" he says "my heart trembleth and is moved out of his place". (37. 1) It is not fear or apprehension which thus moves Elihu; it is awe and reverence. He perceives in this raging storm the power of God in active operation to the destruction of evil and the purification of the earth, and he wants his listeners to perceive that too. "Hear attentively the noise of his voice" he urges, "and the sound that goes

forth out of his mouth". (37. 2) This rolling thunder is God speaking to man; this flashing lightning is God revealing Himself to man. Give attention, take heed, presses Elihu, that you may be of those who escape judgment and are found able to stand in the light of the Divine Presence. This voice of God and this revelation of God's purpose is universal, for the benefit of whosoever will of men, and "every man that cometh into the world" must sooner or later hear those words and be enlightened by that revelation. We, from our superior viewpoint, can see how truly Elihu's foreview was fulfilled when "the Word became flesh and we beheld His glory, a glory as of the only-begotten of the Father." Elihu could only see that wonderful Advent in the terms of this thunderstorm but he is in no doubt as to its world-wide scope. "He directeth it under the whole heaven, and his lightning unto the ends of the earth. After it a voice roareth; he thundereth with the voice of his excellency; and he does not restrain the lightnings when his voice is heard." (37. 3 4). That last half sentence is from the R.S.V. It pin-points the understanding of the whole passage. The voice of God's laws and the revelation of God's purpose, His thunder and lightning, goes out into all the world, first at the instance of the Man Christ Jesus and then at that of His faithful followers, all down this Christian Age until at the last He comes again in power and great glory to complete His work. That is what Elihu sees in the thunderstorm, the work of God among men in the world of sin, judging, destroying, enlightening, saving, until at last, the darkness and the storm clouds pass away, and the new earth enters into its "afterward of peace".

(To be concluded)

ROUSSEAU'S EULOGY OF CHRIST

"How petty are the books of the philosophers, with all their pomp, compared with the Gospels. Can it be that writings at once so sublime and so simple are the work of men? Can he whose life they tell be himself no more than a man? Is there anything in his character of the enthusiast or the ambitious sectary? What sweetness, what purity in his ways, what touching grace in his teachings. What a loftiness in his maxims: what profound wisdom in his words. What presence of mind, what delicacy and aptness in his replies. What an empire over his passions. Where is the man, where is the sage, who knows how to act, to suffer, and to die, without weakness, without display. My friends, men do not invent like this: and the facts respecting Socrates, which no one doubts, are

not so well attested as those about Jesus Christ. These Jews could never have struck this tone, or thought of this morality, and the Gospel has characteristics of truthfulness so grand, so striking, so perfectly inimitable, that their inventors would be even more wonderful than he whom they portray."

(Jean Rousseau, (1670-1741) French poet and dramatist, born in Paris and living for a time in London, had some reputation in his own day for odes and epigrams on sacred and secular subjects. At this space of time it is impossible to judge how much of sincerity lay behind the eulogy attributed to him which appears above, but the sentiments therein expressed are worthy of preservation and consideration in this more prosaic twentieth century).

One Shall be Taken and the Other Left

An Examination of a Significant Scripture

"In that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken and the other left . . . and they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together" (Luke 17. 34-37).

Many whose knowledge of the Divine character and Plan has by no means equalled their zeal for God and righteousness have dwelt fervently upon the implication of those words. Suddenly, without warning, the elect will be snatched away to heaven from amidst the unrighteous, and the celestial doors will be closed for ever! Too late then for repentance; nothing left but outer darkness, weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, for those who have spurned the day of grace and have found themselves "left". The logical implication of this belief has been well worked out; tracts are still to be met with describing the chaos that will ensue at that dramatic moment when every Christian engine-driver is whisked in a flash from the footplate of his express; every Christian sea-captain from the bridge of his ocean-liner; every Christian car-owner from the wheel of his car—most of these themes were worked out before the days of air travel and this type of tract is not always up to date, but doubtless the same principle would be held to apply to Christian pilots of passenger airplanes. It is not a conception that offers any honour or glory to God, but then so many of the crude ideas of the nineteenth century relating to the Second Advent are like that, and we who hold—or ought to hold—a far more enlightened and rational view of the manner of and method of our Lord's coming must needs take care that we do not retrogress to anything like that view ourselves. We do well to remember our Lord's words of reproof "Ye know not what spirit ye are of; the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives but to save them".

It is clear that this is one of the happenings associated with the Second Advent. These words of Jesus appear in the catalogue of signs and evidences and events given by Him in answer to the disciples' questions "When shall these things be, and what shall be the signal of thy presence, and of the culmination of the Age?" As such we find the words in

Luke 17. 34-37 and Matt. 24, 28, 40-41. They do not appear in quite the same connection in the two accounts and have to be disentangled from other sayings, but it is comparatively easy to discern the connection in which the words were used and to pass on from that to a consideration of their import.

The Second Advent includes a number of different phases and aspects, each displaying characteristics of its own, but all, when fitted into proper sequence, having place in the *Parousia* or presence of the Son of Man. The *Parousia* is the period which endures from the moment of His coming into our world of time and space to gather His own, to the end of the Millennium when all things in heaven and earth have become subject unto Him, and He delivers up the restored Kingdom to God the Father, that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15. 28). These passages in Matthew and Luke about the one being taken and the other being left are associated with that phase of the Second Coming which is likened to the days of Noah. We need therefore to note the analogy very carefully; the similitude was not chosen by our Lord lightly but because it is capable of giving us valuable teaching.

"As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man" said Jesus (Luke 17. 26). Likewise, also, He went on, as it was in the days of Lot. The likeness is in the suddenness and unexpectedness of the catastrophe *after* due warning had been given and generally unheeded and *after*—this is important—the few who *did* heed had taken advantage of the offer of salvation provided and had been saved. Noah and his family entered the Ark before the catastrophe and were saved. The rest of the world were left behind and perished. Lot and his daughters fled to the mountains before disaster overtook the Cities of the Plain and were saved. Their unbelieving fellow citizens were left behind, and perished. "*Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed*" (Luke 17. 30). The word for "revealed" means an open and evident manifestation. That word gives us an indication of the time lapse in this matter. The "days of Noah" figure indicates a period in the Lord's presence when He is already within the time and space framework of the material creation, already in the spiritual "heavens" of this earth, wait-

ing to execute judgment but staying His hand the while His faithful ones are heeding the call to get ready for entrance into the Ark, or to flee to the mountains, to use either the Deluge or the Sodom picture as the case may be, and the preaching of imminent judgment is going out to the world, but there is no outward evidence that can appeal to human senses to support that preaching. Nothing to see; nothing to hear; only faith to believe. When the catastrophe does happen, when the Deluge does come to sweep them all away, the Son of Man is openly revealed in His *apokalupsis*—plainly evident, but this is after the “taken” ones have been taken; from the very nature of the case it must be that the time when some are taken and others left is before the final catastrophe—they are taken away from the “wrath to come”.

Now the “taking” must of itself be unnoticeable to the world. The sudden disappearance from the earth of all true Christians, even though they be a “little flock”, in the manner beloved of the evangelistic tracts previously referred to would most assuredly attract notice and elicit comment. After all, it would only require three or four Christian engine-drivers to disappear simultaneously from their footplates, leaving no trace, in England, and the same in America, and the same in Australia, to set the newspaper reporters busy. Someone would be bound to produce one of the prophetic tracts and the whole matter would at least become a nine days wonder. That would be outward evidence, and the whole principle of the first phase of the Second Advent, the “days of Noah” period, is that there is no outward evidence capable of appealing to the natural man; none whatever. The “taking” must be of such a nature that it conforms fully with the ordinary course of events in the world and presents no outward phenomena which is at all unusual.

At this point it ought perhaps to be suggested for consideration that the interpretation sometimes put upon this passage, that those “taken” are “drawn out” from their former Christian association to an earthly fellowship where they may enjoy a more accurate understanding of the Divine Plan preparatory to their ultimate change to heavenly conditions, and those “left” are the ones who decline so to “come out”, does not really fill the requirements. Noah and his sons were not invited to settle in a peaceful farmstead in some secluded part of the earth while the rest of their fellows were left to languish in the wicked

world; neither was Lot with his daughters called to a Bible study in some quiet house in Sodom while the sons of Belial were left to roam the streets in peace. In both cases the called and responsive ones were taken right out of their respective worlds to a place of safety and in both cases God then proceeded to destroy those worlds. And in both cases, too, the few whose faith had saved them became the means of starting their respective worlds anew with fresh life—even though the story of Lot's daughters does not square with modern ethical standards the fact remains that righteous Lot, like righteous Noah, became the father of a new community of human beings who re-peopled the territory whose former inhabitants had died under Divine judgment. The reality is true to the picture; the “taken” ones come forth when the judgment is over to be the instruments used in bringing new life to the world.

Now that privilege is enjoyed only by those who become “joint-heirs with Christ”, associated with Him for the conversion and hence giving of life to the world. The “taking” can be nothing else than the “change” of individual believers from mortality to immortality, the death of the human body and resurrection to spiritual conditions. If this is to be a process attracting no special notice in the world of men, as it must be if the “days of Noah” aspect of the Second Coming is to be preserved, it follows that the “taking” will be, not *en masse*, at one point of time, as held by so many Christians, but gradually, just as death seems to come “naturally” to all men in all the forms and for all the reasons that death does come.

That agrees well with the Scriptural teaching, embodied in parables such as the goodman of the house, the faithful and evil servants (Matt. 24) the talents (Matt. 25) the man taking a far journey (Mark 13) as well as the epistles to the Corinthians and Thessalonians, that our Lord returns silently, like a thief, first of all to gather His Church—of whom the dead in Christ are to rise first and then the living are to follow—and afterwards to be revealed to the world with His Church for the world's salvation. At some time during this “days of Noah” phase, there is a period, how long or how short we do not know, during which the “sleeping ones” are raised to be with Him, and His remaining faithful disciples go to join them instantly at death. “We shall not all sleep” he told the Corinthians “but we shall all be changed” . . . for the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we

shall be changed." All that is the first work of the Second Advent; it has to be completed before the catastrophe can come; and until the catastrophe has come there is no outward evidence of the Lord's presence that can be appreciated by the world.

The disciples did not understand very perfectly. "One shall be taken, and the other left"! "Where, Lord?" they asked. Where were the faithful to be taken? They expected to stay right where they were, throughout the judgment. The wicked would perish, the scribes and the Pharisees and the priests, but they themselves would remain, and after the holocaust they would sit on twelve thrones reigning as kings over a restored and righteous earth. This talk of being taken away to some unknown region frightened them. "Where shall we be taken, Lord?"

One can imagine the ready sympathy of Jesus with them in their perplexity. How could they be expected to understand? "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." How could he explain to them that the Kingdom of their dreams and hopes was going to be vaster and grander by far than anything they had ever imagined. But He must give them the best possible answer; and He did give them the best possible answer, one which satisfied their question. "And he said unto them 'Whosoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.'"

There is not much doubt that it was a contemporary proverb He had quoted to them. The structure of the phrase, the nature of its subject, and its total irrelevance to the matter under discussion ought to satisfy us that such was the case. He quoted a common proverb as answer in the way that we often do exactly the same thing in modern daily life. "Where the carcass is, there will the vultures be gathered together." It was probably a proverb they had often heard and often used.

The birds referred to were vultures, carrion birds, flocking always to any place where a piece of dead flesh offered a meal, and not leaving until every vestige of death was gone and the ground was sweet and clean again. People do not think of that; they shrug their shoulders and say "Ugh; vultures; beastly creatures, feeding on decay and death; how can such a symbol ever picture anything that is of God and His life?" But God made the vultures! Suppose God had not made vultures. What would become of the dead bodies then? They would lie in the hot sun and breed disease and pestilence, and still more death,

and so continuing death. In England a generation ago the man who collected the house refuse was known as the "dustman" and disesteemed as a socially undesirable although necessary member of society. To-day he rides on a smart electrically propelled vehicle, wears a uniform as often as not, and insists upon being called a "cleansing operative". The vultures of Palestine were cleansing operatives; in them death was swallowed up in life, and their gathering together was an indication to the observer that, for that occasion and in that place at least, they were abolishing death and bringing life to light.

Did Jesus mean to convey all that? He certainly meant the disciples to know that just as the vultures would be found gathered together around that which was the object of their desire, gathered from all quarters to the feast, so would the faithful "taken" ones find themselves gathered together in just that place, in just that company, and for just that purpose, which was their dearest desire. Where or how, what matter? They would be satisfied when they awakened in His likeness. That must have been the primary answer to their question. "Where, Lord?" "Just where you want to be, gathered together around the work which is the purpose and aim of your lives, your calling, your destiny."

Perhaps, in after days, pondering over these things, a deeper thought may have come to them. For vultures are not the only created beings who are said to eat flesh. "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6. 54-55). "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (John 6. 51). That was not living flesh; until the Saviour had shed His blood upon the Cross, and given His life a Ransom for all, there was no flesh of which any could partake. It is out of that partaking that new life comes for all mankind. Those who now partake of His flesh become His ministers to bear His life to the citizens of a new and cleansed world in which death finds no place. It is not an analogy that we ought to press too far; but we should realise as we think upon these things that Jesus Himself did not shrink from the horror and indignity and shamefulness of the death that He died in order to provide that flesh which is given for the life of the world. "A body hast thou prepared me" He said to His Father; that body had to be utterly consumed before life could begin to flow to a

THE TEST OF ENDURANCE

An
Exhortation

“Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.” (1 Kings 20. 11).

The test of endurance is one of the severest tests of faithfulness to which the Church of Christ is subjected. It is the test which gauges the strength of every other virtue and grace, and no soldier of the cross will be crowned with the laurels of victory who has not stood this test. The Christian life is a warfare, and the above words of a king of Israel to a boastful enemy are applicable, not only to every new recruit in the Lord's army, but to all who have not yet finished the good fight of faith.

The first gush of enthusiasm in the Lord's service, much as we may and do appreciate it, may be but the hasty production of the shallow soil of a heart which receives the truth with gladness but, having no root in itself, endures but for a time, and when affliction and persecution arise, immediately is offended. (Mark 4. 16-17). Such characters cannot stand the fiery tests of this “evil day”, whereof it is written—*“The fire (of that day) shall try every man's work of what sort it is”* (1 Cor. 3. 13).

Therefore, says the Apostle Peter, *“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.”* (1 Pet. 4. 12). All must be so tried; and blessed is he that shall endure unto the end. The sure Word of prophecy points to severe conflicts and great trials in the closing scenes of the Church's history. Elijah finished his earthly career and went up by a whirlwind and a chariot of fire—strong symbols of storms and great afflictions. John the Baptist was cast into prison and beheaded. And we are forewarned of the great necessity of the whole armour of God, if we would stand in this “evil day”.

It therefore behoves every one who aspires to the prize of our high calling to brace himself for the conflicts and trials of faith and patience that may suddenly be sprung upon him. In the battle of this day the effort of the Enemy is to surprise and suddenly attack and overwhelm the Lord's people; and the only preparation that can be made for such emergencies is constant vigilance and prayer and the putting on of the whole armour of God—the Truth and the spirit of Truth.

“In your patience possess ye your souls.” No other grace will be more needed than this in the fiery ordeals of this “evil day”; for without patience no man can endure to the end. All along the Christian's pathway, ever and anon, he comes to a new crisis; perhaps these are often seemingly of trivial importance, yet he realises that they may be turning points in his Christian course. Who has not realised them? There comes a temptation to weariness in well-doing, together with the suggestion of an easier way; or there springs up a little root of pride or ambition, with suggestions of ways and means for feeding and gratifying it. Then there comes, bye and bye, the decisive moment when you *must* choose this course or that; and lo, you have reached a crisis!

Which way will you turn! Most likely in the direction to which the sentiments you have cultivated have been tending. If it be the wrong way, most likely you will be unable to discern it clearly; for your long cultivated sentiments will sway your judgment. *“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but at the end thereof is the way of death.”* (Prov. 14. 12). How necessary, therefore, is prayer, that in every crisis we may pass the test successfully! Nor can we safely delay to watch and pray until the crisis is upon us; but such should be our constant attitude.

The life of a soldier, ever on the alert and on duty, is by no means an easy life; nor do the Scriptures warrant any such expectation. On the contrary, they say *“Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ”*; *“Fight the good fight of faith”*. The opposition is daily becoming more and more intense, Satan realises that his time is short, and he is determined by any and every means to exert his power against the consummation of the Lord's plan for the exaltation of the Church.

Consequently, we have many and severe storms of opposition; and there are doubtless more to follow. Those who, with overcoming faith, out-ride them all—who patiently endure, who cultivate the spirit of Christ with its fruits and graces, and who valiantly fight the good fight of faith, rather than withdraw from the field—such will be the “overcomers” to whom the laurels of victory will be given when the crowning day has come.



Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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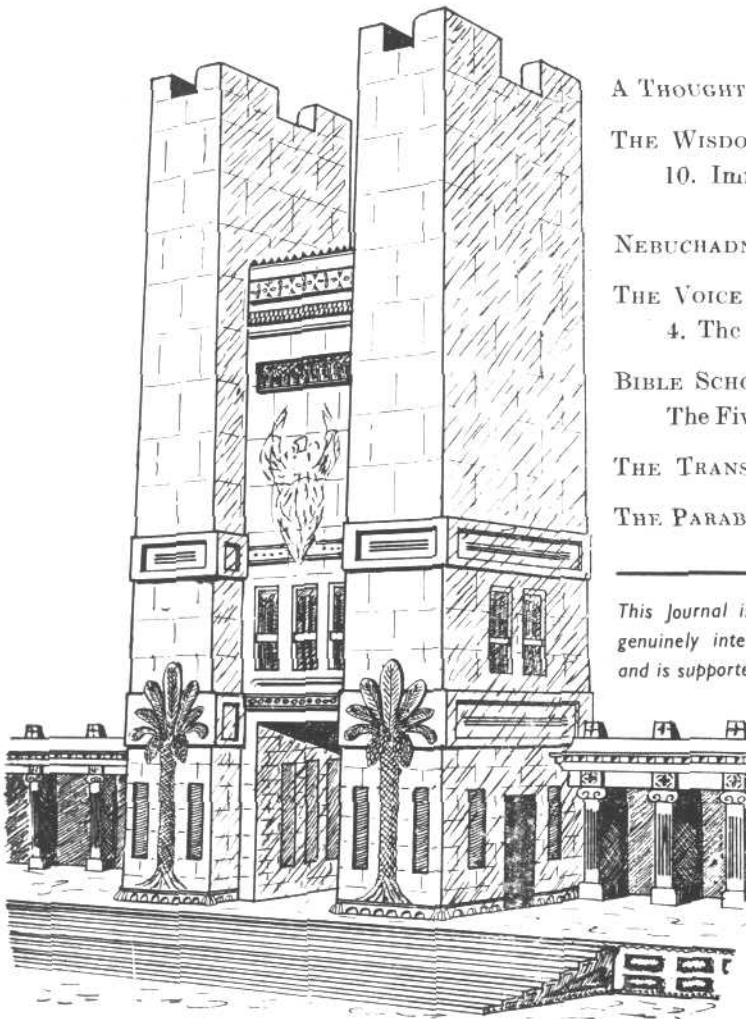
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CONTENTS

A THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	62
THE WISDOM OF ELIHU 10. Immortal, invisible, God only wise	63
NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S PRAYER	66
THE VOICE OF THE MONUMENTS 4. The Moabite Stone.....	67
BIBLE SCHOOL The Five Books of Moses	69
THE TRANSLATION OF ENOCH.....	74
THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL.....	78

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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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A Thought for the Month

"Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth . . . a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto you do well that ye take heed." (2 Pet. 1. 12; 19).

While we are, in the words of the old hymn, "straining our eyes for the tarrying day" and the scenes around us are still shrouded in semi-darkness, we may perhaps be forgiven for partial failure to comprehend aright the full significance of many of the events and portents which our eyes behold. Throughout the present age the Watchers have, like Habakkuk of old, taken their stand on the tower and *watched to see*—significant words—what God would say unto them. And to what good effect that watching has been we are witnesses, if we hold a definite and clear-cut expectation of the manner of His appearing and His Kingdom. That expectation is none the less definite for the fact that as time goes on we find it necessary to modify our earlier immature conceptions of the manner in which God will work out His purpose.

That which in the dim light of early dawn seems to be a haystack turns out to be a house, and the seemingly grotesque animal becomes a shapely tree. So with our watching; we must expect it to show in greater and more accurate detail the "shape of things to come" as the light "shines more and more unto meridian day." (Prov. 4. 18).

"It is because of this failure to comprehend the gradually unfolding nature of God's Plans that many to-day are walking in darkness when they might be walking in the light —"

Those words are not original, and many will recognise the source from which they are quoted. To-day, nearly a century after they were written, they are truer than ever. If only more of those who profess to hold and guide their lives by the "Present Truth" of Peter's

Epistle had learned the implications of his words better there would not be one-tenth of the doubt, the fear, the lack of confidence and the waxing cold of faith and love that the last few decades have seen amongst Christians. So many have accepted gladly and zealously that understanding of the Divine Plan which the nineteenth century produced but have failed to make increase with it. They have failed to live up to the opportunity and favour which was theirs. Like their prototypes, knowing not the time of their visitation, they have taken all that the favour of God held out to them and failed to make that progress in its light which would enable them in turn to contribute toward the further unfolding of the Plan of God. And the Kingdom of God has passed them by.

So must it always be. *"They that were ready went in with Him to the marriage, and the door was shut."* The work of service to which the Father of all men has appointed His New Creation is so stupendous, demanding so high a standard of Christ-likeness and so great a depth of spiritual wisdom, that only those who have demonstrated their utter loyalty to Christ and appreciation of every phase and aspect of the Divine revelation can hope to hear the final "Well done". Knowledge, of itself, will not bring one to this consummation; but knowledge rightly applied is an indispensable handmaiden to that spiritual development which is so essential; and without knowledge we shall be as those who, in the parable, were asleep when the Bridegroom came.

A fish in the Thames—afraid of perishing?
A mouse in a granary—afraid of starving?
All things are ours, and above all "My grace is sufficient for thee".

THE WISDOM OF ELIHU

A study in
Job 32—37

10 Immortal. Invisible, God only wise

"God thundereth marvellously with his voice; great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend" (37. 5). One waits here to perceive what mighty exhibition of Divine power is now to be adduced by Elihu in further support of his argument for the power of God and it is with a sense of anti-climax that we find he is going to refer only to such everyday things as snow and rain. Not much evidence of the power of God here, surely. And yet . . . it was not so long ago that at a time of unusually persistent rainfall, a cartoon appeared in a London daily newspaper depicting a rain-drenched and flooded landscape in the midst of which a figure clad in oilskins stood with hands upraised to heaven in an attitude of despairing supplication. The caption read "I can split the atom; I can fly faster than sound; and yet . . ." With all his wonderful achievements that lonely figure was powerless in the face of Nature's rain. And how true that is! It only needs a blanket of fog or snow and the whole complex system of human transport comes to a stop; only a few spots on the sun or a magnetic storm out in space and the world's radio communications resolve into meaningless gibberish. The light and heat of the sun are rightly regarded as the most beneficent influences which bless the human race, but it only needs a little too much sun combined with not enough rain, and the crops fail and man perishes from the face of the earth. With all man's boasted scientific achievements and his claimed control of the forces of Nature, he is still absolutely and altogether dependent upon the orderly working together of those forces for his continued existence upon earth. His claimed control is no control at all; he is utterly at the mercy of Nature, and only God can control Nature.

Elihu saw all this plainly and used this very illustration. "He saith to the sun, Be thou on the earth: likewise to the small rain, and to the great rain of his strength" (the "former" rains, light, soft showers, came in the spring-time when the seed was growing fast, the "latter" rains, drenching downpours, "great rain of his strength" in the later summer when the crops were ready for harvesting) "He sealeth up the hand of every man that all men may know his work" (37. 6-7). Says Rotham "On the hand of every man he setteth

a seal that all men may take note of his doing". The power of God manifested in the irresistible force of Nature has the effect of constricting, binding, limiting man until he realises his own impotence in the face of God's work. "That every man may know his own weakness" is the manner in which the LXX renders this last sentence. Sooner or later men will have to realise their own weakness and littleness in the sight of God; all their marvellous inventions and all their wonderful works can be rendered impotent by one little snowstorm which only God can avert.

The lower creation, it would seem, is more sensible than man. In the face of the great snowstorm or the persistent rain, says Elihu, "the beasts go into dens, and remain in their places" (37. 8). Their instinct tells them of the futility of fighting against the way God has ordained the course of Nature. Modern man thinks he knows better. He thinks he can bend Nature to his will and do things even better than Nature can do them. He fails to realise that he is thus defying God and the ordinance of God and will surely fail. Only by cooperating with Nature, and so with God, will man come into his inheritance; but that time is not yet.

Elihu continues his theme. "Out of the chamber cometh the whirlwind and out of the storehouses the cold. By the breath of God ice is given and the broad waters become solid" (37. 9-10). Driver has shown that "south" and "north" in the Authorised Version should be rendered "chamber" and "storehouses" respectively. The allusion is to the ancient belief that the winds were stored in great chambers and storeplaces above the sky, and that portals were opened to allow them to blow upon the earth. The entire picture is that these things are held in Divine power to be let loose in the earth at God's pleasure and in God's time. So it is with the clouds that float above the earth—Elihu knew that these clouds were the rain carriers. "Also by watering he wearieth the thick cloud; he disperseth his lightning cloud. It is turned round about by his counsels; that they may do whatsoever he commandeth them upon the face of the world in the earth" (37. 11-12) or as Driver again has it "upon the face of his habitable world". The close connection of all these

powers with the race of men is constantly stressed. These forces of Nature and these natural functions of rain, snow, ice, storm, lightning, sunlight; all these things, are not just casual happenings in an inanimate creation, the outward manifestations of the operation of some blind natural law. They are not even merely an essential part of the economy of a world of unreasoning vegetable and animal life. They are devised to have a direct effect upon man and profoundly to concern the very basis of his being. Elihu knows that too. In a wonderfully eloquent and far-sighted remark he sums up the whole truth of God's power in Nature's phenomena. "He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for his land, or for mercy" (37. 13). Three purposes for which the rain, the snow, the storm, the sunshine, all these things, are sent to come upon the earth. Sometimes for man's correction, to warn and chastise him and turn his mind, if he will, to the better way; sometimes simply and plainly for the good earth, the land, that it might be fertilised and freshened, and bring forth its fruits, that man might continue to live before God. Sometimes—and this more particularly in the last great dispensation of God's dealings with mankind, the Messianic Age and reign of Christ upon earth—for mercy. In that glad day all the forces of Nature will combine together to make the wilderness and desert place to blossom as the rose (Isa. 35. 1) and the earth yield its increase to the glory of God.

This verse is just one of the many instances in the Bible where this dual aspect of God's dealings with His children is expressed. "Correction" is *shebet*, the rod of chastisement and of guidance. In Psa. 2. 9 the victorious Messiah is to break the rebellious of the earth with a *shebet*—a rod of iron, whilst in Ezek. 20. 37 backsliding Israel is to be brought to pass under the *shebet*—the rod of iron, and into the bond of God's covenant. New Testament references to Christ ruling all nations with a rod of iron (Rev. 2. 27 and 19. 15) come from the same root, rendered into Greek. A firm, strong and just rule in which evil and wickedness meets with instant retribution is indicated by this rule of the iron rod. That is one aspect of God's dealings. The other is characterised by mercy—*chesed*, a word which means loving kindness. "Because thy lovingkindness" (*chesed*) "is better than life, therefore my lips shall praise thee" (Psa. 63. 3). "Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness" (*chesed*) "and tender mercies" (Psa. 103. 4). The combination of these two is very aptly

shown by the writer to the Hebrews. "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb. 12. 6). In our Father's providence the outward circumstances sometimes bring to us the rod of correction and sometimes the sunshine of His approval, but always it is to the end that we may be fashioned and conformed into His likeness—which is, after all, the original meaning of the word "chastening". So then the strong power of God is exercised toward men, sometimes in correction, sometimes in lovingkindness, sometimes in the general progress of His plans for the earth and man upon it, but always does it bear the impress of a God of love.

And now with an arresting and a peremptory demand for attention Elihu comes to the end of his long series of orations. For the last time he calls the attention of Job to the inescapable logic of his words. "Hearken unto this, O Job; stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God. We know that God has disposed his works, having made light out of darkness" (this latter sentence from the LXX) (37. 14. 15). This is a reference back to the beginning, to what might be regarded as the most momentous thing that happened at the time God moved to the creation of things that exist. "Let there be light, and there was light." That is the sublime introduction to the story of the Divine purpose. Men do not know, even now, what light really is, only that it is fundamental, not only to life, but to matter. The narrow band of vibrations which register on the human optic nerves as light does not by any means exhaust all the vibrations there are; perhaps there is light, more widespread, more penetrating, more lovely, visible to other intelligent created beings which is quite outside the range of human comprehension. Somehow we think of the condition of unformed chaos which existed before God commenced to create as an impenetrable and universal darkness. Somewhere in that darkness God dwelt, immortal, invisible, the only wise and omnipotent Deity, inhabiting timeless eternity. Somewhere in that darkness He decreed light, and light began, and with it time began, and from then onwards this creation of radiation and matter which scientific men claim to resolve back into a magnificent and almost incomprehensible system of vibrations, had its existence and began its ordered development. Many, many years later St. Paul, his spirit-filled mind illumined with this same understanding, recalled Elihu's words and gave them a new

meaning as he talked of an even more wonderful creation which God was even then bringing into being. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God . . ." (2 Cor. 4. 6). The whole story of the developing plan of God is the coming of light where there was formerly darkness, and of the victory whereby the light eventually dispels the darkness and takes its place. So Elihu, as he draws his long discourse to its close, and makes his final plea for the power of God manifested in His wondrous works, puts the creation of light out of darkness as the first and most noteworthy.

"Do you know the balancings of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge, you whose garments are hot when the earth is still because of the south wind? Can you, like him, spread out the skies, strong as a molten mirror?" (37. 16-18 R.S.V.). From the unknowable to the known, the unseen things to those that are seen, Elihu leads his argument. No man saw the dawn of the first light to shine in God's creation; no man witnessed the mighty cataclysms which gave birth to the first stars; but every man, and Job himself, could clearly perceive the clouds sailing majestically over their heads without ever understanding how they maintained their position up there in the sky without falling down. Every man, and Job himself, experienced the heat of the south wind, blowing from the sun-scorched deserts of Arabia, without ever knowing what it was that gave the south wind its heat when the north wind and the west wind and the east wind brought snow and rain and cold as Elihu had just been reminding them in the earlier part of this chapter. Every man, and Job himself, could look up into the heavens on those days when there were no visible clouds, just a shimmering field of azure tinged with a slight haze through which the sun shone in his strength—for that is the kind of sky indicated by the Hebrew word here—and ponder, as men did ponder in those days, how God stretched out that mighty veil which divided the earth which is man's domain from that far-off realm which is the abode of God. Strong as a molten mirror; mirrors were made of burnished copper in those days and the shimmering sun-filled sky could well be likened to a polished mirror. No man, not even Job himself, could hope to understand how the sky maintained its position and distributed the light and heat of the sun over all the earth

to the joy and comfort of man.

So Elihu finished his appeal. He has no more to say. His arguments have rested all along upon two inescapable facts, first that God is inherently right in all His decrees and secondly that God is supremely powerful in all His works. Even though man cannot discern all His ways he can trust, because of these two facts. And in those truths lie Job's condemnation and that of his three friends for every word they have spoken against the absolute wisdom, justice, love and power of God. Elihu throws down the challenge, his final challenge, before he ceases to speak. From here to the end of the discourse the Septuagint rendering rises to a height which cannot be approached by the Authorised Version and with little variation that rendering is adopted here. "Wherefore teach me, what shall we say to him; and let us cease from saying much". (and then Rotherham) "were any man to say aught he might be destroyed" (37. 20). It is not a challenge he expected to be taken up. These men had already shown their inability to answer Elihu; his own personal faith in God and knowledge of God had carried him to a height they had not as yet attained. Even Job, approved as he was by God after the discourses were ended, had these things to learn of Elihu before he could say, as he did say at the end of his story "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I repent, and abhor myself in dust and ashes" (Job 42. 5. 6). And it was the closing words of Elihu's discourse, magnificently sublime, which brought Job to that position at last.

"But the light is not visible to all; it shines afar off in the heavens as that which is from him in the clouds. From the north come the clouds shining like gold; in these great are the glory and honour of the Almighty. We do not find another his equal in strength; as for him that judges justly, dost thou not think that he listens? Wherefore man shall be in awe of him and the wise in heart shall reverence him" (37. 21-24).

That is the conclusion. The light is there, shining in the far distance, where God dwells, but all men do not see it. The light is there, but it has not yet penetrated all the darkness and many of the people who sit in darkness have not yet seen the great light. But all that is to be remedied in God's good time. "From the north come the clouds shining like gold." The light of God comes to men in measured stateliness and nothing can hinder its advance. It was in "the fulness of time" that

Jesus came, a great Light in the world, a light that can never be put out. "We beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father". (John 1. 14). Truly did Elihu foresee this when he saw the clouds coming from the north shining like gold and exclaimed "*in these great are the glory and honour of the Almighty*". And how true to say we do not find another his equal in strength. As the hymn puts it "None other could with him compare, among the sons of men. He's fairer too than all the fair, who fill the heavenly train". Of course Elihu spoke these words of God who is forever invisible to man; but in Jesus Christ God becomes manifest to man and these words then become true of "the Word made flesh" who men could see and with whom they could converse. So the Son manifests the Father's glory and exercises His power, executing the provisions of His purpose and commanding obedience to His decrees. Naturally and obviously, then, "*men shall be in awe of him and the wise in heart shall reverence him*".

It seems so simple a word with which to conclude this long exposition of the wisdom, the justice, the love and the power of God. Elihu has taken us to the very mountain tops of spiritual pilgrimage in his endeavour to

show us the revelation he himself sees so clearly; he has urged us through depths of heart-searching and self examination and turned our eyes to great manifestations of Divine power and goodness, but at the last he leaves us in a quiet meadow with this simple conclusion that because of all these things, we should reverence God. "Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" said the Preacher a thousand years later (Eccl. 12. 13) and we, who live yet another three thousand years later, can still do no more than repeat the injunction uttered by that zealous young advocate of utter and unyielding faith in God and His righteousness. Nearly four thousand years have passed since Elihu was laid to sleep with his fathers; his words live on, and because they are words full of the Divine glory and because they look forward to the One who Himself manifested the Divine glory, they are words which will never die.

THE END

A few back issues up to No. 8 of "The Wisdom of Elihu" are available, and new readers who missed the earlier instalments may have such issues as they desire, free on request, while they last.

Nebuchadnezzar's Prayer

Nebuchadnezzar II, king of the second Babylonian empire 604-561 B.C., is known to Christians chiefly for his connection with the prophet statesman Daniel and the records preserved in the books of Daniel, Jeremiah, Chronicles and Kings. He is probably the most famous pagan king of the Old Testament. He is also known to history as a wise and enlightened monarch and a deeply religious man, devoted to the worship of the Babylonian god Marduk. The following prayer to Marduk was composed by Nebuchadnezzar and exists still in the records of his times. Although addressed to a heathen deity the sentiments it expresses would do credit to anyone who addressed them to the true God. A very narrow line separates the heart condition of some men who worship false gods and others who worship the true God, in equal sincerity. The conviction is driven home that, given the opportunity of knowledge of God which is possessed by us to-day, many of these ancient pagans might well have become God-fearing men. That in turn prompts the reflection that if God truly "will

have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth" as St. Paul declares, there must yet be some provision for the possibility of Christ-acceptance by those who in their own day and time had no opportunity so much as to hear of His Name.

*O eternal Prince! Lord of all being!
As for the king whom thou lovest,
And whose name thou hast proclaimed as
was pleasing to thee,
Do thou lead aright his life.
Guide him in a straight path.
I am the prince, obedient to thee,
The creature of thy hand.
Thou hast created me,
And with dominion over all people thou
hast entrusted me.
According to thy grace, O Lord,
Which thou dost bestow on all people,
Cause me to love thy supreme dominion,
And create in my heart the worship of thy
deity
And grant whatever is pleasing to thee,
Because thou hast fashioned my life.*

THE VOICE OF THE MONUMENTS

4. The Moabite Stone

Mesha, king of Moab, was the undistinguished king of an undistinguished people. The nation of the Moabites was never a very powerful or influential one; it had its beginning in the days of Abraham, at the time of the destruction of Sodom, a beginning that was by no means auspicious (Gen. 19. 30-38), and it came to an ignominious end by being absorbed into the surrounding peoples during the times of change that attended the coming of the Persians and the Greeks shortly before the First Advent. But Mesha king of Moab has one claim to enduring fame; he caused to be inscribed a stone tablet which, buried for nearly three thousand years, has appeared in these our days to give witness to the accuracy of Holy Scripture.

Mesha rebelled against the overlordship of Israel. Omri, king of Israel, had reduced Moab to subjection. Ahab his son received tribute until the day that Mesha turned against him. Ahab allowed the case to go by default for the time being, but in the days of his son Jehoram, the Israelites advanced against Moab to re-impose their rule. They entered the land, driving the Moabites before them, until in his extremity Mesha resorted to the terrible act of sacrificing his first-born son in the fire to Chemosh the god of Moab, in the hope that in face of this offering Chemosh would relent and deliver his people. The Israelites were so horrified at the scene that they raised the siege and returned to their own land, at least for the time being. Doubtless the Moabites exulted in the thought that Chemosh, at the eleventh hour, intervened to save them.

The whole story is told in 2 Kings 3. 4-27. "And Mesha king of Moab was a sheepmaster, and rendered unto the king of Israel an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool. But it came to pass, when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel; and king Jehoram went out of Samaria the same time, and numbered Israel. And he went and sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, the king of Moab hath rebelled against me; wilt thou go with me against Moab to battle? And he said 'I will go . . . so the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom . . . And when all the Moabites heard that the kings were come up to fight against them they gathered all that were able to put on

armour, and upward, and stood on the border . . . And when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them; but they went forward smiting the Moabites, even in their country . . . And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him, he took with him seven hundred men that drew swords, to break through even unto the king of Edom; but they could not. Then he took his eldest son, that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall. And there was great indignation against Israel, and they departed from him, and returned to their own land."

Up to the latter half of last century the Bible stood alone in this account of the conflicts between Moab and Israel, and the Old Testament historian not unnaturally enlarged upon the times when Israel was victorious, and said little about the periods of Moabite supremacy. But Mesha himself has also committed to writing the story of his exploits in those same days. It came about in the year 1868 the Rev. F. A. Klein, of the Church Missionary Society, was taken by a friendly Arab sheik to a spot near the ancient village of Deiban, where the River Arnon rushes down a steep gorge into the Dead Sea, to see a massive black basalt slab, some four feet in length by two feet wide and thick, inscribed with a mysterious writing, that had come to light.

That slab is now known as the Moabite Stone, and a replica of it stands in the British Museum. (The original is in the Louvre at Paris). The local Arabs, learning of the interest their "find" had aroused, superstitiously broke it into pieces before it could be moved, but impressions of the inscription had, happily, been taken; the pieces were for the most part recovered and the monument restored.

It is sometimes said that the Moabite Stone confirms the Bible story of Jehoram's war against Moab, but that is not true. The inscription refers to an earlier period, and recounts the events of a time when Moab rebelled against Israel and was victorious, capturing many Israelite towns and taking many Israelite captives. But it is a striking confirmation of Old Testament history just the same. The first verse of the first chapter of 2 Kings says,

simply and briefly "Then Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab". Nothing is said as to the success or otherwise of the rebellion and the chapter goes on to tell of the reign of Ahaziah, Ahab's successor. It is not until we come to the reign of Jehoram in the third chapter, earlier quoted, that we find Moab still independent, and Jehoram advancing against them in order to subdue them. Obviously then, although Scripture says not one word about it, the Moabite rebellion had been successful. And this is what the Moabite Stone declares, giving the fuller details of that revolt that the Old Testament historians had omitted. The inscription commences "I am Mesha, son (worshipper) of Chemosh, king of Moab, the Deibonite. My father reigned over Moab thirty years and I reigned after my father. I made this high place for Chemosh because he had saved me from my enemies. Omri was king of Israel, and he oppressed Moab many days, for Chemosh was angry with his land. And his son (Ahab) succeeded him, and he too said 'I will oppress Moab'. He said so in my days, and I went out against him and his house, and Israel perished utterly And Chemosh said to me 'Go, seize Nebo from Israel'; and I went by night, and fought against it from dawn until noon, and I took it and slew all . . . and I took from thence the vessels of Jehovah, and placed them before Chemosh . . ."

There is more in the same strain. The Book of Kings, eloquent in what it does not say, merely tells us that Moab rebelled after the death of Ahab. Mesha tells us of the success of that rebellion and how Israel—as he thought—perished utterly under his onslaught. The Moabite defeat of Israel in the days of Ahaziah the son of Ahab must have been a crushing one. Then in the reign of Jehoram the successor of Ahaziah came the reversal of fortune which is recorded in 2 Kings 3, when Israel drove the Moabites back into their own land with heavy loss. Taken together, the two accounts, the one in the Scriptures and the other on stone, yield us a complete picture of those stirring events.

2 Chronicles has another sidelight on the story. It is the well-known account of how good king Jehoshaphat of Judah and his people set out to meet the invading Moabites without weapons but trusting in God for defence and singing the high praises of God as they went. "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle" was the word of the Lord to them "for the battle is not yours, but God's". And God delivered with a great deliverance.

Now that, also, was just after the death of Ahab and it must have been the same invasion which is recorded on the Moabite Stone. This time it is Mesha of Moab who is silent. He exults about his victory over the king of Israel; he says nothing at all about the king of Judah. That is Mesha's unwitting testimony to the truth of 2 Chron. 20. That part of the Moabite army which encountered good king Jehoshaphat's men, trusting in their God, was routed and dispersed. The part which fought Ahaziah the wicked king was victorious, and that victory was engraved upon Mesha's stone monument to be a witness against the ten-tribe kingdom for ever.

The word "tares" in the parable of the wheat and tares, is a translation of the Greek word *zizanion*. This word does not appear in the writings of any classical Greek writers, and it is supposed that it was a Palestinian local name for the plant that to-day is known in the land as *ziwan*. This plant is definitely poisonous. Travellers have observed that it has the property of causing giddiness and even unconsciousness, and that its effect is insidious and often unnoticed until too late. At least one case is on record where a whole community of people was affected by eating *ziwan* which had not been cleansed out of the wheat that had been used to make their bread. Jesus used an apt simile for His parable!

* * *

An old story tells of three men who were each presented with a crystal to use as he pleased. The poet tells of the outcome and how these three men used their gifts.

"The *fool* contrived of his a *lens*,
Wherein, to gloating eyes,
The smallest blot that could be found
Was magnified in size.
"The *just man* made of his a *pane*,
All clear without a flaw.
Nor summer sun nor winter rain
Affected what he saw.
"The *wise man* pondered long and well
How best to search, to aid.
Then taking up the crystal given,
Of his a *mirror* made."

* * *

Scripture is most explicit that we are called to "follow in His Steps". But Jesus never stepped out of sinfulness into sinlessness, hence, till our sinful estate has been ended by a full and complete acquittal, we cannot even begin to follow in His Steps.

Bible School THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES

Part 4. Gen. 12-25

Study 4 ABRAHAM

The active moving of God for the reconciliation of man and the elimination of evil has its effective beginning in Abraham. Here are placed the first promises and acts which led to Jesus and the cross and bear final fruit in the Messianic Kingdom and climax of the Divine Plan so far as man is concerned.

The story opens in Gen. 11. 27 with the family of Terah, Abraham's father, in the Sumerian city of Ur. Terah was a descendant of Noah's son Shem, founder of the Semitic race to which all Israelites and Arabs belong. The time is a subject of some dispute among scholars but the best correlation with related history seems to place the departure of Abraham from Ur in the time of Sin-muballit king of Babylon and Ur about 1850 B.C. Haran, eldest son of Terah, had died. His daughters, Sarai and Milcah, were married respectively to Abraham and his brother Nahor. Marriage of uncles and nieces was not uncommon at this time in history and the longer life span of human beings meant that many an uncle and niece were of equal ages. The family, including Lot the son of Haran migrated into the northerly Semitic land of Mari, from which their ancestors probably came several centuries earlier. Here Terah died, and chapter 12 commences a new era in world history with Abraham resuming his migration to what, from that time and for ever, became the land of the Bible—then called Canaan and now called Israel.

