

BREAK OF DAY

BY

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or the Road to Emmaus," etc., etc.

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PREFACE

THE following papers have, for the most part, already appeared in a monthly periodical edited by the writer.¹ He would like to regard them as a contribution, under the Lord's guidance, to that ministry of truth given so richly in connection with a movement in the Church of God a hundred years ago—a revival worthy to rank with the two in Israel (and bearing many of their features) to which attention is drawn in the chapters on the close of the Book of Judges and the return of the exiles from Babylon under Ezra and Nehemiah. This later revival of the last century answered to Philadelphia (Rev. iii.) and is not unworthy to be ranked with those earlier ones and also with that known as the Reformation.

We are living in Remnant days. Such times have always proved occasions of the greatest blessing to those who have received light from God, and who have endeavoured to maintain, though perhaps in much feebleness, the character and special truth of the dispensation in which they find themselves. And this will always be the experience of those who seek to maintain God's testimony in dependence upon Him. To all such we would commend these pages, especially the chapter on the Remnant.

Will those who receive help from this book please circulate it?

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EUTYCHUS : OR BREAK OF DAY

A FORECAST OF CHURCH HISTORY

ACTS XX. 7-12

WHAT is this incident in connection with Eutychus intended to teach us ? We cannot imagine that this young man finds his name on the page of inspiration simply for his own sake, for his fame rests, not upon any great achievement, but upon a fall from a third loft, under circumstances which do not redound very much to his credit. It seems rather as if there is something in the background, as if the real interest does not centre so much in the young man himself, but in what happened to him. He is presented to our notice in a representative character. Our conviction is that the deep sleep which fell upon Eutychus represents the condition into which the Church was lapsing. Very shortly she, too, would fall asleep, and like Eutychus would sink down with sleep, giving up her heavenly calling and position and, settling down upon the earth, it would hardly be known whether she was dead or alive. Thus the Lord in addressing the Church at Ephesus says, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen." And there can be little doubt that the persecution which followed, as represented in Smyrna, was to rouse her from her lethargy, and to some extent this was accomplished.

If we take this view of it, it will account, we believe, for the burden which seemed resting upon the apostle's spirit ; a burden which explains the continuance of his speech until midnight (*v.* 7). With unfailing prescience he discerned the tendency of things and foresaw what

was coming. Thus he could write to Timothy, even in his first epistle: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith" (1 Tim. iv.). While in the very chapter to which our subject belongs he declares to the Ephesian elders: "For I know this that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." And for three years he had never ceased to warn them of this night and day with tears. No wonder, then, he poured out his soul in prolonged speech at Troas. Can we help seeing therefore that the incident concerning Eutychus, with all that led up to it and surrounds it, has a significance beyond the young man himself? that it forms a vivid picture of the state into which the Church was rapidly sinking, and therefore is not without very important instruction for ourselves.

Two things specially stand out from the narrative. (1) We have the course of Church history indicated: (2) What is to preserve us amid the general decline and corruption? How are we to be approved amid the general failure?

I

It will be noticed that four periods of time are mentioned. (a) The first day of the week; (b) the morrow; (c) midnight; (d) break of day. Three of these occur in verse 7 and the last in verse 11.

(a) The first day of the week holds a supreme place in the history of the Early Church. It is not too much to say that the Church takes its character from it; while closely linked with it is the breaking of bread. Those two things are mentioned in verse 7 of our chapter: "Upon the first day of the week the disciples came together to break bread." Earlier in this same book we read: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (ii. 42). Well would it have been for the

Church had this early simplicity continued. Let us see how much is involved in these two striking facts, the first day of the week and the breaking of bread. The latter can hardly be understood apart from the former.

To begin with, the first day of the week was not the day of the Jewish Sabbath. From a Jewish point of view, this was a matter of tremendous import. To substitute another day for one that had been appointed with Divine sanction, meant either lawlessness, or that Christianity had superseded the older faith. Moreover, to make everything of the first day of the week instead of the seventh day, was to make everything of Christ, for it confirmed and commemorated His resurrection. It became the Lord's Day.

But, further, the first day of the week puts us in touch with a new order of things. The Sabbath stands related to Creation, and to Israel as God's earthly people. The first day of the week stands related to *new creation*. We read in Mark xvi. that "very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun." Yes, but another Sun, the Light of another world, had already risen! The grave was empty. Resurrection had opened a new scene and on the first day of the week we are put in touch with another order of things altogether.

On that day, we read (John xx.) the disciples were gathered together for fear of the Jews, and while thus assembled Jesus came and stood in the midst; and his first word is "Peace." The effect of Christ's presence is to take away the remembrance and influence of the world through which we are passing and all that would disturb our mind, and we are put in touch with a world where everything derives its character from Him. Thus an atmosphere of peace and a sense of relationship fills our souls. "My Father and your Father; My God and your God." We come together as His brethren, and all must be well with us.

But this is not all. "When He had so said, He shewed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the dis-

ciples glad when they saw the Lord." Not only peace but joy fills their hearts. His hands and side tell a tale that leaves nothing unsaid. They remind the disciples of His sufferings and His triumph. The love that led Him to die is revealed. In the presence of such wonders the world is forgotten. We do not remember the trials of the week that is behind us, we worship.

Thus the first day of the week gives character to the breaking of bread. In meeting to remember Him we give Him the first place at the commencement of a new week. His death, of which the bread and wine are the emblems, recalls Him to us in connection with all He has accomplished, and our response is: "Unto Him that loved us." We are in the presence of the Risen One and this scene is for the time being left behind.