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM Chap. 12-13

A Divine commission is given to Abraham. He is to leave his native country—not only Ur of the Chaldees, apparently his birth-place, but the entire system of Sumero-Semitic civilisation in Mesopotamia in which he had been brought up, and go to a distant, less civilised and settled land, among an alien people and a totally different way of life, in order that God might make of him a specially chosen and powerful nation through whom all peoples of the earth might eventually be blessed. This is the first intimation of Divine planning for the welfare of humanity. Human history extends backward from this point for almost four thousand years at least and in all that time, so far as the Scripture record goes, no revelation of the Divine intention had been given. To Abraham a clear statement was

made, later on to be ratified in a solemn covenant. In response to the call Abraham abandoned his city dweller's life and adopted that of a nomadic herdsman, moving from place to place as the needs of his flocks and herds dictated. Thus he traversed the whole of Canaan from north to south and finally crossed the Sinai peninsula and reached Egypt, arriving there in the time of the 12th dynasty, a period of prosperity and ordered government. Narrowly escaping the loss of his wife to the reigning Pharaoh, due, it must be admitted, to his own duplicity in not revealing their true relationship, he left Egypt and returned to Canaan, settling eventually at Mamre, the modern Hebron, whilst his brother-in-law Lot left him and settled in Sodom at the southern end of the Dead Sea. From Ur of the Chaldees he had travelled in all a distance of nearly two thousand miles over a period of some five or six years and the end of chapter 13 shows him more or less settled in the southern part of Canaan on terms of amity with the Amorites and Hittites who at that time were sparsely scattered over the countryside. The population was evidently very thin and there was plenty of room for Abraham.

THE CANAANITE REBELLION chaps. 14-15

The first record of war of any kind in the Bible appears here in the story of the rebellion of a number of Canaanitish tribes against their Mesopotamian overlords. Canaan had for a long time been subject to the city-states of the Euphrates valley, Ur, Babylon, Larsa, whichever one happened to be in the ascendant. At the moment supreme power was wielded by Babylon which held in subjection most of the cities of Sumer and Akkad. "Amraphel king of Shinar" (Hebrew form of Sumer) has been identified both with the famous Hammurabi and his predecessor Sin-muballit. The latter is perhaps more likely. "Arioch king of Ellasar" is Eri-Aku of Larsa, better known as "Rim-Sin", and Chedorlamer is identified with the Khudur-Lagamar of history. These kings mounted a punitive expedition which invaded Canaan and routed the rebels around the Dead Sea and southward almost to the frontiers of Egypt. Returning, they defeated the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and set out for their own land, among their prisoners of war being Lot and

his household, involved in the capture of Sodom.

The whole episode reads as though large armies were involved, but the story is reduced to a sense of proportion in the sequel, when it tells how Abraham pursued the victorious army with his own private garrison of three hundred and eighteen men. Over-taking the Sumerian forces after a pursuit of two hundred miles, he defeated them completely and recovered all the prisoners and spoils of war. It is unnecessary to suppose that Abraham engaged a numerically vastly superior force; Sumerian accounts of inter-city warfare of the period contemporary with Abraham show that a force of a few hundred men was considered a big army in those days, and the population of big cities was often expressed only in a few thousands. It is not always realised that populations were, by modern standards, extremely small and nations were counted by thousands rather than millions.

Here appears the first allusion to organised worship in the Bible. Abraham came before the principal dignitary of the land formally to hand over the recovered captives and property. Melchisedek king of Salem is described as "priest of the Most High God". This individual is said in the Book of Hebrews to be at one and the same time a king and a priest, "a priest upon his throne", and is used as a figure of Christ at His Second Advent, ruling in kingly power and performing the priestly function of conferring Divine favours upon the people. In this the writer to the Hebrews contrasts this aspect of Christ's work with His First Advent on earth as Man, a sacrificial function terminated by death, in which He was prefigured by the other priest, Aaron of the Levitical priesthood. The one is a dying priesthood devoted to sacrifice and death, the other is an everlasting priesthood in which death has no place.

Salem, the city of Melchisedek, named after Salim, an ancient Semitic god of peace, afterwards became Uru-salim (Jerusalem is the Anglicised form), "The city of peace". The antiquity of Jerusalem is unknown: it was already the capital of Canaan when Abraham entered the land. It must have been an extremely small town centred chiefly on Mount Zion where the kings of Judah afterwards had their palaces, for Mount Moriah, on which the Temple stood later on, was open country in Abraham's day as is evidenced by the story of Abraham and the sacrifice of

Isaac.

The immediate consequence of this incident was the appearance of the Word of the Lord to Abraham in vision promising him protection and revealing still more of his destiny and that of his posterity. This is the first occasion in which the idea of any visible appearance of the Word of the Lord is introduced. Later on in Abraham's life God was to be revealed to him in more definite form. There is in this declaration that the word of the Lord appeared to Abraham in vision the seed of a truth the understanding of which developed in Israel's history until it reached its climax in the words of the Apostle John "*The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us*". The Word of God from the beginning was and is the medium in which God the Father is revealed to His creatures and through which He speaks to them. The Divine Son, who appeared on earth in human form as Jesus of Nazareth, and now sitteth on the right hand of God, the eternal Lord of Glory, is in His own Person the Word of God. He spoke to Abraham in vision, and Abraham, knowing Him to be the Word, addressed Him as "Lord God". In this he found nothing strange; the Sumerians among whom he had been brought up themselves believed in the personification of the word of the gods by means of which the gods executed their decrees and conveyed their messages to men, and the history of Abraham from the moment he is introduced to us shows him to be a man thoroughly accustomed to communing with God.

The gist of the message was that a son of his own should be the heir of promise; he had apparently given up hope of a child by Sarah and made up his mind that his steward should be his heir. The promise that his seed should possess the land was reiterated, defined in detail and confirmed by the enacting of a covenant. As was customary upon such occasions, a formal sacrifice was made, Abraham feeling bound to keep vigil by the offering until God should speak to him. The message came in the night, a prediction that his seed would be held in bondage in a land not theirs, four hundred years, four generations, (fulfilled in the sojourn of Israel in Egypt) but that they would surely return to the land of promise. With the end of the message came the visible evidence of God's abiding presence, a supernatural light which glowed from between the dismembered portions of the sacrifice. That was the precur-

sor of the symbol of the Divine Presence among Israel in later days, the "Shekinah", the mysterious light which shone from between the cherubim in the Most Holy of the Tabernacle, and afterwards, the Temple. From the day of that covenant described in Genesis 15, the presence of God has remained with all who have been truly His people.

ISHMAEL *Gen. 16-17*

It must have been almost immediately after those happenings that Abraham and Sarah, anxious for the fulfilment of the Divine promise, and apparently feeling Sarah's infertility was incurable, decided that her maidservant, Hagar, an Egyptian, should become a secondary wife to Abraham in order that her child might be the seed of promise. In taking this course of action they were following a custom which was quite usual in the land of their birth and was properly regulated by law. Thus was Ishmael, eldest son of Abraham, born, and grew up to be a lad of thirteen years of age, without any word from God to indicate either approval or disapproval of Abraham's belief that here was the heir envisaged in the Divine promises. It was in Ishmael's thirteenth year, when Abraham was ninety-nine years old and Sarah ten years younger, that his confidence was shattered by another appearance of the Lord, apparently in open daylight this time, and an intimation that the heir was not to be Ishmael, but a son who would be born to Sarah within the year. Abraham's own predilection for Ishmael was overruled by God for a reason which becomes more apparent as the Bible story unfolds. Hagar was an Egyptian; Ishmael was half Egyptian; his descent was traceable both to Shem and to Ham. In the inscrutable design of God the seed of promise was to be purely from the line of Shem. Sarah, like Abraham, was a Semite. Abraham never forgot the lesson. In after days his acceptance of Isaac as the seed never wavered, and when it became time for Isaac to marry he insisted that his son's bride should be of the Semitic race; his steward was sent right back to Haran in Mari to bring Rebecca to Isaac.

But God promised that Ishmael also should become a great nation, a promise that was fulfilled in the development of the Arab peoples, a great number of whom are traceable back to the eldest son of Abraham.

THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH *Gen. 18-19*

At this same time, before the birth of Isaac, occurred the cataclysm of Nature which

destroyed the Cities of the Plain. The natural cause of the disaster is well understood nowadays, but this is subservient to the fact that it came upon the inhabitants as a definite Divine judgment. The wickedness of the five cities of which Sodom and Gomorrah were the principal was proverbial even in ancient times and the detestation in which these people was held has persisted throughout history. The story opens with the coming of three celestial visitants to Abraham, appearing in the form of men. They accept his proffered hospitality; after reiterating the promise of a son to Sarah they rise up to proceed in the direction of Sodom. Abraham directs them on the way but one of them remains behind with him, and Abraham knows it is the Lord. Once again God is appearing to Abraham by the only means He can reveal Himself; the One before whom the patriarch stands is the Word of the Lord. For the first time in history the principle is enunciated that God will not proceed to action without revealing His intention to the man who is His man. "*Shall I hide from Abraham the thing which I do.*" Later on in the Bible the same principle is laid down in other words "*The Lord God will do nothing but he revealeth his secrets to his servants the prophets and them that love him*". The Lord had come down to investigate the sin of Sodom and to take appropriate action; as soon as Abraham knew that, he knew what the result must inevitably be, for he himself knew full well the extent of their iniquity. Without further ado he requests Divine mercy. "*Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked?*" Suppose there are fifty righteous persons in the condemned cities would God relent and spare the people for the sake of the fifty righteous? The Lord was not less merciful than Abraham; He agreed to spare the cities if fifty righteous could be found therein. Anxious to guard against every contingency, Abraham brought the number of righteous necessary to preserve the cities down to forty-five and then by steps down to five, and each time the Lord was found not less merciful than his servant. Then the Lord left him. The first Bible lesson in the forbearance and mercy of God had been given and placed on record, a lesson which needs to be repeated time and time again. God is not less merciful than His creatures, but He is just and wise more than any of them. The cities of the Plain were destroyed, for there could not even be five righteous found in them; only Lot and his two daughters. From related incidents and

allusions in chap. 19 it is evident that the daughters were betrothed but not yet married and the prospective husbands declined to join the affianced brides in their flight from the city.

The natural cause of the disaster was probably an earthquake which opened up crevasses in the ground from which escaped bitumen, sulphur and mineral oil, all of which are known to exist underground in the area, in liquid and vapour form, and their igniting by lightning, resulting in a widespread conflagration which destroyed everything over a wide area. The "pillar of salt" which overcame Lot's wife, lingering and looking back in the flight, most likely was the narrator's rendering of her having being overcome and buried by a mass of such ejected material. She was probably a native of Sodom; nothing is said about Lot having a wife when he left Haran with Abraham twenty-four years previously and the daughters were almost sure to have been born in Sodom. The story is that of a good but weak man who tried to combine his belief in God with life in a godless environment and with godless companions and in the outcome he lost everything. The story closes with the erstwhile prosperous city-dweller living in a mountain cave with his daughters, saved from the destruction but with the loss of all except life.

It seems that the daughters must have concluded that all mankind had been wiped out. If, as is possible, they knew nothing of the world outside the ill fated cities that is reasonable. All the world they knew now lay a smoking ruin. So far as they could discern the only man left alive was their own father. They took steps to ensure, as they thought, the perpetuation of the human race on earth and the resultant children became the ancestors of the twin nations of Moab and Ammon, occupying the region east of the Dead Sea, until they became submerged by and absorbed into Israel and various Arab peoples in later centuries.

ISAAC, THE CHILD OF PROMISE Gen.20-22

At this time Abraham left the district of Hebron and moved his entire establishment some hundred miles southward deep in Philistine territory. The move may have had some connection with the desolation caused by the destruction of the cities. No hint is given. He was apparently well received by the Philistines even although Abraham's fears for his personal safety landed Sarah in the same predicament as some twenty years

earlier in the court of the Pharaoh of Egypt. Abimelech, king of the land, was an honourable man and a devout worshipper of God and the episode ended happily. An interesting sidelight on the state of religion in Canaan at the time is afforded by the incident. Melchisedek in Salem and Abimelech in the desert each ruled a people professing worship of the true God, a faith they must have received from their fathers through a totally different channel from that through which Abraham received his. There seems no doubt that the early centuries of human history saw more widespread knowledge of God than did later times; contrary to the claims of some modern scholars, the history of man's conception of God has been one of degeneration, not one of progressive development.

Here was Isaac born and inevitably jealousy arose between Sarah and Hagar the mother of Ishmael. Reluctantly, Abraham banished Hagar and her son in order to keep the peace and the pair wandered in the wilderness south of Canaan until they found a place in which to settle, probably with some desert tribe, where Ishmael grew to manhood and eventually, as prophesied, became a patriarch and head of a great people. It is evident that contact between Hagar and Abraham was not broken off, for at Abraham's death Ishmael joined with Isaac in the burial ceremonies. In the meantime Isaac grew to manhood himself in the family establishment at Beer-sheba, to which Abraham had removed, still within the territory of Abimelech the friendly ruler. From here Abraham set out on the strangest mission of his life and one which has sorely puzzled many students of the Bible—his expedition to sacrifice Isaac as a burnt-offering to God. There is the plain command of God that he should do so, and if we believe that Abraham was in fact in communion with God in the manner presented in Genesis we have to accept that God did in fact tell him to do this thing. The explanation is in the sequel. The entire transaction was a test of faith. Would Abraham obey God in this even though it meant the death of the promised seed and therefore the apparent blasting of all the hopes and promises, confident that God would find a way to fulfil his own undertaking. Abraham did so obey God; the writer to the Hebrews explains that he did so in the belief that God was able to raise up Isaac from the dead. (Heb. 11. 19). So in the story of Abraham the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead appears for the first time in the Bible and the fundamental truth is enunci-

ated that the fulfilment of God's promise to bless all families of the earth by the instrumentality of the Seed of Abraham will involve a resurrection from the dead.

This incident appears to represent the climacteric of Abraham's experiences. Life flowed in a more gentle manner from now on. Probably another twenty years passed with Abraham maintaining his headquarters at Beer-Sheba but evidently having his flocks and herds and all his interests widely spread over the southern wilderness, the Negev as it is called today. Then Sarah reached the end of a long life, dying when her son Isaac was thirty-seven years of age; Abraham buried her in a tomb in Hebron which he purchased from its Hittite owner.

MARRIAGE OF ISAAC AND DEATH OF ABRAHAM (Gen. 24-25)

Immediately upon Sarah's death Abraham began to give serious attention to his son's future. Unlike his nephew Lot, who had not hesitated to entangle himself with the people of the land, Abraham was determined that his son should marry a woman of his own race. To this end he sent his steward back to Haran to his brother Nahor—whom he had not seen for something like sixty-five years—to seek a wife for Isaac from his family. Thus it was that Nahor's grand-daughter Rebekah undertook the parting from her own people and kindred to travel eight hundred miles to marry a man she had never seen. Although the narrative does not say so, it is very probable that Eliezer told his hosts of the Divine promise and intention respecting Isaac so that Rebekah almost certainly came to Isaac in the knowledge and belief that she was to be used of God in the outworking of His purpose. Like Mary the mother of Jesus at a then far future date she may well have said "*Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me*

according to thy word."

Abraham lived long enough to see his grand-children by Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac was forty at his marriage and sixty when Jacob and Esau were born. Fifteen years later, at the age of one hundred and seventy-five, Abraham died. During the long span of a hundred years he had lived and worked in the land which God promised should be his and his seed after him, but the promise was not fulfilled in his own lifetime. He died in faith, believing he would yet see the reality of which he only glimpsed a shadow. "*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day*" said Jesus "*and he saw it and was glad.*" Hebrews 11 contains Abraham's epitaph; he died in faith, not having received the reality of the promise, but looked forward to it in God's own due time. His faith transcended death and he saw clearly that there would be a future life and that life would come by means of a resurrection from the dead.

So Isaac and Ishmael, mature men of sixty-five and seventy-nine years of age respectively, laid the old patriarch to rest beside his wife. The father of the faithful had finished his course and God had taken him; the work of faith went on and developed first into an earthly nation which represented God and His truth, imperfectly, for nearly two thousand years and secondly into a worldwide society, the Christian Church, which became custodian of Divine truth for what is now nearly another two thousand years. The full impact of the Abrahamic promise will not be realised until the third Age, the Messianic Age, has dawned and the full blessing of all families of the earth under the beneficent reign of Jesus Christ and His Church has implemented all that God promised his faithful servant those many years ago.

(To be continued)

BIBLE EMPHASIS

If the Bible be divided along the lines of its three predominant themes, viz., History, Doctrine and Prophecy, and the amount of space devoted to each be examined, an interesting analysis results.

In the Old Testament, the books from Genesis to Esther are mainly history, those from Psalms to Song of Solomon, devotional and doctrinal, and from Isaiah to Malachi prophetic. In the New Testament the same order is shown: Matthew to Acts may be fairly described as history, Romans to Jude as doctrinal, and Revelation as prophetic.

The proportion of page space thus given to these three main classifications is roughly:—

History 60%

Doctrine 15%
 Prophecy 25%

This does not mean that doctrine is to be regarded as of very minor importance; there is much in the historical and prophetic books that is vital doctrinal teaching. What perhaps is a desirable conclusion to draw is this: the amount of space given to historical accounts would seem to indicate that our consideration of the lives and actions of those who served God, or rejected God, in past days is very necessary in the ordering of our own Christian lives. The greatest lessons of life can perhaps best be learned by the study of things that happened in times gone by.

THE TRANSLATION OF ENOCH

Enoch is one of the most singular characters of the Old Testament, a man who appears on the stage only to leave it immediately; visible long enough for it to be known that he was a man of God and that God took him. The Old Testament says "*Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him*" (Gen. 5. 24); the writer to the Hebrews adds "*By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God*" (Heb. 11. 5).

This unusual ending to the brief record of a saintly man's life has given rise to endless conjecture and speculation; so much so that the question "What really *did* happen to Enoch?" is by no means an uncommon one.

The usual conclusion of nineteenth century commentators was that Enoch went to heaven without dying—a kind of instantaneous passage from the scenes of earth to the presence of God. Many have found this a satisfactory answer, but the fact that other words of Scripture are contradicted by this conclusion is sufficient justification for an endeavour to attain a deeper and more accurate understanding of these two cryptic texts.

In such an enquiry any suggestion which may be of assistance, no matter from what source it comes, will be of value as an aid to thought.

Besides the two texts quoted above, Enoch is mentioned in only one other place in the Scriptures. Jude (verse 14) quotes him as predicting the coming of the Lord with ten thousand of His saints to execute judgment. This reference contributes nothing to our knowledge of the life of the prophet and does not materially assist our enquiry. It does however stamp Enoch as one of the prophets who spoke of the coming of the Day of the Lord.

The first point of enquiry is as to the precise meaning of the words in Genesis 5. 24. Does the phrase—"*Enoch walked with God, and Enoch was not, for God took him*" really mean that he was taken to heaven without dying as is so often supposed, or does it bear another meaning?

"What man is he that liveth and shall not see death?" asks the Psalmist (Psa. 89. 48). "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God" says Paul (1 Cor. 15. 50) and again "*the King of Kings and Lord of Lords . . . dwelling in the*

light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see." (1 Tim. 6. 16). Our Lord Himself declared "*No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man*". (John 3. 13). Such Scriptures as these are sufficient to confirm that no man, not even Enoch, has escaped the hand of Death, even had not the writer to the Hebrews stated so definitely, after including Enoch in his portrait gallery of heroes, that "*these all died in faith.*" (Heb. 11. 13). It should be accepted therefore that Enoch, when his allotted span was expired, *did* pass into death and "*slept with his fathers*".

The use of that latter expression serves as a clue to this strange word in Gen. 5. 24. Although we must believe that Enoch did eventually sleep with his fathers, there is no record to that effect in Genesis. This is the more strange when it is noticed that in every other case the formula is consistently the same "*Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son . . . and called his name Seth. And the days of Adam after he had begotten Seth were eight hundred years and he begat sons and daughters. And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died.*" (Gen. 5. 3-6). The same expressions are used for each one of the patriarchs up to Methuselah, *except Enoch*. Why the exception?

Is it not a reasonable conclusion that the time and circumstances of Enoch's death were not known to the men of his day, and therefore the record could not be completed? There is another fact that helps to confirm this thought. The ages of the antediluvian patriarchs ranged between 895 and 969 years; but that stated of Enoch is an exception. The record states that he lived 365 years, and God took him. Is it possible that the ancient historian intended his readers to understand that Enoch lived 365 years among men, becoming famed for his piety, and at that age disappeared unaccountably and was never heard of again? Was it that God in his inscrutable wisdom took Enoch away from the habitations of men perchance to carry out some work for Him during the remainder of his earthly life, living perhaps as long as his fellow patriarchs and, like Moses, ending his life in a solitary place known only to God?

"*Enoch walked with God, and he was not,*

for God took him." The Hebrew here has the significance of "walking to and fro" as a man does with his bosom companion. That could well depict the fact that Enoch was a man living in close and habitual communion with God in a day when quite certainly the wickedness of man was increasing on the earth and "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6. 5). Heb. 11. 5 confirms this view by saying "Before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." Picture then this venerable man surrounded, in all probability, by a godly family—for one of his great grandsons was Noah, a man who was "seen righteous" before God (Gen. 7. 1)—attaining what would be considered "middle age" of nearly four hundred years. One day Enoch was not to be found; he "was not" for he had been "translated". What had happened?

"God took him" says Genesis. The word is "*laqach*," meaning "to be taken away" or "removed" as in Amos 7. 15 "The Lord took me as I followed the flock," and Josh. 24. 3 "I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood". A more definite word is used by the writer to the Hebrews when he declared that Enoch was "translated". The two occurrences of this word in this verse are from the Greek *metatethemi*, meaning to take up an object and put it down somewhere else. These words appear frequently in the New Testament and a clear idea of their usage is gained by noting the following occurrences:

Heb. 12. 27 "signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken."

Acts 7. 1 "And were carried over into Sychem."

Luke 16. 4 "When I am put out of the stewardship."

Acts 19. 26 "Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people."

This word "translate" continued to bear this same meaning, of transference from one place to another, in much later times. There is in Wakefield Cathedral a memorial tablet to a quite recent Bishop of Wakefield who, at a certain date, says the tablet, was "translated to Newcastle," meaning that he was appointed to the latter city and so was transferred from Wakefield to Newcastle.

It is not necessary to insist that the expression "was not" must imply death, or the death condition. It need only indicate that the one referred to is not present or not to be found. A striking example of the usage of this expression occurs in the Babylonian story of the

Flood. (It is probable that Genesis 5 was originally written in the same language—Sumerian—and perhaps not very much earlier than the Flood story, which has survived in its purest form in Genesis and in a much more distorted form in the Babylonian account). Telling of the time when he sent forth the birds from the Ark, Uta-Napishtim (the Babylonian Noah) says "To and fro went the dove, and returned, for a resting place was not . . . to and fro went the swallow. She too returned, for a resting place was not". In this light the expression need only mean that Enoch was not to be found, and this is exactly what Heb. 11, 5 declares. This usage of the term "was not" is extremely frequent in Sumerian literature.

It seems then that both the inspired writers intended their readers to understand that Enoch was taken away from amongst men, but not necessarily to heaven. It could well be to some other part of the earth. From that day onward, Enoch was never seen or heard of again, and the ancient chronicler who first compiled the history which now appears in Genesis 5—probably in the days immediately after the Flood—was unable to say any more about this venerable character beyond the well-known fact that in the three hundred and sixty-fifth year of his life he "was not—for God took him". Where He had taken him was not known, and for that reason the length of his earthly life and the time of his death could not be recorded.

Now it is a remarkable fact that the traditions of the Israelites shed a distinct light on the fact of, and reason for, this mysterious disappearance. The apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus declares (44. 16) that "Enoch pleased the Lord and was translated, being an example of repentance unto all generations". This can only be taken as a reflection of Jewish understanding of the Genesis account, but one is impelled to ask in what way Enoch could be an "example" to "all generations". Perhaps the answer is to be found in the Hebrews verse, where it is said that in faith was Enoch translated, having already pleased God (Heb. 11. 5). Now in that chapter Enoch's faith is placed on the same level as that of Abraham, Moses and others, who at the call of God left their home, kindred and country and went out to a place which God would show them, *not knowing whither they went*. (Heb. 11. 8). Perhaps Enoch also went out to a solitary place, away from men, in close communion with God, to do a work for God just as did Abraham and Moses in later days,

and maybe that was the secret of his translation.

Many have wondered from what source Jude took his famous quotation when he said (Jude 14) "*Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints . . .*" and so on, for the quotation is not to be found in the Old Testament. It was little more than a hundred years ago that a complete copy of the "*Book of Enoch*", in which this passage occurs, was made available in the English language, and although none would now claim that this book was written by Enoch, competent authorities declare that not only Jude but our Lord Himself was quite familiar with it. It is to this book that we are indebted for sufficient light on Judaistic tradition to confirm the suggestion advanced above as to the nature of Enoch's disappearance.

Although the Book of Enoch was put together in its present state no earlier than one or two centuries before Christ, its nature suggests that certain portions are taken from written records which are considerably older. Apart from a great deal of pseudo-astronomical lore with which we have no immediate concern, the book purports to tell of the conditions prevailing immediately before the Flood—an amplification of the story told briefly in chapter 6 of Genesis. It is evident that various "fragments" of older records, some considerably distorted by their passage through the generations, by copying and re-copying, translation and re-translation, have been put together in a very clumsy and disjointed fashion with much material of later composition, but a careful study of these "fragments" does reveal one very interesting fact.

That fact is that the prevailing theme of the book is the taking of Enoch away from the world of men and his establishment in some part of the earth where he could not be approached except by one or two favoured ones who were aware of the secret. The story tells of both Noah and Methuselah visiting Enoch thus, and of the family of Methuselah coming to hear his words. Perhaps the most eloquent passage in this connection is 1 Enoch 12. 1, which says "*Before these things Enoch was hidden, and no one of the children of men knew where he was hidden, and where he abode, and what had become of him. And his activities had to do with the Watchers, and his days were with the Holy Ones*". Again chapter 70, verse 1 declares "It came to pass

after this that his name *during his lifetime* was raised aloft to the Son of Man and to the Lord of Spirits from amongst those who dwell on the earth. And he was raised aloft in the chariots of the Spirit and his name vanished from among them".

The similarity of this to the story of Elijah is very striking, and this likeness is heightened by words which are accredited to Enoch himself. (39. 3) "*And in those days a whirlwind carried me off from the earth and set me down at the end of the heavens*". Elijah too was separated from Elisha by a chariot of fire and carried up by a whirlwind into the heavens (2 Kings 2. 11) and the translation of Enoch is depicted here as having occurred in very similar fashion. The sons of the prophets besought Elisha that they might go and search the mountains, believing that the "wind of the Lord" (Heb. *ruach*, translated "wind" or "spirit" as required by the context, and incorrectly rendered "spirit" in this instance in the A.V.) might have dropped Elijah somewhere within reach (2 Kings 2. 16). They searched, and found him not. So with Enoch; it seems the Israelites believed that he had been removed to some inaccessible part of the earth and throughout the Book of Enoch he is described as continuing in a closer and more direct communion with God and the spiritual powers of heaven than man had enjoyed since the Fall in Eden. They believed that he bore God's message to the "fallen angels" of whom both Jude and Peter speak in the New Testament (Jude 6, 2 Peter 2. 4), warned Methuselah and Noah of the coming Flood, and declared that the judgment of God would come upon the ungodly; but as far as mankind generally were concerned, they knew not where he was and they never saw him again. Incidentally the Book of Enoch depicts the events of Genesis 6. 1 as first taking place in the time of Jared, the father of Enoch.

The "*Book of Jubilees*", written about two hundred years before Christ but incorporating much legendary matter from the lost "*Book of Noah*" of unknown antiquity, says that Enoch after his translation was with the angels of God in the lost Garden of Eden for 294 years, during which time he wrote down all the knowledge they taught him concerning the heavenly bodies, the seasons and the forces of Nature. He also recorded the sin of the angels (the "fallen angels") and the coming Divine judgment, the Flood. The origin of this piece of information is quite unknown, but it does at least indicate the popular belief that Enoch was not in heaven, but very much on earth, in

the forbidden land of Eden, still guarded by the Cherubim with the "flaming sword that turned every way". Since the Book of Genesis says that Enoch was 365 years old at his translation, the addition of this legendary 294 years away from the homes of men would make him 659 years old at his death, which does at least compare fairly well with the ages of his fellow patriarchs before the Flood.

It was the opinion of Jewish tradition that Enoch was the one to whom God entrusted the secrets of astronomy, of heavenly wisdom, what we in our day would call "scientific knowledge", and of writing and other useful arts, to be revealed in turn to mankind. It is of interest therefore to find that in the Babylonian tradition of the ten kings who reigned before the Flood, sometimes thought to be a dim memory of the ten antediluvian patriarchs, the seventh, who would in that case correspond to Enoch, is supposed to have been a special favourite of the gods of heaven and to have been initiated into all the mysteries of heaven and earth. Such legends have some value in that they show a fixed idea, prevailing throughout ancient times, that there once was a man, especially acceptable to God for his piety, who was entrusted with Divine secrets and taken into some place of separation from his fellows in order that he might learn those secrets. The short remark in Genesis about Enoch, brief and uninformative as it is, is quite evidently true history.

There is a hint in Heb. 11. 5 that some search for Enoch was made after his translation, for the verse declares that he was "translated that he should not see death, and was not found", as though men searched for him and their efforts were fruitless.

The most difficult part of this verse is the expression "that he should not see death". Once only is the same expression used elsewhere in the Scriptures, and that is in the well known saying of our Lord "If a man keep my saying he shall never see death" (John 8. 51). It should not be thought that this promise implied the escape of the physical human frame from the inevitable end which comes to all men when life's allotted span is past. Our Lord referred to a far deeper truth, and a far more enduring life than that which men to-day are pleased to call "life". Those who are the faithful of Christ, who have been "born again" and have a life within them which is from above and not of "this corruptible seed" (1 Pet. 1. 23) shall truly "never see death" even although their "earthly house of this tabernacle" (2 Cor. 5. 1) be dissolved. In

like manner the Ancient Worthies of old who are said in Heb. 11. 39 to have obtained a good report through their faith have not failed of their reward, and it can truly be said of them that having manifested their loyalty and allegiance to God by their faith there is a city which God hath prepared for them. (Heb. 11. 16). They, too, do not "see death". Enoch was one of these; and his faith, exercised as was that of Abraham, Moses and Daniel, is an assurance that he inherits the promise which God has prepared for him and so does not "see death"; but just as surely as Abraham and Moses and Christian believers throughout the centuries, finishing their course with joy, have gone down into the grave, so, in some lonely place far from his fellow-men, Enoch must have yielded up his breath to the One Who gave it. If it be assumed that Enoch lived to the average age of his fellow patriarchs, he could have been alive within half a century of the Flood. In this event he might well have been used of God to communicate those messages to Methuselah and to Noah, which the Book of Enoch declares he did in fact communicate. In such case one can well visualise the saintly old man in his quiet retreat spending his time in meditation on the things of God, perhaps seeing in ever clearer vision the trend of events in the world of sin and death, and—who knows—being the one who first discerned that impending fate which hovered over the antediluvian world. It may have been that he perceived the natural signs of the impending catastrophe many years before it happened—perhaps with knowledge born of long observation of the heavens, undisturbed by other distraction, realising something of the mighty changes which were at work in the earth and which at length culminated in the "breaking of the great waters of the abyss" and the opening of the "floodgates of heaven" (Gen. 7. 11). Some dim memory of this may be the reason why those long passages about the stars, winds and forces of Nature in the Book of Enoch are accredited to this mystic personage. It seems that he lived as a righteous man in a world fast giving itself over to every form of evil, that he prophesied to it concerning coming retribution, and that in the heyday of life he was removed from his place among men and until the day of his death lived in his peaceful retreat, serving and living in "quiet fellowship with God".

A conscience void of offence, before God and man, is an inheritance for eternity.

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL

Luke 12, 13-34

The man broke in abruptly, breaking the thread of Jesus' conversation with His disciples. He had a personal matter which to him was more important than all that Jesus had been saying. "Master" he urged "speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me". The total irrelevance of his request to the subject on which Jesus was dwelling shows that in this case at least the Master's teaching was falling on completely deaf ears. The man was not interested in what Jesus had to say to him; only in what He would do for him.

A very noticeable factor in our Lord's ministry is the unceremonious manner in which He dismissed those claims on His attention which came from unworthy sources. Although He never missed an opportunity of doing good when such action was in accord with the object and tenor of His mission He would not use His power or authority on unworthy objects. In this case He saw through the man and refused his request without hesitation. "Man" He said—what a world of scorn and contempt lies in the use of that epithet—"who made me a judge and a divider over you?" And without another word to him He turned to His disciples and began to talk about the evils of covetousness. "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of goods which he possesseth".

It is evident that the original suppliant was a covetous man; he had become involved in argument with his brother over the disposal of their inheritance and was hoping to introduce the authority of Jesus to favour his side of the argument. That was his only interest in Jesus; he called Him "Master" but he was not particularly interested in becoming a pupil, less still a follower who would give up the interests of this world and follow Jesus wheresoever He might lead. He was a covetous man and he meant to get all he could while life lasted and if the moral leadership of Jesus could be invoked to his advantage in this argument with his brother he was going to invoke it.

The remark about covetousness was only the prelude to some more positive teaching. Straight away Jesus plunged into His parable. The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully, so plentifully in fact that he

was faced with the problem of the disposal of his gains. There were of course a number of alternatives. Having taken enough to provide himself with a comfortable living he could devote the remainder to the relief of the poor—there were plenty such in Israel and the need was always there. Or he could make a generous donation to the Temple treasury for the work of God. There would be no lack of worthy outlets for his surplus. But no; he intended to keep all that he possessed for his own selfish enjoyment. He decided to pull down his granaries and storehouses and build bigger ones, and there store all that his land brought forth. Having done so, he would say to his soul, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry". The rich man was too covetous to part with anything that he had or to do good with it; he would hang on to it and look forward to a life of ease and indulgence.

But man proposes and God disposes. This man does not seem to have considered God in his calculations at all, but now God spoke to him. "Thou fool"—an epithet meaning one lacking reasoning power, unintelligent; perhaps our colloquial use of the word "idiot" is the best equivalent—"Idiot, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" To that, of course, there was no answer. The one circumstance in life over which the man had no control was come upon him, and in the face of that fact all his planning and expectation was come to nought. There is an expression in use in this our expressive day "You can't take it with you" and that is the thought which came at last to this man who had laid up treasure for himself but was not rich toward God.

Let that last point be well considered. This man's fault lay not in the acquiring of wealth or of goods. To the extent that he diligently cultivated his lands and cared for his flocks and herds he did well, for the earth hath God given to the sons of men as a stewardship, to be wisely administered and made to bear increase. Slothfulness and idleness are never extolled in the Scriptures—rather the reverse. The unprofitable servant is reproved but the one who increased the money entrusted to him is commended. Up to the point where the man had increased his productivity tenfold he

did well; the fault lay in the disposal of his gains. He failed to recognise his wealth as a stewardship from God. "*All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee*" sang the Psalmist but this man had forgotten that. The needs of his daily life were supplied, and well supplied; now came the question of an acknowledgment to God and some return made to God. There was nothing of that in the man's mind. He failed to admit that all he had gained came in the first place from that which God gave and that some return was meet. More than that, he also failed to realise that the purpose of man's existence is not merely to absorb food and drink and pleasure and thus enjoy the blessing of life without bearing any responsibility toward others or fulfilling some useful purpose in creation exterior to himself. "No man liveth to himself" said St. Paul. Each and every man is designed by God to live for a purpose, both now and in eternity, to fulfil some useful function in the fabric of His entire creation. This man intended to live a life of idleness and idleness has no place in the Divine purpose. "*Ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure*" (Psa. 103.20-21) is a conception of the celestial world and its abounding activity for which we are indebted to the Psalmist; the same energy and zeal for the administration and orderly conduct of the material creation must animate men if they are to be adjudged worthy of what, in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats, is called the inheritance prepared for them from the foundation of the world. The keynote of creation is work—without fatigue, without sweat of brow, divorced from the unpleasant associations normally attached to the term, but work nevertheless, those activities necessary for the proper maintenance of the order of existence in which men have their being—and this man did not want to work any more. He had made his pile and he wanted to sit back and enjoy it.

So the rich man passed through the gates of death empty-handed, with nothing to show for all his years of labour. He could have laid up in store rich provision with God for the eternal future, stores of sterling character and understanding of the principles of righteousness and Divine government, that he might fill a useful place in the eternal world. He might have had stores of sympathy and compassion and experience of human folly and weakness, gained from the wise and beneficent administration, in this life, of the wealth he had acquired, qualifications which would

fit him for use in God's future work of reconciliation and reclamation of men in the day of Messiah's Kingdom. But he had none of these. He came to God without anything to show for what God had done for him, a unit of creation that had yet to find his proper place in God's scheme of things.

Jesus drove the lesson home. "*Therefore*" He insisted, "*take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, nor for the body, what ye shall put on.*" Jesus did not mean that we are to give no consideration whatever to our bodily needs nor plan for the future; that would be the very negation of all His practical teaching. The Greek word employed here and in many like passages is not one that refers to taking thought in the sense of considering or reasoning, but one which means literally to be anxious for, or to have care or concern. Most modern translations render "take no anxious thought" or "be not anxious" and this is precisely what Jesus meant. We who are Christians must needs realise that God has the oversight of all our interests and will overrule circumstances for our good; He can provide against the unforeseen events of life and we may give ourselves without distraction to His service in the security of that knowledge. That does not mean that we should live a hand to mouth existence without using any part of our present gains to make necessary provision for the future. Christian stewardship does demand that we so order our lives within the limits of our ability that we can expect to go on serving the Lord to the end. Neither does it mean that we should announce our intention of "living by faith"—which all too often turns out to be an excuse for sponging on the generosity of other Christians to avoid working at a regular occupation or undertaking any of the normal responsibilities of citizenship. It does mean that we should put the service of God and the interests of His work foremost in our lives, making all other things subsidiary and using all that comes to us in this world as aids to this supreme object.

Jesus' reference to the ravens and the lilies is liable to be misunderstood. The ravens, He said, neither sow nor reap, but God feeds them; lilies neither toil nor spin but are arrayed more magnificently than Solomon in all his glory. His words need carefully reading. God has designed creation so that the ravens can obtain their food and live their lives in a perfectly natural fashion, instinctively going to the place where food is to be gathered and finding it there. He has so

ordered Nature that the lilies, as they grow, can absorb light and air and moisture, and the elements of the earth, to build the wonderful structure that is a flower. These things happen because the ravens and the flowers fit quite naturally into the place God designed for them, and so fulfil their function in creation. So with us. If we rest in the knowledge that there is a place for us in God's purposes and that nothing save our own unbelief or obstinacy or wilfulness can prevent our occupying that place we can be as the ravens and the lilies, fulfilling our designed place in creation in complete orderliness and serenity, giving glory to God by the very fact of our being. Just as the ravens must go to find their food, just as the lilies must lift up their faces to the sun and push their roots deeper into the earth, so must we be diligent in sowing and reaping, toiling and spinning, to fulfil our own particular destiny before God, but always in the serene knowledge that He is overseeing all and we are doing His will. There need be no anxious thought then; we are units in His scheme and He is controlling all things, cognisant of every life which waits upon Him.

"Which of you with taking thought can add

to his stature one cubit?" asked Jesus. He called this "that thing which is least" but the addition of eighteen inches to one's height would seem to be a pretty big thing. In point of fact the A.V. translators misunderstood this expression altogether. "*Helikian*" means extent of years, not extent of inches, and is rendered "age" in other translations. Which of them could lengthen his life by the shortest possible span? That was Jesus' question. No man can extend his life by worrying about it. No man can avoid entering at last into the portals of death. In the final analysis we have to trust God because we have no power of ourselves. He gave us life, all the things which are necessary to continuing life, and He alone knows the ultimate purpose of life. The things of the present are transient and must sooner or later pass away. The life that is in us is capable of eternal continuance, sustained always by God, who is all-powerful. We have to discover His purpose, and place ourselves in line to be fitted into that purpose. Everything else will fall into place. "*Seek ye first the Kingdom of God*" was the conclusion of the lesson "*and all these things shall be added unto you.*"

HOLINESS

Holiness is a word usually associated with religious life and experience. We have an equivalent in the word "Saintliness." Our modern English word "Holy" comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word, "*Hal*". *Holiness* comes from a kindred word—"Halig". In the less-developed language of our forefathers' day these words did not have the almost exclusively religious meaning which the modern word has, but were applied to various physical and mundane things too. We have several kindred words to-day which spring from the same roots. One such is "*hel*"—a word denoting good sound health. Another such is "*heal*"—to make sound or well. Still another is "*whole*"—(or "wholly") meaning "entire," "complete," "nothing lacking".

Our modern word "Saint" comes from the Latin "*Sanctus*"; and means "one set apart"—i.e., one wholly devoted to a purpose, usually a religious purpose. The words "holy" "Holi-

ness" and "Hallow" (used instead of holify) and "Saintly", "Sanctification" and "Sanctify" are synonyms for each other respectively, and stand, almost without exception, in our English Bible as the equivalents of one Hebrew word (*Qadash* or *Qodesh*) in the Old Testament and one Greek word (*Hagios*) in the New Testament. How accurately the Greek "*Hagios*" corresponds, to the Hebrew "*Qadash*" may be seen by the fact that the Septuagint translation (a Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures) uses that word exclusively to pass over into the Greek tongue the old Hebrew thought on holiness. This is of great advantage to us, and helps us to carry forward the Old Testament thought into New Testament days. It affords us additional advantage also to have two sets of English words by which to define that ancient Hebrew thought.



Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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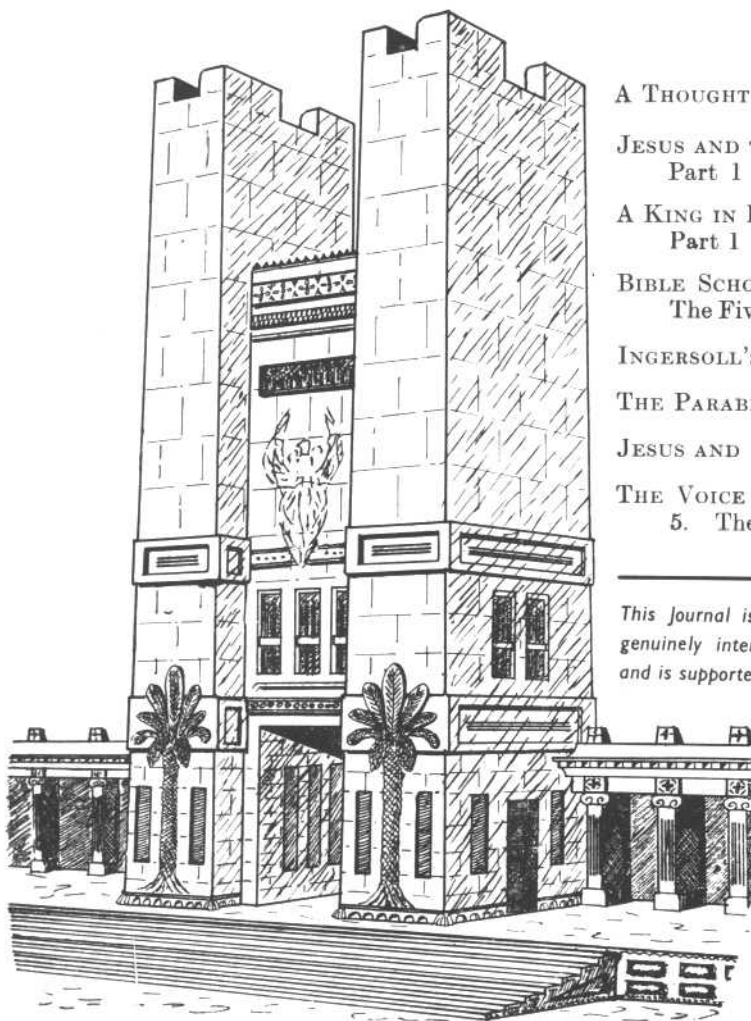
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CONTENTS

A THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	82
JESUS AND THE LIFE TO COME Part 1	83
A KING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS Part 1	85
BIBLE SCHOOL The Five Books of Moses (Part 5)	89
INGERSOLL'S VISION	92
THE PARABLE OF THE TWO DEBTORS	93
JESUS AND THE WOMAN OF CANAAN	96
THE VOICE OF THE MONUMENTS 5. The Siloam Inscription	99

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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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A Thought for the Month

"All men shall stand in awe, and shall declare the work of God, for they shall wisely consider of his doing" (Psa. 64. 9).

We live in a day when the ear is assailed on every side by the blatant claims man makes for himself. Politically, commercially, scientifically, there never was such a time when man declaims to the heavens "See what I can do!" Each new achievement strengthens his confidence in himself and increases his arrogance, and convinces him more than ever that there is no need to include God in any of his calculations or his plans. And with that loss of sense of responsibility toward God goes loss of sense of responsibility toward men. Man is no longer his brother's keeper. His fellows are creatures of earth to be used and exploited, if by any means he can find the power to use and exploit them, just as much as are the lower creations, the animal and vegetable worlds, and the inanimate things, the minerals and the basic elements and all upon which man can lay his grasping hand. Politically, men are potential units for the service of the State, having no rights beyond those granted by the State, and the State becomes an ever bigger and bigger concept until at the last there is one supreme world State holding the entire human race in thrall. Commercially, human beings are objects of exploitation, to make possible the selfish indulgence of the few, whether that indulgence be in terms of monetary wealth or power or whatever else. Scientifically, human beings are subjects for experiment, the acquisition of knowledge through their willing or unwilling co-operation being considered of greater importance than their individual welfare or happiness. The number of men who use political, commercial or scientific power for the enrichment and happiness of humanity is infinitesimal compared with those who use it to man's detriment.