The Morrow

(b) The next period of time mentioned is the Morrow. "Paul was ready to depart on the *morrow*." The morrow also stands related to the breaking of bread, for we show forth the Lord's death "until He come." In one sense, the Christian is not concerned with anything beyond the "morrow"—the "morrow" of the Lord's return. In saying this we are not deferring it, but only emphasizing the fact that it is the next thing before us. To-morrow is, so to speak, the boundary of our horizon, and we do not look beyond. In a very real sense, we may live within the compass of twenty-four hours. What freedom from care, what exhilaration of spirit such a habit of mind would give us! Our to-morrow may be His presence. Of course He may come to-day, but from the point of view from which we are speaking, we need not look beyond to-morrow. Our to-morrow is to see His face. We are to be ready, as Paul was, to depart on the morrow.

And this leads us to look at the matter from still another angle. In the light of Church history, the departure of Paul was fraught with tremendous consequences. He was the minister of the Church—a wise

master-builder. To him had been committed a special revelation regarding it, and when he departed declension soon set in. He himself foresaw it and predicted it, as we have already intimated. So that the words "ready to depart on the morrow," have real significance, and are closely related to Eutychus and what is recorded concerning him. The whole scene was in view of Paul's departure. "For I know this that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you," and he proceeds to indicate the changes that would take place. The knowledge of this undoubtedly explains the length of his discourse.

Midnight

(c) Thus there is introduced immediately another period of time—"midnight." Two things are brought into contrast—"midnight" and "many lights." "There were *many lights* in the upper chamber." This is not without its significance. The Church was in the heyday of its splendour. The "many lights" represent the many gifts—apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers and evangelists. Yet as, in spite of many lights and also of the memorial of Christ's sufferings upon the table, Eutychus fell into a "deep sleep," so the Church was about to lapse into spiritual torpor and death, and in "due time" worldliness and temporal prosperity would eat out its very heart. This helps us to understand the reference to *midnight*. After Paul's departure the Church would in due time reach her midnight. The Middle Ages found her apparently sleeping the sleep of death. Worldly alliance, spiritual arrogance and moral corruption had done their work. Gorgeous ceremonial, pomp and carnal display might be there, but spiritual life and power were absent. Like Eutychus she had sunk down with sleep; from heavenly places she had fallen not only to earth but almost to hell, and to all appearance she was dead.

We speak generally, of course. We are thinking of the history of the Church externally as man sees it. Amidst

it all there were the elect, the remnant spoken of in the address to Thyatira—"As many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan"—but the mass were defiled and corrupt and as apparently dead as was Eutychus.

Then came the Reformation. This is indicated in verse 10 of our chapter. "Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him." The Reformation was a most glorious era, which must be attributed to nothing less than the work of God and the operations of His Spirit. The whole Church was not awakened, but a mighty shaking took place and a work was done which, in spite of very much failure, continues until the present time. Though it must not be forgotten that the words to Sardis, which represents this period of Church history, are: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead" (Rev. iii. 1). In view of our subject this statement is remarkable.

Having regard to the instrument used in this great revival, it is to be noticed that it was Paul's doctrine of justification by faith. "Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him." Under God, Paul's doctrine has been the means of every revival in the Church. This is not to disparage either John or Peter, of course. They have their place, and their ministry is most important, and indeed indispensable, nevertheless God has put the supreme honour, we speak of, upon Paul.

And it is well to notice Paul's method. He "went down and fell on him and embraced him." Are we not reminded of an Old Testament occurrence? Gehazi could place the prophet's staff upon the face of the child, he could carry out to the letter the instructions he received, but without effect. It was only after the prophet had prayed, and "lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands, and stretched himself upon the child," that there were any signs of life. It

is not otherwise in the case of Eutychus. Paul went down and fell on him and embraced him. Little effect is produced by the mere recital of truth, however accurately and fluently performed. People must feel some warmth before there is a response.

"Thy heart must overflow,
If thou another's heart would reach:
'Tis the overflow of heart
That gives the lips full speech."

The Reformation proved that life was still there as in the case of Eutychus. History is thus clearly foreshadowed in this narrative. First, the Early Church, the breaking of bread. Second, Paul's departure, and the growing power of evil in consequence. Thirdly, the worldliness and ease that led to sleep and ultimately to apparent death. Fourth, the revival under God through Paul's doctrine of justification by faith.

The Second Reference to Breaking of Bread

Subsequent to the restoration of Eutychus we read: "When he (Paul) therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed" (v. 11).

There has been much discussion regarding this second reference to breaking of bread. Some have thought that Paul's discourse had preceded the breaking of bread; while others regard this second reference as not meaning anything beyond an ordinary meal, which, as a matter of fact, we know often accompanied in those days the "breaking of bread." Whichever may be the correct view, looking at the matter from the standpoint of Church history—the view taken throughout this article—the reference to the breaking of bread is certainly not without interest. For, as a matter of fact, there has been another revival since the Reformation—a revival which had as its central feature the breaking of bread.