But God is neither disinterested, idle, nor powerless. A certain Pharaoh of Egypt, many years ago, thought that He was, and found out his mistake when God arose in power to deliver His people. So it will be again. There is one theme running all through the Psalms of David, coming continually to the top in texts such as that quoted above, that the arrogant, God-dishonouring and man-despising course of those who live life without God and who oppress God's creatures and defile God's creation will be brought suddenly before the bar of His judgment. *"Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered"* was the ancient battle-cry of Israel, and on more than one occasion He did so arise and His enemies were scattered. Now in the end of time, when it would seem as if man has about completed his plans for organising all human life upon earth without any place for God, the predictions of all the prophets will be fulfilled at once and the Rider upon the White Horse will sally forth from Heaven to do battle for righteousness. It has become fashionable among many people, Christians and otherwise, to deny this belief in ultimate Divine intervention as a too literal acceptance of primitive ideas of God which we have now outgrown. There could be no greater mistake. The dominion of evil upon the earth has reached a point where it can be halted and overthrown only by the direct action of the powers of Heaven, and the Scriptures are consistently full throughout of assertions that those powers will ultimately be invoked.

Then will the words of this text be fulfilled. Men, to-day, goggle and wonder at the marvels of science, heatedly approve or disapprove, according to political sympathies and the effect upon their own pockets, of happenings in the political and commercial worlds; *then* they will stand in awe, speechless in the

continued on page 84

JESUS AND THE LIFE TO COME

Part I

The teaching of Christ
on the future life

It has often been remarked that Jesus said comparatively little about the future life but a great deal about the conditions of entry to that life. There is more in the writings of the Apostles and Prophets on the details of the life which lies beyond the present, and this fact has led some to suggest that the Apostles were over-zealous in their attention to the subject. If the life to come were of such importance, then surely, it is argued, Jesus Himself would have had more to say about it.

Such reasoning is not really justified. The intent of Jesus, when upon earth, was to implant seeds of understanding of God's purposes, which would develop into fuller comprehension in after days under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The parable in Mark 4 illustrates the principle. "First the grain, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear". The realities of the future life are so stupendous, so unlike anything known to or conceived by men at the First Advent, that if He had embarked on a full exposition they would have been overwhelmed. He said as much on one occasion. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now, but when the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth". (Jno. 16. 12-13). It is to be expected therefore that the things which Jesus had to say concerning the life to come were mainly allusions which could only be understood as the Christian faith developed and the relation of the Person and mission of Jesus to the teachings and prophecies of the Old Testament became more clearly discerned.

The basic truth upon which Jesus dwelt more than anything else in His recorded utterances, the truth upon which all else depends, is the fact that life, enduring life, eternal life, inheres in Him and can come to man only through Him. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (Jno. 1. 4). "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life" (Jno. 3. 36). "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (Jno. 11. 25). He told the woman of Samaria that He could give her living water which would be in her a well of water springing up into everlasting life. (Jno. 4. 14). He described Himself to the Jews as living bread from heaven, which if a man eat he would live for ever

(Jno. 6. 50-51). This was the first lesson of Jesus' ministry, that all life comes through Him and that His purpose in coming to earth was to guide men into the way of finding and receiving that life.

The second lesson is best summed up in the words of Jesus in Luke 19. 10 "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost". The parables of the Prodigal Son, the Lost Sheep, and the Lost Piece of Silver, are eloquent with this theme. "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved". (Jno. 3. 17). And the confidence with which Jesus carried out that mission is shown by His own words "and I, if I be lifted up from earth, will draw all men unto me" (Jno. 12. 32). Note that the drawing of all men is after and not before the "lifting up". That fact highlights the third great truth, which formed a constant background to all His teaching, the truth that the First Advent was to witness only one part of His redemptive work, that He must come again at His Second Advent to complete the work of winning men back to God. The subject of the Second Advent cannot be left out when considering what Jesus had to say concerning the life to come.

Jesus set the whole of His teaching and His work on the basis of the Old Testament Messianic promise. He presupposed a sound knowledge of that promise on the part of His disciples and hearers. Many of His allusions can only be understood in that light. When opening His ministry, reading from Isaiah 61 in the synagogue of Nazareth, He declared himself to be the fulfilment of that prophecy. In so doing He identified himself with the Messiah of all prophecy and of Israel's expectation and the people were not slow to grasp that fact. Without speaking one word He had defined for them and for all time His teaching on the life to come; it was the Divine Kingdom of the Hebrew prophets, the condition of things when sin would be eliminated from amongst mankind and the earth be full of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Heaven and earth would continue together in complete harmony and allegiance to God the Creator and Father of all. This all stems from the original promise to Abraham to the effect that through his seed all families of the earth should be blessed. In after days the prophets declared that the promised Seed would come

of the royal line of David and Jesus now appeared as the Son of David, in His own Person justifying the prediction, and the people accepted Him as such. It is not sufficient therefore to define the teaching of Jesus on the life to come purely in terms of His own recorded utterances; the whole of that Old Testament teaching and prophecy which He endorsed and claimed to fulfil must be considered part of His teaching. The apostles quite evidently accepted this fact and the rest of the New Testament draws heavily on the Old Testament in its development and crystallisation of the oral teachings of Jesus into established Christian doctrine.

It is noteworthy that, whilst Jesus was always intensely interested in the individual and the reconciliation of each individual man to God, He continually stressed the fact that God's ultimate purpose visualises the integration of all individuals into a sinless community, the "Kingdom of Heaven". This expression, or its equivalent, the "Kingdom of God", occur repeatedly in Jesus' sayings, and may fairly be said to enshrine what Jesus taught concerning the life to come. Salvation is not merely a personal matter, as though the individual having safely attained the felicity of heaven there is nothing more to be achieved and no further responsibility to any other creature and no longer any communal duty. Salvation is the attainment of a place in God's creation where every power can be and will be continuously employed in the furtherance of the Divine purpose in creation, without the hampering effects of sin. When sin has been overcome and banished from God's universe, when evil and evil-doers and the effects of evil doing have been eliminated, then the Kingdom of Heaven will have universal sway. And Jesus taught, as the old Hebrew prophets taught, that the Kingdom of Heaven is not confined to a spiritual realm beyond the skies, but is also destined to reach down to this world of man and material

things—and for aught we know, to countless other planets like the Earth, where creatures yet unborn may live sinless in the eternal service of God. The pre-occupation of Christian theology for so many centuries past with the spiritual hope of the Church, to be associated with her Lord in the heavenly realm to all eternity, has obscured the parallel truth that there is an earthly as well as a heavenly aspect to the Kingdom of Heaven, and that God has not created the material order of things only wantonly to destroy it. Jesus was primarily interested at His First Advent in calling men and women to be His personal disciples for close association in the celestial world, to all eternity, in all the future creative work of God, and this is still to this day the Christian calling. At His Second Advent, accompanied by those same disciples and subsequent converts and believers, He will proceed to the establishment of the earthly phase of the Kingdom of Heaven among what James in Acts 15 calls "the residue of men".

We shall therefore find that Jesus spoke a great deal about the characteristics of the Kingdom of Heaven and that sometimes He referred to a celestial kingdom inherited by His faithful followers of this Age, all who have dedicated their lives to His service and have served Him to the best of their ability and have come to know Him, and sometimes to a terrestrial kingdom inherited by men and women who, although slow in turning from sin to serve the living God, have at length done so under the beneficent administration of that order of things which is to be established when Christ has revealed Himself in His Second Advent for the final conflict with sin and the establishment on earth of everlasting righteousness.

* * *

Next issue will deal in greater detail with the actual words of Jesus respecting this dual nature of the life to come.

"A Thought for the Month" (concluded from page 82)

face of what God has done. And speedily—for "a short work will the Lord make upon the earth"—they will come to realise the inestimable benefits of the Rule of Righteousness which He will establish and find their voices again, this time to declaim and declare the works of God. "This is our God" Isaiah declares they will shout "We have waited for him, and He will save us". They did not know, before, that they were waiting for him, but so it was. Then at last, men will "wisely consider

of his doings" and realise that, after all, the ways of God are right and true, and that man can ignore them only to his own loss. The whole purpose of God in the permission of evil is that men might learn a much-needed lesson and when material for the lesson has been adequately provided—and the state of the world to-day is witness how adequate is the provision of material now—God will bend down from heaven and say "Stop—and listen to Me".

A KING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

A short study in the
Millennial Visions of Isaiah

Part 1

Isaiah, the statesman-prophet, lived in the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah and Manasseh, five successive kings of Judah; his prophetic ministry covered a term of more than sixty years. A priest by descent and legal right, he was a close student of the political developments of his day and a constant adviser to the royal court—especially to Ahaz and Hezekiah. The first thirty-five chapters of his prophecy record his utterances during the first thirty years or so of his ministry, up to the early years of Hezekiah. They comprise prophetic glimpses of the order of things in the Millennial Age set against the background of the evils of his own day. His understanding of the virtues and vices of kings, priests and peoples, and the principles upon which God will act to accomplish His purposes with them, fitted him very specially to be the prophet of the Millennial Age. More than anything else, therefore, his prophecies enshrine in symbol the principles that will govern that Age.

* * *

The theme of Isaiah's message in chapters 30 and 32 is kingship. This resolute, upstanding man of God had much experience of kings; he spent his life more or less in and out of the royal presence in the palace at Jerusalem, and he was by no means without knowledge of the kings of nations round about. Judah at this time was a flourishing state; its boundaries were extended almost as far as they had been in the days of Solomon, its armies were a power not to be ignored, and it was able to play off its two powerful neighbours, Assyria and Egypt, the one against the other in the best diplomatic tradition. A new power, Babylon, was coming into prominence—rather, an ancient power that had been eclipsed by Assyria for several centuries and was now coming into its own again—and Judah was flirting with that power too. Isaiah, the far-sighted and astute statesman, warned the kings of Judah, one after another, of the risks they ran, but his warnings were very usually ignored and during his own life-time the nation came perilously near to disaster, being saved only by Divine intervention in the destruction of Sennacherib's host; and a century or so after his death it did suffer the inevitable consequence of its political mistakes and was taken captive into Babylon.

But Isaiah also knew of another king, one

who would, in time to come, reign in righteousness and bring peace and prosperity to the people. He knew that it would not be in his own time; like Abraham of old, he had to look forward into the then far distant future, but look forward he did, and, again like Abraham, he "rejoiced to see" that day, "and was glad". So, when the prophetic power was strong upon him, he thought first upon the kings he knew in his own experience, their weaknesses and their folly, and warned his hearers of the ruin that must surely come; then as the vision of the present dissolved into that of the future his mind took a great bound forward into the coming Age, and he told of the better King who would accomplish all the good for humanity that kings ought to accomplish now, but which the kings that men set up, or suffer to take the dominion, have never and will never accomplish.

The thirtieth chapter opens with a message of condemnation upon Israel for seeking alliance with Egypt instead of trusting in the Lord their God for protection from the menace of Assyria. "Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me . . . that walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at my mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt." "Woe to them that go down into Egypt for help . . . but they look not to the Holy One of Israel" (ch. 30. 1-2. ch. 31. 1). Israel had been delivered from this same Egypt seven centuries previously; now of their own volition they were becoming entangled with its fortunes again.

Not for nothing has Egypt been accepted as a symbol of the world. Many a time since the days of Isaiah have those who should have trusted in God chosen instead to entangle themselves with worldly policies and methods and alliances; the result has always been what it was to Israel in that far-off day—disastrous. Now in our own day the same determination is manifest in the world's counsels and councils. "There is no God" is in all their thoughts" is a true quotation when applied to the great men of the earth to-day. It is not so much that they do not believe in the existence of God; many of them are quite sincere in the profession of some orthodox form of the Christian faith. But they are persuaded that salvation can only come by the strong right arm of human power—reasoning

and agreement, if possible, and if that fails, then by force. Under no circumstances will they risk either the "loss of face" or the—to them—appearance of weakness involved in casting their dependence upon God. Israel was like that too, here in this thirtieth chapter of Isaiah, and onward until faced with a crisis. When Egypt had manifestly failed to deliver, and Sennacherib's army stood before the gates of Jerusalem. . . .

But that great deliverance was still future. Here Isaiah is pronouncing Divine judgment upon this unbelieving generation and its king. "Go, write it before them . . . in a book, that it may be for the time to come . . . that this a rebellious people . . . that will not hear the word of the Lord" (vs. 8-9). From that he goes on to declare the utter destruction that will inevitably come, and that did in fact come in the days of Nebuchadnezzar. Even in this extreme the Father again appeals to His erring children (vs. 15). "For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, 'In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength'"; and Isaiah adds, sadly but sternly, "and ye would not. But ye said 'No; for we will flee upon horses . . .'". So he passes sentence; they shall indeed flee, and be broken, and be scattered, until none be left in the land.

Now although this is the pass to which Judah's kings have brought their subjects, and the people have been willing to have it so, God is by no means prepared to let matters rest there. True, the people must endure the judgment they have brought upon themselves. The weakness of Egypt will be made manifest; the Assyrian power in their own day, and the Babylonian power in their children's day, must stalk through the land, burning, destroying and slaying, but God has a plan that extends beyond all this, and will yet reach out for their deliverance. So, at this point, Isaiah begins to see into the future. What he beholds is dim and shadowy at first, and he speaks only in general terms; later on in the thirty-second chapter, he perceives more distinctly and speaks more clearly. But even now he apprehends the promise of deliverance. The Lord will wait "that He may be gracious unto you . . . for the Lord is a God of judgment; blessed are all they that wait for him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; thou shalt weep no more; he will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it he shall answer thee" (vs. 18-19).

Here again the one unalterable, indispensable principle is reiterated. The people have

entered into the bitterness and retribution for their fault; they have spurned the word of the Lord and rejected His prophet, and have reaped the consequences. But there is to be another opportunity for them; for God is a God of a second chance and a third chance and as many chances as may be necessary to teach His wandering ones their lesson, always provided that the proffered further chance is based upon some real possibility, some reasonable hope, that it will bring the wanderer somewhere nearer to God. So, once again, Israel may return and be delivered, if they believe, and trust no longer in Egypt. "He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry"; there must be the cry of faith and repentance before He can hear, and hearing, answer with His graciousness.

From that time forward, says Isaiah, peace and security will return. ". . . the increase of the earth . . . shall be fat and plenteous; in that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures" (vs. 23). The images of gold and silver will be cast away and the curse of idolatry lifted from the land (vs. 22). The true and sincere worship of God and absolute trust in Him will go hand in hand with a restored and luxuriant earth that will meet man's every need.

There will be discipline. In this coming golden age, man, who is still imperfect and weak, will need strict parental care and training before he can be trusted with full liberty in life. The old depraved tastes and desires will shout to have their way and they must be restrained. The old impulses of selfishness and greed, mayhap even of hate and strife, will struggle for expression; and they must not be allowed to have free rein. There will be swift and certain retribution for every attempt to do evil. All of these disabilities will still afflict humanity, albeit in diminishing degree as the Age proceeds in its work of reconciliation, but there will be teachers at work, teachers who are no longer despised and rejected, but standing before men in the full light of day. "Though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction" as He must do, even in the day of light and gladness, cries Isaiah (vs. 20) "yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers; and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it' when ye turn to the right hand or to the left". That is the distinguishing characteristic of the Millennial Age; the presence of experienced and qualified teachers ever on the alert to perceive the slightest deviation from the path of true rectitude and uprightness, and to

guide the traveller with unerring wisdom into the ways of peace.

Who are these teachers? They are, first, the faithful consecrated Christian disciples of this present Age, of this period between Pentecost and now, and, second, the "Ancient Worthies", faithful men of previous ages, before Pentecost. Both companies alike, by reason of their past lives' experiences with man and his sinfulness, and of God and His power in their own lives, will be able to turn men from the power of sin to serve the living God. These will be the sure teachers of mankind "in that day".

Thus it is that in the words of verse 26, the *"light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of His people . . ."* In Scripture symbolism the sun is often put to represent the light of the Gospel, and the moon that of the Law of Sinai, which preceded the Gospel and yet is only truly illuminated by the Gospel. So, in that day, the light of those teachers who were of the days of the Law, and the light of these teachers who are of the days of the Gospel, will together shine resplendently "as the light of seven days" upon men being healed. If it is true that the history of mankind on earth can be said to cover seven days, seven prophetic periods of time, and if it is true—as we know it is true—that each of those historic "days" will contribute its share of "teachers", either earthly or heavenly teachers, to the work of the Millennial Day, then surely it may be said with truth, that the light of the moon and the sun will then be as the light of seven days; the accumulated wisdom and experience of the seven ages of human history will be laid under tribute in the teaching and training of all men in the Millennial Age.

These few fragments are fugitive glimpses of Millennial conditions, stray gleams of light, shooting as it were across the dark background of Isaiah's present message of reproof and condemnation; the full glory of his vision has yet to come. There is a further message to be given first, a further aspect of the judgment that must precede the blessing. Israel's chastisement has been foreseen and described, and that of mankind in general under the figure of Israel, and there is no concealment of the fact that the judgment is directly in consequence of unfaithfulness and unbelief. But what of the agent of judgment, the scourge of God ready to His hand for the purpose? What of the Assyrians who were so ready to ravage Judah and to carry out the

Divine work of retribution? Are they themselves without guilt, and has the Lord no account to settle with them? By no means are they without guilt; and a very heavy account the Lord does have to settle with them. Even though they have, unwittingly, played a part in the execution of the Divine purpose, their own personal responsibility for the evil they have done remains; they did not undertake the invasion and ravaging of Judah from any consciousness of effecting God's purpose or any desire to do Him service. They entered the land completely and entirely from motives of greed and hate and lust and every other vicious attribute. They too were alien from God and fighting against Him, and they too must enter into judgment, before in their turn they can stand before the Great White Throne and hear the terms of life, and turn to find those same teachers waiting to teach them also. So Isaiah has a word for the Assyrians, a word of fierce denunciation and ruthless determination. In reading that message let us not forget that those Assyrians pictured the forces of this world in this, the end of the old Age, that fight against the incoming Kingdom of Christ, that indeed stand as it were between us and the Kingdom. Every institution, every organised power, whether financial, political or religious, that sets itself up as instead of God, and leaves God out of its counsels, and suppresses the things of God in its domain, is of those to whom the prophet addresses these words; and the judgment is certain, and the end thereof sure.

"The name of the Lord cometh from far, burning with His anger . . . His lips are full of indignation, and His tongue as a devouring fire; and His breath as an overflowing stream . . . and the Lord shall cause His glorious voice to be heard, and shall show the lighting down of His arm . . . with the flame of a devouring fire, and tempest, and hailstones. For through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be beaten down . . ." (vs. 27-33).

Here it is that the prophet's understanding widens immeasurably and his field of vision takes in the broad sweep of colour that is the Millennial Age. The strife and confusion and shouting, the darkness and tempest and earthquake, of that Armageddon which marks the time of judgment humanity has brought upon itself at this end of the present Age dissolves and metamorphoses into the radiant glory of a great Throne set up upon earth, and the resplendent figure of a King, a king such as earth has never before known. Here it is that Isaiah embarks upon a detailed description of the

kingship of the Millennial Age, of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth. Raising his eyes to drink their full of the resplendent scene, he cries out in tones of exultation. "Behold," he cries, "Behold, a King shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment" (ch. 32. 1). The King is Jesus Christ, returned to earth in the glory of His Second Advent, in the exercise of that power which He could have wielded at His First Advent, but refused so to do because only in being "led as a lamb to the slaughter" and giving "His soul an offering for sin" (Isa. 53) could He establish the transcendent truth that the only one who can be trusted with absolute power over mankind is the One Who has demonstrated His willingness to share the sufferings and the death that is the lot of all mankind. But now the time of suffering and death is past and the King comes forth in glory and power and takes His place upon the throne of earth, an absolute monarch indeed, but a monarch to whom all men can give unqualified loyalty and obedience, for He is a King Who will reign in righteousness. So, in another place, Isaiah cries rapturously "It shall be said in that day, 'Lo, this is our God. We have waited for Him, and He will save us'" (Isa. 25. 9). David, seeing the same thing, sang (Psa. 72) "He shall judge thy people with righteousness and the poor with judgment . . . in His day shall the righteous flourish . . . He shall spare the poor and needy . . . men shall be blessed in Him, and all nations shall call Him blessed".

Men have never known an absolutely righteous king and have no conception of the benefits such a monarch can bring to his

people. It has been well said that "power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely" and power in the hand of fallible men, however well-intentioned, has very generally been abused to a greater or lesser extent. Some of the most ruthless men known to ancient as well as modern history have commenced their conquering careers with the best of motives and have ended them to the accompaniment of tears and curses from those who have suffered under them. In our own day men of the people have risen to positions of power, loudly proclaiming that they will administer freedom and equality for all men; too late, their hapless dupes have realised that the shackles of bondage have been riveted upon them more firmly than ever. Those rulers were sincere enough when they started out; the possession of power has been more than their integrity could withstand.

A king who will reign in righteousness, then, is a new thing to this world and the results of His reign will be new too. The first reaction of His people will be one of relief and growing confidence. A new hope will be born in the hearts of men, a hope that at last the long-desired but ever elusive peace and prosperity may indeed be within reach.

This is the theme of the remainder of the thirty-second chapter. Having passed from the reign of death and evil, and seen the last of earth's evil power perish in Armageddon, the prophet is free to devote himself to a detailed picture of the benefits which the king who reigns in righteousness brings to his subjects.

(To be continued)

Simplicity of Speech

Lord Justice Birkett (Sir Norman Birkett) speaking to the boys at a public school ten years ago, uttered this tribute to the Bible.

"Here is a mystery which seems past finding out—how it comes that certain simple words placed in a certain order can yet move the human heart beyond all expression, as they do.

"Open the Authorised Version of the Bible almost anywhere you like and you will find exactly what I mean."

The simplicity of the Gospel message is mirrored by the simplicity of the words in which it is conveyed to us. That is why the Bible has a message for all, learned and un-

learned alike. Books written to explain the Bible are often far more difficult to understand than the Book they profess to explain. And that is true of many sermons and addresses and expositions given from the pulpit and platform. In all our service and ministry let us seek for simplicity of expression, for that will appeal to the greatest number and effect the greatest good. If so able and eloquent a man as Sir Norman Birkett, one of the most famous barristers of the century, recommends simplicity of speech and writing as a desirable thing, and points to the Divine Word as an example, we surely do well to follow suit.

Bible School THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES

Part 5. Gen. 25—31

STUDY 4 ISAAC GEN. 25 - 26.

Isaac is the second of the three patriarchs in whom the promise and purpose of God resided before it became vested in the chosen nation of Israel. Whereas Abraham and Jacob lived lives which were rich in incident fully recorded, that of Isaac is quiet by comparison and little is said about him. After the example of his father he followed the nomadic way of life, tending flocks and herds, never moving far from southern Canaan, but continued in his father's prosperity and evidently became exceedingly wealthy by the standards of his day.

Gen. 25 to 28 cover the main incidents of his life. These read as though they all occurred after the death of Abraham, which is recorded in 25. 7, but in fact his sons Jacob and Esau were fifteen years old when their grandfather died. Isaac married at forty (25. 20) Rebekah probably being considerably younger—she was the daughter of his first cousin Bethuel—and was sixty at the birth of Jacob and Esau. The story of Isaac and Ishmael was repeated; two sons of the same father, one of whom was destined to be the heir of the promise, and he the second born. The other, Esau, a man of the world, finding his life and enjoyment in the natural things of this earth just as did Ishmael his uncle, whilst Jacob was destined to be dedicated to the service of God as was Isaac and become the means through which God will eventually fulfil the promise of bringing blessings to all families of the earth. On the larger canvas, the Christian Church is the later born compared with Israel the chosen nation; both have a share in God's ultimate purpose but whereas the Church is to administer Divine blessing in association with the Lord Christ in heaven, Israel is to act as the Divine ambassador on earth.

A Divine intimation was given at the birth to the effect that the younger of the twins—Jacob—was to be the heir of promise (25. 23) but, inexplicably, Isaac strongly favoured his elder son Esau, just as Abraham had longed for Ishmael his elder son in similar fashion. It is certain that Rebekah, who had received the original Divine decree that Jacob should be the heir, had told Jacob of this fact; this throws some light on the story of the birthright (25. 27-34). Esau thought so little of the Divine calling inherent in the family that he

was perfectly willing to trade any rights he may have had in exchange for a meal at a time when he came in hungry from hunting. Jacob's purpose in making the deal was evidently to strengthen his claim to the promise by a voluntary relinquishment of claim by his elder brother. It is sometimes suggested that Jacob took unfair advantage of Esau at a time when the latter was famished; there is no substance in this view; the social system of the day in which the whole tribe lived together as a community, family and servants alike, meant there was always plenty of food available and no one ever went hungry except in times of famine. The story plainly states that Esau had no interest whatever in the birthright and was perfectly willing to exchange it for the smallest immediate benefit.

Chapter 26 covers a span of twenty-five years, roughly from the death of Abraham to the marriage of Esau. During this time the family moved about. Forty years before the death of Abraham Isaac moved southward into the Negev, into the district already occupied by his half-brother Ishmael (comp. 16. 14 with 24. 62 and 25. 11). It is evident that there was no enmity between the two and Isaac was probably building up his own possessions and a separate establishment became desirable. There was now, however, another famine in the land; Isaac moved on in the direction of Egypt as his father Abraham had done before him, halting for a while in the territory of Abimelech in the Sinai peninsula just as Abraham had done. At this point he received the Divine warning "Go not down into Egypt". Unlike Abraham, he was to retrace his steps towards Canaan again.

Isaac's deception in telling the Philistines that Rebekah was his sister, so like that of his father in Egypt respecting Sarah, has provoked much comment but is understandable in the light of the social customs then obtaining. A powerful man desiring the woman for his wife might not scruple to have her husband murdered in order to clear the way, but he would not dream of marrying a woman whose protector was her brother without a long and involved series of negotiations with the brother. It is probable that both Abraham and Isaac thought that by posing as the brother they would in the event of any

local celebrity casting covetous eyes on their respective wives, be able to delay the negotiations long enough to get out of the country and out of danger.

Some scholars think that the double mention of Abimelech king of Gerar shows that the stories of Abraham and Isaac are merely variants of the same original "folk-tale", pointing out that according to the narrative nearly a hundred years separated the two episodes and no king could be expected to reign so long. They ignore the fact of the greater longevity of the day—Abraham lived 175 years and Isaac 180; there is nothing out of place therefore in thinking of other characters in the story living for similar spans of years. It is however possible that the two proper names given in 21, 22 and 26, 26 are titles rather than proper names. "Abimelech" means "The king is father" or "father king"; "Phicol", given as the name of the captain of the army, means literally "mouth of all" or as we might say "commander of all". It is noticeable that in Isaac's time there was the same wrangling with the Philistines over the possession of wells as in Abraham's day—water being an indispensable necessity—and matters were settled in both cases by a covenant or treaty by which the Hebrews agreed to settle at Beer-Sheba, leaving the Philistines in possession of the south land. By the end of chapter 26 Isaac finds himself in his father's old home and settles finally at Beer-Sheba, a name and place which survives in Israel to this day.

Here, at forty years of age, Esau married two native Hittite women, thus allying himself with the people of the land and sealing his indifference to the Divine calling inherent in his family (26, 34 - 35).

The amazing physical vitality of this family which God had called from Ur of the Chaldees now begins to make itself felt. 25, 12 - 13 concludes the story of Ishmael. His twelve sons became the heads of twelve Arab tribes, spreading over what is now southern Sinai and northern Arabia. In after days they were to take a major part in populating the whole of the Arabian peninsula and even to this day many Arab peoples refer to themselves as "Beni-Ishmael"—son of Ishmael. He died at 137 years of age having seen the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham a hundred and fifty years earlier regarding himself, "twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make of him a great nation." (17, 20).

JACOB'S DECEPTION *Gen. 27*

Jacob's deception of his father, recorded in chap. 27, is a familiar story to most Bible

readers. Although the incident occurred seventeen years after Esau's marriage to the Hittite women, and his disregard of the Divine calling thereby manifested, it is evident that Isaac still looked upon him as his heir; feeling that he himself was approaching the end of his days he wanted to confer his patriarchal blessing on his elder son. It is worthy of note that in fact Isaac lived for sixty-three years after this time; he need not have been in such a hurry. The immediate result was to awaken apprehension in the mind of Rebekah, who seems all along to have had a clearer understanding of the Divine purpose than had Isaac. At her instigation, Jacob impersonated his brother before the half blind Isaac and received the blessing which belonged only to the heir. According to the custom and belief of the day, once Isaac had conferred the patriarchal blessing it could not be revoked; the son thus blessed must in fact inherit. Esau, coming in later, discovered the trick and was bitterly outraged, not, it must be admitted, because Jacob was now re-affirmed the promised Seed of Abraham in the Divine purpose, but purely on the material plane of being debarred from the elder son's heirship. It does seem from the account that Esau had a genuine and deep regard for his father and this was the chief cause of his distress. He resolved on revenge; after the death of Isaac he would kill his brother.

This story highlights the fact that not always the most praiseworthy characters are the ones chosen for the purpose of God; not always the most fitting for those purposes. Judged by modern standards, the conduct of Jacob cannot be defended. In the thought of his day, the deception of Isaac was perfectly justifiable in order to save him from his own lack of perception in continuing to favour Esau although knowing that God had appointed Jacob. There could have been apparent reason on his side. Of the two sons, Esau is the most appealing character. Impetuous, warmhearted, generous, swift to anger but not one to remember a grudge for long; his threat to kill Jacob quickly evaporated and in after years he was generous and brotherly to Jacob. His was a likeable disposition but it contained within itself no religious instinct, no feeling of devotion or dedication to God whatever. That was why he could not be used in God's developing purpose. Jacob on the other hand is shown calculating, deceptive, an opportunist who used any means he liked to further his own ends, not of particularly high principle, except in one respect—his devotion and dedication to God. God used that

one attribute and made him an instrument for His purpose, but did not absolve him from the consequences of his misdeeds on that account. In after life Jacob received full measure of recompense for the act of deception he committed against Esau in what may well have been a well-meant endeavour to save God's work falling into the hands of an unsuitable man. We often make the same mistake and have to learn that there is no need; the Most High is perfectly capable of looking after the interests of His work himself.

27. 23 contains a hint that Jacob and Esau may not have been the only sons of Isaac, although the only ones whose names are given in the Bible. Isaac says there that he had made not only Esau, but all Jacob's brethren, servants to him. Although *achim*, plural of brother, is often used in the Old Testament in a wider sense than its strict meaning it does primarily refer to blood brothers and in this case there would have been no point in Isaac's declaration insofar as other members of the establishment were concerned for they were already servants to the heir. The "brethren" of whom Isaac spoke were more likely other sons, either by Rebekah or by secondary wives as was the case earlier with Abraham. The utter silence of Scripture as to any such other sons, apart from this brief allusion, indicates that they had no place whatever in the development of the main purpose. Like the sons of Keturah, Abraham's third wife, they took their place as progenitors of Arab tribes and were lost to history.

JACOB IN HARAN Gen. 28 - 31

It would seem that at long last Isaac had learned his lesson. The decrees of God are inscrutable but they must be carried out. From chapter 28 there is no hesitation in Isaac's attitude; he is fully reconciled to the fact that for reasons best known to God, Jacob was to be the heir of the Abrahamic promise; through him must come the Seed by whose instrumentality God will eventually bless all families of the earth. The first few verses of chapter 28 record Isaac's charge to Jacob that he shall not follow the example of Esau and take his wife from among the Canaanites; he was to travel back on the road to Haran in Mari, to his mother's brother, and find a wife of his own race and family. So the greater blessing, not only of heirship as previously, but of Divine calling, was conferred upon Jacob and he set out upon his journey.

28. 6 - 9 casts another brief light on the character of Esau. Perceiving Isaac's insistence that Jacob at least take a Semitic wife

by whom to continue the purity of the family, Esau added to his two Hittite wives a daughter of his uncle Ishmael. By this means he could at least claim some marital connection with his grandfather Abraham—it does seem that Esau did his best to keep tolerably in line with his father's wishes but the attractions of the wider world were too strong to be resisted.

So Jacob went the five hundred miles to Haran. The story reads as though he went alone on foot; it is likely though that he travelled either with a party of his father's servants with beasts on which to ride, or joined a travelling caravan of merchants for company and protection. Solitary travellers were likely to get short shrift in the desolate countryside. During his journey he experienced the celebrated dream of the ladder, This word conjures up visions of a gigantic builder's ladder stretching up into the heavens and out of sight; what Jacob saw in his dream was more likely an impression of the colossal staged towers of Mesopotamia, with their ascending staircases, at the top of which stood sanctuaries to the gods, He had never seen one, but must often have had them described to him by his grandfather Abraham. On feast days those *ziggurats*, as they were called, were thronged with priests moving up and down to the sanctuary, and now Jacob was seeing one with his own eyes. And right at the top, instead of the mythological gods of Sumeria, stood the Lord God of Abraham, assuring Jacob that He would be with him in all his circumstances, would bring him safely back into the land of Canaan, and would eventually fulfil His promise that in Jacob's seed would all families of the earth be blessed.

The sojourn of Jacob with his father-in-law Laban in Haran lasted forty years. The chronology of this part of Jacob's life is rather difficult to analyse, but Dr. Kennicott showed many years ago that the Hebrew of 31. 38 and 41 indicates two periods of twenty years for Jacob's service, one "in thy house" and one in the field. The age of Jacob's children, Reuben, Levi and Dinah, at the time of his return to Canaan makes this forty years a necessity, so that Jacob was ninety seven years of age when he returned. The story of this forty years is told very briefly in 29. 19 to the end of chapter 30. Jacob's love for Rachel led him to obtain Laban's consent to their marriage, and lieu of the usual gifts he was compelled to give seven years' service to Laban before claiming his bride. At the expiry of the period the wedding festivities took place but Jacob next morning found that he had been tricked into taking Leah, the

elder sister, instead. In answer to his expostulation Laban pleaded local custom and offered Rachel as well in return for a further seven years service, to which proposal Jacob agreed. There is little recorded of the ensuing thirty three years save the birth of eleven sons, some of them by Rachel and Leah, some of them by their respective handmaids, Bilhah and Zilpah, given to Jacob in accordance with the custom of the land just as Hagar a century before had become a secondary wife to Abraham. During all this time Jacob increased in possessions and wealth to such an extent that he incurred the displeasure and jealousy of Laban's own sons and it was probably with eager acquiescence that Jacob at last heard

the voice of the Lord bidding him gather his possessions and return to his native land and his father Isaac.

So it came about that at the end of forty years' sojourn in Haran, Jacob gathered his flocks and herds, his shepherds and household servants, his four wives, eleven sons and an unspecified number of daughters, and set out on the five hundred mile journey to Canaan. His eldest son Reuben would be about thirty-two years of age at this time; his youngest, Joseph, six years old. The twelfth son, Benjamin, was to be born shortly afterward, on the journey.

(To be concluded)

INGERSOLL'S VISION

"A vision of the future arises. I see a world where thrones have crumbled and where kings are dust. The aristocracy of idleness has perished from the earth.

"I see a world without a slave. Man at last is free. Nature's forces have by science been enslaved. Lightning and light, wind and waves, frost and flame, and all the subtle powers of earth and air are the tireless toilers for the human race.

"I see a world at peace, adorned with every form of art, with music's myriad voices thrilled; where lips are rich with words of love and truth; a world in which no exile sighs, no prisoner mourns, a world on which the gibbet's shadow does not fall; a world where labour reaps its full reward, where work and worth go hand in hand.

"I see a world without the beggar's outstretched palm, the miser's heartless, stony stare, the piteous wail of want, the livid lips of lies, the cruel eyes of scorn.

"I see a race without disease of flesh or brain—shapely and fair, perfect harmony of form and function—and, as I look, life lengthens, joy deepens, Love canopies the earth; and over all, in the great dome of Heaven, shines the eternal star of faith."

(Robt. Ingersoll)

Those words are from the writings of Robert Ingersoll (1833-1899) a noted American agnostic of the nineteenth century. Because of his attacks on Christianity and the Bible his name was anathema in respectable households. Sober judgment to-day tends to show that his attitude was probably dictated more by the manifest defects of nominal Christianity in that day rather than an accurate knowledge of the Christ of the Bible. The quotation

reveals his belief that increasing human knowledge and power over the forces of Nature would eventually bring in universal happiness. He expected that happy state to be attained by man without God. Less than a century later the utter hopelessness of his expectation is manifest to everyone. Every element of his vision is possible of attainment to-day by the aid of powers now at man's command; every evidence shows that the selfishness and sin of man will prevent that attainment. Only if God intervenes can Ingersoll's prediction come true.

The Scriptures declare in no uncertain voice that it will come true. The earth is to be full of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. The conclusion is irresistible that God will intervene, will suppress with firm hand the evil things which now afflict human society, will bend down from Heaven to teach men the better way, so ushering into their eternal inheritance all who are capable of conversion and reconciliation. Thus will Ingersoll's dream become reality.

Why not take advantage of the quiet time of our daily opportunities that strength may be imparted to us by the only source profitable to man? Nature works in quietness; strength is begotten by admitted methods and formulated habits, thereby accepting God as the "Live Wire" to every fibre of our being. The Upper Room experience of added strength came conditionally, by process of waiting. We are all the time busy at our work; we do not know the sacredness of resting. We know how to toil and how to give, but we do not know how to sit still and how to receive.

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO DEBTORS

Luke 7.36-47

This Pharisee was a righteous man, one who held sin and every manifestation of sin in a very correct abhorrence. One of his favourite texts was that spoken by the prophet Habakkuk (1. 13) "*Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil*"; in every affair of life he endeavoured to keep himself undefiled by contact with the sinful and the unclean. He believed in the coming of Messiah and the Messianic Kingdom and he was sure that when Messiah did appear He would look for those who had remained true to the Pharisaic traditions and could stand before Him in the integrity of their own righteousness, model keepers of that Law which was at the first given to Moses. Such men, the Pharisee believed, would be welcomed into the Kingdom; the sinful and the unclean would be unceremoniously ejected, and after that, life would never again hold anything to besmirch or defile the purity of God's own people.

Now he had invited this new young prophet of Nazareth to dine with him. It was not necessarily that he believed Jesus to be the Messiah. Rather he had been much more impressed with His bearing and His words than had his brother Pharisees and he wanted to know more. It looked very much as if this young enthusiast was in the tradition and spirit of the old Hebrew prophets and the Pharisee felt that he owed it to himself to explore the matter further. He probably prided himself a little that he was not prejudiced or bigoted or dyed-in-the-wool as were so many of his brother Pharisees. God had undoubtedly spoken in the past by His servants the prophets and history was witness to the fact that if Israel had taken a little more notice of those prophets the nation might not now have been reduced to its present straits. Moses had told their forefathers what would befall them if they forsook their covenant and Moses' prediction had undeniably come to pass. This young man without doubt possessed a clear understanding of the sinful condition of Israel and He was not afraid to voice His opinions; it could very possibly turn out that here was the leader for whom all right-thinking men were looking and if so it would be a good thing to get better acquainted with Him right at the outset. So the Pharisee invited Him home to dinner.

So far so good. He had brought in a few

friends, Pharisees of the more liberal turn of mind like himself, and they were gathered round his table reclining in the customary manner, facing the table, leaning on the left elbow, with the feet outside forming a kind of outer ring. The meal proceeded, servants flitting to and fro attending to the needs of the guests, whilst round the table grave question was followed by equally grave answer. Simon the Pharisee rubbed his hands with satisfaction; things were going well. His guest was certainly coming up to expectations.

There was a slight disturbance at the farther end of the room where it opened out on to the central courtyard. Simon did not take any notice. In conformity with custom his courtyard was open to anyone who wished to linger there awhile, in the shade, and perchance catch a glimpse of the prophet or just satisfy their curiosity by watching the feast. As befitted a Pharisee who took his profession seriously, there would be a certain amount of provision of plain food out there for whoever felt hungry, for hospitality to the traveller and kindness to the poor were incumbent upon Pharisees. But he pursed his lips somewhat as the slight form of a woman emerged from the group in the courtyard and came forward towards Jesus where He sat. It was not her sex which brought Simon's brows together in disapproval; it was his recognition of her identity, a woman known as a prostitute in the town. Had he consulted his own inclination, he would probably have ordered her away from the house, but to do so at this moment would have been a breach of etiquette to his guests and bring an element of dishonour upon his head. Frustrated and impotent, he watched as she knelt down behind the circle, right at the feet of the principal guest. This was altogether too bad; the woman had no sense of decency. Relying on the unwritten code which she knew Simon would not break, she was taking advantage of this opportunity to bring herself to Jesus' attention. He waited, tensely, for Jesus to notice her, His fine eyes to go hard and cold, His voice chill and severe, to condemn her and bid her remove her defiling presence from the house. The Prophet of God could so easily do what he himself could not do, and so he waited expectantly.

Jesus seemed slow to observe. He was still

talking earnestly with the other guests. Simon, at the other side of the table, could give his attention only to the woman. Everything else was a blur; his eyes were fixed only on her, so near to Jesus' feet. Shamelessly, like all such women, she had removed her veil and allowed her long tresses to fall down around her shoulders. She was weeping, sobbing uncontrollably with overpowering grief, in the intensity of her emotion grasping convulsively at the Lord's ankles. Perceiving that her tears were falling upon His feet, she bent her head to the floor and used her flowing hair to dry them; from the recesses of her clothing taking a small phial of perfume, she opened it and poured its contents over them, filling the room with a fragrance it had perhaps never known before. The buzz of conversation had died down now; the assembled guests were all looking, with various expressions of disapproval or repugnance, at that crumpled figure on the floor. Only Jesus appeared to be unconcerned at her presence. He went on quietly talking, making no movement either to encourage or discourage her ministrations.

Looking at his serene face, Simon was attacked by a sudden doubt. "This man" he thought to himself, "if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him; for she is a sinner". He could have understood and approved Jesus receiving this kind of homage from a devout woman, but—if He were indeed a prophet—if He indeed had that extra-human knowledge which was the hall-mark of the prophets of God—why did He not shrink from that defiling touch, refuse the offering of that perfume which itself was probably the reward of sin, command the woman begone? Had he made a mistake in his assessment and was Jesus not the man of God he had imagined him to be? Simon looked down at the woman, distastefully, then back to Jesus, to find those candid eyes fixed full on him. He waited, wondering.

The quiet voice broke the silence. "Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee". He felt instinctively that this was going to be a momentous word. On the one part he feared what was to come, on the other he felt there was something he had not yet grasped and he wanted to know what it was. There was something in Jesus' attitude which told him the situation was not so easily resolved as he would like to think. And he wanted to know; more than anything else he wanted to know what was the power behind Jesus. More humbly perhaps than he had ever spoken in

his life before, he met Jesus' eyes and replied "Master, say on".

The room was very quiet now. The guests had all ceased eating and talking and were giving close attention. Probably more than one of them had had the same inward thought as had Simon, and were each looking upon Jesus with varying degrees of cynicism or speculation according to their respective measures of sincerity. Even the woman had restrained her outward grief, and remained in her recumbent posture, listening intently to the calm voice.

"There was a certain creditor who had two debtors". A story! the atmosphere became electric. No surer means of obtaining rapt and earnest attention. "The one owed five hundred pence" (denarii) "and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?"

Simon was not quite sure what connection this hypothetical case had with the situation before him, but he was prepared to be honest. "I suppose" he said—the Greek word does not imply doubt or dubiousness, but the reaching of a conclusion based on the evidence presented, as though one would say "I consider the answer is thus and so"—"I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most". Came the answer, in tones of quiet approval, "Thou hast rightly judged".

Now for the first time Jesus turned himself about and looked directly upon the woman behind Him. Who can doubt that she lowered her head in shame before that countenance of sinless purity? The level voice went on. "Seest thou this woman?" That was a hard one for Simon. He had been only too painfully aware of her presence ever since she entered his house and now Jesus was talking as if he could hardly have been expected to notice her. Yes, Simon did see this woman: he only wished he could truthfully say he did not. But the next words shattered him completely.

"I entered into thine house. Thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss; but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint; but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment".