At the beginning of the Nineteenth Century there were two movements which, though widely different in char-

acter and aim, yet had this in common, that the Lord's Supper was made the centre of worship, and Church order filled a conspicuous place. Forms and ceremonies and the revival of sacerdotal claims characterized the Tractarian Movement, as it was called, and was a movement in the direction of Rome which, with some, ended there: the other was a return to Scripture and to the practices of the early days of the Church. The result being that once more on "the first day of the week the disciples came together to break bread." So that, from this point of view, the reference to Paul having broken bread, after he had come up again, is extremely interesting. Paul was again in the ascendant. What was true of the Reformation was equally true of this later revival—it was accomplished, under God, through Paul's teaching. And Paul will talk to the end. So we read: "When . . . he had broken bread and eaten, and *talked a long while*, even till break of day, so he departed."

"Break of Day"

This brings us to the fourth period of time referred to—"break of day." There have been four great periods in the history of the Church: the Apostolic era, which practically ended with Paul's departure. In this case we refer to his death. (Compare verses 7, 11 and 29, in each of which allusion is made in some way to Paul's departure.) Next, the Rise of Popery, which culminated in the midnight of the Middle Ages. Then, the Reformation, and lastly, the closing revival to which reference has already been made. What is before us now is the "break of day." This is the Christian's to-morrow. The Morning Star illumines the sky, and we wait for our departure. Paul talked even till break of day, *so he departed*.

And so the Church will depart. As Paul departed just before the day dawned, so it will be with the Church which, as Christ's servant, he founded. All true members of the Body of Christ will depart at dawn, before

God's final judgments overtake this world, and in order that the saints may appear with their Lord when He comes to reign.

"And they brought the young man alive and were not a little comforted." Why should it tell us this except it be for our own comfort? As Paul says with reference to his doctrine of the Coming: "Wherefore comfort one another with these words: 'They brought the young man alive.'" Eternal youth will characterize the Church, as it will Him, Whose Bride and companion she will be, and of Whom it is written: "Thou hast the dew of Thy youth." As sharers of His life, no mark of age, or sorrow or change will ever be upon us. The midnight darkness will be over; the storm and stress of the Church's pilgrim journey will be ended, and the "break of day" for her will be that which finally will usher in the day of God. "Let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." We are not of the night nor of darkness, and at the break of day we shall depart. This is the period for which we wait. The Church's pilgrim journey is almost over; her sad history is almost ended; let us lift up our heads for our redemption draweth nigh.

II

What is to keep us in the meantime? How shall we be preserved from slumber and the down-grade? The same chapter will supply the answer.

1. Will the reader notice that before the breaking of bread is mentioned there is a reference to "the days of unleavened bread" (v. 6). It speaks of "after the days of unleavened bread." An interesting comparison may be made with Acts xii. 3, where we read in a parenthesis "Then were the days of unleavened bread." But in chapter xx. we are reaching the period when the Church would cease to keep this feast, and verse 6 sheds its light upon what follows; it speaks of "after the days of unleavened bread." This is in accordance with what has already come before us.

Now if we are to be preserved from spiritual apathy and decay it must never be "after the days of unleavened bread" with us. Rather must we take heed to the words of the Apostle in his first epistle to the Corinthians, chapter v. : "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us : therefore let us keep the feast"—the feast of "unleavened bread." What it really means is holiness of life. The old evil influences are no longer to affect us. We are to keep in memory what Christ suffered for our sake. As the Apostle Peter puts it : "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness" (1 Pet. ii. 24). That is what keeping the feast of unleavened bread means. It is personal piety—a life lived that is open to God—characterized by "sincerity and truth."

2. Then comes the reference to the first day of the week and the breaking of bread. As we have already dwelt at length upon these, it is only necessary to say that to know the power of Christ's resurrection and to enter week by week into all that His death involves, our own love constantly fed by the remembrance of His, is to be kept above the influence of this world, and in an atmosphere conducive to spiritual health and progress, and would be found an effectual check to our natural proneness to declension.

3. In verse 16 of our chapter, it is to be noticed there is a striking reference to Pentecost. Paul "hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost." What happened on the day of Pentecost gives character to the dispensation in which we find ourselves. Fullness of blessing can only be realized as the truth of the dispensation is apprehended. It can neither be attained nor retained apart from this. Into all that is involved in the descent and abiding presence of the Holy Spirit we cannot enter here. The House of God was formed (1 Tim. iii. 15-16) : within that House alone the Spirit speaks (iv. 1). Ministry and worship are effective only as He is the source of them (1 Cor. xii. 1-13 ; Phil. iii. 3 ; John iv. 14 and 21-24). He glorifies

Christ (John xvi. 14). Let us keep in the power of Pentecost and hold firmly the truth it embodies.

4. There follows in Acts xx. an outline of the Apostle Paul's ministry as well as the manner of it. Only as we keep in mind the man, his methods and his ministry, can we hope to be kept free from the insidious influences around us, and be preserved from all that the Apostle saw would enter the Church and which now holds it in its grip.

"I have not shunned to declare unto you," he says, "all the counsel of God." And again, "I have showed you all things." What a man and what a minister! May we finish our course with joy as he did! He will talk to us if we will listen till "break of day."

THE APOSTLE PAUL

READ ACTS XX. 17-38

THE Apostle Paul, undoubtedly, holds a unique place. The words of the ascended Christ to Ananias, "He is a chosen vessel unto Me," would tell us as much. Endorsed as they are by similar words spoken to the Apostle himself; and recorded in Acts xxvi. as part of his speech before Agrippa. His conversion, and the manner of it, tell the same tale. His conversion, his mission, and his commission are all unique.

But we should miss the whole point of this, if we regarded these facts simply in relation to the man himself. They must be looked at in relation to Christianity. Christianity cannot be understood apart from this "chosen vessel." He is its embodiment as well as its exponent. It is the fashion to-day, in some quarters, to belittle the Apostle and almost to deride him. To speak almost with contempt and opposition of the way he *systematized* Christianity. As if system were necessarily a bad thing in itself. Is not the universe of which we form part an organized system? His teaching and methods, and those of his Master, are contrasted, much to the disparagement of the former. Such criticism is very irrational and very uncalled for. Life and conduct, it is true, are all-important, but a man who fails to regulate his life and who lives it apart from any system whatever does not accomplish much. Moreover, who has more to say, as to life and conduct, than the Apostle Paul? "For me to live is Christ," he says. And again, "I am

crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." And once more, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." If there is any higher life or higher range of conduct than this, we shall be glad to hear of it.

But if the Apostle carried out the work which was given him to do, who dare find fault? What did Christ say to him as to his mission? "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee." Can we believe that the Apostle failed either in understanding the purpose of his call or in giving effect to it? Neither was the case, as his own words bear witness. "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision," he declares before King Agrippa. "Having therefore obtained help of God I continue," he says. And hear him again when the end is in view. After years of suffering and service, he says to the elders of Ephesus, "Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." And again, when the end is still nearer, he triumphantly asserts: "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand, I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

No, the truth of the matter is far otherwise than some critics would have us believe. As we have already said, Paul was both the exponent and embodiment of Christianity. Strange would it have been, and equally tragic, if such "a chosen vessel" with such a ministry should have failed to present Christianity according to the truth of it. To assume otherwise is to suppose that Paul was either a fool or a liar, or that Christ Himself does not understand true Christianity. Would He have chosen one or having chosen him leave him to make such a bungle of things as some people suppose?

In a day when a bastard Christianity is abroad, with a form of godliness but denying the power thereof; when on the one hand sound doctrine is no longer endured, and, on the other, the grave-clothes of a past and dead ritual render what Christ and His apostles established almost unrecognizable and unintelligible, it will not be out of place to consider briefly the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul as set forth in his address to the Ephesian elders, the record of which is contained in Acts xx.

We propose to consider the manner, method, and matter of the Apostle Paul's ministry.

I

The manner. He commences his address with the following words: "Ye know from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons. Serving the Lord with all humility of mind." Now, perhaps, hardly anything could give us a better insight into this man's character than such a reference as we have here to humility. The one characteristic he places before every other, and which he evidently considers higher than any other, is *humility*. How should we have commenced an address of this kind? Paul singles out humility as if it were the one thing he wished to be remembered by. And he had been characterized by this Christian grace, not spasmodically, or only on set occasions, but constantly. "From the first day," he says, speaking after at least three years amongst them—from the first day this quality of his manner of service had been conspicuous. He was not afraid or ashamed to remind them that they knew this. The Apostle does not begin by speaking of his services, though surely they were wonderful in their power and scope. Nor does he refer to the revelations vouchsafed to him; although, in another place, he tells us they were abundant. Nor does he begin by reminding them of his apostleship, although he was not behind the very chief of the apostles, and not one

of them had more to his credit. No, he begins by saying he had "Served the Lord with all humility of mind." And this is all the more wonderful when we consider his intellectual gifts, the powers he possessed and the miracles he wrought, and the manifold results which had followed his labours. All of which were calculated to puff him up and make him feel a little important, but none of these does he mention, first of all. He prefers to single out the humility of mind, which it had been his aim ever to preserve and which the grace of Christ had wrought in him. And this in spite of the temptation, of which he speaks elsewhere, of being exalted above measure, because of the abundance of the revelations. We say again, no surer indication could be given of the Apostle's greatness of soul and that he was possessed of the highest Christian character. He is speaking at the end of years of service and of splendid success, yet his unrivalled powers and achievements left him still humble.

But there is more as to the manner of his ministry, though we do not intend to dwell at length upon every feature of it. "With many tears and temptations" (trials), he says. Here, no doubt, we have one secret of his success. Some one has said that "prayer and temptation, the Bible and meditation, make a good minister of Jesus Christ." Whitefield, we are told, scarcely ever preached without weeping. And the Psalmist informs us: "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Such manner of preaching is largely out of fashion to-day, and probably has little attraction for either preachers or hearers of this twentieth century. But if a better way has been found than the Apostle's, there is at least one fact which cannot be denied: the same results are not manifest. If the weeping is not there, neither is the rejoicing over the sheaves. A man who is so affected by his message or by the need of his hearers that he can weep, is not likely to preach in vain. Any-

way, Paul was not ashamed to shed tears, nor to speak of it, and his trials were great. What trials may do for a servant of the Lord, the effect they may have upon him and consequently upon his ministry, no one can tell.

Further on, the Apostle comes to quite another aspect of the situation. He can make this asseveration: "I have coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel." What disinterested service! "I seek not yours but you," he declares on another occasion. He could elsewhere stoutly maintain and insist upon the obligation that existed on the part of the Lord's people to minister to the needs of those who ministered to them in spiritual things. He can assert, "Even so, hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." The receiving is not to be all on one side. It is not a great matter for one who bestows spiritual things to reap carnal things. But he adds: "I have used none of these things." While, therefore, his practice was not to become the rule, yet the manner he adopted reflects unbounded credit upon him. Again he can say to these elders: "Yea, ye yourselves know." It was common knowledge that his own hands had ministered to his necessities, and even beyond that: "to them that were with me," he can add. Are we not conscious of the tremendous change which has come over the scene, during twenty centuries, in regard to these matters? Has not the Church too often become an arena for the satisfaction of greed and worldly ambition, and filthy lucre played far too large a part?