A slow flush of embarrassment crept into Simon's face. His fellow-Pharisees were looking at him curiously. He realised, now, that he had under-estimated the man before him. Knowing Him as one of the labouring classes,

born and bred among the peasantry of Galilee, it had just not occurred to Simon that the courtesies normally extended to guests in his own walk of life were just as much in place with respect to Jesus. It was customary for the host to provide water and servants for the cleansing of guests' feet upon entry to the house; as a mark of special honour the host might even perform the washing operation himself. Some reluctance to treat this Galilean peasant as on the same level as his Pharisee friends must have caused Simon to omit this formality, doubtless excusing himself on the ground that the peasantry were not so scrupulous in such matters and might even be embarrassed at the service. Every guest normally received a kiss of welcome from the host but somehow Simon could not bring himself to this act of close fellowship; there was, of course, always the question of his own friends' reaction to his too ardent espousal of the young prophet. It was true that he had omitted to have a servant anoint the visitor's head with fragrant oil, but that was pure forgetfulness in the stress and hurry of the occasion. The unspoken excuses faded from his mind again as he became conscious of Jesus' gentle regard and realised that all those excuses counted for nothing. The plain fact was that this woman, sinner though she be, had performed all the duties which he had neglected to fulfil, and performed them with an infinitely greater ardour and sincerity than he could ever have displayed. He looked again at the woman and was bitterly ashamed.

Jesus' voice was very gentle now. "*Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven: for she loved much; but to whom little be forgiven, the same loveth little*". So He had known all the time! The realisation came in a flash to Simon. "*Her sins, WHICH ARE MANY*". Jesus did not mitigate or seek to gloss over the woman's sinful state. He knew her for what she was the moment she entered the room and yet had made no attempt to restrain her in her act of love. So He was a prophet after all! Simon was conscious of a great relief on that score. He had not after all misjudged his man and perhaps his own lack of courtesy would be over-looked. But what was this about forgiveness of sins? Jesus had turned again to the woman, listening fearfully and perhaps only half comprehending what was being said. This time His eyes were ineffably tender. "*Thy sins are forgiven. Thy faith hath saved thee. Go in peace*". And she got to her feet and went out of the house to a new life.

It says much for the sincerity of those Pharisees there gathered that they did not break out at once into impassioned protest. They did not even question Jesus' words outwardly. They asked themselves, each man in his own mind, "*Who is this who even forgives sins?*" There was something in all this which was new to them and they were prepared to reserve judgment. It would seem that Simon had collected some most unusual Pharisees there that day and it might well be that they all learned a most unexpected and unusual lesson.

What of the wider implication? There is much in this incident to throw light upon that other statement of Jesus "*They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*" (Luke 5. 31). Simon the Pharisee is not the only one who, priding himself upon his own rectitude and cleanliness of life, has come to God in a smug and self-satisfied attitude of mind which is none the less frightening although it is characterised by perfect sincerity. We do not necessarily have to demonstrate our repentance by floods of tears and an agony of self-reproach, as did the woman. A lot depends upon the individual temperament and intensity of feeling; some are less outwardly demonstrative than others. But we do all have to realise that of ourselves we have little wherewith to commend ourselves before God and we all come short of His holiness in a variety of ways. The woman's sin outraged and shocked the conventions and customs of the day and violated the written law; the Pharisees' self-righteousness outraged the holiness of God and violated His moral law, and in the sight of Jesus there was no difference between the two kinds of sin. They both needed repentance, conversion and forgiveness. The difference was that the woman realised her need of forgiveness, was repentant, and went out a child of the Kingdom. In the eyes of Jesus the whole of her sin was as though it had never been. The Pharisee had not yet realised his need, had not yet come as a suppliant to the feet of the Saviour, and therefore was yet in his sins. Not for him had the golden vista of the Kingdom gleamed through the partly opened gates.

Perhaps it did in after days. It is noteworthy that in all this story there is no word of reproach for Simon, only the implied reproof at his omissions. It may well be that he, and maybe some of his fellows at that meal that day, became followers of Jesus and eventually followed the "woman a sinner"

into the light of the Kingdom. That there were some such, even among the bigoted Pharisees, who thus espoused the cause of Jesus, we know; perhaps this was the beginning of the way for some of them.

As in so many instances, this story illustrates the Divine principle "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, wherefore turn ye from your evil ways, and live ye". The passion for the punishment of the wicked which characterised all good Jews and still characterises far too many good Christians has no counterpart in the counsels of God. He is much more interested in the reclamation of the wicked than their condemnation, and if there is any capacity for repentance at all He is going to explore that capacity to the full before He permits condemnation to come. "The Son of Man" said Jesus "is come to seek and to save that which was lost". Both woman and Pharisee were lost; Jesus came to save both.

Neither Simon nor the woman appear in the Gospel story again. It is sometimes suggested that the woman was Mary of Magdala, the one who loved her Lord with so fervent a passion that her faith held when that of all

others had well-nigh failed, who became the acknowledged leader of the little band of women during the dark days after the crucifixion when even the disciples had fled into hiding. But there is no proof; only the fact that the character and temperament of Mary of Magdala as revealed in the Gospels harmonises very well with this brief picture of this repentant woman.

The incident in the house of Mary sister of Lazarus at Bethany, recorded in Matt. 26, Mark 14 and John 12, is a totally different one and must not be confused with this story in Luke. This one was at the beginning of our Lord's ministry and took place in Galilee; that one was just before His crucifixion and occurred near Jerusalem. The only similarities in the two stories are the use of a phial of perfume and the fact that the host's name was Simon, a very common name in Israel anyway. There is no foundation whatever for connecting the sister of Lazarus with the woman who came to Jesus on that memorable day, weighed down by the burden of her sin, and went out a free woman, rejoicing in the glorious liberty of the children of God.

JESUS AND THE WOMAN OF CANAAN

*A momentous
incident*

The incident of Jesus and the Canaanitish woman is often misunderstood, and the surface reading of the text seems alien to the known character of the Lord. This woman had a daughter who was sick—possessed by a demon—and she appealed to Jesus for the girl's healing. At first, so says Matthew's account, Jesus refused to answer her plea; then he told her he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and that it was not fitting to cast the children's food to dogs. All Canaanites were "dogs" to orthodox Jews, but one hardly expects to find Jesus openly endorsing that attitude. The woman was quick with a reply. "Truth, Lord" she said, "yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." The text reads as if Jesus changed His mind on the strength of this quick rejoinder, and gave her the benefit she desired; her daughter was healed. There is an element of capriciousness about this view of the transaction, which cannot be squared with what we know of our Lord, and the whole story needs more careful examination than a mere cursory reading will afford.

The woman was a Canaanite, a descendant of one of the aboriginal races which inhabited the land before Joshua led the invading Israelites across Jordan fourteen centuries previously. (Mark's statement that she was a Greek only means that she was a non-Jew—a Gentile). That Jesus entertained no prejudice against her on this account is endorsed by His readiness to talk with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, and by His parable of the Good Samaritan. Whatever the cause of this attitude on this occasion, it was not reluctance to heal a Canaanite.

The woman's faith has to be noted. "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David." Canaanite she might have been by birth; it is evident that she shared the faith of Israel and acknowledged our Lord's Messiahship in a manner refused Him by many of His own countrymen. It was not lack of faith, or any impropriety on her part which led to the initial seeming refusal of her request.

Nevertheless, He "answered her not a word". And His disciples, concluding from His manner that He did not intend to grant

her request, exhorted Him to "*send her away; for she crieth after us.*" At this point the first pointer to the explanation of the whole incident is revealed. Jesus spoke, as if in reply to His disciples' request, but also in the hearing of the woman, "*I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel.*" That statement was in strict accord with current Jewish theology and with the revealed plan of God also. Messiah was foretold to come to Israel, to raise Israel to a position of authority among the nations that they fulfil their destiny of being a light to the nations, to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth. To the Jew first, and afterward to the Gentile, although Israel conveniently and consistently ignored the latter clause. They were not particularly interested in the conversion of the Gentiles, only in their own exaltation to power as the chosen of the Lord. So Jesus enunciated a principle which all His listeners—except perhaps the woman—would heartily endorse.

The woman was in no mood for theological niceties. She only knew that her daughter sorely needed the help she knew the Lord Jesus could give. So "*came she and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me.*" By now the disciples and the bystanders were watching and listening interestedly, which was evidently Jesus' intention. An element of His teaching was about to be expounded, and in a manner that would leave the deepest possible impression. Looking on the woman, "*It is not meet*" He said "*to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs.*"

It seems a cruel thing to say, as it stands in the Authorised Version. The woman was in sore trouble, and Jesus had already in the synagogue at Nazareth proclaimed himself the One who should come to bind up broken hearts and give joy for mourning. Did he really say what the English words imply?

All Gentiles were commonly called "dogs" and thought of as such by Jews. The word is *kuon*, and denotes the animals which ranged the streets and fields in packs, often semi-wild, living on what food they could find, or was contemptuously thrown to them by householders. If Jesus had called the woman a "*Kuon*" it would by no means have been the first time she had had the epithet thrown at her by a Jew. But Jesus did not call her a "*kuon*". In these two instances, Matthew's and Mark's accounts of the incident, and in these two instances only, the word translated "dogs" is not *kuon*, but *kunarium*, which means a little pet dog, such as might be the children's playmate, and live in the house.

Jesus was probably the only Jew who ever referred to a Gentile as a "*kunarium*" and the fact that both evangelists, taking the material for these accounts from different sources, use the same unusual word, goes far to assure that Jesus did in fact use the word. And in this subtle fashion He indicated to the woman that in His sight she was not outside the pale; she was inside the family circle and even, though not on a level with the children of the family, at least had a definite place in the home. "*Ballo*" which is rendered "cast" is also correctly translated in other texts "put", "lay" and similar words, so that it is not necessary to visualise a contemptuous throwing of the food down to the floor, but quite reasonably the putting down of a meal for the pet dog of the family. Jesus had already said He was sent only to Israel; now He gave the second part of the lesson by pointing out that because of this it was not fitting for the general dispensation of His work and mission, intended for Israel, to be extended also to Gentiles, occupying as they did at that time a lesser status in the disposition of the Divine purpose.

It was the woman who gave the third part of the lesson. Jesus, knowing her mind and her faith, knew that she would; for His disciples' sakes He made her rejoinder possible. "*Truth, Lord, your mission is to Israel; but the Gentiles may expect some of the crumbs.*" That is what she grasped from Jesus' words and that is what Jesus wanted His disciples to grasp too. They were always suspicious when there was any question of contact with non-Jews, and Jesus sought in this incident a means of teaching them that whilst their conviction that His mission was to Israel was right, there were developments in the Divine Plan yet to come in which Gentiles were involved, and they would have a great part to play in those developments. And now that the woman, in her faith and insight grasping His meaning, had given the rejoinder which conveyed the principle He sought to illustrate, He did what of course He had intended to do all along. "*O woman, great is thy faith. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.*"

This understanding of the incident illustrates an important aspect of the Divine Plan. Israel as a nation, bound to God in covenant relationship from the time of the Exodus and the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, was designated the chosen people of God. That was for a purpose, that there might be in a continuously degenerating world a nation which would, however imperfectly, stand for God and His righteousness and preserve the

knowledge of Him amid prevalent ignorance. The history of the nation of Israel and their preservation of the sacred Scriptures—our Old Testament—is evidence that they did at least achieve that purpose. But this condition of things was intended also to enable them to recognise and accept Christ when He should appear for the salvation of the world, and this they failed to do. The salvation of the world proceeded just the same, but the honoured position of God's agents in the proclamation and process of salvation passed from unworthy Israel to "a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21. 43), the Christian Church. That transfer took place after the rejection and crucifixion of Christ by the Jewish nation, and their rejection of His apostles and their message, only a few years following Jesus' encounter with this woman. Believing Gentiles, who could only expect "crumbs from the table" at the time the Canaanitish girl was healed of her affliction, a few years later entered into the full privileges of Divine service and sonship, in equal partnership with their believing Jewish brethren, and the formal arrangement which made the whole nation of Israel, believer and unbeliever alike, the earthly representatives of the Most High, was terminated.

The time of this change was marked by the conversion of the Roman centurion Cornelius, the first Gentile convert to be baptised into Christ. The account is in the 10th chapter of Acts, the time A.D.36, three and a half years after the Crucifixion. The considered conclusion of the Jewish congregation at Jerusalem, after considering the related circumstances, was "*then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life*" (Acts 11. 18). Writing to the Ephesians in later years, St. Paul, addressing Gentile believers, confirmed this position by saying, "*Ye, in time past Gentiles in the flesh - - - - - without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel - - - - - without God in the world, now in Christ Jesus ye who were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ - - who - - hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us - - - - - Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.*" (Eph. 2. 11-21).

Of course, the rejection of unbelieving Israel is not final, for as St. Paul says in Rom. 11. 29 "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." National Israel will yet achieve high destiny when at last the veil of unbelief is removed, and as a nation they turn to God. The final scene of the Divine purpose

for human redemption shows the Christian Church associated with the Lord Christ in Heaven, and restored, believing national Israel on earth, labouring together in the execution of God's intention to make known His glory to all men, that all may have the issues of life and death placed squarely before them, that "all who hear may live." For the realisation of that purpose the world must wait for the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom, when Christ takes to Himself His great power and rules in the world of men

In the Apostle Paul we have the greatest example of an imperfect man giving his all for the perfection of heaven. It brought him at last to a prison cell, almost blind, feeble and in chains; his only possessions a few books and parchments and an old cloak. Almost friendless and alone he faced a martyr's death, but he could say, "*I have fought a good fight . . . henceforth there is laid up for me a crown*". The crown was the thing for which he had paid his all, esteeming it only a light affliction. He had nothing, yet everything, for he had the conviction that the crown was his. Do we desire to have the same conviction? To some it is worth while, to others much. Let us say, "To me it is worth everything. I want my Father's perfection, the perfection of Christ, the life of heaven, the fellowship of saints and angels for ever, and by the power and grace of God which avails for me through Christ I know I shall have it".

* * *

What is the source from which we must get the oil for the light, the virtue for the salt, the power to raise that city to its elevation on the hill? Here, at the foot of the Cross, where repentance and determination, contrition and hope, renunciation and consecration, go hand in hand. Not in the emotionless formalism of the detached acceptance of a cold invitation "if ye do this . . . I will give you that" but in the spontaneous, eager realisation of tender, compassionate tones "My son, give me thine heart . . . who will go for us?", lies the power that will make us to "shine forth as the sun" here and now in the sight of all men. In that experience, and that alone, shall we realise what was in the mind of Luke, when he beheld the fellowship of the Early Church and wrote of them, "*praising God, and having favour with all the people: and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved*". Is it any accident that that last phrase is associated with its predecessor?

THE VOICE OF THE MONUMENTS

6. The Siloam Inscription

Deep down in the limestone strata that underlies Jerusalem an inexhaustible supply of fresh water forces its way through cracks and crevices, following the general slope of the rock layers toward the south-east, until at length it comes to the surface at what is now known as the Virgin's Fountain. From the dawn of history that water has flowed. It was the main source of supply for the Jebusite city of Jerusalem ruled by Melchisedek, the Priest-King of Abraham's day. It once served the Crusaders' need when Jerusalem was besieged by the Saracens. To-day it waters the market gardens of Jerusalem. And it has made Biblical history.

The Virgin's Fountain lies half way up the rocky slope of Ophel, the south-eastern projection of the mountainous mass upon which Jerusalem is built, and outside the ancient walls. In the dim days before Abraham entered Canaan the industrious Jebusites had cut a tunnel into the mountain to conduct the waters to the foot of a vertical shaft which they had made leading up to the city on the heights above. They called it Gihon, and by its means they were able in times of siege to obtain water without venturing outside the walls. It was their undoing eventually, for when David beset the city Joab and his stalwarts made their way along the tunnel, climbed up that shaft and took the Jebusites by surprise, so capturing the city for David (see 1 Chron. 11. 6 and 2 Sam. 5. 8—the "gutter" of the latter text is this shaft).

But it was at a later date that the fountain demanded a king's anxious thoughts. In the days of Hezekiah, Sennacherib of Assyria invaded Judah with his armies. Once again Jerusalem was threatened with siege. The first thing to do was to ensure the water supply. The measures Hezekiah took to accomplish this end were considered so noteworthy as to justify incorporation in the histories of the times. Says the chronicler (2 Chron. 32) "*There was gathered much people together, who stopped all the fountains, and the brook that ran through the midst of the land, saying 'Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water' Hezekiah also stopped the upper watercourse of Gihon (the shaft into the city) and brought it straight down*" ("underground" is the literal meaning) "*to the west side of the city of*

David". The Book of Kings supplements this by saying (2 Kings 20. 20) when recounting the deeds of Hezekiah "*. . . . the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and how he made a pool, and a conduit (aqueduct) and brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah.*" And in the Apocrypha, Ecclus. 48. 17 informs us that "*Hezekiah fortified his city, and brought in water to the midst thereof; he digged the hard rock with iron, and made wells for waters.*"

King Hezekiah's tunnelling operations, interesting as they must have been to the people of his own day, had little or no interest for more recent generations, and the story was speedily relegated to the background by students. In later times, however, speculation began as to whether this tunnel had any real existence. The critics dubbed it legend; others were not so sure; but there was no external evidence. Dr. Thomson, the Palestine missionary and author of the well-known work "*The Land and the Book*" says of the water channels and fountains of Jerusalem, when describing his own investigation, "*Hezekiah and his 'much people' stopped them up so effectually that they could never be found again, even by the Jews themselves.*" The historians of the Old Testament had left no geographical indication of the locality of the tunnel—at least, it was accepted that no such indication existed until someone, reading the familiar words of Isa. 8. 6 "*forasmuch as this people refuse the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son*" realised that here was a clue. "*The waters of Shiloah that go softly!*"

The Pool of Shiloah (Siloam is the New Testament Greek form of the word) was well known and had been well known for generations. It was, and is, the most constant reservoir in the city. Artificially built, more like a tank than a natural pool, some fifty feet by twenty, and about twenty feet deep, it has served the needs of generations of Jews and Arabs without question. It was common knowledge that the water reached the pool from the mouth of an arched orifice in the rock, but no Arab had ever dared to venture far inside. So far as can be ascertained, the first to make the attempt was Dr. Robinson, early in the nineteenth century. Stepping into

the water of Siloam, he waded into the archway and found himself in a narrow tunnel, two feet wide but ten to fifteen feet high, the stream that supplied the Pool flowing along its floor. He followed the winding course of the passage for about one third of a mile, knowing that from the direction he took that he was some hundred feet or more beneath the streets of Jerusalem above. At length he splashed his way into daylight again and found himself at the Virgin's Fountain, outside the City and on the steep slope of the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

Later on it was ascertained that the first hundred feet or so of the tunnel at the Virgin's Fountain end is in fact the ancient Jebusite aqueduct, and the vertical shaft leading up into the city was discovered, and signs that the old tunnel had been blocked at that point in order to divert the waters to the Pool of Siloam. The correspondence here with the account of Hezekiah's action in 2 Chron. 32 seemed almost complete.

Then in 1880 some Arab schoolboys were playing around the Pool of Siloam and one of them fell into the water. Scrambling out, he ventured, boylike, into the tunnel and, clambering along its wall, noticed, what no one had ever noticed before, some rough Hebrew characters chiselled in the rock. He told his teacher, Dr. Schick, who investigated for himself. He found a complete inscription in archaic Hebrew characters. The following year Dr. A. H. Sayce, the celebrated archaeologist, visited the spot and copied the inscription. When examined it proved to be an account relating to the building of the tunnel, written in Biblical Hebrew of the 8th to 6th centuries B.C. Since Hezekiah's reign falls within this period there remained no reasonable doubt that the tunnel was in fact the one described in the Old Testament as built by Hezekiah at the time of the Assyrian invasion.

Various translations of the inscription differ in minor details. Here is a fair representation.

"Behold the tunnel. Now this is the history of the tunnel. While the miners were still lifting up the pick, each towards his neighbour, and while there were yet three cubits to excavate, there was heard the voice of a man calling to his neighbour, for there was an excess in the rock on the right hand, and on the left. And after that on the day of excavating the miners had struck pick against pick, one against another, the waters flowed from the spring to the pool, a distance of twelve

hundred cubits. And a hundred cubits was the height of the rock above the tunnel."

Those miners must have worked hard! Spurred on by the imminent threat of invasion, they excavated and removed, by hand, over two thousand tons of rock to make that tunnel. Every bit of that material must have been passed in baskets along a line of men to the open air. And when the work was done someone from among them, a man perhaps for ever unknown, left this writing, chiselled in the everlasting rock, to give its witness in due time to the accuracy of the Bible story.

These explorations yielded another detail of interest in relation to the New Testament. The account of Christ healing the impotent man at the Pool of Bethesda is well known. The Pool was famous because at intervals, said the Evangelist, an angel came down and troubled the waters; whoever first stepped in after the troubling was cured of his complaint. Such a phenomenon as is thus described is seen daily at the Virgin's Fountain and the Pool of Siloam. Somewhere far underground beneath Jerusalem, where the water which supplies these fountains collects, there must be a great reservoir shaped by Nature into the form of a siphon; periodically, generally two or three times a day, the water comes gushing into the Virgin's Fountain, and from thence through the tunnel into the Pool of Siloam, as though a hidden store had been suddenly let loose. This freak of Nature has never been discovered, but the signs are conclusive that the water builds up slowly until it overtops some bend in the outlet and then the whole accumulation siphons away. The situation of the Pool of Bethesda is not established with certainty; even though it prove to have been in some other part of the city the probabilities are that it received its supply from the same ultimate source as Hezekiah's pools, and the "troubling of the waters" occur there, just as to-day it still occurs while the villagers of Siloam satisfy their needs at the place made famous by Judah's pious king.

We ought not to be weary of doing little things for the love of God, who regards not the greatness of the work, but the love with which it is performed. We should not wonder if in the beginning we often failed in our endeavours but at last we should gain a habit, which will naturally produce its acts in us, without our care and to our exceeding great delight.



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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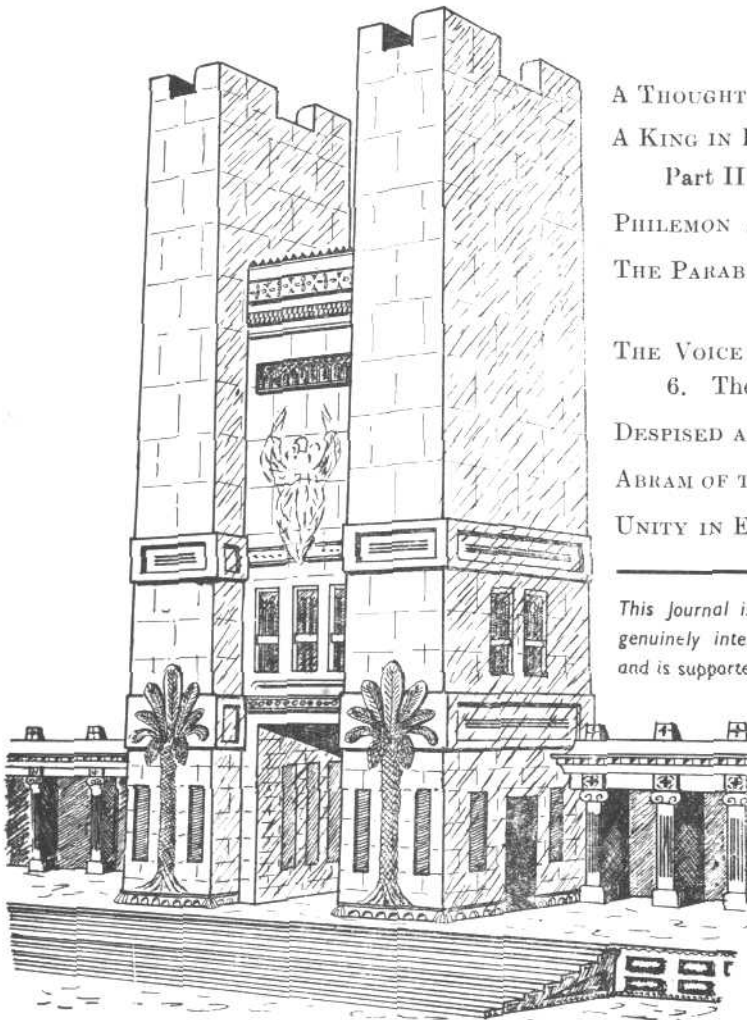
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CONTENTS

A THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH	102
A KING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS	
Part II	103
PHILEMON	106
THE PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN	109
THE VOICE OF THE MONUMENTS	
6. The Ras Shamra Tablets...	111
DESPISED AND REJECTED	114
ABRAM OF THE MOST HIGH GOD	115
UNITY IN EPHESIANS	118

This journal is sent free of charge to all who are genuinely interested, on request renewable annually and is supported by the voluntary gifts of its readers



*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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A Thought for the Month

"He taught them; as one having authority."

In this world of dictators and totalitarian States, where the gospel of individual submission to the will of the Leader is paramount, such a statement as this would cause disquiet of mind were it not that we know of Whom the words were spoken. Not for Jesus the blustering arrogance of the bully, nor the cold passionless orders of the man of steel. Christ's teaching was warm, tender, vibrant with the love of humankind and pity for their unhappy condition; yet underlying his words there was a calm authority which carried conviction that this man who "spake as never man spake", told of things He had both seen and heard. Having known and shared in the glory of that spiritual realm of which the Infinite Creator is at once the centre and the all-in-all, He spoke to the hearts of men and women who themselves were part of God's creation, and His words came with the force of that authority which is engendered, not by the outward trappings of physical force or mental superiority, but the inward power of the Holy Spirit of God.

Christians right down the Age have realised this, and rejoiced in our Heavenly Father's own way of imparting knowledge to mankind—knowledge not only of Himself and His Plan, but also of themselves, their relation to each other and their mutual obligations and responsibilities as fellow-citizens of the earth. But it still remains true that those who remain to listen are far smaller in number than those who turn away "to walk no more with Him". The day has yet to dawn when the emptiness and worthlessness of these much-vaunted earthly dictatorships will be appreciated by all men, and, in the appointed day when God shall judge the world in righteousness, that gentle, insistent teaching of the stranger from Galilee's shores will come into its rightful heritage.

Therefore, knowing this to be the outcome of the Divine Plan for humanity, we can with

confidence turn to our own position as men and women who already have accepted the Divine principle of teaching and have rejected the earthly policies. Not for us to sit at the feet of teachers who impress their claims to overlordship as by right, or enforce their dogmas by appeals to the intellect or alleged loyalty to personal teachings of past or present ministers to the Church, or considerations of policy or allegiance to the group. Such things are manifestations in our Christian fellowship of that same spirit which is producing in the political world menacing forms of government and national life and filling the minds of worldly thinkers with apprehension for the future of humanity. "Mass-thinking" and the restriction of personal liberty may yet prove to be an important factor in bringing the nations to Armageddon. The same principle within the Church must produce, in a different sphere, the same results.

We turn then to Christ's words. Here is our salvation. "If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free." In quiet discussion of Scriptural teaching between ourselves; in the appeal, not to force, not to intellectual reasoning, but to the enlightening and illuminating influence of the Holy Spirit, dispensing to every man severally, shall the word of old be fulfilled, "And they shall be all taught of God; and great shall be the peace of thy children." So shall every teacher and pastor the Church has known be held in rightful esteem and honour, "for his works sake" and true loyalty to those who in the past have been our personal mentors manifested. So shall we progress in understanding of the Divine Will, until at length, like Christian in Bunyan's immortal allegory, we see with our own eyes the city to which we journey, and hear with our ears the strains of celestial song.

A KING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

A short study in the
Millennial Visions of Isaiah

Part II

"By me kings reign, and princes decree justice" declares Wisdom, speaking as a person in Prov. 8. 15-16. "By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth." That is the ideal but it does not appear in practice as yet, and will not until the king that shall reign in righteousness has commenced His beneficent rule. In the day to come Wisdom will be enthroned on high and there will no longer be the spectacle of earth's rulers hesitating and vacillating about their policies, sacrificing principle to expediency or quite openly and frankly using their positions to oppress their subjects and serve their own indulgence. Righteousness includes every right and uplifting quality, and a king who reigns in righteousness is a king who is guided in all his ways by unerring wisdom. So the King of the Millennial Age will be characterised by that wisdom from above which James says is pure, peaceable, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and hypocrisy.

"Princes shall rule in judgment." (vs. 1). This must without doubt refer to the "princes in all the earth" of Psa. 45, the "judges and counsellors" of Isa. 1. 26. The writer to the Hebrews tells, in his eleventh chapter, of men who maintained their loyalty and faithfulness to God at different times in past history and were laid aside in death "not having received the promise" but yet were persuaded that God had "prepared for them a city". And so He has. In the day that Christ reigns as spiritual King from His exalted place in the heavens, these men of Old Testament days, these "Ancient Worthies" as they have been called, will be raised from the dead to assume the positions of administration upon earth for which their past lives' experiences have qualified them. Sterling characters such as Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, Daniel, Nehemiah—certainly Isaiah himself—besides others whose names have not been recorded and whose deeds are not known, will certainly be found in the forefront of affairs in that day. They will be men who can be trusted with the oversight of affairs upon earth because they, like the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, have esteemed the service of God and of their fellow-men of greater worth than anything else that life can offer. Already well versed in the plans and purposes of God, and firm in their stand for the principles of Divine

government, they will indeed be "princes" that "rule in judgment".

The manner in which these "princes" will take control of earth's affairs and begin to lead mankind into the ways of peace is somewhat problematical. It is evident that their raising from the dead must be some appreciable time before the revelation of their identity to the world at large; they all will quite obviously require some time to become adjusted to life as it is lived to-day and to acquire the necessary knowledge of the course of history between their original lives on earth—two, three or more millenniums ago—and the time of their awakening. It may well be that their obviously exceptional intellectual powers and their quick perception of humanity's troubles will speedily bring them to the forefront so that men are half ready to accept them as leaders when the tremendous manifestation of Divine intervention that is to mark the establishment of the Kingdom occurs. Suffice it then to realise that when they are revealed they will be men who can be trusted, princes who "rule in judgment".

"And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." (ch. 32. 2).

Who is this "man"? Are we to understand a third factor in the ruling administration of the new Kingdom here introduced to notice, or in the alternative another aspect of the rulers already mentioned? There seems to be little doubt that the "king" of vs. 1 is here referred to. He is a king, but he is not like earth's usual kings, remote, untouchable, surrounded by a panoply of royalty which separates him from the touch or gaze of the common multitude. He is, as it were, one of them, one who knows their condition and their needs, and can claim to have walked with them, borne their griefs and shared their sorrows besides carrying those same sorrows. He is a merciful and faithful king because he knows what his subjects must have for their true welfare and happiness and he intends them to have it. And the first thing they need, he knows full well, is defence and protection. They have been so buffeted and tormented, persecuted and driven, by enemies of all kinds in life before, that now they need more than anything else a time of respite from trouble, a freedom from fear

and apprehension, that they may begin to take fresh heart, and look up to the heavens, and listen to the voice that is to speak to them in words of wise guidance and vital instruction. So the first aspect of this kingly work of the Millennial Age is couched in terms indicative of covering and of protection. "A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." The simile is taken from Palestinian scenery. The hot winds from the *midbar*, the southern desert lying between Judea and the Red Sea, laden with sand and dust, beat fiercely upon the unprotected traveller, so that, like Jonah at Nineveh in similar plight, he might well wish to die and not live. This king will be a protection from the incessant winds of adversity and give the traveller time to recover. He will defend from the rains and tempests of disaster. He will provide refreshment and sustenance, "rivers of water in a dry place," and He will be as the shadow of a great rock on a sun-baked plain, tempering the heat of midday with His presence.

One cannot help noticing the care with which these symbols are selected, as if Isaiah meant very definitely to indicate the protection that would be given, in that day, from the great plagues that do at this present time afflict humanity. His four symbols are wind, waters (the tempest), drought, and noon-day heat. Those four are symbolic in the Scriptures of great curses that afflict mankind—war (wind and tempest), famine (drought) and pestilence (heat). The fear of all these things will disappear completely when Christ is king and is in control; violence and want shall be no more. This man will be as an hiding place and men will realise as never before the meaning of the old saying "the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe".

Zechariah, much later on, saw this king in the glory of His symbolic manhood, this Son of David who is also David's Lord, and said of Him (6. 12) "*Behold the Man whose name is the BRANCH*" (His very descent from David in the days of His flesh becomes a title of honour forevermore) "*and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord . . . and shall sit and rule upon his throne, and he shall be a priest upon his throne.*" There is some clear indication here that, in the Millennial Day, men will be constantly reminded that the glorious One Who is now their King was once of themselves, walking the earth with them, talking

to them about their troubles and triumphs, their joys and sorrows, sympathising, counselling and helping . . .

"*And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken. The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly.*" (vs. 3-4). Here the work of the Millennium commences in earnest. The first necessity of the sin-blinded and sin-weakened human race is education, instruction, and it must be given without any opposing influence being allowed to retard its work. The arch-enemy of mankind, Satan, will have been bound for the entire period, the "thousand years" of Rev. 20. 1, and there will no longer be blindness and deafness imposed from without. No more will it be said as it is said of this present day "the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them". (2 Cor. 4. 4). Leaser seems to appreciate this fact when in his translation he renders this passage "the eyes of those that see shall not be blinded again". They were blinded once, in the past, but now they shall see, and see more and more plainly as they make progress in the knowledge of the things of God that are manifest in that Day. "The heart also of the rash" says Leaser again "shall be attentive in order to know". There will be a thirst for knowledge and men will eagerly come to the fountain of wisdom that they might learn the way of life.

Now the prophet turns himself and surveys another class of men who will be in evidence in that day. Not all will come to the proffered way of life for not all will want to embrace the ways of righteousness. Some there will be who, at first at any rate, will want none and will have none of this new order of love and unselfishness, and who will endeavour to go back to the old ways of self and sin. They will be quite unable to harm their fellows, for nothing will be permitted to cause any kind of hindrance to those seeking the way of righteousness—"they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain"—but those whose hearts are fully set in them to do evil will succeed in doing a lot of damage to themselves and unless they do eventually repent and come to the fountain of life they must inevitably reap sin's penalty—death. But Isaiah is not seeing so far as that in this particular vision; in fact he seems to be viewing only the commencement of the Age, its first early years, and his words must be understood in that light. What he does say is illuminating

enough. He says that there will still be vile (Heb. *nabbal*, brutish, worthless, sensual) persons and that they will still speak and work their villainy with the object of oppressing their fellow-creatures. But the "liberal"—noble, bountiful, is the meaning of the word—will have devised effectual counter-measures and in consequence the machinations of the vile will be of no effect.

The Septuagint gives what is perhaps the clearest rendering of this particular passage—at least the sense is more easily understandable in relation to the context—and when applied to the operations of those who in the early days of the Kingdom attempt to oppose its work is very eloquent. *"For the fool shall speak foolish words, and his heart shall meditate vanities, and to perform lawless deeds, and to speak error against the Lord, to scatter hungry souls, and he will cause the thirsty souls to be empty. For the counsel of the wicked will devise iniquity, to destroy the poor with unjust words, and ruin the cause of the poor in judgment. But the godly have devised wise measures, and this counsel shall stand."* (vs. 6-8).

These are they who in another place are

said to "yield feigned obedience". Outwardly obedient to the laws of the Kingdom, conforming to the general regulations which will be made for the conduct of daily life in general harmony with the principles of righteousness, they will nevertheless be seeking opportunity to work their nefarious schemes to the detriment of others and most certainly will refrain from that service of helping others that is to be so characteristic a feature of Kingdom conditions. The parable of the sheep and goats makes mention of these same. These are they who, standing before the great white throne, are accused that, having the opportunity to do good to their fellows for whom Christ died, refused so to do, and the Christ the King tells them that in that failure they offend, not only against their fellows, but against Him also. Refusing to accept in their own lives those principles by which alone human life on earth—or life on any plane of being—can be conducted harmoniously and to give glory to God, they are but as the wastage of God's creation and can have no part or lot in that edifice which He is building to stand for all eternity.

(To be concluded)

THE BURNING BUSH

"And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." (Exod. 3. 2-3).

It was "in the backside of the desert" somewhere in the wilds of Sinai, that Moses saw this strange thing. A more recent traveller through that same district, Louis Golding, in his book *"In the steps of Moses the Lawgiver"* has given a vivid description of something he himself witnessed which may have been the very means used by God to reveal Himself to Moses those many years ago.

"I am at this point compelled to quote the apparition of a Burning Bush which was so exact a rendering of the strange and lovely marvel described in the Bible, that I quite literally was afraid to trust my eyes. The apparition lasted several seconds, and though I was aware of its exact rationale while it endured, I still said to myself it was a mirage or inward fancy. The thing happened "in the back of the wilderness" in one of the wadis

under the flank of Sinai. It was the evening of a hot and windy day. As we approached the arena where two or three wadis debouched, the winds met, and, joining forces, became a cyclone, a tall pillar of air violently rotating on its axis, its whole length defined by the sand it sucked up from the dry wadi bed. In the centre of this arena was a large thorny acacia, the only tree which grows in these regions. The sun had for some minutes been hidden behind a long bank of cloud. It remained hidden until the cyclone reached the acacia. Then in the moment the cyclone possessed itself of the tree, the sun hurled its rays obliquely upon their embrace. The whole tree went up in flame. The smoke of it soared in golden gusts. Every thorn was a spit of fire.

"It continued so for several seconds. It seemed as if the cyclone was impaled on the sharp spikes of the branches. It turned and thrust and thrust again. The bush burned with fire, and was not consumed. Then at last the cyclone freed itself, and went hurtling along one of the wadis. The tree was no more than a thorny acacia again, arid and lonely in the centre of the hills."

PHILEMON

*An exquisite gem of
the New Testament*

True nobility is more often shown in the little things of daily life than in the great things. When a man lives in the full view of public opinion he is keyed up to create a favourable impression but it is the nature and temperament shown when the lime-light is withdrawn, when there is no inducement to wear a mask, which reveals the true man and what he really is.

This is shown in an incident in the life of the great Apostle Paul. This does not mean that Paul was not at all times genuine or that he at any time dissembled or pretended that he was one thing at one time when the public eye was upon him and another thing at another time in private. The incident brought before us in the letter to Philemon, however, shows us the true nobility of this man of God in a clearer light than is possible when we are considering the great public work Paul accomplished during his eventful life. We can gather from the record of Paul's life a very good idea of his keen spiritual vision, his intellect and reasoning powers, his great skill in argument, his passion for truth, his love for his countrymen and for the churches he founded, his continual care for them, his ardent loyalty to the Master he served and his heroism, courage and fortitude under bitter trials and disappointments. We can gauge pretty accurately the strength of all these qualities but nowhere is the heart of the man so well revealed as in the short private letter he wrote to Philemon.

It is here that Paul throws off as far as possible his Apostolic dignity and his fatherly authority over his converts and descends to a familiarity of equal intercourse. He lingers with obvious delight on the word "brother" which breathes the very spirit of freedom and equality. In this letter we see in Paul not the towering Apostle but the friendly partner; he speaks simply as a Christian gentleman and uses true courtesy, delicacy and tact. After reading it we confess that we know the writer better and it would have been a vast pity if this letter had not been included in the Canon of Scripture.

In the course of his missionary journeys Paul had spent a considerable period at Ephesus. It is probable that the Church he founded there was numerous and distinguished and the fame of the Apostle as it spread affected neighbouring towns and doubtless

attracted men like Philemon and Epaphras who were natives of Colossæ. Perhaps these men founded the Church in their own town; it is certain that Philemon's house at Colossæ was the recognised centre of Christian activity in that place.

Philemon was evidently a man of mark, probably quite wealthy, for it is said he was able to refresh the hearts of the saints which seems to suggest gifts both temporal and spiritual. Moreover he was in a position to entertain brethren. Philemon must have been held in high repute by the Apostle for the latter treats him almost as an equal, a fellow labourer and partner, as a brother and not as a son, like Timothy, for instance. Philemon's wife appears to have been Apphia and his son Archippus; both Christians, Archippus holding office, probably a Deacon in the Church. The details supplied, though meagre, give us the impression of some wealth and dignity in the family nobly used for the relief of necessity and the binding closer of the bonds of Christian love and unity.

Another member of the household was Onesimus, a slave, but he turned out badly. He stole his master's goods and, fearing detection, fled to Rome, doubtless thinking that among the thousands of that crowded city he would escape notice.

Our God is ever watchful and in this runaway slave He saw a potential child of grace. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called, but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world." It is among the poor despised and outcast ones that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has wrought miracles all down the age. It has changed lives like those we read of in the Corinthian Church, some of whom were thieves, covetous and worse; but the message of salvation transformed them into noble and pure men and women with hearts aflame with a new and burning desire to do the will of God and tell forth the wonders of His grace.

Paul was at this time undergoing his first imprisonment at Rome. It was irksome enough to be chained continually to a Roman soldier, though some generous concessions were made him and he was able to live in his own hired house and receive there any who came enquiring into the faith he preached. So earnestly did he follow up this advantage that a number of converts to Christianity were

made and Paul's name began to be known in Rome. Men and women who came under his influence were not backward in proclaiming their new faith and in course of time the Truth reached Onesimus the runaway slave. Christianity regenerated the true humanity which had been degraded in him. The actual circumstances which led to his introduction to Paul are not told us but it is certain that Paul, noting his sincerity and earnestness, received him as a brother in Christ and a close fellowship sprang up between them. Onesimus was happy in the privilege of doing many a little service for the Apostle.

It would not be long before Onesimus made a full confession of his past life and how he had robbed and run away from his master, and we can picture the Apostle's surprise when he learnt that the master's name was Philemon, one of the principal supporters of the Colossian Church and a most worthy friend of his own. It was with mingled feelings and some perplexity of mind that Paul meditated on the problem now presented to him. What course of conduct should he advise Onesimus to pursue? Onesimus was now a free man; ought he to inform the authorities and let the man suffer for his crime? That, he knew, would be sending his convert to certain death. Would it not be better to say nothing about the matter? Onesimus had become very dear to him and had been of great service to him in his imprisonment. It would be hard indeed to lose him and yet Philemon had his rights which ought to be respected. Slavery was a recognised custom and clearly Onesimus was the property of Philemon and ought to be restored to him. He would write to Philemon and make Onesimus the bearer of the letter. But the letter did not prove an easy one to write; he wanted to conciliate Philemon and yet not humiliate Onesimus—to commend the evil doer and yet not excuse his offence. Such was the delicate problem set his mind.

To give Onesimus courage to face the master he had injured, Paul arranged that there should be a third person present. Tychicus, a companion and fellow labourer of Paul and probably one of his own converts, was on his way home and the idea came to Paul that Tychicus might act as a mediator and ease the situation by his presence (Col. 4. 7-9). Tychicus could present the letter while Onesimus, adopting his old position as a slave, would remain unseen but within call.

The letter is a model of tact and Christian courtesy. Paul first endeavoured to create a

favourable atmosphere of good-will by referring to the fact that they all belonged as members to one family. There was himself and Timothy, Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and other members of the Church meeting in Philemon's house, all called in one holy calling, all privileged to name God as their Father and the Lord Jesus as their elder Brother. What a bond of union—! Surely Philemon's heart would rejoice as he recalled the boundless grace of God accorded to his family! Then the writer touched a chord of tenderness in Philemon's heart by making reference to himself as a prisoner and an old man; Paul would be between fifty and sixty and after a life of unexampled labour and suffering he might well call himself aged in relation to his need of ministry from his son Onesimus. Paul commended Philemon in verses 4-7 and cordially acknowledged his love and loyalty and thus carefully prepared the way for the main object of his letter. He intended to make it very difficult for Philemon to refuse the request he was about to make; Philemon would surely be anxious to live up to the good opinion Paul had of him. In verses 8 and 9 he approached the matter a little closer and told Philemon that there was a duty he should do. He did not yet tell him what it was but he urged his own position as an Apostle and suggested that he could demand this thing but he preferred to leave it to Philemon's love and goodwill and to his feelings towards himself as a dear bosom friend. His appeal was to love rather than authority, "I plead with you for this child of mine to whom in my prison I have become a father". Then he announced the name, Onesimus. In verse 11 he frankly acknowledged that Onesimus had been found a worthless character. The name Onesimus means useful or profitable and Paul played upon the word and seemed to say, "He belied his name in days past, he will more than deserve it now". Though once unprofitable Paul could vouch that he was a changed man. "He is so dear to me that in sending him back to you with this letter it is like tearing out my very heart. If I kept him by me he would be ministering to my needs in your stead just as I know you would be serving me if you were here, but I would not do that without your consent so that your goodness to me might come of your own free will and without any appearance of restraint." Notice how carefully Paul chose his words, he said Onesimus "departed" not "fled" from his master. The word "fled" might have awakened resentful feelings and he

wanted to avoid that. "He parted from you for a while that you might get him back for good", a very graceful way of putting it! He hinted at the *Providential aspect of the matter* and suggested that the parting was unconsciously overruled by a higher hand. God in His wisdom had parted him from Philemon for a season that he might receive him for ever. Verses 16 to 18 are very tender; Paul reiterated that Onesimus was now a brother dear to himself; how much more must he be dear to Philemon. If Philemon considered Paul as a partner in the Gospel let him receive Onesimus as his own representative. In verse 21 Paul speaks of his confidence that Philemon would do as he suggested, then adds that he was hoping to see him soon face to face.