Without any unseemly boasting this man can declare: "I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." Here was one who not only preached to people, but those very people to whom he preached saw day by day before their eyes a man who exhibited in his own life the reality and power of the principles he proclaimed.

II

So much for the manner of the Apostle's ministry. But we are also privileged to learn a little of his methods.

He declares he "kept back nothing that was profitable" (v. 20). Neither indolence nor fear withheld him from speaking, if he knew the theme to be for edification, however solemn might be the subject, or unwelcome to the depraved heart of man. Indolence may lead to the neglect of certain lines of ministry. If a preacher is to keep back nothing he must be abreast of the truth himself, always learning more and always advancing. But very frequently, especially in these days, fear rather than indolence closes the lips of many a preacher. He shrinks from being a purveyor of unpalatable truth. Like the false prophets of Jeremiah's day many prefer to prophesy "smooth things," and to say "Peace, Peace, when there is no peace." "They speak a vision of their own heart and not out of the mouth of the Lord." Not so Paul. He says again: "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (v. 27).

Further, he says, "But have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house." What does he mean by "shewed you"? A similar expression occurs in regard to our Lord's own ministry. In Luke viii. 1, we read: "He went throughout every city and village, preaching and *shewing* the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God." And the record goes on to speak of certain women who accompanied Him, who had been "healed of evil spirits and infirmities." They were the living exhibition of the power He exercised, and in such witnesses people could see the effects of His ministry. Was not this the way in which He *shewed* the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God? In the Apostle Paul's case, it may have been somewhat similar, though perhaps more confined to himself personally. His manner of life, as we have seen, bore witness to the power and reality of the truth he proclaimed. In

writing to the Thessalonians he says : " For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance ; *as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.*" " What manner of men " ? Was not this the " shewing " ?

Nor did the Apostle confine his ministrations to public instruction. Part of his method was " house to house " visitation. The value of this is not properly appreciated. In the early chapters of the Acts at the beginning, the work was largely associated, though not exclusively, with private dwellings. " And daily in the Temple," we read, "*and in every house*, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." And it cannot be doubted that the decay of Christianity was concurrent with the neglect of this. No greater injury has ever been inflicted upon Christ's cause than to associate it with solemn and stately buildings. Nor can it be questioned that where these splendid and ornate buildings most abound there Christianity is weakest and at its lowest ebb. If the Bible were read and expounded in the houses of the people to-day, there might be some hope of the revival of true Christianity in our land. The religion of Christ has been too much divorced from home and personal life, and has become associated with consecrated buildings and a round of ceremonials. It is not in vain that the Apostle thought it worth while to refer to household instruction.

The Apostle's habit was to *warn* his hearers as well as instruct them. " Therefore watch and remember," he says, " that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears." The passage from which this is an extract reveals clearly the nature of these warnings and the cause of them. He foresaw that grievous wolves would enter in among them, not sparing the flock, and that of their own selves men would arise speaking perverse things. The history of the Church proves with what unerring wis-

dom and foresight the Apostle spoke, and to-day on every hand we see what mischief the wolves have wrought, and what perverse things are spoken everywhere. If there was need for the Apostle to warn, how much more need is there for such warnings to-day, from all who have the true interests of Christ's sheep at heart. The greatest need to-day is for every true servant of Christ, everyone who cherishes the truth and to whom Christ's interests are dear, to remember the exhortation as well as the example of the Apostle, and to feed the Church of God and warn the flock.

Evidently every other kind of method was accompanied and supported by prayer, for at the close of the address this great servant of God "Kneeled down and prayed with them all."

III

Having considered the manner and method of the Apostle's ministry, we now come to the matter. In this address there is evident design in the way the Holy Spirit guided both Paul and Luke: the former in what he was led to say and the latter in the record he has given. We have an account of three of the most important years in the Apostle's life given us in this chapter, during which the climax of his ministry and service was reached, condensed into less than five hundred words. And this brief record contains both counsel and admonition unequalled in value and importance.

1. The Apostle alludes, in the first place, to the most elementary truths. "Testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks," he says, "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 21). He did not hesitate to proclaim the need of *repentance*. In a day when men are treated as if they needed only a little help, a little more impulse toward goodness, as if they needed Christ merely as an example, it is of all-importance to be reminded that one of the keynotes of Paul's ministry was repentance. And

repentance implied that men are bankrupt and lost. John preached the baptism of repentance in view of the Coming of Christ. This did not mean that Christ was coming merely to give a right direction to people's lives; it meant that "the axe was laid unto the root of the trees." Men were warned "to flee from the wrath to come." A Jew even had nothing to trust in. Even his relationship to Abraham did not avail. All this was a preparation for believing on Christ. The Prodigal repented when he came to an end of his resources and realized his position. When he came to himself, he took a right view of the situation, and cried out, "I perish with hunger," but I will return to my father. This is repentance. A realization that all is lost as regards ourselves, but God is good. The goodness of God leads to repentance. "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare." "I will arise and go." It is a turning to God in a sense of utter bankruptcy.