It is not difficult to follow the workings of Philemon's mind as he read the letter. We are not told of the result but we cannot doubt that Paul's appeal, couched in such happy language, had its effect. Philemon would surely feel that he could never face the Apostle again if he refused to do what he desired; what Christian joy would fill his heart as he learnt that the grace of God had touched Onesimus and effected such a *marvellous change in him*. How long would it be before Philemon would eagerly enquire where Onesimus was and learning that he was without, insist on having him in so that he might assure him of his complete forgiveness?

Why is this letter included in the New

Testament? No important doctrine is enunciated as in Romans; it admits of no controversial or directly theological use; there is no *dissertation on Christian virtues*, no warning against apostasy or false teaching as in Galatians; it is purely a *personal letter*, even though a model of the highest character. The question will be answered if we can see in this simple letter an analogy to the story of redemption.

Onesimus the thief and slave had run away from his master. Man was the creation of God and as such was His property but by his conduct he has erred against his Master and provoked Him sorely. He has become not a servant of righteousness but the slave of sin and has run away from God, his legal and proper owner. Not only has he run away but he has robbed Him of His due and gone into a far country. But an all-loving Providence has led his steps to Jesus, Who has suffered great privations for his sake. There at the feet of Jesus, whom God counts as His partner, the repentant slave pours out his soul and confesses his sin. Acting on the advice given him he returns to God, his rightful owner, and is received, not as a slave, but even as Christ Himself and all the debt he has incurred is put to the account of Jesus.

*"Naught of merit or of price
Remains to justice due
Jesus died and paid it all
Yes—all that did I owe."*

Word of explanation to regular readers

An untoward circumstance has rendered it impossible to include the current instalment of the Bible School and "Jesus and the Life to Come" in this month's issue. It is hoped and expected to resume both these features in our next issue.

* * *

Man's Primeval Perfection

"Neither in Egypt nor in Babylonia has any beginning of civilisation been found. As far back as archeology can take us, man is already civilised, building cities and temples, carving hard stone into artistic form, and even employing a system of picture writing; and of Egypt it may be said, the older the country the more perfect it is found to be. The fact is a very remarkable one, in view of modern theories of development, and of the evolution of civilisation out of barbarism. Whatever may be the reason, such theories are not borne out by the discoveries of archeology. Instead of the progress we should expect, we find

retrogression and decay; where we look for the rude beginnings of art, we find an advanced society and artistic perfection. Is it possible that the Biblical view is right after all, and that civilised man has been civilised from the outset?" —*Dr. R. Bell Dawson, F.R.S.*

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It is important correctly to understand the doctrine of co-operation. A disposition to co-operate is not more opposed to the sinful indolence which falls behind, than to the hasty and unrighteous zeal which runs before it. It is in the excess of zeal, which has a good appearance but in reality has unbelief and self at the bottom, that we run before God. Co-operation, by being calm and peaceable, does not cease to be efficacious. Souls in this purified but tranquil state are souls of power, watchful and triumphant against self; resisting temptation; fighting even to blood against sin.

THE PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN

Luke 18.9—14

There were some in that day who "*trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others*"; to them Jesus addressed this parable, and not to them only, for self-righteousness is still rife among those who claim to be His true followers, and the lesson is as important as ever. The rigid, bigoted Pharisee of the story has had his counterparts in every generation since that day and has them still. The parable of the Pharisee and publican has a very topical application to us to-day.

Both men went up to the Temple to pray. They both acknowledged the same Law, at least outwardly, but that is about as far as the similarity went. The Pharisee, accustomed to the respect of men and sure of his standing before God, returned thanks that he was the man he was. He could think of no element in his life capable of change for the better. He already was all that God could possibly want him to be. And he preened himself in the pride of that knowledge. The publican—tax-gatherer—came conscious only of one thing, his inadequacy in the sight of God. He had come short of the Divine glory; he knew that. He needed forgiveness; he knew that too, and in an agony of self-abasement he pleaded for Divine mercy.

The Pharisee was probably a very good man. There is nothing in the account to say he was not, and the brief picture given us is at least sufficient to show that Jesus intended His hearers to picture the typical orthodox Pharisee—zealous for righteousness and the observance of the Mosaic law; bigoted almost to the point of fanaticism in his allegiance to the "traditions of the fathers", punctilious in the discharge of every duty which custom and ordinance required of a son of Abraham. He duly fasted on the third and fifth day of every week, and took care that his neighbours and business associates knew about it. He rendered the tenth of his income to the things of God as the Law required—verse 12 should read "*I give tithes of all that I acquire*" not "*possess*"; he tithed his income, not his capital. Like the rich young ruler on another occasion, he could say, referring to the Divine Law, "all these things have I kept from my youth up" but unlike that young ruler he did not add "what lack I yet?" for in his own mind he had no idea that anything was lack-

ing. He had done all that God had required of him and now he looked to God to do the handsome thing and acknowledge the fact.

"*The Pharisee stood, and prayed thus with himself.*" There is more than a suspicion here that the man was praying to himself, at any rate God does not appear to be much more than an equal partner in the matter. There is no plea for forgiveness, no acknowledgment of the superior position of the Most High, no supplication for help in leading a better life, or guidance in approaching more nearly to the Throne of God's holiness. In fact it hardly seems a prayer at all, more of a boastful statement of the position. "*I thank thee, that I am not as other men are*". He wanted to say cut loud in the hearing of his fellows that thing which he liked to believe his fellows thought of him. As a Pharisee he was one of God's chosen ones and all others were inferior. One day when Messiah came and the Romans were expelled his superiority would be manifest even more than now, for then he would advance from his present position of moral leadership to actual political leadership and not only Israel but all the Gentiles would bow down before him. After all, he and his brother Pharisees were the present successors of the tradition established in the days of Ezra when the first Pharisees stood in the breach to defend the nation against prevalent indifference to the things of God, and preserved the Law and all that it implied for future generations. It was only right that God should acknowledge the services he and his had rendered Him and honour him accordingly.

Whilst thus he stood and congratulated himself the publican came into the Temple court. He was under no illusion; he knew himself to be unclean in God's sight. He came with nothing in his hands and with nothing wherewith to commend himself in God's sight. His prayer was brief and eloquent in its simplicity. "*God be merciful to me a sinner.*" The Greek has the definite article, *the sinner*, as though he counted himself a greater sinner than other men, just as the Pharisee had counted himself greater in his righteousness than other men. He asked nothing of God; he came in repentance and threw himself on God's mercy.

And God looked down from Heaven and saw those two men standing there.

"I tell you" said Jesus "this man"—the publican—"went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted". We hardly need the comment for ourselves as we read the story, for it seems so obvious. How could anyone justify the Pharisee in his arrogance and count him as more worthy in God's sight than the publican?

And yet, it happens so often among Christians. There is a type of mind which, whilst thoroughly loyal to God, takes pride in its exclusiveness and separation from "the world" and not infrequently from fellow-Christians who do not share the same outlook on the faith or the same conception of Christian service. "Spiritual pride" is a very real thing and an ever present danger to the disciples of Christ, for the very love and zeal for Him which leads us to Him at the first is liable to drive us into an excess of devotion which can bear fruit at the end in an unreason-

ing and unseeing bigotry which of itself stultifies our further efforts to do Him service. We all do well to remember our Lord's own injunction, "*when ye have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do*" (Luke 17, 10). The difference between the best of us and the worst of us, great though it may seem in our sight, is very little in God's sight. Repentance and devotion mean much more to Him than mighty works and lavish gifts. Jesus commended the scribe who said "to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices". (Mark 21, 33), "*Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God*" Jesus told that man. The publican in this parable was not far from the Kingdom of God; the Pharisee had not even realised his need of that Kingdom.

Extracts from the works of John Bunyan

"Now since a man must be made righteous before he can do righteousness, it is manifest his works of righteousness do not make him righteous, no more than the fig tree makes its own tree a fig tree. . . . Hence those acts of righteousness that Christian men do perform are called the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. (Phil. 1, 11). . . . Nor can any man propound such an essential way to cut off boasting as this which is of God's providing. . . . The righteousness is Christ's, not the sinner's. The imputation is God's, not the sinner's. The cause of imputation is God's grace and love, not the sinner's works of righteousness. The time of God's imputing righteousness is when the sinner was a sinner . . . not when he was good, or when he was seeking of it; for his inward gospel goodness is the fruit of the imputation of justifying righteousness. . . . For by grace are we saved through faith, and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast. . . . That it might be sure, implying that there is no certain way of salvation for the elect but this, because God can never by other means reconcile us to himself; for his heavenly eyes perceive, through and through, the silly cobweb righteousness that we work; yea they spy faults and sins in the best of our gospel performances."

"The vision of all"

By "vision" was frequently meant prophecy as a vehicle of the revelation of the will of God, but it was constantly necessary to understand what prophecy really was. The prophet was a seer, the interpreter of the signs of his times, often a shrewd thinker, frequently a man of deep passionate patriotism sick of the heedlessness of court and temple, who had retired into solitary places with his grief and his dream, until suddenly, impelled as by the out-thrust of a hand invisible, he found his way again into the streets or even to the foot of the throne, denouncing, revealing, awakening, inspiring. He did not so much guess at the future as interpret the present. He occupied the position of an outside critic—standing apart from the welter of politics and the battle of little ambitions, and according as he had the gift of perception of relationship of cause and effect, according as he saw the drift and trend of actions and tendencies, so was he of value to his own generation. The nation along whose far horizon beat the inspiration of no gleam, whose darkness was not stirred by the voice of any dreamer, was certain to fall into stagnation. There was no uplift without the vision of the idealist. The most prosaic, matter-of-fact age could not shake itself free from the effect of the teaching of the idealists and dreamers of the age preceding it.

THE VOICE OF THE MONUMENTS

7. The Ras Shamra Tablets and conclusion

During the year 1929, very nearly an exact century since Henry Rawlinson started the fascinating series of discoveries which have continuously added to Biblical understanding, two French archaeologists, Professors Schaefer and Chenet, were carrying out investigations at a place on the coast of Syria called Ras Shamra, near Cape Fennel and a few miles north of the modern sea-port of Latakia. They had found the buried remains of an ancient temple; upon uncovering the room which had evidently been the temple library, there was revealed a considerable number of baked clay tablets inscribed in what afterwards proved to be eight different languages of antiquity. Even after so many "finds" extending over the past hundred years and spread over all the lands of the Middle East, it was speedily recognised that this was one of supreme importance, and when scholars had given these first tablets some examination a more thoroughgoing expedition was arranged. Throughout the period between 1930 and 1932 a considerable amount of work was done at Ras Shamra and in addition to many more tablets there were brought to light weapons and implements of bronze, jewellery, pottery and other articles in great abundance. Satisfactory evidence in the form of seals and other emblems bearing the names of certain Egyptian Pharaohs established the date when these relics were buried beneath the ruins of the temple, not to see the light of day again until discovered in our own century, as about 1400 to 1350 B.C., just after the time when Joshua and the Israelites entered Canaan and were engaged in gaining possession of the land. It was therefore seen at once that these written tablets would most likely prove to be of considerable interest to Bible scholars and probably throw some light on certain Bible narratives, particularly those relating to the time of the Exodus.

Three of the languages in which these tablets are written are still undeciphered. The remainder include Egyptian, Cretan, Babylonian and, most interesting of all, archaic Hebrew written in Babylonian cuneiform characters. The nature of the tablets shows the temple to have been the centre of a kind of theological college and many of them record various kinds of ritual observances and

instructions which bear a striking resemblance to much of the Tabernacle ceremonial given to Moses at Sinai and which became the worship of Israel for many centuries thereafter. Now this is a most important as well as most interesting discovery. For two generations prior to 1930 the "modern scholarship" school of Biblical thought had assiduously promulgated conclusions to the effect that much of the ceremonial in Exodus and Leviticus was invented by priests at much later times—in the days of the Kings—and accredited to Moses to give it authority in the eyes of the people. The general position of Old Testament "criticism" was that the books of Moses were not to be taken as strictly historical and that even if Moses had in fact lived, much of what is credited to him in the books bearing his name must be assigned to a considerably later date. These discoveries at Ras Shamra therefore have come as a most welcome independent testimony to the strictly historical character of the books of Moses, for they show that sacrificial rituals very much like those described in the Book of Leviticus were evidently quite well known in Canaan at the very time that Moses was alive.

The type of religious faith that is revealed by the tablets is polytheistic—it has to do with the worship of many gods and goddesses. At the same time there is frequent mention of the god *Elyon*, which is the Hebrew name for the "Most High God". Those who are familiar with the book of Genesis will recall the fact that the first name by which God was known—or at least the earliest name which is recorded—before He was known as *Yahweh*, the Eternal (to Moses), or *El Shaddai*, the Almighty (to Abraham), is this very name—*El Elyon*, the Most High God. Genesis 14 tells of Melchisedek the Priest-king of Jerusalem in the days of Abraham, that he was "the priest of the Most High God". Abraham paid him tribute, thereby acknowledging his recognition that Melchisedek's God was the same as his own. There are other indications in Scripture to the effect that God was known by this name in the earliest ages of earth's history. It seems probable that those in Canaan who, though not of the line of Jacob, which for several centuries had been absent in Egypt, had nevertheless continued worship-

pers of the God of Abraham and Jacob, knew Him still by this name. The worship of the "Most High God" which Scripture indicates prevailed in Canaan in Abraham's time, is shown by the evidence of the Ras Shamra tablets to have survived, probably in an increasingly corrupted form, until Joshua arrived from Egypt six centuries later.

These tablets betray some acquaintance, on the part of the writers, with the ceremonial of the Tabernacle in the wilderness, or else with some common source which forms the basis of both. Much the same terms are used to describe much the same things. Thus there are references to the peace offering, the trespass offering, the tribute offering, the wave offering, the burnt offering, the first fruits, beside allusions to sacred furniture such as that in use in the Tabernacle, and to the Most Holy, the Court, and so on. Now we do not, of course, know just what inspired the detail of the elaborate Tabernacle design and its attendant ceremonies. The entire pattern was shown to Moses by God, we are told, in the Mount. (Exod. 25. 40). It would seem that the venerable leader of Israel saw these things, this Tabernacle and all its ceremonies, as in a kind of vision, during the time he was alone on Sinai as recorded in Exod. 24. It is a fact that much of the physical structure of the Tabernacle bore a distinct resemblance to Egyptian temple architecture and some of the furniture can be shown to have had likenesses in common with Babylonian temple furniture of many centuries previously. On this account it has been suggested that Moses adapted ideas from older faiths to build a religious ceremonial of his own. What is more in keeping with the Scripture record is to accept the account in Exodus to mean exactly what it says, that Moses was caused by the power of the Holy Spirit to see in vision an exact replica of the Tabernacle as God required it to be made. If, in designing that pattern, the Most High made use of ideas that men had already developed in their past attempts to worship Him, that is entirely within the exercise of His discretion as the Lord of all created things. We do not know in fact just what origin, in the mists of antediluvian time, some of these emblems of worship may have had when men did worship God in the measurable purity of the days immediately after the Fall.

It is probably reasonable therefore to conclude that the ceremonials described in the Ras Shamra tablets have some connection

with, or were in part derived from, the instructions which God gave to Moses in the wilderness. Their existence in these tablets does at least prove quite definitely that such ideas were abroad at that time, and to that extent gives evidence of the historical accuracy of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

One other point of interest remains to touch upon. Who were these people who administered this temple and lived in the surrounding countryside?

The remains at Ras Shamra show that the city and its people existed there from at least two centuries before Abraham entered Canaan, until about two hundred years after the Exodus—say about the middle of the time of the Judges, some little while before Samuel came to Eli at Shiloh. During this long period of about a thousand years all kinds of races and types made their homes in that district. Some of the later tablets have to do with seafaring expeditions; there are registers of ocean-going ships using the port. Remembering that in after days this very country became the home of the Phœnicians, that renowned seagoing merchant people of old time, it may well be that their progenitors were here taking root in the soil. Another class of tablets incorporates legends regarding Terah, a military conqueror under the protection of the Moon-god, who invaded the country with his hosts. One is reminded immediately of Terah, the father of Abraham, who left his native city Ur of the Chaldees, the holy city of the Moon-god, to come to Canaan, and how at a later date Abraham with all his "trained servants" (mercenary or "hired" soldiers) defeated and put to flight the Babylonian and Elamite armies in this very land. (See Gen. 14). It would not be profitable to dwell upon or spend time examining the mass of such legend that appears in the tablets but allusions such as these do go to show that what we now read as history in the early chapters of Genesis was so well known in the days of these tablets that much of it, distorted and intermixed, had already passed into the realm of popular legend.

The true value of Ras Shamra, therefore, is its testimony to the facts that, first, the Bible is true history of the periods with which it deals, and, second, that this Bible history is still the fullest and most complete account of those times, revealing a more detailed and accurate picture of the progress of events in the world's oldest civilisations than any tablets or other records which the researches of

men in these last days have brought to light.

* * *

The story is not complete; it will never be completed. The earth is continually yielding fresh treasures to the excavator and the investigator and with every such discovery the Bible stands illumined in brighter hue. The days are long since past when the rash allegation that the Bible had no independent testimony to support its claim to be true history must needs be endured in dignified silence. To-day there is a host of witnesses; solid evidences of the handiwork of men living in Bible times, testifying to the accuracy of that which had already been recorded in Holy Writ. And if the preservation of these clay tablets and rocks and stones through the centuries and the millenniums, and their subsequent discovery long after the very nations in whose languages they were inscribed had passed away, is a matter of astonishment and wonder, what must be said of the Bible itself? That record has been preserved, not on enduring stone hidden away in the depths of the ground, safe from interfering and malicious hands, until its secrets could be revealed to the sober inquiry of this latter age, but in the world of men and among men. The precious manuscripts have at all times since their writing circulated in the world, read and re-read, copied and re-copied, the while great established powers among men have sought by every means at their disposal to root them out and exterminate them. No other book ever written has had such a chequered and hazardous career as has the Bible. No other book has been the object of such determined and relentless efforts to suppress and exterminate it. And no other book has survived so long and so triumphantly. Neither the burning fires of persecution nor the chilling winds of indifference have prevailed to wither and destroy its message and its influence in the world. Even to-day, when the religious apathy of the Western nations has become a byword and a proverb, the Bible remains a "best seller". Not for nothing is it described by the Apostle Peter as the "word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever". In all this world of change and decay, of tumult and unrest, of indifference and hostility, the Bible stands, serene, dignified, confident, an inflexible witness to God and to His concern and care for mankind.

That is its central truth. The historical features of the Bible are not there as an end in themselves; they are a means to an end. Its

history is not myth. Men and women did live and work and write as the Bible says they did. Their hopes and fears, loves and hates, strength and weakness, were all as the Bible relates of them. Even its greatest heroes have their faults and failings, their mistakes and their sins, recorded as faithfully as their triumphs of faith and the things wherein they pleased God. But all of this is but to point to one great truth—that man, created perfect and sinless at the first, fell from that high estate into sin, and so death passed upon all men; that God is working ceaselessly to recover man from the effects of that sin and to achieve His final goal of a sinless creation in which "all that hath breath shall praise the Lord"; that to achieve that end—by the only way in which that end can be achieved—the Lord Jesus Christ came from above and moved among men, teaching the true principles by which men must live, suffering Himself to be put to death rather than betray those principles; that eventually all men must be brought face to face with the alternative of accepting Christ and His ways and so inheriting eternal life, or rejecting them and suffering eternal death.

That is the message and the power of the Bible. It will by no means renounce or whittle down its claim to be the authoritative expression of God's Will and exposition of God's Plan in respect to man, his origin, his present state, and his destiny. It takes us back to earliest times and shows us man as he was—pure, upright, sinless, perfectly adapted to his environment, and capable of everlasting life whilst remaining in harmony with Divine Law. It passes on into history and leads us up to the present, showing us the dark and terrible results of human selfishness, depravity and sin, in a world that has largely rejected God and is increasingly so doing. It takes us forward into the future and shows us a world at peace, sin banished, war a thing of the past, love and good fellowship replacing hate and rancour and jealousy. It shows us the will of God done on earth as it is done in heaven, and God dwelling as it were with men and all creation at peace with Him. Then it comes back into the present, the time of this world, and shows us the means by which that glorious consummation is to be brought about, in the person and work of Christ, and tells us in unmistakable terms that only by full acceptance of Christ and consecration of life to Him can men and women be recovered from their state of imperfection and weak-

ness and sin, and be translated into the glorious liberty of the children of God. The Bible has a lot to say about the philosophy of the Atonement; it does not demand that all its readers understand that philosophy in detail; what it does demand, and demands because compliance with the demand is the only possible way of escape from sin and death, is "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved".

"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life!"

That verse is the crowning glory of the Bible and the expression of its deepest truth. All else leads up to it. The object of the Bible in this world is to lead men to Christ and to instruct them in His ways after they have accepted Him. Its history, its poetry, its visions, its ethics, all converge irresistibly upon one transcendent Figure, the One Who is rightful King of the earth and King of all

men, the One Who, in the power and glory of His Second Advent, will reign as Prince of Peace over a transformed and transfigured world of men, teaching them to pursue the arts of peace and eschew the evils of war, until in enlightenment and true reverence they come before Him in voluntary yielding of all life's powers in a dedication of heart and mind that will endure to all eternity.

In their own humble way, the tablets and the inscriptions on the rocks are agents in the execution of the Divine Plan. They have played, and still play, their part in establishing faith in God. It is said of Him that He hath "left not himself without witness" and this at least is one respect in which the statement is true. Jesus spoke of the very stones crying out to testify to His Messiahship; the voice of the monuments has made itself heard to declare, indirectly, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

THE END

DESPISED AND REJECTED

This rendering of one of the finest passages in the Bible is said to represent a compendium of six translators. It may not be so literally accurate as the Authorised Version rendering, but there is a beauty in this presentation of a familiar chapter which perhaps brings home more intimately the pathos of the prophet's theme.

"Behold my servant shall prosper; he shall be raised aloft, and magnified, and very highly exalted.

"As now many are astonished before him (so disfigured is his aspect before men, and his figure before the children of men) so shall many nations exult in him; kings shall close their mouths before him; for what had not been related to them, shall they see; and understand what they never heard.

"Who hath believed what we have understood by hearing? Who perceives what the arm of Jehovah is preparing?"

"He hath grown up as a twig before him, as a shoot out of dry ground. He had no form nor beauty. We looked at him, but there was no fair appearance that we should be desirous of him.

"Despised and neglected by men, a man of sorrow and familiar with sufferings, and like one who hideth his face from us; disdained, and we gave him no attention. But it was our griefs he bare, it was our sorrows he carried. We indeed, accounted him smitten, stricken by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions: was smitten for our

iniquities: the chastisement, by which our peace is effected, was laid upon him; and by his bruises we are healed.

"All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned each to his own way; but Jehovah hath inflicted upon him the punishment of all. He was severely afflicted, yet he submitted himself, and opened not his mouth. As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, or a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.

"By an oppressive judgment he was taken away—the men of his age who shall describe? For he was cut off from the land of the living; on account of the transgression of my people was he smitten. A grave is assigned him with the wicked, but his tomb is a rich man's; for he hath done no injustice, and no guile is in his mouth. But Jehovah is pleased to crush him with sufferings. If he will offer himself a sacrifice for sin, he shall see his posterity, he shall prolong his days, and the gracious purpose of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand.

"The effects of his soul's pain he shall see and shall be richly satisfied. By his knowledge my righteous servant shall make many righteous, and shall take away their iniquities.

"Therefore will I distribute to him the many for his portion, and the mighty people shall he share for his spoil; because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isa. 52. 13 to 53. 11).

ABRAM OF THE MOST HIGH GOD

Some Lessons from an old story

The story of Abraham's victorious conflict with the four kings of Babylon is one of the strangest and most intriguing in the Bible. Not only does it introduce the mystic figure of Melchisedek, Priest-King of Salem, but it intrigues by reason of its apparent separateness from the rest of Genesis. It is a scrap of political history of the times, in which Abraham became involved, but having no apparent connection with his life before or after. We hear no more of Melchisedek, or of the Babylonian kings, or of the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. And yet the story has been recorded for a purpose, or it would not be there at all. As one reads the narrative and reflects upon this warlike aspect of Abraham's character, so unlike the picture so consistently presented in the rest of his life story, the reason surely begins to appear. The idea of Abraham as a man of faith is a very familiar one; in this chapter and here alone he is depicted as a man of war, battling for the triumph of right, and that in turn reminds us that we who are the "children of the faithful Abraham" are called, not only to go through life sustained by a firm and unwavering faith, as did he, but also when occasion demands sally forth to engage in Christian warfare for the defence of the things we hold dear and the driving of God's enemies from His domain. The fact that the weapons of the Christian warfare are "not carnal" does not by any means belittle the value of the lessons we can draw from this incident where Abraham showed most convincingly that he was by no means a novice in the arts of material warfare.

The climax of the story comes when Abraham, returning from his defeat of the retreating Babylonian kings, bringing with him the recovered captives and their goods, receives the patriarchal blessing of Melchisedek, the Priest-King of the land. The great truth which stands out so plainly is that Abraham did not receive the Melchisedek blessing because of his faith, but because of his successful warfare. Melchisedek is a picture of Christ in His glorious Millennial reign just as Aaron pictures His suffering sacrificial life in this Age. Is this story of Genesis 14 intended to illuminate the contrast between the two pictures? Faith, devotion, suffering and sacrifice are all part of the Christian life just as all these things were characteristic of our Lord's

life on earth, and all this was pictured by the high Priestly service of Aaron. Abraham experienced all these things in his life also and so that life became a marvellous allegory of the life of any and every Christian. But warfare is also a characteristic of the Christian life—the Apostle Paul counsels that we take unto ourselves the whole armour of God that we may be able to withstand the assaults of the Devil. We are to resist every encroachment of the world and every enticement that would draw us away from our consecration to God. We are not only to avoid sin in ourselves; we are to condemn it in others, holding up the standard of God's righteousness and making known the Truth that is mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. It is when we have accomplished that task that we can look for the Melchisedek blessing and be called to sit on one of those thrones on which the glorified saints shall sit and reign the thousand years. This story therefore can have much to teach us and we do well to look at it not only from the historical viewpoint—for of course it really did happen—but also, and more intently, as an allegory teaching important truths to us as we, like Abraham, forsake our native land to go to one which God will show us.

Abraham had lived in Canaan some twenty years when these stirring events broke into the even tenor of his life. How long the family lived at Haran before the death of Terah we do not know, but it is probable that the departure from Ur of the Chaldees was thirty or forty years in the past. That had been a big step, to give up the luxury and refinements of a civilised city and go out "not knowing whither he went" as the writer to the Hebrews puts it. A fitting picture of consecration! All that the world has to offer, given up and left behind for—what? A visionary promise of a better land that one has never seen, with the certainty of hardship, loss, suffering, in the attaining of that land. Ur of the Chaldees was a busy sea-port and a commercial city; it is more than likely that Abraham was a prosperous merchant or trader of some sort. When he came into Canaan he had to become like everybody else there, a keeper of flocks and herds. It might be that he had never in his life before lived in a tent; henceforth until the day of his death he lived in nothing else.

Another wonderful picture of our consecration, that! Strangers and pilgrims in the earth! Ur to Haran, Haran to Moreh, Moreh to Bethel, Bethel to Egypt, Egypt to Mamre, Mamre to Gerar, Gerar to Hebron; constantly wandering and never possessing in his own right any portion of the land that God had promised him until at the last he had to buy a piece in which to bury his beloved wife.

But he found God in that country! In leaving Ur of the Chaldees he left behind him for ever the worship of Sin the Moon-god; in Babylon he left behind him for ever the worship of Marduk the false redeemer. In coming to Canaan he found the God of his fathers, the God they had worshipped before they went down to Ur to live with idolators. He found Canaan a land that worshipped the Most High God, and he found Salem, the city of peace, not far from Mamre where he spent most of his life, and Melchisedek who was both king of Salem and Priest of the Most High God. In answering the call to "come out" he had found God, and until the day of his death he dwelt as it were in the presence of God.

So, for that twenty years—and eighty years more, for Abraham lived one hundred years in Canaan altogether—he lived his life and awaited the fulfilment of the promise. To his seed God would give this land; in him and in his seed would all families of the earth be blessed. That was the promise that sustained him as he went quietly about his daily occupations. Though it tarry, it would surely come, it would not really tarry. It was in that calm confidence that Abraham adjusted himself in his surroundings and soon found that he was becoming a prosperous man. His flocks and herds increased and his neighbours began to look on him with respect. Peaceable, likeable folk, these neighbours. Abraham seems to have got on with them very well, probably much better than he had done with the people of Ur. These Amorites of Canaan were themselves descendants of Shem, and they were worshippers of the Most High God. (It was only thirty years ago that that fact was established, but it seems clear now that Abraham must have found the religious views of the Canaanites much in line with his own). It must have been that Abraham anticipated a promise to be given by Jesus two thousand years later and that in giving up father and mother and houses and lands for God's sake he had received even in this life an hundred-fold; and there was still the fulfilment of the promise for the future.

Into this quiet life of peace and prosperity there came the shattering blow of invasion. "It came to pass in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlamer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations, that these made war . . ." (Gen. 14. 1). The story is probably familiar enough. The four Babylonian kings had marched into Canaan to subdue the rebellion of the five cities around the Dead Sea. The insurrection was quickly crushed and the invaders commenced their homeward journey taking with them the spoil and captives, among whom were Abraham's brother-in-law Lot and his family. Upon hearing the news, Abraham summoned his own private army, three hundred and eighteen strong, pursued the retreating enemy, attacked and defeated them, and returned in triumph with the recovered captives and their property.

The historical truth of the story used to be attacked on the grounds that none of these kings were known to history; that objection no longer holds good. Amraphel king of Shinar is the Hebrew form of the name of Babylon's famous king Hammurabi, (*Ammurapi* in his own language). The kings of Babylon claimed Divine honours and this one's name was written *Ammurapi-ilu*, "*Ammurapi-the god*" and this becomes "*Amraphel*" in Hebrew. "Arioch," king of Ellasar, is the Hebrew form of Eri-aku king of Larsa. (Eri-aku, meaning "*Servant of the Moon-god*") was a Semitic name but this king is known in the inscriptions by his Sumerian name "*Rim-Sin*," having the same meaning). Chedorlamer king of Elam would in his own language be written *Khudur-Lagamar*; this name has not yet been found but he was most probably a son of *Khudur-Mabug* king of Elam at the time Abraham departed from Ur. Tidal king of nations is a mistranslation by a very early copyist; the reference is to the king of Gutium, a land lying to the east of Babylonia.

These were the lands and these were the men whom Abraham had known in his youth. Now they had followed him into his new life with God and would make this land also subject to their rule. This was a time for action. Without hesitation he summoned his "trained servants" (these were really professional soldiers, attached to the service of a great "sheik" like Abraham for the defence of his property and people) and led them himself to the pursuit and attack of the Babylonian army.

It has been thought strange that so small a force as three hundred and eighteen could put

to flight the armies of four kings. In fact these kings, and all the kings of antiquity, were little more than petty chieftains and their armies, especially when engaged on distant expeditions such as this, little more than raiding parties. Plenty of inscriptions now exist relating the stories of wars and sieges similar to this one and more or less contemporary with this one in which the numbers of the contending forces are given and they are often measured only in hundreds or at the most a few thousand. When the city-state of Umma laid siege to and captured the city-state of Lagash in the days of Eannatum II, the inscriptions say "the carnage was frightful!"; but there were only six hundred men in the army of Umma! It is reasonable to expect too, that Abraham's men were familiar with the country-side; the Babylonians, a thousand miles from their own home, were not, and just as in the case of Gideon's army some eight centuries later—and in much the same territory—the smaller force assumed the initiative and took the enemy by surprise.

So Abraham returned home in triumph; but even in the day of triumph he still retained his separateness from the world around him. The king of Sodom in gratitude for the deliverance, offered Abraham the whole of the recovered goods, asking only that the liberated captives be restored to him. Abraham's reply is a noble one. "I have lift up mine hand to the Lord, the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth" he says "that I will not take . . . anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say 'I have made Abraham rich'." It would have been a grievous snare to Abraham had he accepted the other man's offer; he could hardly avoid thereafter being associated in some way or other with the king and people of Sodom. So the king of Sodom went back to his own city with his people and his goods, and Lot and his family went back with him. Abraham was left alone, but in his isolation, he cherished a reward and a treasure of much more lasting value than anything he had relinquished. He had the blessing of Melchisedek.

Now this blessing of Melchisedek was a most important thing. It was the climax to a solemn ceremony in which, for the first time in Bible history, bread and wine are used in a ceremonial fashion. All the parties concerned were present in the valley of Shaveh, "the king's dale," a locality now quite unknown but probably quite near Jerusalem. Abraham himself, with his band of retainers, flushed with their victory; Aner, Eshcol and Mamre,

the Amorite chieftains, and their men, who had apparently gone with Abraham under his leadership and helped in the victory; all these were worshippers of "the Most High God". The king of Sodom was there; the lack of mention of the remaining kings of the five cities leads to the conclusion that they perished in the original battle; see vs. 10. Presiding over all was the venerable figure of Melchisedek himself, the acknowledged overlord of all these chieftains and kings, overlord not only in secular things but also in the things of God, a priest upon his throne.

The bread and wine was evidently partaken of by all the nobilities present as a ritual feast. It was a symbolic acknowledgment that the blessings of life and prosperity come from God above. God had been merciful, and by the hand of his servant defeated the invader who had threatened to deprive them of life and prosperity. Hence the next stage in the ritual was to invoke the Divine blessing on the means of that deliverance. "*Blessed be Abram of the most high God*" i.e. let Abram be blessed of God. "*And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thine hand.*" Note how all the glory is given to God.

The final act in the ceremony is equally impressive. Abraham comes forward and in the sight of all the spectators solemnly lays before Melchisedek, as the representative of God, tithes of all the recovered property. God had wrought the deliverance; one tenth of the wealth must be returned to God. That is tantamount to a recognition of Divine sovereignty; in symbol, it is a yielding of life and all that life holds, in dedication and consecration.

That is the picture for us. A day will come when the age-old conflict with evil will have ended so far as the Church is concerned, and the greater Melchisedek comes forth with bread and wine to meet His faithful saints. Just as Abraham stood before the Canaanites and received the Divine blessing because of his valiant warfare, so will the Church be blessed in the sight of all men. "*Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.*" Just as Abraham received of the bread and wine at the hands of Melchisedek, so will the glorified Church enter into the joys of the "wedding feast" at the "marriage of the Lamb."

That is not all. There is bread and wine for others also, just as there was for Aner, Eshcol and Mamre, the "people of the land" among whom Abraham sojourned. With the ending of the Gospel Age and the glorification of the

Church the forces of evil will have been defeated and driven far away; there has been deliverance for the captives and an opening of the prison for them that are bound. The dawn of the Millennial Age and the establishment of the Kingdom means bread and wine for all men; and it is then that tithes of all are presented to God, the heartfelt consecration of life to God of every right thinking one among all the resurrected hosts whose deliverance has been so much greater than that of those few who came back with Abraham.

This experience must have been a turning point in Abraham's life. Previously he had exercised faith in God and had followed the call; one wonders though, how much he had proved God. Up to now Abraham had always been on the defensive—he had separated himself from the idolatry of Ur and departed out

of Egypt as soon as his presence began to become obnoxious to them. Now for the first time he had taken the offensive against the forces of evil, and—perhaps to his own surprise—found that God was with him and endowed him with power to achieve a striking victory. Perhaps there is a lesson for us in that also. We got so used to withdrawing from contact with the world and its wickedness and in our assurance that God will one day rise up to make an end of evil fail to realise that, even so, there is a case for our doing something towards it here and now. If Abraham had never taken the offensive and gone out to smite the army of Chedorlaomer he would never have received the blessing of Melchisedek. There is always the possibility that something very similar may yet prove to be true of us.

UNITY IN EPHESIANS

*Important teaching from
an important book*

There are several references to unity in the epistle to the Ephesians, addressed to Christians covering relationship to Christ, to fellow Christians, to family and to the outside world. Never is it implied that the parties will be unified by becoming exact copies of each other; for that, as is well-known, is uniformity rather than unity. For example, in the sixth chapter advice is given to promote unity between masters and servants, yet it is not suggested by Paul that it can be achieved by abolishing the distinctions of master and servant. Some sociologists might reason that unity could be attained by dropping all thought of these differences and all becoming fellow-workers of equal standing, but not so *the Bible*. And in the heavenly realms unity prevails though the stars differ in glory. Before proceeding any further we do well to remember all the time that Paul is writing to Christians, though all may profit by his advice. SERVANTS (v. 5) are urged to do their part in securing unity by obeying their masters in the flesh in singleness of heart as though they were serving Christ, and at times this admonition will be irksome to Christians whose masters are sharp men of the world. By no means will it be easy at times for the Christian when faced with orders which border on sharp practice to decide what to do. His duty to God is of course the greater obligation; but he will find that as his master gets to know his principles and practice he will honour him. And it is by doing these "good

works" for the master (usually unknown to fellow Christians) that the reputation of the servant is enhanced. If on the other hand the Christian fails in his duty of obedience, the master will be the first to judge his religious pretensions. From Paul's words it is clear that the onus is on the servant faithfully to serve, not with a view to securing favours; and yet he has the satisfaction of knowing that obedience to one's earthly master is noted by his Master in heaven. Paul also advises those who happen to be MASTERS (v. 9), for unity is best attained by both parties contributing to that end. Whereas servants give loyal service, masters must not be overbearing and must remember that like the servant they have a Master in heaven who deals impartially with all. Often in this world the servant will have a master not in the faith and the master have unbelieving servants; yet nothing in Paul's injunctions allow either party to act differently when such is the case. Every now and then master and servant will come face to face with some problem which will test their loyalty to Christ their Master, and all of us will hesitate to give advice apart from the Word when particular difficulties occur between them, having been tried ourselves. But in passing we must note that these problems in life give the Christian opportunity to let his light shine before men. Such problems almost invariably are met when one is without the help of other members. Hence faithful service and faithful management receives the

heavenly Master's approval, and he who seeth in secret will reward openly. And apart from Christian duty all know that in business, in factory and in field, unity and well-being increase when employers and employees act in accordance with the Apostle's advice, even though neither may know that he had so written.

Also in Eph. 6 we find the basis of unity between PARENTS and CHILDREN. Here again we find that to achieve unity both parents and children contribute something. All have met those parents who quote "Children, obey your parents" yet do not appear to know the remainder of the sentence or avoid quoting it. Usually it is those parents who have not followed the advice of v. 4. The first step in family unity, as v. 2 says, is that the children honour the parents. All know that where there is little respect for parents, disobedience is rife. Parents will be spared many of these problems if they have "brought them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord". Difficulties increase when either or both the parents are not Christians; or the children, growing up, do not care fully to embrace the faith "and want to live their own lives"; and again all of us will be loth to advise what to do in particular cases. One can but say that Paul's words give the basis upon which we should act, and leave it at that. And all of us thinking over these words of Paul, and reviewing our own lives, will own that we could have done better than we have. Blessed are those parents who having brought up their children in the fear of the Lord, receive the reward of having their children reach manhood and wholeheartedly accepting the faith. Such does not often ensue; and some of the great men of the Bible had sons who did not follow in their footsteps.

In chapter five Paul teaches how unity can be secured between HUSBAND and WIFE, though his teaching is subsidiary to his topic of Christ and the Church. In fact the unity of the one is by him as the picture of the other; and this should always be in mind when we hear the modern world criticising Paul's use of the word "submit" in v. 22. It is usual nowadays to say that his words on family relationships are unsuited to present conditions, though the critics have not propounded a better basis of unity. Even if Paul were only discussing husband and wife, it would be unfair to him not to remember his words in verses 25 and 33. We must not dilate on his advice to wives without mentioning also his words to the husbands, and if we deal with the subject

we shall have to admit that the closing words of the section are most reasonable.

Let us not dismiss these practical precepts from the Bible on the ground that our own master, or children, or wife or husband, furnishes a case not covered by this advice. We are all prone to think that our home or business life is exceptional. And some of us may pass over the sundry obligations of the last three chapters of Ephesians because of our liking for the great church truths of the first three. The advice is given in the latter part, because Paul having declared such glorious things realises that we must in all phases of life walk worthy of our calling. How incongruous it would be for those hoping to be unified with their God and their Saviour for eternity, to fail in their associations with their fellow men and their families! Possibly more to our taste is the unity of Christ and the Church as revealed by His sacrifice for them in giving himself, and that He might continue his work and sanctify them and cleanse them by the Word, and eventually present them to Himself a glorious church free of all blemish and wrinkle. That achieved there will indeed be unity. Let it be seen straight away that it will result by what He has done for the church and that they have contributed very little. Throughout the N.T. will be found that He has done all, and we accept. And that truth is at the bottom of the word "submit" in Eph. 5. 22. In the relationships of master and servant, parents and children, etc., unity is formed by each doing something to that end; but in the relationship of Christ and his church the work is predominantly His, and we thankfully submit. Without question, without doubt of mind we accept all that He has done and so we become united to Him. Our great sense of debt always remains in our minds and our thanks though inadequate keep us united to Him. In the same sense, if husband and wife feel indebtedness to each other, they will be unified.

Still reviewing the Ephesian points of unity in the reverse order to that they were written, we come to the well-known seven parts of unity (making one whole) mentioned in the 4th chapter. In fact the first sixteen verses deal with the subject, concluding with that perfect figure of unity, that of head and body. The first three verses show how the unity which the Holy Spirit has prompted may be maintained; and the words lowliness, meekness and longsuffering show just what was in Paul's mind. These are the virtues which, if unity is existent in the church, will smooth

over those differences of opinion which can so easily disunite any community. All know that the antithesis of these principles make for discord in church and in world. Many of mankind's troubles arise from the lack of forbearance with others. No dictator would ever succeed had he lowliness of mind and meekness, and none will "get on" in the world today whose hearts are thus controlled. But in the church they are a contribution we can all make; and possibly because of that Paul mentioned them before the seven points of unity of verses 4-7. For one of the seven links of unity is the "one faith" and immediately we think of that our definition of the faith may not suit other members' opinions. It may not be well to single out one phase and stress it to the detriment of the other six and it is also inadvisable to say that any of the seven is the most important. All are important and all are links in a chain without a weak link. And that being so, we can dispense with the ancient slogan "*In essentials unity, in doubtful matters liberty and in all things charity*" as being unsuitable for Christian problems. The slogan has, of course, its good points, but the Bible is a better mentor for us all.

The last one the apostle mentions "One God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in all" provides us with a great truth towards church unity. And if we can gather all that is meant in the prepositions (above, through and all) we shall see that the other phases of unity, including the one faith, are parts of His purpose. For this God and Father is the one who has formed the one body; from whom the one Spirit emanates; from whom the one hope of our calling has reached our ears; who is the Father of the Lord who died for us; who framed the one true faith, and who has baptised us by the one Spirit into the one body. As we read through Paul's words we begin to see that he is referring to a small and exclusive body within the larger body we loosely speak of as Christendom. And whereas the larger body is not unified (partly because of its size and certainly because it admits of various faiths and hopes) it is possible for a little flock owning but one Master, animated by one Spirit, and governed by one God and Father to be united even in this world.

In the second chapter Paul writes of a time prior to the First Advent when the favoured people Israel had the promises and blessings of God. During that long period the outside world of Gentiles had no hope in God and

were without knowledge of Him and his purposes. So dissimilar was the status of the two that he refers to the one as being nigh to God and the other as far off. This enmity has been changed to unity by the cross of Christ reconciling both to God in one body—the body of Ephesians 4. By the death of Christ such of Israel as accept the atoning work of Christ will be nearer to God than ever they were under the law of Moses and the ministry of the prophets, and the Gentiles will be alongside them and as near to God as them because both will be "in" Christ. Thus unity is made not only by the two parties being united to each other, but both are united to God in twain, in one new man, so making peace. In this truth we see once more that the blessedness we now enjoy in Christ is due to that done for us and to which we have not contributed. But the unity thus made for us we maintain by following the instructions of the fourth chapter.

In the first chapter we have revealed that unity which is the purpose of the ages. There we see (v. 10) the Divine purpose is to unite all earthly peoples and worlds beyond our ken (and it is reasonable to think, worlds yet to be inhabited) under one Head. It is difficult to imagine the glorious outcome of this predetermined plan, but one thing will satisfy the hearts of all Christians—that all things will be united under the Lord Jesus Christ, an honour we all feel is most justly due, for He is before all things and by Him all things consist.

The whole substance of religion is faith, hope and charity—by the practice of which we become united to the will of God; all beside is indifferent and to be used as a means that we may arrive at our end and be swallowed up therein by faith and charity.

* * *

Spiritual life needs opposition to bring out its best development. It flourishes most luxuriantly in adverse circumstances. The hardness of our experiences, which seem to us to be more than we can possibly endure, make the very school of life for us in which we learn our best lessons and grow into whatever beauty and Christlikeness of character we attain.