But repentance in itself is not sufficient. There must be "faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." If God is the one in view in our repentance, Christ is the object of faith. Repentance toward God is looking at my sin in relation to God, not merely as it affects myself or other people. "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight." And such repentance can come only as the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. But as regards faith, there is a truth equally important, and that is, God justifies only those who believe in Jesus. Apart from Christ's blood there is no redemption, no meeting place with God. Repentance is a turning to God, but Christ is the way to God. Repentance is having the face in the right direction. Faith brings us to the goal.

Here then we have two elemental but fundamental truths which formed the framework and foundation of the Apostle's teaching.

2. But all the grace of God is within the reach of those who have repented and believed. And so the

Apostle speaks of the ministry which he had "received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." Only the barest suggestion of what this means can be set forth here. It was grace now instead of law. In other words, all was of God, instead of all depending upon man. Consequently it was faith instead of works. "By grace are ye saved through faith," says the Apostle: "The grace of God that bringeth salvation." All is "according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." "We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." Or as the Apostle Peter expresses it, "the true grace of God wherein we stand" is that we are redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ": "Who His own self bear our sins in His own body on the tree." "He died, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." Grace justifies us to begin with and then it is grace all along. Grace is God's attitude towards us when we are justified: there is grace to help in time of need. And the God of all grace has called us unto His eternal glory. Grace represents all that sovereign purpose of God for our blessing which He will never forego until every part of it is accomplished. Glory is its crown and goal.

3. Further, the Apostle preached the Kingdom of God (v. 25). He preached it both as a present truth and also in its future bearings. The present aspect he refers to in Romans xiv. 17. "For the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." If we have submitted ourselves to the righteousness of God, that is, "confessed with our mouth Jesus as Lord and believed in our heart that God hath raised Him from the dead," then we must become practically in accord with that by submitting our lives to His will. In other words, presenting our bodies a living sacrifice, so that they may be used for Him, and we may "prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." It is the

rule of God's word in our hearts. This is the righteousness the Apostle speaks of. If this is true, then peace and joy will follow. For if we live in subjection to God's will the power of the Holy Ghost is on our behalf to deliver us from the evil within, and peace and joy are the result. In the days of our Lord on earth the exercise of this power delivered men from physical disabilities which were the result of sin, such as disease, demon possession and death. That was the aspect of the Kingdom in His day. But the exercise of that power mainly affected men's bodies and seldom went beyond. Now the Kingdom of God is within, and is of a higher character, "righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." What can exceed the benefit of the Holy Ghost indwelling us and what can His power and influence not accomplish in our lives? or what higher blessing can there be for us as individual Christians than peace and joy known in the heart?

The Apostle refers to the future aspect of the Kingdom in 1 Corinthians xv. 24: "Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power." And again in 2 Timothy iv. 1: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His Kingdom."

4. As rounding off and completing the scope and solidarity of his teaching the Apostle concludes by saying, "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (v. 2). With what solemn words he introduces this last reference to his ministry: "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men." Ezekiel had to hear the solemn words, "If thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand." Yet to-day, instead of warning, smooth things are heard on every side. The Apostle realized that his message was a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death.

"All the counsel of God." What did this include? Surely it embraced the wicked as well as the just: those who perish equally with those who are saved. The counsel of God is that to those who are contentious and do not obey the truth there will be "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil." He will "judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ." "No whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God . . . for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." Equally stern and terrible words fell from the lips of the Lord Jesus. Of those who refused His message He said: "It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgement, than for you." And again, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Can anything be more solemn than that these words to-day are treated as if they had very little meaning? Paul did not shun to declare the whole counsel of God as regards the impenitent.

But the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God has its application to the saved as well as to the lost, and the Apostle Paul was the chosen vessel for making this known. No other inspired writer gives us "All the counsel of God" as Paul does. The unfolding of it is in the Epistle to the Ephesians. This was probably a catholic epistle intended for all the Gentile Churches, but sent first of all to the Ephesians. In no other epistle, whether written by Paul himself, or by any other writer in the New Testament, do we touch such heights and depths as in this epistle. The breadth and length and depth and height of God's eternal purpose are here unfolded to us. Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, predestinated to sonship, sharers of Christ's inheritance; the Church, the fullness of Him, who filleth all in all, and sharing His place as man before His God and Father; all this is "according to the eternal purpose which He

purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." In contemplation of this vast scene of glory the Apostle bowed his knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying that the saints might be strengthened with might by His Spirit, so that Christ, the beloved of the Father and the Centre of all, should have a place in their affections, and His love be known, which yet passes knowledge, and that thus they might be filled into all the fullness of God. We see, therefore, that "all the counsel of God" is nothing less than "all the fullness of God."

What a wonderful view this valedictory address to the Ephesian elders gives us of the Apostle of the Gentiles, both of the man, his methods and his message ! He was nothing less than the exponent of Christianity both in word and deed. He was the embodiment as well as the exponent, as we have said. Christianity cannot be understood apart from him. He was indeed "a chosen vessel." Writing to the Colossians, whom he had never seen, he does not hesitate to lay emphasis upon the peculiar and special nature of his ministry. Speaking of the Gospel he says, "Whereof I Paul am made a minister." Then he declares that his sufferings were the filling up of the afflictions of Christ for His body's sake, which is the Church. In addition to the Gospel ministry he had been made a minister of the Church ; a special dispensation to fill up the Word of God having been given to him. His ministry completed the revelation of all that God had been pleased to make known unto the sons of men. In the light of these statements what can be thought of professed exponents of Christianity in the present day who disparage both the Apostle and his teaching ! The fact is, the present deplorable state of the Church is due more than any other thing to the neglect of Paul's message and the failure to imitate his life. If his manner, methods and matter were in general evidence to-day it would mean such a revival as the Church has never witnessed. Christianity cannot be separated from the Apostle Paul. It has been done, and it has spelt disaster. Every

revival that has taken place has been the awakening of the Church to his teaching, as we have already indicated elsewhere. On every hand to-day there exists a base form of Christianity. It is not Paul's Christianity, and if he were to come back he would denounce it as he did when writing to the Philippians: "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the Cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." These were professing Christians.