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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CONTENTS

A KING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS Part III	123
THE WHIP OF SMALL CORDS	127
BIBLE SCHOOL The Five Books of Moses (Gen. 31-32)	128
JESUS AND THE LIFE TO COME Part 2	131
THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE SAY COME	132
THE PARABLES OF THE SOWERS.....	135
A MERCIFUL AND FAITHFUL HIGH PRIEST	138

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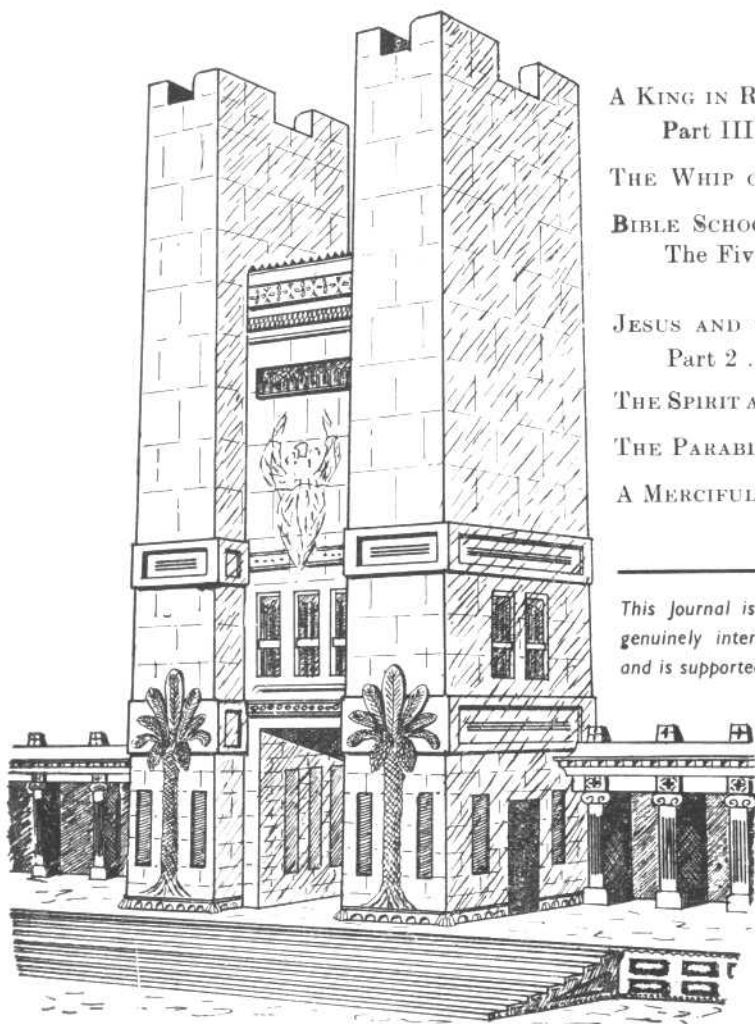
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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BETWEEN OURSELVES

Bro. Edwin Allbon, who is British representative for the "*Herald of Christ's Kingdom*", wishes it to be known that his address has now been changed from 20 Sunnymede Drive, Ilford, to the following:—

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BOGNOR REGIS, Sussex.

Will all subscribers to the "*Herald*" and the Benevolent Service please take note of this

new address and direct their letters accordingly in future.

Gone from us

Bro. C. T. Davey (*Malvern & London*)

Sis. Ada Halton (*Manchester*)

Sis. Molly Humphrey (*London*)

"Till the day break, and the shadows flee away"

Thomas Carthew, a missionary in East Africa, was amazingly powerful in his presentation of the truth. One day when he was teaching the Commandments to his congregation, everything went calmly until they reached number eight. "Thou shalt not steal," thundered Carthew. "Thou shalt not steal," repeated the coloured congregation. There was a pause. "Thou shalt not steal—coconuts", announced Carthew. This was an unexpected innovation, and dead silence reigned. "Say it!" demanded the preacher. In hesitating tones came the response, "Thou shalt not steal coconuts". "Now say this: 'Thou shalt not steal—fowls,'" and so on through the whole list of petty pilferings, until the subdued congregation felt the power of the applied Word of God as never before.

* * *

Justin Martyr, who lived in the second century, wrote "On Sunday all those of us who live in the same town or district assemble together, and there is read to us some part of the Memoirs of the Apostles, which are called Gospels, and the writings of the Prophets as much as time permits. Then whoever is presiding gives us a sermon, after which we rise for common prayer; afterwards bread and wine are brought".

The allusion to "rising" for prayer calls to

mind the fact that it was the custom of Christians in the early centuries to stand whilst prayer was being made, the one who was offering prayer doing so with arms extended as if in blessing. Engravings in the Catacombs at Rome depict this usage in repeated instances and this in turn explains the words of 1 Tim. 2. 8, "*I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.*"

* * *

King Asa of Judah was diseased in his feet, "*yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians*". (2 Chron. 16. 12). This is not to say that Divine displeasure is upon those who seek to obtain relief from sickness and physical ailments by means of the skill of the medical profession. In Asa's day the only physicians were the priests of idolatrous faiths and their "cures" were invariably mixed up with the worship they professed. Asa preferred to become contaminated with such rather than go to his God for instruction. It may be remembered that good King Hezekiah, in like case, went to the prophet Isaiah, and he, although not a physician, was evidently guided by the Holy Spirit in the selection of a remedy that proved effective. (See Isa. 38. 1 and 21).

A KING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

A Study in the
Millennial visions of Isaiah

Part 3 (conclusion)

The latter part of Isaiah's thirty-second chapter seems to be a pen-picture of one aspect of the transition from this age into the next, almost as though the prophet, after describing the general characteristics of the "reign of righteousness" as it is going to affect ordinary men, turns his eyes upon those who in this age have wielded authority and exercised power over those same ordinary folk and tells them in no unmeasured terms that the time of their luxurious indulgence is ended and that conditions will be very different in the Millennial Kingdom. His especial theme is the passing away of the works of man as exemplified in the cities and palaces and fortresses of this present order of things, and the coming into its own of that world of Nature, of mountains and valleys and fields and streams, which has been so cruelly despoiled by heedless and callous men but in that day is to become the environment in which redeemed mankind will live its life. *"They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, and none shall make them afraid."* (Micah 4, 4).

First of all, then, in this section of his thesis, Isaiah addresses the luxury-loving, indolent, wealthy women of Jerusalem. *"Rise up, ye women that are at ease,"* he commands, and the scorn that is in his voice comes to us even in the printed words. *"Hear my voice, ye careless daughters; give ear unto my speech. Many days and years* ("days above a year" is the Hebrew, an idiom meaning "soon" "imminent") *shall ye be troubled, ye careless women; for the vintage shall fail, the gathering shall not come."* (Chap. 32., vs. 9-10). In every age the "idle rich" have lived upon the industry of the poor; the abundant harvests of the land have yielded their quota to the luxurious living of the propertied classes, many of whom have been content to take, and live on, their gains without contributing any kind of work or labour themselves. These "careless daughters" of Jerusalem were parasites of this kind. There was plenty of refinement and luxury in Jerusalem in Isaiah's day. The continued connection of Judah and Israel with the merchant nation of antiquity, the Phœnicians, whose capital city was Tyre, a connection that commenced in David's day with his friendship with Hiram,

king of Tyre (1 Ki. 5, 1) was continued by Solomon (1 Ki. 5, 10-12) and later by Ahab the husband of Jezebel, daughter of the then king of Tyre, brought all of the world's products into Jewish homes. Dwellers in Jerusalem could obtain for themselves—if they had the money—any and every article of ornament and luxury that the world afforded. The contrast between these plutocrats and the simple hard-working peasantry of the Judean highlands was very great, and Isaiah was not the only prophet who fearlessly denounced the indolence and the profligacy of the rich. That the judgment of God would one day come upon them he had no doubt. *"There is a crying for wine in the streets; all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone. In the city is left desolation, and the gate is smitten with destruction."* (Isa. 24, 11-12). Adroitly, he connects Jerusalem, the wicked city, with her daughters and the condemnation he pronounces is equally applicable to both. Jeremiah, too, is equally forthright. *"I have likened the daughter of Zion"* (Jerusalem), he says, *"to a comely and delicate woman . . . Prepare ye war against her; arise, and let us go up. . . . For thus hath the Lord of hosts said, 'Hew ye down trees, and cast a mount against Jerusalem: this is the city to be visited'"* (with judgment) *"she is wholly oppression in the midst of her."* (Jer. 6, 1-6).

But Isaiah was seeing something more distant than the overthrow of Jerusalem that came in the days of Nebuchadnezzar; and the "idle rich" for whom his burning words of reproof were chiefly intended were those of this twentieth century A.D. rather than these of the eighth century B.C. Isaiah's prophecy here had already passed into the sphere of the Millennial Age and he had already described some of the conditions of that rule of righteousness inaugurated by the king who is to reign in righteousness. So the condemnation of verses 9 to 12 of Chapter 32 is a condemnation of the idle and heedless materialists of this present time, when all their works and all their possessions and all their buildings and cities are crumbling before their eyes. They shall lament, he declares in verse 12, for the cattle-clad hills, for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine. To-day we see that word fulfilled, "They that have" are lamenting as

never before over the loss of their possessions and their privileges. Under this figure of a disintegrating city in which the buildings are falling down and Nature is moving in to cover the wreckage with quick growing undergrowth we have a vivid picture of the passing of twentieth century civilisation, and with that, the passing of the rule of man. "Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briers; yea, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city; because the palaces shall be forsaken; the multitude of the city shall be left: the forts and towers shall be for dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks." (vs. 12-13). Those who live in the cities of England had good cause fifteen years ago to know how quickly the ragged ruins of man's making become invested with the green of weeds and flowers and shrubs; in a matter of three or four years the derelict sites of bombed buildings in the heart of London became hidden beneath a tangle of self-sown vegetation and on occasion quite sizeable trees. That is Nature's return to the places from which man has ousted her to put up their own erections, erections which have no life in themselves and as soon as they crumble under the weight of man's own evil forces must give place to the vigorous, irresistible tide of life that sweeps from the places of fields and trees. The thorns and briers come first, yes, but Isaiah goes on to show that after the thorns and briers come the fruitful fields and the quiet arts of agriculture, and then God's earth will be as He intended from the first. But all that comes later on in the chapter.

The judgment that is proclaimed, then, is one that comes upon the world at the time of Christ's taking His kingdom and commencing His reign. In symbolic imagery the cities are destroyed, their buildings broken down, the scenes of gaiety and debauchery in the "houses of joy" brought to an end. The palaces are forsaken—what a toppling of thrones and a losing of crowns there has been in these last days, the "Day of His Preparation!" The forts and towers shall be for dens of wild animals—what revelation of impotency of each military weapon is made almost as soon as it has been invented, counter-weapon matched against each new device of military science. The whole world system is crumbling, and the world is becoming a place where thorns and briers are spreading quickly over the ruins that man has made himself. Even in a literal sense these things are true of the world's cities and areas that men inhabit; how much more true it is in a symbolic or a spiritual

sense of the world order that, as Peter says, is to pass away with a great noise! One of the finest passages in the whole of the Bible from a purely literary point of view is the one in which Isaiah's brother-prophet, Jeremiah, saw the same thing. "I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the Lord, and by his fierce anger." (Jer. 4. 23-26). "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness" the Apostle tells us, and although this crowning disaster to the work of humankind and this irretrievable ruin of men's systems of life and of government is entirely due to man's fault and altogether to man's adoption of the rule of selfishness it is nevertheless quite correctly described as a manifestation of the wrath of God—that God who loves the sinner while He hates the sin, and is working silently, patiently, and effectively to eliminate the sin so that He can receive the repentant and chastened sinner back into reconciliation with Himself and give to him his eternal inheritance.

This is where Isaiah moves on into that position also. Like the God he served, this far-sighted prophet of good tidings had no mind to proclaim woe and disaster without declaring the sequel. The thorns and briers were to come up, the palaces and fortresses to become ruins, the city to be abandoned and darkness cover the whole scene of desolation, but only for a time—"until" . . .

Until what?

"Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest." (vs. 15).

This is a "key" Scripture. The pouring out of the Spirit from on high, on all flesh, is pre-eminently a sign of the inauguration of the Kingdom. The ruins of the Time of Trouble are to lie waste only until that glad day has dawned and then a breath of new life will come upon the world. Here is where the natural picture of the exuberant life of the countryside invading the ruined city and clothing its broken brickwork with Nature's endless variety of form and colour has its application. The Millennial Age is essentially an age of verdant fields and fruitful trees and sparkling streams, and so soon as Armaged-

don is past, the sprawling ruins of man's making will give place to the all-conquering beauties of Divine creation. The wilderness shall become a fruitful field and the old broken-down palaces and fortresses be seen no more. "Is it not yet a very little while," asks Isaiah again (29. 17, 18), "and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest? And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness."

This pouring out of the Spirit from on high, resulting in the vivifying of the very soil so that Nature herself responds, is probably literally as well as spiritually true. The power of the Holy Spirit will without doubt be exercised creatively as it was at the first in bringing the earth itself to that degree of fruitfulness which will make it a fitting and adequate abode for the millions of redeemed humanity. That the Spirit does exert such power in the material creation is evidenced by the noble words of Psalm 104. 30, where, speaking of the living creatures of the earth, the animals and the birds and the fishes, the Psalmist says "thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created, and thou renewest the face of the earth". If that is true in this age of the earth's incompleteness, how much more in the day of its fulness!

Dr. Moffatt, in one of his rare flashes of insight, renders this passage in a very appealing manner. "Yet one day from the heights of heaven a spirit shall breathe into us, till the downs grow like an orchard, and the orchard like a forest." The whole picture is that of fruit-bearing trees rising up to take the places of the thorns and briars which at the first grew up over the ruins of the city, and then those fruitful trees growing so sturdy and luxuriant that they become as it were a veritable forest. This brings us very near to Ezekiel's vision of the trees of life growing on both sides of the river of life, and the constantly ripening fruit and evergreen leaves that are to be for the food and for the healing of the nations.

This is where righteousness is triumphant. "Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." (vs. 16-17). There is a contrast here. First there is the desolation of briars and thorns, the wreck of the old world, on which Divine judgment has come. Judgment is to remain on that wilderness. But that

same wilderness is to give place to an orchard of fruit trees, a "fruitful field", and in that fruit-bearing grove, that is the symbol of the new world, righteousness is to remain. The severity of God's judgment remains on the "wilderness" until that wilderness is wholly swallowed up by the "fruitful field" which is to replace it. So, quite rapidly, the wreckage of the old world will be cleared up and the institutions of the Millennial Age take its place, institutions that are built on equity and inspired by righteousness. Here it is that Millennial blessings begin to come to mankind in consequence of the work of the glorified Church. This is the point at which the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of the Father, and the beneficent influence of the reign of Christ begins to make itself felt in the earth. "The work of righteousness shall be peace." This word "work" is "maaseh," meaning the act of doing something. The ministrations of the "kings and priests" are here referred to; all that they do and all their activities are directed to the teaching and the education and the conversion to Christ of all mankind who can be induced to repentance. "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." (Dan. 12. 3). The effect of their endeavours will be peace—peace on earth and peace in the hearts of men, a complete fulfilment of the angels' Bethlehem song. That is stressed in the rest of the verse. "The effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever." Peace and security! They are the two great blessings for which mankind is constantly yearning. The avowed object of the "Welfare State" is to secure these two things for all its citizens but it does not succeed in producing either. Only the kingdom of Christ can do that. And, once secured, it will be for all eternity. "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." (Rev. 21. 4).

And now Isaiah looks out across the sunlit Millennial landscape and he sees a people, dwelling safely, and happy at last. The city has gone, utterly destroyed in that last time of human madness and Divine retribution, but "my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings and in quiet resting-places." (vs. 18). Says Moffatt again "my people shall have homes of peace, and rest in houses undisturbed." The promise elsewhere is that "they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards,

and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant; and another eat: for as the days of a tree" (of the tree of life—Septuagint) "are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands" (Isa. 65. 21-22). The picture is one of complete and unalloyed contentment.

It does seem as if the prophet is at pains to indicate the forsaking of city life for something far more closely in tune with Nature as the normal way of life in the Millennial Age. Here in this thirty-second chapter he sees the city destroyed and no indication of its resurrection; the redeemed multitudes are cultivating the arts of husbandry in a purely rural and agricultural setting. Somehow that seems appropriate; God surely never meant men to live crowded together in massed blocks of dwellings far from the fields and streams and flowers and trees. The Millennial Age must surely include among its many benefits a mighty "back to the land" movement. Instead of less than ten per cent of the world's population working the land and growing the food that every man must eat, as at present, all earth's citizens will most probably take their share in co-operating with Nature for the provision of all that is needful. The promise that every man will plant his own vine and fig-tree, and sit under them and himself eat the fruit of them, is most likely to have a truly literal fulfilment. The evils of modern industrial and commercial life have created the world's great cities; the end of that kind of life might well sound the death-knell of such creations and all the earth be made, as it was at the first, a garden.

Isaiah's story is nearly told. The Holy Spirit has but one further scene to show him, a scene that seems to be intended more particularly for those who, as faithful and devoted footstep followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, follow these visions with an eager desire to find their own position and duty clearly indicated. The prophet now sees a fierce storm of destroying hail coming down upon the earth, pattering upon the trees of the forest with a great noise, and finally crushing the ruined city, and such of its inhabitants as still remain, to the ground. At the same time—or, is it immediately the hailstorm has done its work, and ceased, and the sun is shining again—he beholds sowers, industriously scattering their seed in the water-sodden ground that has been softened by the storm waters, their oxen and asses treading the ground into soft mud in which the seed may quickly take

root and germinate. "When it shall hail, coming down on the forest, and the city shall be utterly abased (margin) blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass." (vs. 19-20).

That was a familiar sight in Israel. So soon as the winter storms of hail and rain had temporarily water-logged and softened the ground the oxen and asses were quickly sent out to trample the soil, and the seed was quickly sown. What did the picture mean to Isaiah? It could only mean that the crushing hail of Divine judgment upon the city was in God's economy a means of preparing the soil for a new sowing, and that the sowers would be ready. In his zeal and joy at the prospect Isaiah pronounced a blessing upon the sowers. But what does it mean in the reality? Nothing less than that in the outworking of the Divine plans, this tremendous judgment upon the nations which forms the prelude to the Millennial kingdom will itself be a means of preparing men's hearts for the ministry of the Word in the next Age, for that Millennial sowing that is to yield so glorious a harvest. And the sowers will be ready. They are waiting, even now, but the time for sowing is not yet. The ground has yet to be softened by the downrushing hail, but so soon as that has been accomplished the word will go forth "blessed are ye that sow beside all waters".

The sowers will go forth. They will by then have been gathered to be with their Lord and Head and be made like Him, to see Him as He is. They will have been presented faultless before the presence of the Father with exceeding joy. They will have participated in the marriage supper of the Lamb. Armed then with abundant power, enriched and fortified by their lives' experiences, by virtue of patient endurance having been made merciful and faithful and sympathetic "priests", they will come forth to commence the work of writing God's laws in the hearts of men, and converting them to turn from sin to serve the living God. That is the great object of the Millennial reign, to reconcile to God as many as will be reconciled, to save for His eternal kingdom on earth so many as will be saved, to fulfil, at last, the plan that started its slow but sure development so many thousands of years ago in Eden. Isaiah saw, plainly, the end of the story; he saw the "afterward of peace" which God has known all along He would achieve at last; it is a source of rare inspiration to us that he also was led to declare the blessedness of those who in this day and Age have been privileged beyond all measure in

receiving the call to be transformed by the renewing of their minds. Having been thus called, justified, sanctified, glorified, they will come forth in the end of days to sow beside all waters, and long enjoy the ultimate fruit-

age of their works in the sight of God's human sons dwelling in quietness and assurance for ever.

THE END

THE WHIP OF SMALL CORDS

A much misunderstood incident in our Lord's life is that recorded by John as occurring during the early stages of His ministry, the cleansing of the Temple. A similar incident also took place much later and this is recorded by the other three evangelists, but it is the one spoken about in John's Gospel which mentions the whip of small cords. The generally accepted impression is that Jesus, entering the Temple and finding it given over to all manner of merchant trading connected with the ritual sacrifices, made Himself a whip (more properly a flail or scourge) and drove out the traders by the use of sheer physical violence. This action, so contrary to the general tenor of His conduct and teaching, has been made the basis of argument to the effect that the Prince of Peace sanctioned the use of violence.

A brief study of the passage in question reveals the false premise upon which this conclusion rests. Jesus did not in fact assault the traders with His flail at all. He drove out the beasts—the cattle and sheep—and then returned to upset the money-changers' tables and utter those burning words of denunciation which caused the guilty men before Him to slink out of the Temple precincts, quailed and cowed under the fire of His indignation.

The A.V. is at fault in rendering the passage "*When He had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep and the oxen*" (Jno. 2; 15). The R.V. corrects this mis-translation "*He made a scourge of cords, and cast all out of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen.*" This rendering is confirmed by the majority of independent translators, as may be seen by the following examples.

"*All of them he thrust forth out of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen*" (Roth.).

"*So he drove all—both sheep and bullocks*" (Weymouth).

"*He drove them all, sheep and cattle together*" (Moffatt).

"*He cast all out of the sanctuary, the sheep as well as the oxen*" (Concordant).

The sheep and cattle were driven out, their owners being left to round them up as best they could; the money-changers, sitting to barter the pilgrims' coins, of all nations, for the Jewish coin in which alone the Temple tribute could be paid, grovelled on the ground seeking to recover their ill-gotten and scattered gains; while the sellers of doves for the very poor quickly carried their cages away as His piercing voice rang in their ears, "Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise."

The time was the Passover. Every orthodox Jew had within the past few days scrupulously searched his house for hidden leaven and anything else that might defile, and attended to his own ceremonial cleanliness that he might keep the Passover according to ritual. Now there appeared one Who took to Himself the role of a prophet in Israel and commanded men to cease from desecrating the Temple of their God, and with that inborn awe of a man who spoke to them in the name of God they hastened to remove themselves from the Court which they knew was defiled by their presence. The fact of Christ's indignation joined to their own knowledge that their conduct was indefensible, was sufficient to empty the Court of the Gentiles of its trafficking crowd, and it was not until after the occasion had passed and the cupidity of these men once again overcame their temporary confusion that they began to ask of Him a sign—a miracle—to establish His right to act as He had done in claiming the authority of a prophet in Israel.

It is true that we cannot all be intellectual giants, but many of those who want to serve their Lord seem content to do so in a "first-form" way, and then are surprised and hurt when the "sixth-formers" will not listen to them. Let us "give attendance to reading", for the Truth's own sake, for the sake of the generation to which we must witness, and for the sake of our own soul's growth and experience.

Bible School

THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES

Gen. 31-32

STUDY 5. JACOB'S FLIGHT. GEN 31-32

Jacob's return from Haran to Canaan is related in two sections; chapters 31-32 tell of his departure from Haran, the circumstances of his separation from the life which had been his for forty years, and chapters 33-34 the circumstances of his arrival in Canaan and taking up what in many respects was a new life there. Behind the entire narrative there is the background of the Divine promise and all that happens is related in some manner to the fulfilment of that promise. It cannot be said that the incidents of this part of Jacob's life are particularly worthy of admiration; some of them can very fairly be said to deserve the reverse, but what has to be realised here is that the entire narrative is intended to show how the vicissitudes and the mistakes, as well as the achievements and the triumphs, of ordinary men's lives were all being moulded in the Divine crucible to effect His ultimate purpose. That purpose was the creation of a nation which should serve as God's representative in the midst of a godless world for more than a thousand years and then become the medium by which Messiah came into the world.

From the purely natural viewpoint, the migration of Jacob was inevitable. By virtue of the arrangement he had made many years previously with his uncle and father-in-law Laban he had now become a prosperous cattle owner in his own right. He had his own separate establishment, apparently several days' journey from that of Laban, and a large retinue of servants besides his four wives and numerous children. From the empty-handed man who entered the land of Aram-Naharaim—the "Land of the Two Rivers"—forty years previously he had now become a typical Eastern Sheik, with all the somewhat barbaric trappings that normally went with that position. The land on which he pastured his flocks and herds was fertile but it is probable that space was getting a bit cramped and Laban's own sons, having an eye to their own needs for land as time went by, were manifesting their jealousy. So "Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not towards him as before".

It was at this juncture, chapter 31 tells us, that the Lord told Jacob to return to the land of his fathers. The cynic might observe that

the Divine injunction seems to have come at a time particularly convenient to Jacob; it might however be more fair to suggest that the disastrous results consequent on Jacob's handling of his own affairs in the past might by now have put him in the frame of mind to await God's leading before making any further major move. It is not probable that he was staying with Laban by personal preference; whatever his faults and whatever the attraction of the prosperity he was experiencing in the land, Jacob had already shown that he had valued the birthright and position of being God's anointed, and he knew well enough that the promise could only be fulfilled in the land of Canaan, never in an alien territory. So he must have been secretly longing for the day when he could return, and most likely the adverse and possibly hostile attitude of Laban's sons provided the indication he sought that it was time to make a move.

Once more the tortuous workings of Jacob's mind are shown up with brutal clarity. He had faith enough to believe that God was calling him to return to Canaan, God who had promised to be with him in all the way he might have to go, and yet he had not faith enough to tell Laban to his face that he was going and leave God to take care of Laban's possible wrath. He waited until Laban was occupied with the most important annual ceremony of all Eastern nomadic tribes, the time of sheep-shearing which was always an occasion of family gathering and feasting, and then quickly gathered in his scattered flocks and herds, dismantled his encampment, and set out on the long trek to the distant land of Canaan. The probable size of the caravan may be gauged from the present he sent his half-brother Esau on his arrival, as related in chapter 32; more than five hundred head of assorted beasts, with their attendants, constituted that present. Even if Jacob had thus sent his brother as much as five per cent of his total possessions, he must have been the owner of over ten thousand head of cattle. The labour force necessary to manage such herds and flocks must have been large, and those workers, with their wives and families, were all part of Jacob's establishment.

Three days after the migration commenced

Laban was apprised of the fact, and according to chapter 31. 23 pursued and caught up with Jacob in Mount Gilead after a "seven days journey". On the most moderate estimate Mount Gilead must have been over three hundred miles from Jacob's starting point; encumbered as he was with his flocks and herds he could not possibly have covered this distance in less than three weeks. It is probable that Laban awaited the completion of his sheep-shearing ceremonials and feasting before setting out. On the way he was warned of God in a dream to be careful in his dealings with Jacob and when at last he did catch up with the latter he referred to this fact, indicating the respect he had to God's directions. It would seem that Jacob need not have feared in the first place; again he involved himself in trouble and anxiety quite unnecessarily. Laban's acknowledgment of the true God was mixed with an element of idolatry; his daughter Rachel had stolen his family "images" (31. 19) called "*teraphim*" in the native language. These "*teraphim*" were statuettes of family ancestors used in ritualistic worship and serve to illustrate Joshua's allegation (Josh. 24. 2) to the effect that Abraham's and Laban's ancestors had "served other gods". These *teraphim* must have been handed down from father to son; Abraham on leaving Haran for Canaan would have had nothing to do with them and they remained in Laban's possession. Rachel, still semi-idolatrous in outlook, brought them with her believing that their possession would confer a blessing in the new life in Canaan. Laban searched for them and found them not; eventually they were destroyed by Jacob in his determination to root out idolatry from his household (35. 2).

So Laban and Jacob were reunited by the making of a covenant in Mount Gilead and the erection of a monument. Laban called upon the God of Abraham his uncle, Nahor his father, and Terah their joint father, to witness and judge. He seems to have developed a queer mixture of idolatry and true worship but he did at least acknowledge the authority of God and parted friends with Jacob, returning to his own land. Now Jacob had to face the unknown hazards of a land and people from which and from whom he had fled in fear forty years previously.

JACOB'S ENTRY INTO CANAAN.

GEN. 31. 32.

There is a remarkably strong element of the supernatural in the story of Jacob. In a perfectly prosaic and matter-of-fact fashion

the occasional intervention of God in the sequence of events is related just as though it were an everyday occurrence. In all there were seven such occasions, beginning with the celebrated ladder stretching to heaven with the Lord standing at its summit, when Jacob was on his way to Haran to seek a wife, and ending at the same spot more than forty years later when God changed Jacob's name to Israel and reiterated the promise of the covenant. It may justly be accepted that each of these visitations is the record of a profound spiritual experience in Jacob's life and the fact that he was able to hold such converse so many times with God should go further to assure us that notwithstanding Jacob's many and manifest weaknesses he was in fact a deeply religious and reverential man and did hold in high esteem the position he occupied in God's sight.

Chapter 31 opens with the fourth occasion of such Divine intervention. Laban and his retinue had returned home; Jacob was free to proceed without further apprehension from that quarter. The caravan was once more on the move, journeying more or less in a westerly direction from Gilead towards Jordan, beyond which lay their goal, the land of Canaan. At this juncture, we are told "*the angels of God met him*". The incident is not elaborated, and it is true that the word for "angels" could refer equally to human as to celestial messengers. Jacob's comment "*This is God's host*", however, seems to indicate that, either in vision or in reality, the journeying caravan was met and perhaps escorted for a while by a numerous company easily recognisable as angelic beings, celestial visitants appearing as men, but in an aura of splendour and glory which testified to their other-worldly origin. No explanation is vouchsafed as to the purpose of this visitation. Jacob called the spot at which it occurred "*Mahanaim*" which merely means the Two Hosts; he probably referred to the host of his own followers on the one hand and the host of angels on the other. It might well be that by this means God was giving to Jacob a kind of royal welcome to his new home, the land in which the promise of the covenant resided, and an assurance that the forces of heaven were at hand to defend him from any foe that might lift up weapon against him. He left Canaan alone, penniless and with only the promise of God to support him. He returned with a family, a retinue of servants, wealth and possessions, and was welcomed back by a company of angels. That is probably how

Jacob was intended to interpret this happening.

But if so, his faith soon failed again. He had despatched messengers in advance to inform his brother Esau of his return, and the messengers returned in haste with the news that Esau himself, with four hundred men, was on his way to meet him. The news put Jacob into a state of panic; he immediately assumed the worst, that Esau was coming to execute long-cherished revenge. "Greatly afraid and distressed" he came to God in supplication for deliverance, a prayer which is the first intimation in the story of his life of any kind of real heart-searching on Jacob's part. "I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shown to thy servant." It was now that he prepared his present of some five hundred assorted beasts and sent them in advance in the hope that this quite handsome gift would be accepted by Esau as an appeasement and avert any intended hostility. Having despatched what appears to be five separate droves, spaced in such a fashion as to produce the maximum impression upon Esau as they arrived one after another, he next sent his household, his wives and his children, forward, and remained alone, evidently feeling, at last, the need for some quiet communion with God.

This is when Jacob entered into what reads in the account as the strangest and most inexplicable incident in his chequered life. Jacob, left alone, found himself wrestling with a stranger, a conflict which lasted all night, until dawn broke. The stranger had already partially crippled Jacob, but with grim tenacity he held on, for he recognised that his adversary was more than human, and he knew that some mystic purpose of God, some message for himself, was hidden in this happening, and he refused to let go his grasp until the mysterious stranger had conferred a blessing. So, eventually, he had his way, and his antagonist told him that he had struggled, not with a man, but with God, and had gotten the victory, and because of that victory would no longer be called Jacob—the supplanter—but Israel, the prince of God. So he left him, and Jacob, realising the importance of the thing that had happened to him, called the place *Peniel*, the "face of God", for, he said "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved".

From this time forward Jacob takes on a new nobility, a quieter trust in God, and no longer manifests the somewhat shifty manner

of conducting his affairs which undeniably does characterise his earlier life. From now on he is definitely much more God's man, giving evidence of a much deeper understanding of the Divine purpose at work in his life and his affairs. He is no longer afraid of his brother Esau; it might be said with some justice that at last Jacob had grown up.

The nature of the incident is difficult to appraise. The stranger who wrestled with Jacob was certainly a visitant from heaven, appearing as a man and certainly possessing the physical strength of a man. The implication in 32, 28 and 32, 30 that Jacob was contending in a literal sense with God Himself means only, of course, that the individual who opposed him was there as the representative and emissary of God. It is sometimes suggested that this occasion was in fact one of the theophanies of the Word of God, an occasion when the One who afterwards appeared on earth as the Lord Jesus Christ did actually appear as God in concrete form, visible and perceptible to the man facing him, so that so far as Jacob was concerned God was manifest to him in the human form standing before him. There is not much point into going into such detail; the plain fact is that an appearance from heaven, resolved into human form, did wrestle with Jacob in such a manner that Jacob was able to delay his departure until he had given a blessing; at the very least that pictures how Jacob at last was induced to come to grips with the constraining and directing purpose of God and decide for himself that he would of his own volition hold fast to it and never let go. Perhaps it was here that he faced up to the fact that he could not expect to have God doing everything for him all his life; a time had come when he would as it were stand on his own feet and exercise faith and trust in God, and go forward in the power and strength of his own convictions.

(To be continued)

The truth of the thing is only one of the tests to which it must be put. We may find a matter to be true and yet not find it to be worthy of our thought, dishonorable. Who does not know that there are dishonorable and dishonoring thoughts, the pondering of which not only wastes valuable time, but instead of bringing a reward, a blessing for the time spent upon them, entails a loss, a disadvantage, in that it leaves a dishonorable stain in our minds, unworthy of us as new creatures in Christ Jesus?

JESUS AND THE LIFE TO COME

Part 2

The teaching of Christ
on the future life

That cryptic remark of Jesus in Matt. 11. 11 is a pointer to the whole of New Testament teaching regarding the life to come. "*Among men that are born of women, there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist; nevertheless he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.*" There is one other verse in the New Testament which has a similar ring and enshrines the same principle. Speaking of the ancient heroes of faith of Old Testament times, those who sealed their faithfulness with their death, the writer to the Hebrews says (11. 39, 40) "*These all, having received a good report through faith, received not the promise; God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.*" In both those texts, as in so much of New Testament teaching, there resides the principle of a dual salvation—a salvation first for Christian disciples of this present Age, the span of time between the two Advents, the time for the selection and perfecting of Christ's Church "which is His Body", and a second salvation for those, of whatever Age in human history, who do not attain a position among the saints who shall judge the world (1 Cor. 6. 2) but do eventually accept Christ. Only thus can be understood the many scriptures which picture one company of saved and glorified believers, reigning with Christ over a second company, a world of men who are as yet unreconciled to him when Christ's Kingdom on earth is established and world sovereignty passes from the rulership of this world to the rulership of Christ. (Rev. 11. 15).

The "kingdom of heaven" of Matt. 11. 11 is clearly not intended to include all who are eventually to be saved. If the least in that kingdom is greater than John the Baptist then logically John has no part nor lot in that phase of God's kingdom. That is in keeping with the fact that both John and Jesus preached the kingdom of heaven as at hand, not already in being, and that St. Peter was given the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16. 19) as though it was by his instrumentality the kingdom was to be opened to believers. So in fact it was. "*The law and the prophets were until John*" said Jesus "*Since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.*" (Luke 16. 16). There is a sharp distinction here between the

avenue by which men approach to God before the Advent of Jesus and that avenue which was opened afterwards. Abraham and others in patriarchal times believed God and had faith in God and their faith was imputed to them for righteousness (Rom. 4); the Israelites under their Covenant with God, made and ratified at Sinai, achieved a ritualistic righteousness which gave them a standing before God; none who came to God were turned away and all such entered into a form of relationship with God, but none such could at that time be reconciled to God in the only manner which can ensure man's eternal life because the basis of reconciliation did not as yet exist. After the death and ascension of our Lord and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the waiting believers there was opened a "new and living way" (Heb. 10. 20) which is available only to those who by reason of an intelligent grasp of the invitation to be dead with Christ have been buried with Him by baptism into His death.

It is this latter feature of the Christian calling which illuminates such words of Jesus as "*Strait is the gate, and narrow the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*" (Matt. 7. 14). "*Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able when once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door. . . .*" (Luke 13. 24-25). It is a misconception of the Divine purpose to suppose that these words imply the irrevocable loss of salvation for the vast majority of humankind, even though such is the logical conclusion if they be held to apply to the entire scheme of salvation instead of only a part. The Lucan text contains within itself the rebuttal of this misapprehension, for the Lord goes on to describe those thus excluded as appealing for admittance and admitting His position as Lord. They claim to have feasted in His presence and to have listened to His teaching; nevertheless He knows them not and they are bidden depart. It is inconceivable that the Lord Christ would cut off from all further opportunity of reconciliation those who, despite their past failures, manifested at least this amount of desire to enter His presence. The parable of the Prodigal Son is of itself sufficient to assure us of that. We must conclude therefore that these who have

been shut out of the kingdom have been found unworthy of the highest honour, that of entry into the assembly of "called, chosen and faithful" of this Age who are to reign in association with Christ over the nations in the day of the Church's triumph but, providing they are rightly exercised by their failure, they find their place in the second company of the saved. Instead of becoming rulers in the kingdom they stand as subjects of the kingdom.

Thus Jesus declared at the conclusion of the Parable of the Wheat and Tares "then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." (Matt. 13. 43). This is the revelation of the Church in glory to mankind as yet unreconciled, the time when the Church's humiliation is turned into triumph and she begins her destined work of making known the glory of the Lord in all the earth. This is the time when is realised the fulfilment of the Lord's own prayer. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as in heaven." At the Last Supper the disciples heard Jesus telling them that He would not again drink with them of the fruit of the vine until the day that He would drink it new with them in the Kingdom of God. That promise looked forward to a future day when they would be associated with Him, never to be parted.

The teaching of Jesus insofar as His call to personal discipleship is concerned needs to be

differentiated from His declarations regarding the ultimate purpose of God for human salvation. The present call, as it was at the First Advent and has been ever since, is to a life of complete consecration, dedication, to the service of God both in preaching the Gospel in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and in personal submission to the Will of God in being conformed to Christ-likeness and in the fellowship of His sufferings. "As he is, so are we in this world." (1 John 4. 17). But this is not a mere preparation of saints for Heaven, a kind of preliminary grooming for the fellowship of angels. There is purpose in the calling and preparation and perfecting of Christ's disciples, a future work which has much to do with the Divine intention respecting mankind. To all those scripture texts and all those sayings of Jesus Christ which speak of the Christian calling and the Christian life which culminate in the triumphal entry into Heaven must be added those which tell in no uncertain terms of the purpose—or at any rate one of the purposes, and the immediate purpose—for which God has selected and fashioned this exalted company of Christ's disciples to become His associates. To the fruits of His First Advent must also be added the fruits of His Second Advent before the tale of salvation is complete.

(To be continued)

THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE SAY COME

Thoughts on a well-known text

"The Spirit and the Bride say 'Come'." (Rev. 22. 17).

Why the Spirit and the Bride? Would it not seem more appropriate for the Son and His Bride to issue the invitation? The Lord Jesus Christ is the King of that Age, and the Bride is associated with Him as joint-heir in the Kingdom! Why then is it the Spirit that in the Book of Revelation is associated in the invitation to life?

No word of Scripture was put in its place lightly. The expression must have been framed in that way because the truth of the matter is best expressed that way: such is the only logical conclusion.

Knowing, as we do, the perfect unity and harmony of purpose existing between the Father and the Son, and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both, we can be sure that there

is no disharmony here with our understanding that our Lord is the "Everlasting Father" of the Millennial Age (Isa. 9. 6). The Holy Spirit is as it were the vehicle of the King's invitation to accept life and the only question before us is why the Spirit is said to issue the invitation rather than the Lord.

Maybe the answer is related to the fact that this verse deals with the creating of new life. Those who hear and accept the call to the waters of life do thereby have planted within them a new life. The old Adamic life was lost at death. The awaking to conscious existence at the commencement of the Millennium is not really the enduring life that God has promised to all who come into harmony with Him; it is a life which still has much of death in it. The awakened ones are under the protection and care of the Mediator; their life

depends entirely upon Him for they are still imperfect and unable to keep the Divine Law in its fulness. They have been awarded a measure of conscious existence for a limited period—the thousand years—the while they have the opportunity to become reconciled to God and accept whole-heartedly the conditions of eternal life. Only after they have been awakened can they hear the invitation and commence to take the living waters. The work of the Spirit therefore comes after the first work of the Mediator in raising men from the dead.

It seems that in the Scriptures the imparting or creating of new life is pictured as being the work of the Holy Spirit. In the very first chapter of the Bible, and the very first activity of recorded history, we find that the agency which is at work is the Holy Spirit. *"The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, and God said 'Let there be light' and there was light"* (Gen. 1. 2-3). It is fairly plain that we are expected to read the whole of the ensuing account of creation as though God was represented on the primitive earth by His Holy Spirit, executing all the works that had to be done in accordance with His Divine command. The important factor in this view is that the creation story is the story of newly created life. Of the history of life and living beings before this earth came into existence, before Genesis 1, we know little. We know only that there were angels, spiritual beings dwelling in the presence of God, but we know nothing else. Genesis 1 introduces us immediately to the creation of life on this material earth—first vegetable, then animal, finally man. And all this was the work of the Spirit. It has long been a puzzle to scientists how life originated upon earth. They have hazarded various guesses, some thinking that there are "spores" of life floating through space and that some of these settled upon earth and took root—and then evolution did the rest. Others think that some accidental combination of chemical substances produced a reaction which became living—and again evolution did the rest. But all of this is guesswork and none of them claim really to know. The truth, of course, is that life on this earth was introduced by the Holy Spirit of God, and on its onward progress and differentiation into all its myriads of forms has been guided and controlled by that Spirit. The first living creatures of recognisable form to appear upon earth, as far as can be ascertained from the fossil remains, were queer little swimming things something like wood lice, called trilo-

bites. But queer as they were, even repulsive as they would appear to many people if met with today, they were the work of the Holy Spirit, an earnest of a future time when the earth shall be full of happy human sons of God rejoicing in all that Divine Wisdom and Love has provided for them.

That brief glimpse of the Holy Spirit at work, then, shows us a world on which new life had been created. From thence onward, through immeasurably long ages, that life developed and multiplied along what we call natural lines, generation succeeding generation, individuals born according to the natural laws God instituted for the purpose, until in the fulness of time the Holy Spirit introduced another new life into the world, a life owing nothing of its vitality to the life that already existed in the world even although it was clothed upon with a form that was of this earth.

"The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee", said the heavenly messenger to Mary, *"and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy one that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God"* (Luke 1. 35).

The Son existed with the Father from before the world was (Prov. 8. 23). Now He was to lay aside that glory which He had, that He might be made man, for the suffering of death, that fallen man might be redeemed from death. No power other than the power of His Father could effect that transfer of His conscious life from heavenly conditions and a spiritual body to earthly conditions and a material body. The words of the angel reveal to us how the incomprehensible power of God, His Holy Spirit, came upon the handmaid of the Lord and effected His purpose. The "Word" had been made flesh (John 1. 14) and in due time men saw His glory, the glory as of the Son of God revealed to the sight of men.

It was not long afterwards that new life of another kind came to be conferred upon men. The Day of Pentecost had dawned and a company of earnest followers of the Master were gathered in an upper room. The story is very familiar to us all, but it is not the outward manifestation of the Holy Spirit's coming, nor yet the miraculous gifts that were bestowed, of which we speak at this time. These things were important and had their place in the later experiences and work of those believers. But a more vital thing took place at that same time, not outwardly manifest as were the tongues of fire and the supernatural gifts, but

something of supreme importance. They all, at that moment, were "born again". Jesus had told Nicodemus about the necessity of being born again in order to inherit the Kingdom of God and Nicodemus had completely failed to understand Him. For the first time in the history of the world, here in this upper room on this Day of Pentecost, human beings were "born again". By the operation of the Holy Spirit there had been an infusion of new life not derived from human life that already existed. These believers experienced the implanting within them of a new and spiritual life which would ultimately attain its full development in a spiritual body in the "First Resurrection". The relation of this new life to the old Adamic life—which was imperfect and doomed to extinction anyway—is not something that we can define with certainty. As human beings we go on living after our "new birth" much as we did before. The same life processes continue to function and we have the same consciousness of existence and the same identity. But there is something new. "If any man be in Christ" says Paul in 2 Cor. 5. 17 "there is a new creation"—a newly created thing. We have to bear in mind the New Testament insistence that he who believes on the Son *hath*—present tense—eternal (*aionian*) life, and although at times some try to minimise the direct nature of those words and make it a prospective eternal life only, there can be little doubt that Jesus did mean His disciples to understand that in some very real sense they would become possessed of a new life quality on that day when the Holy Spirit entered into them. Probably we do well not to define our terms too dogmatically but to accept quite literally the Scripture statements. "If Christ be in you, the body is dead as to sin, but the Spirit is life as to righteousness. If the Spirit (of God) . . . dwell in you. He . . . shall also quicken (give new life to) your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8. 10-11). In some wonderful way that we cannot at present understand and therefore must not be too dogmatic about, the Holy Spirit is operating in our bodies and lives to give us a life force and a power which enables us to see things and do things that as natural men, having only the powers of life inherited from father Adam, we could never hope to do.

Once more in the world's history the Spirit comes to bring new life. The scene is this earth; the time the Millennial Age. Once more Adamic life has proved insufficient. Once more there must come life from above

to constitute ransomed men and women sons of God. Here is where an old question comes to the front again. Do humanity in that Age receive their life from the Lord Christ or from the Father; are they children of Christ or children of God? The Scriptures certainly speak of it both ways. Jesus spoke of men who "eat His flesh" in order to obtain life; without that, He said, they could have no life in them. (Jno. 6. 53). "*Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children*" says the Psalmist in Psa. 45, addressing the King and the Bride. Yet Rev. 21. 7 declares that overcomers of the Millennial Age will be sons of God, and Rom. 8. 21 assumes the same position. Perhaps the answer to the apparent disharmony is that which answers so many questions touching the relationship between the Father and the Son, that they are so absolute a unity in all that concerns all creation that what is true of one is also true of the other. The Holy Spirit is the vehicle of all that proceeds from the Father and the Son and whether we picture life as coming *from* the Father, or *from* the Son, it must of necessity be *by* the Holy Spirit. In such case the phrase in Rev. 22. 17 becomes not only understandable, but the best that could possibly be chosen. The Bride is associated not only with Jesus the Christ, but also with God the Father, in sending out the invitation to all men to come and receive of the life that is offered. With perfect propriety, therefore, it is, not the King and His Bride who say "Come", not the Father and the Church who say "Come", but the Holy Spirit and the Bride who are the agencies, or instruments, of that life which, issuing from Father and Son, will quicken the human bodies of all who accept and obey the laws of the Kingdom. Sustained into all eternity by the life which thus comes from God, they will receive and enjoy the inheritance which God prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

There is only one way to live in peace—it is by leaving to-morrow in the hands of God, and faithfully serving Him to-day. Faithfulness to-day is the best preparation for to-morrow. Protect to-morrow by faithful living to-day. We may not boast of to-morrow, but we may boast of God who will take care of the morrow. Faith never boasts about the coming days, but faith rests in God who governs them.

THE PARABLES OF THE SOWERS

Mark 4. 3-32

There are really four parables of the Sowers, each presenting a different aspect of the theme and each illustrating a distinct phase of the development in human life and history of the Kingdom of God. Perhaps the most familiar is that usually known as the Parable of the Sower, recorded in the three synoptic Gospels (Matt. 13. 3-8, Mark 4. 3-8, Luke 8. 5-8) in practically identical terms. This is the one in which the seed falls on four kinds of ground and prospers or suffers accordingly. There is also the Parable of the Growing Seed in which a man casts seed into the ground and watches its slow development into ripened grain ready for the reaper, preserved only by St. Mark (Mark 4. 26-29). Then there is the Parable of the Mustard Seed, a single minute seed sown into the ground and producing at last the greatest of all trees (Matt. 13. 31-32, Mark 4. 30-32, Luke 12. 18-19). And lastly there is the Parable of the Wheat and Tares, sown respectively by the Goodman and the Enemy and allowed to grow together until the harvest, when the inevitable separation takes place (Matt. 13. 24-43). Viewed as four separate pictures, yet taken as intended to be complementary, each to the others, it can be seen that there is a dispensational element in their interpretation besides the usually tacitly accepted personal application.

The Parable of the Sower (Mark 4. 3-8) is quite evidently intended to illustrate the various degrees of receptiveness to the Gospel message displayed by different hearers. Here is the reaction of every man who evinces any appreciation of the Word of God and the appeal of Jesus Christ whatever. Here are the varied results of the lodgment of the seed of righteousness in the hearts of men. This parable is fulfilled over and over again in every generation from Pentecost until the present. This is not a dispensational parable: it is the story of the innermost workings of the mind and heart of every one who gives heed, if only for a moment, to the message of the Gospel.

The Parable of the Growing Seed (Mark 4. 26-29) takes us a step further. Here the seed has fallen on good ground and grows—silently, unobtrusively, but steadily—through all the stages of development until at length the

ripened grain stands ready and waiting for the reaper. As such the picture is merely identical with that of the seed sown in good ground in the former parable, for that too attained full maturity and brought forth fruit, even to a hundredfold. But there is one other element in the second parable; the sickle is put in "because the harvest is come". This is not one solitary seed, one individual who has made the Gospel his own and brought forth fruit unto righteousness. This is a field of wheat, and the time has come to clear the field. There is a dispensational aspect here; at the end of this Christian Age the work of the Sower during the Age comes to an end and in His capacity as Chief Reaper He comes forth to gather that which is His own and—although this is not in the parable—prepare His field for His next work.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed gives us a brief—a tantalisingly brief—glimpse of the wider canvas. One seed only is sown, and that, from the human point of view, the most minute and insignificant of all seeds. But it grows into the greatest of all trees so that it gives shelter to all creation. That, said Jesus quite plainly, is a figure of the Kingdom of God. From an insignificant beginning it becomes universal in extent and power.

The Parable of the Wheat and Tares constitutes the most comprehensive dispensational picture of all four parables. Here is enshrined the history of God's entire purpose. Here is the age-old conflict between Christ and Satan. The good seed is sown but almost at once the Enemy sows tares. The two grow together until the time of reaping but then they are separated, and the separation is both right and final. The wheat is assigned to its intended place, the tares are destroyed—and the purpose of God is vindicated. As a dispensational picture this parable must cover all that time during which the struggle between truth and error, between Christ and Satan, for the souls of men, is going on. And the parable shows the outcome.

In a sense, then, the Parable of the Wheat and Tares covers the whole of the ground covered by the three other parables and relates the individual, the communal and the universal aspects of the Gospel message to the whole of God's workings in human history to

achieve His intended purpose. As such the Parable of the Wheat and Tares requires separate treatment as a parable in its own right; the remaining three are best appreciated when viewed together.

"*There went out a sower to sow*" (Mark 4: 3). A simple approach but how direct. The entire vision is flashed as in a moment on the screen, and we see the wide, ploughed field awaiting the seed, the pathway skirting its borders, the line of rocky boulders and large pebbles, cleared from the field, lining the pathway in ragged profusion, and the sower himself, striding along the narrow track, his hand already in the capacious bag of seed slung across his shoulders. "*There went out a sower to sow.*" His methods were not as the methods of to-day. To and fro across the field he must needs walk, scattering the seed handful after handful, trusting to wind and rain to spread it evenly and bed it down into the soft ground.

But as he walked along the edge of the field the wind carried the seed across the hard, beaten pathway he had just left, and there it lay, bleaching in the sun. He went on his way, and the flocks of birds, watching from a safe distance, swooped down quickly on that pathway and quickly devoured every visible shining grain before the return of the sower caused them rapidly to take flight and settle on the trees bordering the field, watching.

Now he was coming back, a little farther from the path this time, but even so, much of the seed fell among the piles of rocks and boulders which separated path from field. It was safe enough there in the nooks and crannies; the birds were unable to reach it, and there was a certain amount of soil and moisture which allowed the seed to germinate and grow. But later on, as the green stems began to show above the pieces of rock, the fierce heat of the sun dried up what moisture there was and the tender green shrivelled up and vanished away, for there was nothing in which the roots could spread and find sustenance.

Turning the corner of the field, the sower trampled over a patch of weeds and thorny scrub. Unheedingly, he scattered his seed over that patch and it germinated and grew, strong and healthy at first. But the weeds and thorns grew too, and faster and stronger than the wheat, and soon there could be seen only a few pallid fruitless stalks half-hidden among the fast spreading thorns.

And now the sower was well into the field, his strong hands flinging handful after hand-

ful of seed over the soft, yielding soil, where it would lie and germinate, and grow stronger and taller, receiving nourishment from the soil along with the benefit of sun and rain, until at last it stood, proudly erect, a golden glory awaiting the coming of the reaper.

It seems very strange that the twelve should ask of Jesus the meaning of the parable; it seems so transparently clear to us. Perhaps, though, the explanation, given in answer to their question and recorded by the three Evangelists, is so much more impressed upon our minds by reason of its appearance in the record.

The word of God falls on the ears of some, said Jesus, but leaves no lasting impression. Idle it lies, finding no real lodgment, no vibrating chord, until Satan, the arch-deceiver, by one of the many means at his disposal obliterates the transient impression which had been made and it is as if the word had never been spoken at all. Like Israel in the days of Ezekiel "*Thou art unto them a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and that can play well upon an instrument, for they hear thy words, but they do them not*". The word spoken has vanished as surely as did the seed on the pathway after the birds had swooped.

Others there are who receive the same word with every manifestation of appreciation and gladness. "This is what we were looking for" say they, and for a while they are very vocal in their expressions of joy and appreciation. But presently there is difficulty, opposition or persecution. Perchance they become disappointed or impatient. Things are not as they expected; the test of time finds them out; the life of consecration to God's service is too narrow, too onerous. It involves giving up things they do not wish to give up. They are like the man who, having put his hand to the plough, looked back, and so manifested his unfitness for the Kingdom of God. These, then, like the seed falling upon the rocks, endure for a time, but when the sun's heat beats upon them, they wilt and vanish away.

Then there are those who attain a more advanced position than this. More resolute, more determined, they are not easily turned aside by opposition or persecution. They ride over the disappointments and the disillusionments and become pillars of strength in the Christian community, and as the years pass by it seems impossible that they could ever fall away. Yet they do fall away. Some meet with success in business and become wealthy in the riches of this world; some attain high

honour among men; some have their attention distracted by other aims and pursuits and interests. Imperceptibly at first, but none the less surely, their progress in the things of the spirit slows, and stops, and so they become progressively surrounded and hidden by those interests of this world upon which their hearts have become set, and so, at last, they are seen no more.

But there are still those who not only hear the word, and receive it into sincere hearts, and allow the Spirit to do its great work, but throughout life, be it short or long, remain faithful to their covenant with God, in steadfast faith looking unto Jesus who is not only the Author but also the Finisher of their faith. These survive all the vicissitudes of storm and tempest, the gales of wind and the crushing hail, by virtue of their strong roots penetrating far down into the good soil and taking firm hold thereof, their long, shapely leaves reaching up into the air to receive the sun and rain which is God's gift, attaining at the last that full-fruited maturity which the Apostle Paul in Ephesians calls "*the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*" (Eph. 4. 13).

This is the end of this parable. There is no question of reaping or harvest here. The end is reached when the sown grain has reached the stage of bringing forth fruit, thirty, sixty, a hundredfold, it matters not. After the full cycle of development has been traversed, the sowing of the seed of the Word has brought forth its fruit in the life of the individual, and that individual is ready for God's purpose.

This is where the second parable, that of the growing seed, has its place. This time Jesus is talking of the Kingdom of God, and that means He is taking our thoughts away from the individual. But He is still concerned with the individuals who collectively constitute that Kingdom, or, perhaps more properly, one phase of that Kingdom, the heavenly phase. "*So is the Kingdom of God*" He said "*as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.*" (Mark 4. 26-29). Now so far as the sowing aspect of this parable is concerned, the picture is identical with that of the seed falling on good ground in the previous parable. But there is a difference of standpoint. The

emphasis here is on the harvest, which involves the picture of a field that is standing ready for the reaping. There has been a progressive development "*first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.*" The seed was sown by Christ and His Apostles at the beginning of the Age. It went on being sown by the Apostles' successors after they themselves had "fallen asleep" in death. So men rose up and slept in turn but the sowing continued. So did the growth; from the earliest times men and women in whose hearts the seed had been received made continuous increase in the things of the Spirit and brought forth the Spirit's fruits. At the last, when this Age has come to its close, the harvest of the Age will have been fully reaped; there will be a fruitage of this sowing giving glory to God. "*The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready*" says the Revelator of this same thing (Rev. 19. 7). A more apposite picture of this consummation is to be found in the fourteenth chapter of Revelation, where John sees One coming on a white cloud to reap the harvest of the earth—a manifest picture of our Lord in the majesty and power of His Second Advent for the resurrection to immortal life of those His faithful who "sleep in Jesus" or may be waiting for his appearing, preparatory to His open manifestation to all men. It is that phase of the Kingdom of God which this parable can be made to picture, the development of the Church, the Body of Christ, during this Age and Her exaltation to heavenly glory at its close that they might be a fitting instrument in God's hand for the evangelisation of the world during the next, the Messianic Age.

That is where the third parable, that of the Mustard Seed, has its place. Again Jesus seeks a simile with which to illustrate the Kingdom of God. He chose the mustard seed, small and minute, sown in the earth and growing up to become greater than any plant, then shooting out great branches, so that it becomes a mighty tree, indeed the largest of all trees, giving shelter and a home to numbers of living creatures. There is such a similarity of thought between this parable and the vision of Daniel's prophecy in which the stone that destroyed the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth (Dan. 2. 35) that one is justified in concluding they might very possibly refer to the same thing. In both cases there is the idea of that ultimate extension of God's Kingdom over all the earth so that all men come under its power and

administration. That implies a time when "all that hath breath shall praise the Lord" which in turn involves the repentance and conversion of "whosoever will" (Rev. 22, 17) and the final condemnation of those who will not accept Christ. The mustard tree will have reached its final development and become the home and the shelter for all living creatures in the day that the last unrepentant and irreclaimable sinner loses the life of which he can make no proper use, and sin and evil have departed for ever from God's creation. "Whereunto shall we liken the Kingdom of

God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?" asked Jesus. God's universal Kingdom, the heavenly and the earthly phases together, is likened to the Mustard Tree—commencing as a minute seed on the Day of Pentecost, and spreading its great branches in full maturity over all the earth and through all the heavens at the end of the Messianic Age, when is fulfilled the foreview of St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, "then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father . . . that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15. 24).

A MERCIFUL AND FAITHFUL HIGH PRIEST

A study in the Book of Hebrews

The Book of Hebrews is a book of contrasts. In Hebrews 5, 6-11 we have one of these contrasts in which Christ is set forth as the priest greater than Aaron, a "priest after the order of Melchisedek". This latter is a quotation from Psalm 110, verse 4, which reads "The Lord hath sworn and will not repent, Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedek", following verse 1, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool". Quite obviously, therefore, this Psalm refers to Christ, after His resurrection and ascension to the Father's right hand. The same period is referred to in Hebrews, Chapter 1, verse 6 "And let all the angels of God worship Him". (Psalm 97. 7). We would recall that when Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees, He took the very words of this Psalm and applied them to Himself (Matt. 22, 42-46). "What think ye of Christ, whose Son is He; they say unto Him, the Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in Spirit call Him Lord, saying 'The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on my right hand till I make thine enemies thy footstool'?" The whole of the seventh chapter deals with the contrast between Aaron, the High Priest of the Levitical order, and Christ as the Melchisedek priest; here the writer deals with how Christ qualified to become this great priest and king: Verse 7:—"Who in the days of His flesh when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared".

"In the days of His flesh!" This refers to Christ's earthly life when He was here among

men, and in particular to that period when His development as the future Priest was in process, between Jordan and Calvary. From beginning to end, His life was one of prayer; He spent all night in prayer, we are told, on many occasions. Prayer is many sided; it is worship and adoration, communion and fellowship, petition and supplication and intercession. Jesus often supplicated the Father on behalf of others, but we have only the one record of supplicating on behalf of Himself, which would suggest that this verse is specially applicable to the agony He was passing through in Gethsemane, when, as it says, "with strong cryings and tears" He prayed to the Father that if it were possible this cup might pass from Him. Just how strong was this crying, we cannot know, but an idea is given when it says that "His sweat was as it were great drops of blood". "Unto Him that was able to save Him from death"; the Diaglott, Weymouth and the Concordant all render this "out of death", and this seems more understandable, for Christ did not ask the Father to save Him from death. The whole object of His coming to this earth and becoming bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, was that He might go into death, and pay the penalty for sin, and thus release Adam and all His race from the dreadful consequences of sin, namely, death. The fate of the whole human family rested on Him, and the question would arise in His mind, "Have I been faithful in carrying out the Father's will, so that I may be able thus to redeem the race?" According to the Book of Revelation, up till that time no one had been found worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof.

Three times we are told by Matthew that He prayed the same words "O my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt".

Thus before He prayed thus, He spoke to the three disciples, Peter, James and John, saying "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death". So He well knew that death was before Him. Luke, alone of the evangelists, records the dreadful agony that He passed through in the garden of Gethsemane, when the account says "And being in an agony He prayed the more earnestly, and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground". None of the Gospels record that He shed tears at this particular time, though it is quite possible and reasonable to think that He did. There are only two recorded instances of Jesus weeping; the one at the grave of Lazarus, and the other when He wept over Jerusalem. Tears as a rule come as a relief when one is in great distress of mind, so if He wept in Gethsemane, it would only be natural.

"Unto Him who was able to save Him out of death." We know that death could not hold Him as it holds the human family, except in the sense that He was the substitute for Adam, for He who knew no sin was made the sin-bearer for Adam and all in him. So He had to commit His cause, and life itself, into the hands of His Father, who alone was able to raise Him out of death. We read in Ephesians 1. 19 that it took the mighty power of God to raise Christ from the dead and set Him at His own right hand. So on the cross; "When Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said 'Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit'."

Low in the grave He lay, Jesus my Saviour,

Waiting the coming day, Jesus my Lord.

Death cannot keep his prey, Jesus my

Saviour,

God tore the bars away, for Jesus my

Lord.

Up from the grave He arose,

With a mighty triumph o'er His foes,

He arose a victor from the dark domain,

And He lives forever with His saints to

reign.

He arose, He arose, Hallelujah, Christ arose.

"And was heard in that He feared" or "for His piety" as the margin of the Authorised Version has it. The Diaglott renders "And was heard for his devotion", and Moffatt "He was heard because of His godly fear". There are a number of other different interpretations of this sentence, which makes it rather difficult to explain. That He was heard is

evident. Luke alone tells us that "there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him". At the grave of Lazarus, Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard me, and I know that Thou hearest me always". It is one thing to have our prayer heard by God, and another thing to have it answered in the way that we desire. The important thing is that, like Jesus, we say from the heart "Not my will, but thine, be done". There was a great deal included in that prayer to His Father. That He was to die He knew, but was death not enough, He might reason, to pay the ransom price, without all the dreadful suffering of mind and body that was attached to such a painful death as that of the cross; was it necessary that He bear all that terrible ignominy, and all that lay between Gethsemane and Calvary, the mocking, the spitting, the crown of thorns so cruel and painful, the nails in His hands and feet, and the spear wound in His side, an exhibition to all who passed by; and besides, the denial of Peter with curses, the forsaking by all the disciples, and the betrayal by one? All these trials must have weighed heavily upon Him, for, being a perfect man, He would feel these things much more than an imperfect individual. If He visualised all He had to go through in His mind, what about His final test on the cross when He cried "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me"? Did He expect this, or did it come as a surprise to Him? To have all His disciples forsake Him was bad enough, but His Father; why? One wonders if He realised that this was before Him when He prayed in Gethsemane that the cup might pass from Him. These were the very words recorded in the 22nd Psalm, verse 1; no doubt Jesus knew that they applied to Himself, as also did many other of the verses of that Psalm.

A lesson we can take to ourselves in this prayer of our Lord is, that like Him, we can say "Father, I know that Thou hearest me always. You may in wisdom not answer my prayer the way I would like, but since Thou knowest what is for my best interest and highest good, I leave the answering or otherwise to Thee". Paul, who thrice asked for the thorn in his flesh to be removed, received the answer "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness". His prayer was answered in a different way from that which might have been expected when he asked.

Another comfort we can take from this verse is that God has promised He will never

forsake us. "I will never, never leave thee, I will never, never let go thy hand", as one version puts it. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and they shall not overflow thee".

Verse 8:—"Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered". Weymouth says "Although He were God's Son". The things that He suffered reached their consummation in those experiences He went through in Gethsemane and on the Cross, but besides all that, He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself, in an unfriendly world, with imperfection all around Him, unbelief amongst His nearest and dearest, and so often misunderstood. To think that these were the people He had come to save! Yes, He suffered in all those ways, but He suffered most as Philipians puts it (Chap. 2. 8) when "He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross".

Verse 9:—"And being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him". "And being made perfect"! Have we not just finished saying that He was perfect? As a man He was perfect, as Adam was perfect, and like Adam He also was tested. This testing took place during the thirty years of His life before Jordan, and while we have little record given in the Bible of that period of His life, we know that He alone of all men must have kept the Law of God perfectly, and given loyal obedience to all God's commands. We read that He grew in stature and favour with God and man, thus demonstrating that it was within the ability of a perfect man to keep God's Law perfectly.

At thirty, however, He entered upon a different aspect of His life's career. He gave Himself at Jordan in consecration to God to do His will. Had only a ransom been necessary, then God could have taken His life there and then. More than a ransom was required. The three and a half years of suffering was necessary to fit Him as a priest, one who would have compassion on the ignorant and those who were out of the way. So as a priest He was perfected. "In all points He was tempted like as we (His brethren) are, yet without sin". Matt. 8. 17 declares that "Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses". This is supposed to be a quotation from Isaiah 53, but in reading this chapter, it does not suggest that Jesus took our sicknesses. Infirmities, yes, but Jesus was always perfect.

Though perfect, that did not mean that He did not feel frailty. When He healed the woman with the issue of blood, He perceived that virtue had gone out from Him and healed her. He was so tired on one occasion that the disciples took Him, as He was, in the boat to the other side of the lake. A night in communion and prayer with His Father, however, was all that was necessary to restore Him. It only needed a word of command to cast out an evil spirit, or many spirits, and when He healed a leper, He did not become a leper, or in giving sight to the blind, or hearing to the deaf, He did not become deaf or blind. In all these things He was demonstrating His coming power and glory in the Kingdom.

"The author of eternal salvation" is rendered in the Diaglott and the Concordant as "Became the cause of Eonian salvation". It is the duty of a Priest to mediate between two or more who are at enmity with each other, and this is just what Christ qualified to do. He became the author, through His laying down His life daily on behalf of others, and finally gave up life itself to redeem them from death. As the one who purchased mankind by the shedding of His own blood, it is therefore through Him that salvation comes to all. There is, however, an important qualification. He is the author of eternal salvation, not of necessity to all, but to all them that obey Him. God coerces no one. The gift of salvation is freely offered to all, but on condition. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life".

Let us guard against the negative form of evil-speaking, generally the most thoughtless. Absalom was an example of this. Who could quote any actual evil-speaking against his royal father? Who could charge him with speaking evil of dignities? And yet by insinuations, by his way of putting things, by his very manner, he wrought a thousand-fold more cruel harm than any amount of evil-speaking out could have possibly done. Oh to be watchful as to such omissions to speak well, as amount to speaking evil? Watchful as to the eloquence of even hesitation, watchful as to the forcible language of feature and eye.

* * *

God is not sparing in His riches, He gives not a trickle but a torrent. As His power is great, so is His grace. (2 Cor. 9-8).



BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Thou, therefore, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ

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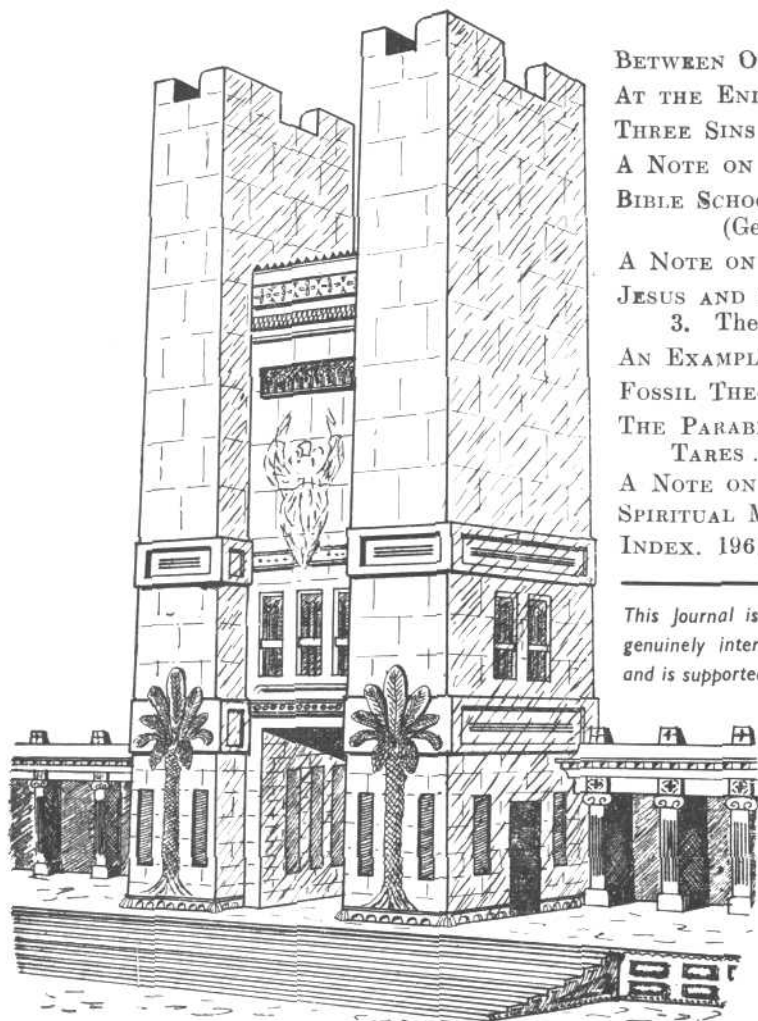
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CONTENTS

BETWEEN OURSELVES	142
AT THE END OF THE YEARS	143
THREE SINS	145
A NOTE ON MATT. 12.43 ..	146
BIBLE SCHOOL (Gen. 33-38)	147
A NOTE ON EXOD. 20.5.....	150
JESUS AND THE LIFE TO COME 3. The Regeneration	151
AN EXAMPLE TO AVOID.....	153
FOSSIL THEOLOGY	154
THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND TARES	155
A NOTE ON JNO. 20.22-23.....	157
SPIRITUAL MANHOOD	159
INDEX. 1961	160

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And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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BETWEEN OURSELVES

It is customary at this time of the year to mention, for the interest of certain of our readers, the special fund administered by Bro. E. Allbon, and to say that contributions will be utilised in the most judicious manner possible. Bro. Allbon's address is: - "Keswick", 9 Esher Close, Nyetimber Park Estate, Nyetimber Lane, Pagham, Bognor Regis, Sussex.

* * *

We are asked to make it known that the Central London Class formerly meeting at the Minerva Club have transferred their meeting place to Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, where they meet every Sunday in the North Room at 2.30 p.m. and 4.30 p.m.

* * *

From time to time one or another of our readers in overseas countries is perturbed to find a renewal slip or an enquiry as to their continuance of the BSM some few weeks after they have renewed their request or sent a donation to the funds with request to continue. The explanation is simple enough but it needs a word here to make the matter clear. Letters sent by surface mail to this country from U.S.A. and Canada take several weeks to reach us; from Australia and New Zealand even longer. It also takes a similar time for the "Monthly" to travel overseas. In consequence a renewal slip may be inserted in the current issue after the reader has sent his letter but before it has reached us, and then reaches the donor still later. The renewal slip states that it shall be ignored if a gift has recently been sent and we trust that this word of explanation will enable readers concerned to realise the difficulty and rest content accordingly.

* * *

The series "The Tragedy of Samson" which appeared in the "Monthly" two years ago is still available in booklet form of 50 pages at

1/6 post free (stamps acceptable) from the "Monthly" office. This series traces the life and experiences of the Israelitish hero through his many failures to his ultimate triumph after the hand of God had been laid upon him; it does not gloss over his sins as have so many treatises on his life but shows how a man subject for most of his days to the weaknesses of the flesh can at last become the subject of true conversion by the power of God.

* * *

"The Mission of Jonah" which appeared in the "Monthly" some fifteen years ago is still available in book form, price 3/- in stiff paper covers and 5/- bound blue cloth, both post free. This 80 page book relates the entire story of Jonah in semi-narrative form and incorporates a wealth of information on the story of the great fish and Jonah's mission to Nineveh, much of it never published elsewhere, and furnishing solid ground for the literal truth of the story. It is a useful little Christmas gift for young people in particular. Here are a few extracts from reviewers' comments at the time of publication.

"A most helpful treatise on sound lines" (*Prophetic News*). "Well written and well produced. We commend this little book" (*The Harvester*). "Analysis of the character of Jonah is careful and helpful" (*Life of Faith*). "Carefully written and has the mark of devout and detailed study; the case for the historical accuracy of the narrative is argued with cogency" (*The Record*). "Some remarkable facts, ancient and modern, bearing on the great fish" (*Evangelical Quarterly*).

Gone from us

Sis. Florence Halton (Manchester)
Bro. S. Naylor (London)

⁸¹⁰²⁰
"Till the day break, and the shadows flee away"

AT THE END OF THE YEARS

An
Exhortation

"O God, thou hast taught me from my youth; and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O Lord, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come."

(Psa. 71. 17-18).

There is a ring of mature faith in those stirring words, the mellow confidence of one who gave his heart to the Lord in the golden days of youth and now in the quietude of old age realises that his faith was not misplaced. The One Who gave him work to do in those early days of youthful zeal and enthusiasm has work yet for him to do. Even in old age he may still shew forth the strength of God's righteousness to a new generation that the work of God may continue. Even while the shadows of death close around him he may still, with last expiring breath, tell of God's power and glory to those who are as yet babes in Christ. There is inspiration and encouragement here for those to-day—and there are many such—who look around on depleted numbers and a diminishing fellowship in which the tale of years is many and the signs of youthfulness almost absent. There is more than inspiration and encouragement, too, there is a call to action and service, a reminder that the labours of the consecrated do not finish short of death, that at all times during our sojourn this side the Vail we are capable of some service for our Lord and King, some means of declaring His strength to this generation and his power to that which is to come.

The Psalmist here admits physical weakness but refuses to admit any ageing of the spirit. As a young man and in the heyday of middle age he rejoiced to declare God's wondrous works. That was to him the breath of life and without the joy of service life would not be worth living. The whole object and end of his existence was to give praise and honour to God in the sight of all people, to witness to the wonder of His Plan and the grandeur of His Promise to all who would listen. It needs physical vitality as well as mental alertness to do that; one cannot endure the heat and burden of Christian witness in the outward sense without a goodly measure of physical strength. Those not so favoured can and do serve in quieter ways, in the ministry of prayer, the ministry of comfort, the

ministry of healing, and so on, but the active work of prosecuting the Gospel requires the ability to be active in the physical sense. And that is an attribute of the young; it cannot be expected of those who have passed the prime of life and whose physical powers are failing. Such a time must come to all of us and it cannot be avoided. But there is no reason why the spirit should fail too.

This word comes reproof and chiding to all who have used advancing age as excuse to lose interest in the work of God in this Age. It is an unhappy spectacle, and one that is all too common, that of one who has laboured mightily, spending and being spent, in the service of his Master, maybe from early youth, through the twenties and thirties and forties and fifties, and then lost heart. The apparent failure of fond expectations, the disappointments and disillusionments that the Christian life is bound to bring, instead of performing their intended work of making mature and mellow the Christian character, have been allowed to make virtual shipwreck of faith. For it is no good claiming that faith is retained if the works of faith have been relinquished. It is no good saying we still look for and expect the Kingdom if we no longer evince any outward sign of concern for its interests. Our consecration is unto death, and although it may be true that our outward man perish, yet it is equally true that our inward man is being renewed day by day, if so be that we are still faithful to our covenant.

There is another and more subtle delusion abroad also. It appeals especially to the elderly. It is the feeling that "the end" is so near and loss of faith in the world so general that the Lord would no longer have His faithful ones preach the Gospel to those who have not yet heard it but rather devote their remaining time and energies exclusively to their own calling and election and that of their consecrated brethren. It is not well to condemn such conclusion too hastily; it is a natural reaction to the rebuffs and failures and apparent lack of success of many long years' active preaching and witnessing. But the attitude must be deprecated nevertheless. It is not a healthy one. It breeds egotism and self-righteousness and tends towards an exclusiveness and narrow-mindedness that is the very reverse of what the mature and

mellow Christian should manifest. There was *no such thought in the mind of the Psalmist* when he wrote these words. He did not say "Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not while I abide in splendid isolation before thee, proclaiming no more thy glory to this generation and utterly ignoring every one that is to come." Far from it. Con the words once more. "Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not, until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come." So far from voicing a plea for a kind of "honourable retirement" from the work of evangelising, the Psalmist passionately beseeches that God will not forsake him in his old age until he has declared the message to yet another generation. He wants to labour to the end; he wants with his last expiring breath to declare the greatness of God to those who still know Him not.

There is a certain ring of "up-to-date-ness" in the Psalmist's words. He wants to declare God's strength to "this generation". He himself, old and greyheaded, belongs to a generation that is past. In many things the world has grown beyond him and the fashion of the world is strange to him. Customs, conventions, practices, which in his day were unknown or not accepted have now become commonplace. The very language in which the new generation talks is one that is fast becoming incomprehensible to him. The pace of life has quickened and those things on which he and his once set such value, are now lightly esteemed. The temptation is ever present to withdraw from this strange new world and dwell in more comfortable seclusion with other greyheads of like mind until the call comes to "go home". The world is no longer the understandable place that it was; it is better that we shut it out from our lives and beseech the Lord to take us away from it quickly.

Not so the Psalmist. It is this new and strange and in many ways uncouth generation to which he wishes to declare the glory of God. He knows that the fashion of the world must needs change as the clock of Time ticks on; he knows that restless man, ever exploring and seeking something new, must change with it, as generation follows generation. He knows, too, that faith will ebb lower and lower with each succeeding age so that the one who takes his stand on the words of God will appear to be more and more an outworn relic of a past era. He knows all this, and feels within himself that he is getting

older and more out of tune with this modern way of life. He realises how easy it would be to accept what appears to be the inevitable, and give up the conflict, waiting for the end. He might reasonably anticipate the words of St Paul and apply them to himself. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day."

He might do all this; but he does nothing of the kind! "Now also when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not, until . . ." What though this new generation has a new language? He will speak to them in that language! What though they adopt customs and conventions and practices which seem to him strange and even repellent? He will relate his message to those customs and conventions and show that generation how the truth of God is for them as well as for those of the past! What though their interpretations and ideas, yea, their very practice of the faith he tries to inculcate in them, show features undreamed of in his own youthful days and features that would have been roundly condemned in those days? He will seek to find in all this the evidences of younger hearts giving themselves to the Lord and strive to give them wise guidance in the pathway that they must certainly tread for themselves and in their own way.

Our own position in this day, as life goes on and we find ourselves surrounded by a new generation whose accepted standards differ so much from ours, is to play the part of understanding counsellors and convinced witnesses. No matter what else changes, the truth of God stands the same. No matter how we must change the language in which it is preached, it remains the same message having the same power over all generations new and old. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day and for ever." Our earthly powers may be failing and days of active evangelism be over, but there is always something we can do to declare God's strength to this generation and His power to that which is to come. Aaron and Hur held up the hands of Moses while the battle raged; it was little enough they could do but it made all the difference to the outcome. When Israel went out to fight their enemies it was decreed that he who "tarried by the stuff", and cared for the camp property should share equally with the warriors when it came to dividing the spoils. So it is with us; so many there are who must perforce "tarry

by the stuff", but all the time they can be "holding up the hands" and contributing to the success of the Lord's cause. Let those who still can, go forth into active service for the Lord and His Gospel; those who can do so no longer, wait upon Him in prayer and supplication, perform the countless little services that mean so much to the warriors in the field, help with words of encouragement and confidence, evincing a ready sympathy with the progress of all that is going on, and in these

and many other ways demonstrate their own unity in thought and action with the Church militant all over the world.

Our Master has accepted us into the work of His vineyard not until the ninth hour or the tenth hour or the eleventh hour, but right up to the last minute of the twelfth hour. It is then, and not until then, that He utters the longed-for words "*Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joys of thy lord*".

THREE SINS

There is a very interesting correspondency between the sin of Eden, the sin of Sodom, and the sin of the world alluded to by the Apostle John in his first epistle. It almost seems as though there is a three-fold principle at work, manifesting itself continually in world history, and illuminated by this three-fold repetition in the Scriptures. In the story of Eden it is said of the woman, at the time of her succumbing to the temptation, that . . .

"When the woman saw that the tree
 (a) *Was good for food*
 (b) *And that it was pleasant to the eyes*
 (c) *And a tree to be desired to make one wise—she took of the fruit thereof."*

(Gen. 3. 6).

Note the correspondency in Ezek. 16. 49.

"This was the sin of thy sister Sodom.
 (a) *Pride*
 (b) *Fulness of bread*
 (c) *Abundance of idleness*
was in her and in her daughters, therefore I took them away as I saw fit."

Fulness (sufficiency) of bread is not in itself a sin; evidently the sin was gluttony, the immoderate excess of good living corresponding to the beholding of the Tree, by the woman in Eden, that it was good for food. This does not mean merely that the Tree was satisfying and health-giving, for there is no sin in the appreciation of such a fact, but rather that Eve saw it could be made conducive to excess, abusing in place of using the natural faculties of eating and drinking. Likewise the "abundance of idleness" of Sodom matches up to the fact of the Tree being "pleasant to the eyes"; not that there is any sin in beholding and enjoying beautiful things, but that even this can become a means of diversion from one's duty and commission in life if carried to excess. So

that indulgence in that which is pleasant to the eyes can result in an abundance of idleness and a forsaking those activities which are good and necessary in life. The "pride" of Sodom which led the Sodomites to become haughty and commit abomination can very well present the ultimate results of being made "wise" without learning that wisdom in God's way. "Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth" (1 Cor. 8. 1) says Paul. The Tree was "one to be desired to make one wise" but it did not bring wisdom in God's way and it was not heavenly wisdom that it brought. The wisdom conferred by the Tree proved to be "earthly, sensual, devilish" (Jas. 3. 15) just like the pride and haughtiness of the Sodomites. The three manifestations of sin which the Tree of Knowledge began to reveal to—and in—Mother Eve are shown in fuller development in the people of Sodom.

John carries the same theme a step farther.

"For all that is in the world—
 (a) *The lust of the flesh*
 (b) *And the lust of the eye*
 (c) *And the pride of life,—*
is not of the Father, but is of the world."
 (1 John 2. 16).

These are the same three sins, all branded as being not of God, but of the world. The desire of the flesh—that which is good for food, appealing to the physical senses, but carried to excess. The desire of the eyes—that which is good for the mind, the soul, appealing to the æsthetic tastes, but carried to excess again. The pride of life—self-sufficiency, selfishness, the banishment of God from the personal life and the serving of self-interest in preference to the service of one's fellows and of mankind at large; the earthly wisdom which says "self first" "I can do it" "I have no need of God" and is as deadening

as the pride and haughtiness of the Sodomites and the wisdom Eve gained from the Tree.

It would appear as though these three principles, which have always characterised human life and human affairs throughout the history of "this present evil world", were enshrined in the story of the fatal tree, as a signpost warning all generations of the way their first parents took, a way themselves should not take. Most people have taken it; the world to-day is still governed by these three cardinal sins. Not until the Millennial Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ is set up will there be a new influence abroad in the land nullifying the dire results of the Tree of Knowledge of Evil and overspreading the earth instead with the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good.

For that must be remembered. It was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good as well as Evil. Men have only tasted of the evil fruit as yet. What of the time when they taste of the good? They ate at the Devil's bidding and have reaped misery and death for many long millenniums of years in consequence. What of

when they eat at God's bidding and reap happiness and life instead—and for eternity at that?

In the future ages of glory the Tree will still be good for food, and pleasant to the eyes, and a giver of wisdom, but it will not bring death to those who partake, for then they will partake in harmony with the ways and will of God, and not in disobedience to His decree as they did in Eden. God has made the earth for man, and man for the earth, so that men might appreciate and enjoy its good foods and its beautiful sights, and increase in wisdom everlastingly in the knowledge and reverence of God. That still future phase of God's work with man is foreshadowed in the Scriptures under the symbol of a Tree of Life which brings healing and health to the nations. Both Trees, it would appear, offer life and happiness to those who will partake upon the Divine terms; perhaps, rightly understood, there is at the end no essential difference between the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life after all.

A NOTE ON MATT. 12.43

"When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return unto my house from whence I came out . . ." (Matt. 12. 43).

What is the meaning of our Lord's allusion to "dry places"? Why should the dispossessed demon apparently desire to avoid the vicinity of water?

Jesus had in mind a very popular idea, prevalent in the days of the First Advent, to the effect that evil spirits shunned the crossing of water, and were, in fact, unable to negotiate the passage of rivers or streams. This idea, so obviously absurd to us with our greater knowledge of the nature and powers of both holy and evil spirit beings, was a tradition coming down from earlier ages, but very real to the people of our Lord's own day. This verse is an interesting example of the fact that Jesus sometimes spoke to the people within the framework of the common thought of their own day—not that He Himself necessarily endorsed these old fables and legends, but as using them in illustration of the truths He wished to inculcate. In referring to this popular idea of the evil spirit walking about

seeking a place of rest remote from the imaginary dangers of running water, He brought before the minds of His hearers the obvious sequel—that if the cleansed man's mind has been left empty and not occupied by a holier spirit, the Spirit of God, then the dispossessed demon would return from his uneasy wanderings, and settle down in the safety of his former home; and the last state of that man, said Jesus, would then be worse than the first.

A homely illustration, built upon a Rabbinical fable having no basis in fact, but capable of teaching a vital spiritual truth. When the evil spirit is cast out, let the mind be filled with that which will prevent such a calamity as demon obsession ever befalling the man again.

In all temptation and difficulty the way of deliverance is to remember that the eye of the Lord Jesus as a Friend is upon you; that His presence as a Friend is with you; and then to ask with confidence and to expect with certainty.

Bible School THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES

Part 6. Gen. 33-38

STUDY 7. JACOB IN CANAAN. Gen. 33.

Jacob's meeting with his half-brother Esau, somewhere in the fertile wilderness east of the Jordan, is a classic in itself. He had already had the report that Esau was on his way to meet him with four hundred followers. Jacob feared the worst; now was his brother coming to exact revenge in fulfilment of his threat of more than forty years earlier. He made hasty preparations to placate Esau, if that were possible; drove upon drove of cattle, amounting to five hundred and fifty beasts in all, with their attendants, a gift to Esau. Behind the droves came the household servants, the wives and children of Jacob, and finally Jacob himself. And having made all these preparations, "*Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men*" (33. 1). They were probably horsemen, mobile and speedy, and the very sight of them filled Jacob's heart with apprehension.

He need not have feared. Esau appears completely to have forgotten the bad terms on which they had parted. Jacob approached slowly, stopping seven times to bow himself to the ground in Eastern fashion as if in the presence of a mighty king. Esau was in no mood for ceremony of that kind. He cut this part of the proceedings short. "*Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him; and they wept*" (33. 4). The reconciliation was complete. Then Esau looked around at the women and children and learned in response to his quick enquiry that these were the wives and children of his brother. Impulsively he asked the meaning of the droves of cattle he had met and was told they were a gift to him. Esau wanted nothing of that either; at once he replied "*I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself*". There follows a typical piece of Eastern double-talk, Jacob urging the gift, Esau professing reluctance to accept it; at length he did accept it. Then it was Esau's turn. He suggested that Jacob change his intentions forthwith and come with him to his own territory of Seir and settle alongside him. Jacob, not refusing outright, demurred that he must come on more slowly, lest he fatigue and lose his cattle. Esau suggested leaving some of his own men to accompany

him on the way; Jacob countered this offer with the assurance that he could find his way to Seir without need of any help. So Jacob had his way and Esau left him; probably both of them knew perfectly well that Jacob had no intention of following Esau to Seir and each knew that the other knew it too. Eastern notions of the proprieties having been observed and both brothers vying with each other in generosity, they parted on good terms, Esau back to his home and Jacob to continue his journey into Canaan.

It is clear from 32. 3 and 33. 14 that Esau had long since parted company with his father Isaac and set up his own establishment in the region south-east of the Dead Sea known variously as Seir and Edom, some sixty miles from Isaac's lands at Mamre or Hebron. His own growing family by his three wives and increasing prosperity would make some such move desirable such as Jacob had done with Laban for the same reason. An apparent contradiction appears in 36. 6-7 where it is stated that Esau's migration to Edom was because the land could not bear both him and Jacob together. The probable explanation is that Esau had already spread his interests as far as Edom before Jacob's return, but still retained common interests in Canaan with his father. After Jacob's return the position became more difficult and Esau then abandoned all claims in Canaan and confined himself to Edom.

So Esau's horsemen cantered the hundred miles back to their headquarters in Edom or Seir, and Jacob halted for awhile, evidently to rest his flocks and herds, at Succoth, a few miles to the east of the Jordan. This could not have been more than a very short stay; before long he was on the move again, crossing the Jordan into Canaan proper and travelling some twenty five miles until he came to the Canaanite town of Shechem, near to which he pitched camp. Chap. 38. 18 says that he "*came to Shalem a city of Shechem*" but no such place as Shalem existed. The word means "peace" and the correct translation is "*he came in peace to Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan*". He evidently intended to make this his permanent dwelling place, for here he purchased a piece of land whereon to erect his tents and his altar for "*an hundred*

pieces of money—probably silver shekels, worth intrinsically about half a crown each, although the value of money was considerably higher in those days. At Shechem Jacob was only some fifty miles from his father Isaac at Mamre, and there is little doubt that he visited his father although he maintained a separate establishment. His mother he never saw again; Rebekah had died whilst he was still away in *Padan-Aram keeping the flocks of Laban*.