In the previous article which dealt with the earlier part of this chapter it was pointed out how Paul was talking still and would do so until the end. He "talked a long while," we are told, "even till break of day." Are we willing to listen? He talks to us of "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Repentance, that is to say, which means a turning to God in the sense of utter bankruptcy and ruin. There is no true turning to God apart from the cry of the Publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." There is no repentance apart from the conviction, "I perish," any more than there is any real faith apart from faith which is the individual acceptance of a divine message—the Word of God that reveals Christ as the Saviour of sinners, and redemption through His blood alone. Paul speaks to us, too, of the grace of God, that grace which had been exceeding abundant to himself the chief of sinners, which justifies and proves sufficient for every need, which saves from the power of sin, and sustains us all along the road. And he talks to us of the Kingdom. How the Holy Spirit can fill our lives with righteousness—the righteousness which renders to all their due—and with peace and joy amid a scene full of suffering and causes of alarm. And finally, he directs our thoughts beyond this scene and this time state altogether to that which is eternal, opening out to us the eternal counsels of God and bringing to our notice all

that God will yet accomplish for His own pleasure and our blessing.

And what manner of man was he? He can write to his son Timothy: "But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, patience, persecutions, afflictions." The same man at the close as he who stands before us in our chapter. Humble, tearful, wrestling against stupendous odds, untiring in his labours: as content to visit from house to house as to address crowds in the market place; unmoved by suffering, and counting not his life dear unto him; his only ambition to finish his course and be faithful to the ministry he had received, thinking of the weak and of the blessedness of giving. No wonder he could say, "I have shewed you all things." And no wonder that at parting with such a man "they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more." All that was deepest and most enduring flowed from Paul's heart, and it flowed back to him in full measure from those who were blessed through his ministry, and were touched by the fervour and goodness of the man.

TWO REVIVALS : OR EZRA AND PHILADELPHIA

SEE EZRA i. 3, ETC., NEHEMIAH viii. 9-18 ; REVELATION
iii. 7-13

FEW things have more interest to the Christian than revival. What can awaken such interest as to witness the display of God's power and grace in the recovery of His people ! We say " His people," because revival, in the first instance, concerns not the world but the Church. Those inside must feel its influence before others outside can be affected. Besides, the state of God's people must be of paramount importance to Him, much as He is concerned about the masses which remain untouched. Moreover, in the end it will be seen that, even as far as the world is concerned, everything depends upon the condition of the saints. Thus our Lord prayed : " That they all may be one . . . that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me." And few facts are more clearly indicated in Scripture than that the final blessing of the nations depends upon the fulfilment of God's promises to Israel as His people.

There have been three great revivals during this Church period, that is, since Pentecost. The first is indicated in the address to the Church in Smyrna ; and refers to a time of recovery brought about by persecution in the second and third centuries. The second was at the Reformation, represented by Sardis. A wonderful recovery, in spite of its subsequent failure, which only the power and goodness of God could have effected, after all the darkness and even degradation of the

Middle Ages. And, finally, we have Philadelphia, representing a recovery which took place a hundred years ago. This revival did not attract the same attention as the Reformation, nor produce the same world-wide effects, but it was far more spiritual in its character, and meant a more complete return to Scripture doctrine and practice than the other. The most profound blessing was experienced by those who came under its influence, and it became a means of emancipation from a decadent Protestantism. In reality, it was like a second escape from Babylon, and we shall find much in common between the return from literal Babylon, in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, and this later revival, and for this reason we wish to compare them. By so doing, we trust, their characteristic features, which so much resemble one another, will be made clear. This will enable us to appreciate more highly, than as yet we may have done, a revival which has affected our own times and in the blessing of which it is still possible to share.

I

The first thing to be observed is that, in the Providence of God, the powers that be were favourable. From Ezra i. 1-3 we learn that, in fulfilment of the word spoken by Jeremiah, God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus King of Persia, and moved him to make a proclamation. This announcement was to the effect that any of God's people were free to return to their land to build the temple, and help of every kind was to be afforded them. It was not otherwise, though different in form, in connection with this later recovery of which we speak. There had been disabilities resting upon all who were not within the pale of an ecclesiastical system established by law, which had they remained would have proved a serious hindrance to any revival. These, or most of them, were, in the providence of God, removed before the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Providential dealings of God are very marked in both cases.

II

The next matter to which we would direct attention is the insignificance of both these movements: judged from a merely human standpoint. The number that returned from Babylon seemed ridiculously small. In Ezra ii. 64 it is stated, "The *whole* congregation together was forty and two thousand" odd. Far from being a nation, this was not even an army, for the number included women and children. When "the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid," we read that the ancient men, that had seen the first house, wept. While Sanballat and his confederates poured scorn and contempt upon the efforts to build the wall of the city. "What do these feeble Jews? . . . Will they make an end in a day? . . . If a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall." Such were some of their contemptuous remarks.