The sojourn at Shechem was abruptly terminated by the incident of Dinah, Jacob's daughter, related in chap. 34. The summary vengeance exacted by her two brothers Simon and Levi, for the wrong done her by the prince of Shechem, led Jacob to evacuate the district as quickly as he could. This story constitutes one of the proofs that Jacob was forty years with Laban, and not the twenty usually assumed; even on the basis of forty years sojourn Dinah could not have been more than fifteen and Simeon and Levi about thirty years of age at this time. Once again Jacob was on the move; he travelled another twenty five miles and settled at Bethel, only twenty-five miles from Mamre, the home of Isaac. Chap. 35 declares that God spoke to him and told him to go to Bethel; it is reasonable enough to suppose that Jacob, faced with the disaster at Shechem and realising that it was incumbent upon him to depart, sought the Divine leading for his next step and was directed to Bethel. This was the place where he had the dream of the ladder set up to Heaven, when he left Canaan forty years previously. It was appropriate that now God appeared to him again in this place and reiterated the promise. Not only was the land which God had promised to Abraham and Isaac confirmed to Jacob's seed, but an assurance given that his seed was to become a nation and a company of nations. This expression "company of nations" means *nothing else than what in Leviticus is called the "congregation" of Israel*. The word translated "company" means an assembly or called-out body; the fact that Jacob's descendants, the nation of Israel, was to comprise an assembly of twelve tribes, gathered together, called out from the rest of the world, separated and consecrated to Divine service, is indicated here. So Jacob "set up a pillar" (35. 14); in all probability restoring the old monument he had erected at the time of the dream, and consecrated the place afresh. Bethel was a sacred site to Israel for many

centuries after that.

The strange allusion to Deborah in 35. 8 deserves notice. Deborah was Rebekah's nurse and when Rebekah left her own home for Canaan to marry Isaac her nurse accompanied her. Verse 8 reads as though this Deborah died at Bethel and was buried there at the time, while Jacob was there. If this be the intention, Deborah must have been at least 160 years old at her death. There is nothing unexpected in that; others of her generation lived for comparable periods—Isaac, for example lived 180 years, it might however with more reason be asked what Deborah was doing in Jacob's household at this time and how did she get there. Normally she would remain a member of Isaac's household after the death of her mistress. It is very possible that verse 8 records a circumstance connected with Bethel prior to Jacob's arrival there, viz, that Deborah had died at a previous time and had been buried at Bethel; now that Jacob had settled there and made the place sacred the circumstance that it was already the place of Deborah's grave gave it an added sanctity.

The patriarch was not to find rest even at Bethel. For reasons not stated he was soon on the move again, heading southwards towards his father's home. He got as far as the outskirts of Bethlehem, then called Ephrath, and there his best beloved wife Hachel died giving birth to his twelfth and youngest son Benjamin. Here he seems to have set his headquarters for something like thirty years until his final journey into Egypt at the time of the famine. His interests must have spread widely over Canaan, for after some ten years at Ephrath we find Joseph, at the age of seventeen, sent on a message to his brothers pasturing Jacob's flock at Shechem, fifty miles to the north. Similarly Judah, another son, is shown in chapter 38 to have settled on his own account at Timnath, in the south-west. In fact the geographical indications of the account in Genesis indicate that Isaac, Jacob and Esau between them ranged their flocks and herds over practically the whole of what is present-day Israel.

The events related in chapter 38 concerning Judah and his family must have taken place during the time of Jacob's residence at Ephrath. A total period of thirty-three years elapsed between Jacob's return to Canaan and his migration into Egypt. Judah would have been about twenty-five years of age when he came into Canaan with his father. The ensuing thirty-three years must include his

marriage to Shuah, the birth of their sons Er, Onan and Shelah, these sons' attainment of manhood and the marriage of Er and Onan in turn to Tamar, a space during which Shelah was growing to manhood, and finally the birth of Pharez and Zarah to Judah by Tamar. All of this could hardly have taken place in less than thirty years so that Tamar's children must have been mere babes at the descent into Egypt.

In this story of Judah we have the first Biblical example of a Levirate marriage—the system by which a man was required by law and custom to marry his deceased brother's childless widow, the first child of such marriage being accounted the dead man's child and heir, and succeeding to his estate. In the days of Moses, still three hundred years future, the system was a feature of the Law given at Sinai, and the story of Ruth and Boaz as told in the Book of Ruth is a noteworthy example of its practical application. But the custom goes back to antiquity and was the rule in Canaan from earliest times and in Haran when Abraham lived there. In this particular instance it was Er, Judah's eldest son who had died, and Onan, the next son, who married his elder brother's widow Tamar at Judah's bidding. But Onan objected to providing his dead brother with an heir—perhaps he had designs on his inheritance for himself—and according to the account, his consequent conduct displeased the Lord and he died also. This duty thus devolved on Shelah, the youngest, but Judah, perhaps superstitiously afraid that the same fate might befall Shelah and so leave Judah without an heir, put off the marriage on the excuse that Shelah was as yet too young. This was probably the case. Er and Onan could not possibly have been more than twenty-three and twenty-one years old respectively at their death and Shelah was probably about sixteen. But after about four or five years Tamar perceived that there was no intention on Judah's part to marry her to Shelah and she resorted to an artifice by means of which Judah himself unknowingly became the father of two legal heirs to Er and Onan.

Tamar is often unjustly blamed for her part in this episode. In fact she was only carrying out the law and claiming her rights. It was not an unusual thing in those days when no brother existed to "raise up seed" to the dead man, to use the Biblical expression, for the father to assume responsibility, or when necessity so dictated, an even more remote

relative. In the case of Ruth and Boaz neither the kinsman who declined his duty, nor Boaz who then willingly assumed it, were brothers of Ruth's deceased husband. So here, if Shelah was not yet grown, the duty devolved upon Judah, and according to the custom of the day Tamar did right in contriving a means by which he fulfil that duty.

One wonders why so fully detailed an account of this matter should be included in Genesis. The usual reason advanced by commentators is that the genealogy of Christ is preserved through the links in this story. There may be another reason. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had all married wives of their own race, the Hebrews. Esau's crime was that he married alien women. Now Judah, through whom from Jacob the promised seed, which is Christ, should come, had married Shuah, a Canaanite woman. Both Er and Onan were of mixed blood. Nothing is said as to Tamar's nationality, but Tamar is a Hebrew and not a Canaanite or Hittite name, so that the balance of evidence might well be held to favour her descent from a Hebrew family, either from one of the many servants who came with Jacob from Padan-Aram, or else from among the many descendants of Abraham himself, who had other children beside Isaac who lived on in the land apart from the "children of promise" centred in the line of Isaac and Jacob. If this be the case, then Pharez and Zarah, children of Judah and Tamar, were themselves pure-blooded Hebrews and so the purity of the line was maintained. It might well be that the whole sequence of events recorded in chapter 38 was overruled by God to rectify the error of Judah in marrying an alien woman in flagrant heedlessness of his own obligation as the heir of promise after Jacob.

Ten years or more before this climax, Joseph, son of Jacob and Rachel, had been sold into Egypt as a slave by his jealous brothers, and now only one event of note remains in the story of Jacob in Canaan. Twelve years after the loss of Joseph, and eight years before the famine which eventually drove the entire family into Egypt, Isaac died in Hebron at the ripe old age of one hundred and eighty years. (35. 27-29). It seems that before the end Jacob moved his headquarters a few more miles from Ephrath to Hebron to be with his father—perhaps the old man's failing health demanded that the son take over his responsibilities—but Jacob's own sons were probably spread over half

Canaan looking after his own many interests. So Isaac, the child of promise born to Abraham and Sarah nearly two centuries earlier, "gave up the spirit and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him". It is evident that the brothers were on terms of amity; by now Esau had retired entirely from Canaan and had become the progenitor of a fast growing virile tribe in Edom sixty miles away. It is noteworthy that as the eldest son his name is mentioned first in this reference to Isaac's death; he would take the senior place in the proceedings.

It is possible that the brothers never met again. In another ten years Jacob and all his family had gone down into Egypt, and when after more than two centuries their descendants, grown into a nation, assayed to pass through Edom on their way to the Promised Land, they found the descendants of Esau, also a powerful nation, arrayed against them in hostility. Edom was never re-united to Israel; they were enemies always until, only a short while before Christ, the Jews managed to subdue and absorb what was left of Edom into their own nation.

(To be continued)

A NOTE ON EXOD. 20.5

"The Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God." (Exod. 34. 14 and 20. 5).

The modern usage of the word "jealousy" as indicating an evil passion akin to envy of another or an unreasoning demand for the exclusive right to another's affections or regard has led many to misunderstand the many Scriptures which speak of God as a "jealous" God. From first principles we know that the great Creator has no base or evil element in His being, and therefore He is not "jealous" in the ordinarily accepted sense of the word. The dictionary definition of jealousy is of assistance here. It is "Jealous—Watchful of one's rights, honour, etc. Afraid of being supplanted by a rival. To be solicitous for the good name of the object" (of jealousy). Now our God manifests these characteristics except that there can be no question of His being afraid of being supplanted.

When we turn to the Old Testament we find an interesting fact. The words "jealous" and "zealous" are from the same Hebrew word.

Upon turning to the New Testament the same fact is observed. The "zeal" of God and the "jealousy" of God are one and the same thing.

For those who are interested, the words are "ginah" in Hebrew and "zelos" in Greek.

If then we combine the dictionary definition of jealousy with the meaning attached to "zeal" or "zealous" we can approach these Scriptures from a fresh angle. Turn to Zech. 1. 14. "I am jealous for Jerusalem, with a great jealousy." God's solicitude for Jerusalem, His desire for her prosperity, is manifested in His zeal for her restoration. So Paul, using the Greek *zelos*, says in 2 Cor. 11. 2, "I am jealous

over you with godly jealousy" thus expressing his watchful zeal for the well-being of his converts. Zephaniah declares (1. 18) that "all the land shall be devoured by the fire of (God's) jealousy" or zeal; zeal for the destruction of every manifestation of sin and the bringing in of every righteousness.

The prophetic words of Psa. 69. 9. "The zeal of thine house hath consumed me" quoted by Jesus in Jno. 2. 17 and applied to Himself is another instance of the use of this same word. So also are Isa. 9. 7, "The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this" and Isa. 59. 17, "And was clad with zeal as a cloke". Many other texts could be quoted to the same effect.

When therefore we read that our God is a "jealous" God, we are expected to picture in our minds One who is ever active and zealous for the honour of His great Name and for the execution of His Plan; One Who will by no means clear the guilty and yet has provided a means whereby the guilt may be covered and the sinner reconciled to Him; One Who will not tolerate sin in His creation and is zealous in His operations directed to the removal of sin. God is jealous for the honour of His own character and for the happiness of His creatures. His zeal will never flag until He has accomplished all His good purposes. With this in mind we can read Exod. 14 "The Lord, Whose name is ZEAL, is a zealous God" and in our confidence in that sacred zeal we can rest content, knowing that as surely as He hath spoken, so surely will it come to pass.

Would you have fellowship with the Father? You will be sure to find Him within the precincts of His holy house.

JESUS AND THE LIFE TO COME

3. The Regeneration

"Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matt. 19. 26).

This is one of those very plain statements of Jesus regarding the future life in which the relative positions of Jesus' followers and all others are contrasted. It is a time of judgment and yet not a time of hopeless condemnation. The disciples—and obviously, all the faithful in Christ of the entire Age—are to occupy positions of authority and administration in a day which is a time of general and universal judgment. The day is one made very familiar to the disciples by the imagery of Jewish apocalyptic. The time when the Son of Man shall sit upon the throne of His glory is the Messianic Age, following the Second Advent, when the kingdom of Christ is established on earth and the glory of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea. Every Jew knew that, although at that time they had no conception of the difference between the First and the Second Advents. Every Christian in the first two centuries of Church history knew it too, and looked for the Second Advent which was to mark the beginning of that glad day. The apostles in after days held fast to that same belief, and expressed it in their writings. Thus Paul in 1 Cor. 6. 2 reminded his readers that they already knew perfectly well the saints are to judge the world, and John the Revelator, seeing in vision this same thousand year Millennial reign of Christ over the nations, saw also the saints seated upon their thrones as kings and priests, reigning with Him the thousand years (Rev. 20. 4). We must therefore accept as an essential feature of the post-Advent reign of Christ that it is a reign over the earth, upon which men still live, and that His saints, the "Church" of this present Age, will be glorified with Him and reigning with Him. The question naturally comes to the forefront "What is the purpose and object of that reign?"

This Messianic Age is not the final eternal state of the blessed. Though it be the Kingdom of Christ and an administration of righteousness, with the Devil bound that he may deceive the nations no more (Rev. 20. 1 2) yet it is an age that has an end, a kingdom

which finally is handed over to God the Father that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15. 24). There is a dark picture in Revelation 20 of a rebellion at its end when Satan apparently endeavours to deceive the nations once more, fails, and is destroyed with all evil and evil-doers. The Messianic Age is therefore another stage, even though it be the final stage, of God's developing purpose in the reconciliation of "those who will" from among men to Himself. The Church have already been thus reconciled and glorified to immortal life. For them, salvation has been achieved. But for other men the end of the pathway has not yet been reached.

Jesus called this period the "regeneration". The word means the giving of new life. Mark well that this is at a time when the faithful in Christ, true believers of the present age, have already entered their eternal inheritance in the presence of their Lord. Here is shown in no unmistakable manner the fact that after the Church has attained her heavenly destiny there is another work of salvation, culminating in another award of eternal life, to others who did not share in the first salvation. That is why James the Lord's brother, leader of the Christian community in Jerusalem in the years just after Pentecost, uttered his memorable judgment recorded in Acts 15 when he declared the Divine purpose in three stages;—first, the calling out from the nations a people for God's name, the Church; second, the raising up the tabernacle of David, the purification and regathering of Israel; and third "that the residue of men might call upon the name of the Lord". It is the "residue of men calling upon the name of the Lord" which is the purpose for which the epoch Jesus called the "regeneration" is intended.

This realisation throws a flood of light upon those rather cryptic utterances of Jesus when He referred to some of old time who would find things more tolerable in the Day of Judgment than would His own generation. Tyre and Sidon, idolatrous cities long since passed away, would find it more tolerable than would Chorazin and Bethsaida, towns of His own Galilee (Matt. 11. 22). Sodom and Gomorrah will find it more tolerable than Capernaum and the unbelieving towns of Galilee (Mark 6. 11). The men of Nineveh who

repented at the preaching of Jonah and quickly lapsed into their old bad ways, the Queen of Sheba who came to hear the wisdom of Solomon but now has been dust these many years, these too are to stand again in the judgment and they will condemn the generation of Jesus' day (Luke 11. 31-32) for its unbelief and faithlessness. All of this shows that the rising again at the Day of Judgment is for something more than a rehearsal of past sins or righteousness and an immediate passing of final sentence. The Day of Judgment is synonymous with the Messianic Age, a period of time during which the blessings of the Second Advent will be bestowed in full upon all who will heed the voice of earth's King, and conform his life thereto. This is clearly the meaning of Jesus' words linking three things—His word, the resurrection, and the granting of life. "*The hour is coming*" ("*and now is*" is an interpolation and no part of Jesus' original words) "*when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live*" (John 5. 25). Here again is the giving of new life by Jesus in the day of His glory, the "regeneration".

This is where one of the most vivid parables Jesus uttered has its place—the Parable of the Sheep and Goats. The scene is set "when the Son of Man shall come in His glory". When this event occurs His saints will be with Him and sharing His Kingly power so they are evidently not included in the array of "all nations" which in the parable are gathered before Him. This is clearly a second work of salvation, ending in eternal life for some and final condemnation for others. But the point just now is that it takes place in the Messianic Age, this time of "regeneration" which is at one and the same time a giving of new life and condemnation to loss of life for the "sheep" and "goats" respectively. In all these pictures and sayings left on record for our instruction the supreme importance of the Messianic Age is clearly shown. Our Lord returns at His Second Advent not only to take His Church to Himself and bring to an end the evil institutions of mankind, but also to inaugurate an era of blessedness and peace during the whole extent of which He will make His last endeavour to reach the hearts of all who so far have not believed on Him in Whose Name alone can there be salvation. The words of John the Baptist will always be terribly true; they admit of no exception. "*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that*

believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him". (John 3. 36). There can be no doubt that the Father, in His unerring wisdom and love, has provided in His purpose a means whereby every man and woman ever born has the opportunity to be enlightened by the Light which has come into the world (John 1. 9) and it seems very clear that the day of Christ's reign over the earth, the Messianic Age, is the final era of opportunity, the day when God brings all men into judgment and makes up to each man for the opportunity he may not as yet have had. But the decision has to be made by the end of that Age. No shadow of sin, no taint of rebellion, may be suffered to mar the blessedness of the Ages of glory that are to follow. The end of that Age means not only the awarding of eternal life to those who have become reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ; it also means the final condemnation of sin and sinners. The 20th chapter of Revelation gives a short picture of that final dark chapter; the rebellion, at the end of the Age, of some who have remained in unbelief and will not yield themselves in submission to their Creator. The fire which comes down from heaven to destroy them is of course a symbol, but an eloquent one. Said the Psalmist "*the wicked shall be returned into sheol*," the grave "*all the nations that forget God*" and that word is fulfilled when at the last those who will not accept life on the Divine terms face the only possible alternative.

This is the end of the Millennial work of the Lord Jesus Christ. During the Age, evil having been restrained, men have had opportunity to appreciate and enter into heart harmony with the Divine principles of life. By its end there will be no longer any excuse for ignorance or failure to measure up to the standards required by God, for all will have had abundant opportunity to come to Christ in true conversion and to attain that state of mental, moral and physical perfection which will enable them to keep the Divine laws without failure. The removal of the Divine restraint on evil must come, for God will have men living righteous lives on a completely voluntary and willing basis, not because they have no power or ability to do otherwise, and this will at once constitute a test of loyalty. Those who turn again to sin thereby demonstrate that they are unworthy of life, and that further prolonging of life is useless in their case; so God leaves the sinner to his way, and the end of that way is death. This is the

principle which is symbolised by the allusion in these verses to the rebels going up against the citadel of God, and meeting with sudden and utter destruction.

The vision of the new Jerusalem, the account of which concludes the Book of Revelation and the Bible, is a symbolic representation of the final phase, the consummation of the Divine Plan. John saw a wonderful city descending out of the heavens to settle everlastingly upon the new earth created by God to take the place of that old earth which had passed away. This city was to become the dwelling-place of God, where He would dwell with men, and into it there should nothing defiling ever enter; only those that were accounted worthy of everlasting life. From the city there flowed a "River of Life", having "Trees of Life" growing upon its banks, and from this water and food of life the sin-sick nations of the world were to derive sustenance and healing. The vision closes with a gracious invitation to all men that they come and partake of the water of

life freely.

Here the veil is drawn. The Holy Scriptures do not take us beyond the end of the Millennial Age to talk in detail of the "ages of glory to follow". Of the condition and life of the redeemed through the everlasting years they say nothing. We are shown the Plan of God for this earth at its triumphant conclusion, sin and evil banished for ever, irreclaimable evil-doers destroyed, the Church of Christ fully converted to God and enjoying His munificence on the restored and perfected earth. "Not a stain of sin mars the peace and harmony of a perfect society." For the further glories of revelation, of knowledge and of activity that must assuredly be the lot of all the redeemed we must wait, until the time shall come; but we can wait in full assurance that as Isaiah predicted (Isa. 32. 17) "*The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever*".

THE END

AN EXAMPLE TO AVOID

In his book "*A Pilgrimage to Palestine*" Dr. Harry Fosdick tells of his visits in 1928 to the High Priest of the Samaritans on Mount Gerizim. The tiny remnant of this people, who once had a Temple on the Mount in rivalry to that at Jerusalem, still holds to the traditions of their fathers and still treasures a copy of the Pentateuch—the five books of Moses—which experts consider may date from the time of Ezra, and in that case is easily the oldest manuscript of the Old Testament in existence. The point of Dr. Fosdick's narrative is the striking resemblance between the complacent bigotry of the old High Priest and the attitude of some Christians of to-day, quite sure that they, and they alone, have the monopoly of Divine Truth and that all who differ with them must of necessity be in error. His narrative runs:—

"As guests of the High Priest we sat in his tent and through a skilled interpreter talked with the venerable old man about his religion. His complacency, his sense of superiority, his certainty that these few Samaritans alone among men knew the truth about God and practised it, were fascinating. The millions around him, he said, were forgetting the Divine Law; only his little group of despised people were keeping it. He nestled comfort-

ably into that conviction. From every point of view, he said, the Samaritan religion alone was perfect. Could Jews or Christians divide their edition of the Ten Commandments into two tables so that the same number of words and letters would be on each? Never! The Samaritans could do with their edition! He had visited, so he said, London, Paris, Constantinople, and had always tried with open mind to welcome new truth, but had come back to Gerizim certain that no new religion was so flawless as the Samaritan. All others were simply more or less pleasing superstructures; only the Samaritans had solid foundations in the Mosaic Law. So the old man, venerable of aspect, amiable in spirit, talked on into the night, archaic as the blood sacrifice he had just administered."

Surely we need to be watchful, that we, who have such wonderful opportunities for advancement in the knowledge of Divine Truth, do not fall into the same petty, narrow groove. How different the exultant words of the Apostle, when, comparing our position with the blinded people of old, he cried:

"We all, *with open face*, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory unto glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. 3. 18).

FOSSIL THEOLOGY

A lump of coal showing on its surface, in delicate tracery, the form of a fern or fish, is prized by the geologist as a specimen of the vegetation or fauna of a very remote period in the day of creation. Such a fossil is valuable as a connecting link between the dead past and living present, possessing no other value except to be burned.

In the world of theology we find many such relics of bygone ages fossilised in the form of liturgies, creeds, confessions of faith, etc., many of them originating in the Carboniferous period of religious knowledge, the "Dark Ages", which, apart from their value as antiquities, representing the mind and practice of the religious systems of their day, are of no use whatever, except as fuel.

"For what so fiercely burns

As a dry creed that nothing ever learns?"

It is remarkable that in this age of progress and development, men of education and intelligence should shape their thoughts and teachings after the pattern of these Theological Fossils, which are as devoid of life as the petrifications that we find in the museum duly classified and labelled.

In the advanced light of medical science of to-day, the physician who would follow the old system of bleeding, pilling and blistering, and confine his patient in a dark, ill-ventilated room would be denounced not only as an "old fogey", but as a fool, since medical colleges are continually experimenting and opening up new avenues of knowledge as to the causes and cure of disease. In like manner, theology can learn nothing so long as the minds of its teachers are moulded and shaped by the petrified dogmas of their ancestors. He who receives his credentials as a denominational teacher is not a free man if he is bound to accept as the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, the complications of doctrines handed down to him from the "fathers" of his denomination. What these men, hundreds of years ago, declared to be truth is truth, to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be taken away. No matter what light advanced scholarship may have thrown upon the inspired Word; no matter what science may have revealed; no matter what new truths the servants of God may have brought forth from the store-house; the religious instructor of to-day must shut his eyes to the light, and stop his ears from hearing strange or new sounds, and submis-

sively bow to the teachings of antiquated theologians, priests, and prelates as though their voice were the voice of God. There is no idolatry that has more submissive devotees than has this worship of the stocks and stones of Fossil Theology; there is no tyranny more oppressive than is the tyranny of creed.

How is this accounted for? Very easily. Denominations are formed about the teachings of some man or set of men. These teachings are accepted as the quintessence of truth; preachers are instructed in these doctrines, and ordained to teach them; colleges are endowed to perpetuate them, and the graduate from these schools, before being authorised to preach, must subscribe to the system of practice and doctrine taught, and agree to teach the same. He is not a free man. He dare not turn either to the right or to the left under penalty of losing his commission, and with it the means of gaining a livelihood. Instead of building upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone, the foundation is human; and the Divine injunction applies with terrific force: "In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men".

There is little wonder that spiritual deadness is characteristic of so many churches, with fussy Uzzas reaching out their hands to steady the ark of the Lord; with inquisitorial ecclesiastics snuffing out the light of truth as soon as it shows its first feeble rays, and then compelling those who hunger and thirst after righteousness and truth to accept their dead forms and creeds, or else look elsewhere to have their cravings satisfied. Thank God that His truth is not committed to such hands, but is as free as the water of life to all who will go to the fountain to drink. Divine truth is not in dead forms and compiled dogmas, but it is liberty and life in Christ Jesus.

From "Words of Truth"

"What is freedom? Not mere political independence, but the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, the reign of Truth and Non-violence in every walk of life." (*Mahatma Gandhi speaking at Panchgani, India, 19th July, 1945. Gandhi was a Hindu by religion, and therefore his reference to the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth as the requisite for true freedom is doubly interesting.*)

THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND TARES

Of all the parables Jesus related to His disciples, this seems to have intrigued them most. On the surface it seems so simple a metaphor; the good and the bad seed, the two harvests, the preservation of the good grain and the destruction of the bad; it all seems so straightforward a picture of the Gospel in the world and the machinations of the Devil that one would hardly expect there to be a request for an explanation. Yet there was. "Declare (explain) unto us the parable of the tares of the field." They evidently sensed there was some important teaching embedded in this little story and they did not want to miss it.

The parable is a dispensational one. It has to do with events of the Last Days. That is clear from the references to the harvest, the end of the world, the furnace of fire. There are some final decisions and actions taken and performed in the course of this parable, and when it is ended the destinies of those who are pictured are decided for ever.

"The kingdom of heaven" said Jesus, "is likened unto a man, which sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way."

This parable has to do with the events of an Age and the climax of that Age. The good seed is sown broadcast and commences to germinate; the tares are scattered amongst the growing wheat and both grow to maturity together until harvest time. Then the reapers come forth and separate the tares from the wheat as they gather, at the last burning up the tares and depositing the wheat in their master's barn. So will it be at the end of the world, said Jesus. The Son of Man will send forth His messengers and they will gather out of His realm all things which offend, and destroy them. After that will the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

The parable divides naturally into two parts. First comes the growing period in which both kinds of seed are coming to maturity together, a period characterised by the statement that it was "while men slept". The second part concerns the harvest and the fate, respectively, of the ripened and gathered wheat and tares.

Many a homily has found its inspiration in the alleged physical nature of the "tares" as

contrasted with the wheat. The best description of this celebrated weed is probably that given eighty years ago by Dr. Thomson, the Palestine missionary, in "The Land and the Book". It seems that zizania, to give it its Greek name, is indistinguishable from wheat during the growing period, and only when ripened can men tell it apart. The seeds, resembling ears of wheat, have soporific and mildly poisonous properties and hence careful separation is imperative. When finally gathered and separated from the wheat, burning is the only safe method of disposal, to prevent the seeds finding their way back to the fields and renewing the harm they create.

"The good seed are the children of the kingdom." This expression occurs once elsewhere, when in Matt. 8. 12 Jesus said that "the children of the kingdom will be cast into outer darkness" where He is evidently referring to the men of Israel of His own day. This is sufficient to point the Lord's meaning. Both Jesus and John the Baptist proclaimed "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand". Every instructed member of the House of Israel knew what that meant, whether he accepted the person of Jesus or did not. The Kingdom of Heaven was the rule of Messiah who was to reign over the nations in righteousness and destroy all evil; the nation of Israel was to be Messiah's agent in proclaiming God's salvation to the ends of the earth and to convert the Gentiles. Hence the significance of Jesus' promise to His own disciples "In the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory ye also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the tribes of Israel." (Matt. 19. 28). Israelites were the children of that Kingdom in the sense that in them that Kingdom could have its beginnings, its first representation. But they were unready, unbelieving and unworthy, so, as Jesus foretold, they were cast into outer darkness. "The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21. 43). When uttering this parable Jesus foreknew this development and He spoke of other "children of the kingdom" who by reason of loyalty to Him and belief in Him and acceptance of Him would become the "good seed" with which the work of this present Age should commence. He Himself appeared after His resurrection to above five

hundred of such good seed (1 Cor. 15. 6). On the Day of Pentecost there were found another three thousand of such seed (Acts 2. 41) and five thousand more were added shortly thereafter (Acts 4. 4). This was the seed which, sown in the days of the Apostles, constituted the good seed which promptly began to grow and multiply as the message of Christ went out to the nations and the work of the Age progressed.

But the Apostles and their co-workers "fell asleep", their lives' works completed. It was then, as Jesus said, "while men slept" that the great Enemy of God and man came and sowed tares, children of the Evil One. The Apostles knew this would happen. "*After my departing*" said Paul to the elders of Ephesus "*shall grievous wolves enter, not sparing the flock*" (Acts 20. 29). "*In the latter times some shall depart from the faith*" (1 Tim. 4. 1). "*The time will come that they will not endure sound doctrine*" (2 Tim. 4. 3). And Peter adds his words "*There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts*" (2 Pet. 3. 3). There has at all times during the Age been a very liberal sowing of tares, not usually recognised as such until the fruitage of their work and teachings begin to appear. And by then they are so inextricably mingled with the "wheat" that nothing short of the reaping of the entire field can separate them. That reaping does not take place until the harvest time.

"*The harvest*" said Jesus "*is the end of the age*" ("world" in this text, as in several others in the New Testament, is the Greek *aion*, which denotes an age, an age in which some aspect of the Divine purpose is initiated and progresses to its climax, a present, a past, or future age extending over a period of time). The analogy is very accurate; just as the wheat cannot be physically separated from the tares until harvest time has come, so it is true that the faithful sincere believers in Christ and those who are mere professors of faith or even outright hypocrites do not and cannot receive the Divine decree which separates them and adjudicates to each their destiny until the end of the Age, the time when the Lord Christ returns in the glory and power of His Second Advent, first to raise His own faithful servants to be with Him and second to bring to an end the evil works of men and set up His own Messianic Kingdom. This can be fairly termed the harvest of this present Age; not only the harvest included in the Divine Plan, for that Messianic King-

dom itself has a harvest conducted on very similar principles. But at the end of this present Age the calling and the selection of the church, the Bride of Christ, is complete, and that which in Revelation 19. 7 is termed "the marriage of the Lamb" will mark the resurrection from the dead, and the exaltation to heavenly conditions of those who throughout the Age have completed their course and formed part of the company of the "dead in Christ" who participate in the First Resurrection.

Now this harvest of the Church is only the "first fruits". There is a further harvest of that good seed which has been sown from Pentecost onward and that further harvest is going to be reaped throughout the thousand years of Christ's Millennial reign. Not until the end of that Age is the last of the good wheat safely gathered into the Father's barn. It is when we realise that fact we can also understand the significance of the furnace of fire which destroys the tares. Many there will be at the time of the First Resurrection who will find themselves left outside the company of the Elect Church. "*Many*" said Jesus on one occasion "*will seek to enter in and not be able, when once the master of the house is risen up and hath shut to the door.*" (Luke 13. 24-25). They will claim to know Him, to have eaten and drunk in His presence and to have acknowledged His teaching, yet He declares that He knows them not. These are not eternally lost—they cannot be if they do at least acknowledge Him as Lord—but they have missed the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. As "tares" they have no share in the First Resurrection. But their final judgment may well be deferred until the Lord Christ in the power of His Millennial reign, accompanied by His glorified Church, will have completed the final evangelising of all the world and reaped that harvest. The 20th chapter of Revelation contains a vision of the end of the Millennium, when Satan is pictured as being loosed from the prison in which he has spent the thousand years, and comes forth in the endeavour again to deceive the nations. The vision goes on to show some who line themselves up under his banner and advance against the powers of holiness, and fire comes down from God out of heaven and devours them, Devil and all. Here, perhaps, is that furnace of fire which eventually devours the tares. When at last the long-suffering of God has been extended to its widest limit, when at last all of Adam's race

who can possibly be made receptive to the goodness of God have been won for God and become reconciled to Him, then at last all that is beyond redemption goes into the destruction from which there is no resurrection. The First Resurrection of the Church at Christ's Second Advent, and the Second Resurrection, of men during Christ's Millennial reign, will have restored to God all who are capable of being reached by the message and power of Christ, and after that there is nothing but the burning of the tares.

"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." That was Jesus' conclusion to the parable. He may have been speaking of the Church alone, He may have referred to all who ultimately attain salvation. The declaration is equally true in

either case. At the end of the Millennial reign Christ Himself, the Divine Son, is to "deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father . . . that God may be all in all." (1 Cor. 15. 24-28). In that glad day, when the whole purpose of God for mankind has reached its triumphant consummation, all who are righteous will shine as the sun in God's eternal kingdom. What matter that those who are with Christ as His Bride occupy a different station than do those who have come to eternal life through the beneficent ministrations of the Messianic reign? The fact remains that every knee will then bow, and every tongue will then confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. There will be no dissentient voice, no discordant note, in all God's wide universe.

A NOTE ON JOHN. 20.22-23

"And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit, Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." (John 20. 22-23).

Were the disciples really given power to remit sins, a power which we normally believe to be the prerogative of God only? An acquaintance with the customs of the times can help us to a better understanding of this incident. It was a characteristic of the people of the East not many generations ago to consider it a great honour should a saintly or "holy" man breathe upon them as he passed. In ceremonial form such a holy man would deliberately perform this act toward one who came before him as a disciple or in some subservient manner. It was evidently a survival from ancient times and almost certainly the same custom existed in the days of Jesus. His breathing on His disciples was an outward sign of the authority and power He possessed to impart the Holy Spirit to them in due time. The act was evidently connected with the charge concerning the remission of sins that follows in the next verse, and that in turn would seem to point to the commission upon which they were embarking—the preaching of the Gospel. Jesus had just been raised from the dead and the disciples were now to represent Him in the world by the proclamation of His message. The sins of men would be remitted or retained according to their response or lack of response to that preaching. Both Paul and Peter in their early sermons

made it plain that acceptance of the Gospel would bring forgiveness of sins. "Repent, and be converted, that your sins might be blotted out" were Peter's words on the Day of Pentecost. Therefore the Lord was identifying the Gospel that was to be preached so closely with those who were to preach it, that instead of saying "the power of the Holy Spirit operating through the Gospel will bring forgiveness of sins to men" it was as if He had said "the power of the Holy Spirit operating through you will bring forgiveness". The disciples, empowered by the Holy Spirit, by the preaching of the Gospel would bring either forgiveness of sins to men who believed, or leave in their sins those who did not believe.

It is important to note that this "retaining" of sin on the part of the unbelievers is not final. God still has appointed the Millennial judgment day to give full and fair opportunity to all men. But so far as this Gospel Age is concerned and the immediate commission given to the disciples is concerned, the word of these men, and their successors, moved by the Spirit, in preaching the Gospel "in all the world for a witness", does have the effect of converting some and leading many such to the life of consecration, the High Calling, and leaving others just where they were, "in their sins". All such latter must eventually, in the Millennial Day, face up to the challenge and accept the message of the Gospel, or reap the inevitable consequence of wilful sin in the final cutting off from life.

SPIRITUAL MANHOOD

A study in
1 Cor. 13, 11

Spiritual law is as fixed in its principles and operations as is physical law. If it were not so the physical could not be so frequently used as it is for illustrations of spiritual things. Thus, for instance in spiritual life, as revealed in the Scriptures, we have duplicated that principle so well known in physical law, of growth and development—first the blade, then the ear, and afterward the full corn in the ear; first the infant, then the boy, and afterward the full grown man; first the babe in Christ, then the growing child, the young man, and finally the full stature of a man in Christ. (Heb. 5. 31, 14; 1 John 2. 12-14; Eph. 4. 13-15). In both cases there is also a marked similarity in the process of development. As in nature both plant and animal life are sustained by appropriate nourishment, food, light, heat, air, etc.—thus strengthening them to perform the various functions of their being, so the spiritual new creatures in Christ must have and appropriate nourishment that they may continue to live and grow. There is this difference, however, to be observed between the physical and the spiritual life in the process of development; viz., that the former matures quickly, while the latter is of slow growth—a plant to bloom in eternity.

As "new creatures" in Christ—babes in the family of God—we realise our adoption as sons only when we have renounced the vain pomp and glory of this world and turned fully to God, claiming no righteousness of our own, but humbly accepting the imputed righteousness of Christ. No one is even a babe in Christ who still cherishes iniquity in his heart, or who fails to recognise his need of the covering of Christ's righteousness. But having been converted, turned about, from sin to God and righteousness, having learned of Christ, having put off the old man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4. 24), and having been renewed in the spirit (disposition) of our minds, we are reckoned sons of God, babes in Christ. And from that infantile standpoint, which has in it, undeveloped, all the elements of the man, the duty and privilege of such is to grow, to develop as new creatures in Christ. We are not to content ourselves with the lisplings and prattlings of infancy, nor with the milk diet suitable to that age, but, making due use of these as stepping-stones we should go on unto

perfection.

It was in view of such considerations that the Apostle penned the words of this text. He himself had rapidly passed on from the early stages of Christian character to higher degrees of development, and yet he was not counting that he had attained the perfection which was the mark at which he was aiming. (Phil. 3. 13, 14). He had, however, passed beyond both infancy and boyhood to the stature of a young man in Christ. Looking back over the pathway of his Christian experience, he recognised these different stages, and recorded his thoughts, "*When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things*".

This was true both of his natural life and his spiritual life—the reference being specially to the latter, of which the former was merely an illustration. By the illustration he would draw our attention to the fact that if we have been children of God for some time we should be able, on looking backward over our Christian experience, to trace a degree of advancement toward the mark of perfection. While as mere babes in Christ our hearts must always be loyal to God and true to righteousness, our very inexperience causes us often to stumble; our knowledge of the right ways of the Lord is very imperfect, and our powers of discernment are very unskilled: we have much to learn both of revelation and experience. The child in Christ has its own childish understanding, thoughts and ways, and his brethren in Christ should not expect from him the wisdom of the sage. Nor should he himself presume to have such wisdom; for only through knowledge and the discipline of experience does wisdom come; and then, only when we have allowed them to work in us the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

For our growth and development in the Christian character God supplies all that is needful in the way of nourishment, and it is our part to make use of all the help He sends. By study and meditation upon His Word of truth, by prayer and communion with God, we partake more and more of His Spirit, and are led into a closer acquaintance both with the Lord Himself, and also with His works and ways. And by exercise of the strength thus gained in active service of the Lord, we

are prepared to receive more and more of the fullness of His grace, and so to go on from grace to grace, and from one degree of advancement to another.

But notwithstanding these recognised principles of Christian growth and development, it is a lamentable fact that many who can point with exactness to the day and hour when first they gave their hearts to the Lord and received the Holy Spirit, the seal of their adoption, are compelled to realise, when they consider the matter at all, that instead of advancing toward the stature of men in Christ, they have actually retrograded. Often such painfully look back to the blessedness of that first experience of the grace of God in their hearts, and say:—

*"Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I sought the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and His Word?"*

It is a thing of the past with them, and its joys have fled. Why? It is because they have failed to appropriate the means of grace which God has supplied, and because, instead of striving against the downward tendencies of the carnal nature, they have allowed those old dispositions to rise up and re-assert themselves. In some cases a morbid desire for something new and strange has led away from the truth into the forbidden paths of human speculation—philosophy and science, so called—until the mind became bewildered and confused in the labyrinths of error—the snares of the Wicked One. In other cases the measure of truth possessed has been held in unrighteousness. The tongue has been permitted to wag in the service of sin and uncleanness, manifesting unkindness, lack of Christian courtesy and forbearance, evil surmising, self-exaltation, pride, boastfulness, vaunting, etc., etc., and these unholy indulgencies have been excused and even cultivated; they have not been striven against nor repented of; hence the spiritual decline.

It is for these causes that the blessed sense of fellowship and communion with God, experienced when first the Holy Spirit set the seal of adoption upon the heart, has been lost by many. God cannot dwell in a heart so unfit for His presence; and no Christian can look back to the time of his first experience as a child of God and recall any such evil dispositions at that time. Had his heart been in such a condition then, God would not have accepted him; and it is only as we strive against sin that we can continue to abide in His love and

favour.

Who cannot look back to his first experience in the Christian life and remember how the love of God filled his heart and overflowed to all His creatures, especially to them of the household of faith—a love that could bear well the beautiful description of 1 Cor. 13. 4-7. *"Charity (love) suffereth long and is kind, envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."*

Realising such to be the will of God, this was the attitude of heart which the seeker after God sought to attain; and such an attitude of adoption sealed him as an accepted son of God. Yet God, who remembers that we are dust, that we are morally weak from the Fall, knew with what difficulty we must endeavour to maintain this condition of heart and mind when assailed by temptations, and worn with the disappointments and trials of life. Nevertheless, He does look for the cultivation of these graces of character in us. He does, and has a right to, expect us to strive to live godly, and to war a warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil. And, therefore, notwithstanding the facts of trials and temptations, the maturer growth of Christian character should find our first love deepened into a more steady, constant and enduring thing, not characterised, perhaps, with so much of the gush and fluster of youth, but rather with the mellow benedictions of a more nearly ripened character.

That the church in this sifting and proving time will be individually tested as to character, as well as to faith, is certain. The prospective heirs of the kingdom must, like their Lord, be tried and tested in every point; and it behoves everyone, therefore, to watch and pray, lest he enter into temptation, and diligently to cultivate such a character as will stand every test applied to it. But in the hour of testing let none mistake love of peace for love of righteousness. Let us see to it that the same mind dwells in us that is in Christ, our pattern. So shall we be children of God beloved and owned of Him.

The saintly Dr. George Matheson once said, "Devotion must be a child of reflection; it may rise on wings, but they must be wings of thought".

INDEX, 1961

EXPOSITORY

Abram of the Most High God	115
Bible School—5 Books of Moses	9, 29, 49, 69, 89, 128, 147
Elihu, The Wisdom of	
7 God is Love	3
8 Destiny of the wicked	36
9 Power of God	53
10 Immortal, invisible	63
Jesus and Life to Come	
Part 1	83
" 2	131
" 3	151
Jesus and woman of Canaan	96
King in righteousness, A	
Part 1	85
" 2	103
" 3	123
Merciful & faithful High Priest	138
Monuments, The Voice of the	
1 Rosetta Stone	7
2 Behistun Inscription	28
3 Tel-el-Amarna Tablets	46
4 Moabite Stone	67
5 Siloam Inscription	99
6 Ras Shamra Tablets	111
Oikoumene—the world	16
One taken, another left	56
Parable Wicked Husbandmen	17
" Wineskins	33
" Unforgiving Servant	43
" Rich Fool	78
" Two Debtors	93
" Pharisee & Publican	109
" Sowers	133
" Wheat & Tares	155
Philemon	106
Physician, The Beloved	13
Question Box, The	20
Spirit & Bride say Come	162
Three Sins	145
Translation of Enoch	74
Unity in Ephesians	118
Whip of small cords	127
Zerubbabel's Passover	23
DEVOTIONAL	
End of the Years, At the	143
Fossil Theology	154
Test of Endurance, The	60

Thought for Month	2, 22, 42, 62, 82, 102
Spiritual Manhood	158

SHORT ITEMS

Angel's Food	19
Bible Emphasis	73
Burning Bush, The	105
Example to avoid, An	153
Holiness	80
Ingersoll's vision	92
Mark's Gospel	15
Nebuchadnezzar's prayer	66
Note on Exod. 20. 5	150
" " Matt. 12. 43	146
" " Mark 4. 11-12	46
" " Luke 11. 51	6
" " Jno. 20. 22-23	157
" " 2 Cor. 2. 15-16	52
" " Rev. 20. 10	8
On the Bible	15
Prejudice	48
Rousseau on Christ	55
Simplicity of speech	88

TEXTS EXPOUNDED

Gen. 1-5	29	Matt. 18. 21-35 ...	43
" 4-11	49	" 19. 28	151
" 12-25	69	" 21. 33-44 ...	17
" 25-31	89	Mark 4. 3-32	135
" 31-32	128	" 4. 11-12 ...	46
" 33-38	147	Luke 5. 31-37 ...	33
" 5. 24	74	" 7. 36-47 ...	93
" 14	115	" 11. 51	6
Exod. 3. 2-3	105	" 12. 13-34 ...	78
" 20. 5	150	" 17. 34-37 ...	56
Ezra 5. 1	23	" 18. 9-14 ...	109
Job 32-35	3	Jno. 2. 15	127
" 36. 1-21	38	" 20. 22-23 ...	157
" 36. 22-37. 4 ...	53	1 Cor. 13. 11 ...	158
" 37. 5-24	63	" 15. 40	22
Psa. 64. 9	82	2 Cor. 2. 15-16 ...	52
" 71. 17-18	131	Heb. 2. 5	16
" 78. 25	19	" 11. 5	74
Isa. 30-32	85	2 Pet. 1. 12-19 ...	62
" 32	103, 123	" 3. 3	156
Matt. 12. 43	146	Rev. 20. 10	9
" 13. 24-43 ...	155	" 22. 17	132