They might well have asked, "What can we accomplish? Forty and two thousand! Why have we ever left Babylon? So much to be done, and so many enemies to hinder and to frighten us. Was it worth while for so few to return?" This accounts for certain words recorded in the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah. "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? And how do you see it now?" asks Haggai, "is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? Yet now 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, saith the Lord of hosts." Thus speaks Haggai. While Zechariah addresses them in somewhat similar language: "This is the word of the Lord . . . saying, Not by might (army) nor by power but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." And again, "Who hath despised the day of small things?"

Yes, it was a "day of small things" then, and the revival indicated in Philadelphia is equally so. "Thou hast a little strength" (or "little strength," as some

render it, without the article) describe this later movement. But what mighty things were accomplished in both cases! Thus Haggai's message is, "Be strong . . . and work, for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts." "I am with you." That is everything. If in all our testimony and labour we can say that, it is sufficient. If not, it matters little who else is with us, or how many,—the enterprise will prove a failure in the end. In the other case, this is impossible. Thus to this feeble remnant the exhortation comes, "Be strong . . . and work"; while to Philadelphia the message from Him that hath the key of David is to remind them of what He can do. "He openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth . . . behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." Was not this exactly what was found to be true in Ezra's day? The enemy caused the work to cease for a time, but only for a time, and at length the Temple was reared and the wall completed. There was an open door, in both cases, and no man could shut it.

Every revival has in view not merely the blessing of man but the glory of Christ. Not merely a present work, but in view of the future. And so we find Haggai lifting the veil in order that the people may see all that was involved in their return, and in the work they were doing. They had been brought back to wait for Christ, and Haggai connects their return with the final establishment of the Kingdom. "Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come." Who would have connected all this, the shaking of the heavens and the earth, with the return of that feeble few from Babylon? Only forty and two thousand, yet because this movement was of God, and because He was with them, the final issue would be the fulfilment of all His purposes—the shaking of the heavens and the earth, the overthrow of mighty nations and kingdoms, and the establishment of a new order, world-wide in its extent, under the sovereignty of

Christ. They had been brought back in view of all this. Was it not then worth while? Has not the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews these very words of Haggai in mind as he addresses the remnant of his day? "Yet a little while"—he uses the same expression—"Yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." This in chapter x.; while in chapter xii. he refers to the shaking of all things and the establishment of Christ's Kingdom. What a difference it makes, how we look at things! Whether from the point of view of sight and sense or from the point of view of God's purpose!

Were they tempted to despise the day of small things? Did they weep as they saw the foundation of the temple laid and remembered that same "house in her first glory"? Haggai connects it all with a future temple, which Christ would build, and God would fill with His glory. "The desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of Hosts . . . the glory of this latter house" (or as it should read, for the Temples built at different times are looked at as one house, "the latter glory of this house") "shall be greater than the former." In view of this, again we ask, Was it not worth while to come back from Babylon?

Are we tempted to despise the day of small things? When we gather together do we merely look at things in their external aspect; at numbers, at the size of the building, or become occupied with persons? Or do we look at it all in connection with Christ?—Christ, His death and His return. Just as in the case of the small number that returned from Babylon, God said "I am with you," and this made all the difference; so Christ spoke of two or three being gathered to His Name, but added, "There am I."

"I am with you" was the word to the remnant of Haggai's day: "There am I" is the word to-day to the two or three. No place can be mean where He is who fills heaven and earth, time and eternity; nor can any occasion be fruitless, either to God or ourselves, when we

enter into the meaning of His presence, with the symbols of His death before us ; and the love and devotedness and perfection seen there engage our thoughts and affections.

III

And this brings us to a third point of resemblance between the two revivals of which we speak, the one under Ezra and the other Philadelphia. In Haggai ii. 5 we read : " According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so My spirit remaineth among you ; fear ye not." In every revival there is a recovery of the characteristic truths of the dispensation : in other words, a return to the beginning. Here we find God does not go back simply to the glories of the reigns of David or Solomon, but further back still, even to the beginning of their history as a nation, when He brought them out of Egypt. All that God undertook to be to His people then, He would still be ; and all this is summed up in the fact that His Spirit remained among them. This was the source of that enlightenment and inspiration which has given to the world the revelation contained in the Holy Scriptures, which is not only unequalled, but unapproached—nothing else in all the world can for a moment be compared with it. Unto this one nation—" the fewest of all people " were " committed the oracles of God." The prophetic spirit was found there as nowhere else. They were both the channels of communication and the custodians of these " living oracles," now once and for ever complete. No other nation has received a like honour, and it is all due to the fact here stated that God's Spirit remained among them : " Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost " (2 Pet. i. 21). Haggai and Zechariah were amongst those who thus became God's mouthpiece, and communicated His mind to His people ; and this truth enunciated by Haggai, is confirmed by these words of Zechariah, " Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." We see, then, what

stress is laid upon the important fact of the presence of God's Spirit.

The same feature marked the revival one hundred years ago. The characteristic truth of this dispensation is the presence and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, both corporately and individually. The descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost marked the beginning of the dispensation and gave character to it. The rushing mighty wind filled the house, and tongues of fire sat upon each of them. We are "builded together for a habitation of God by the Spirit"; while to the individual believer He became the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry "Abba, Father." With that same Spirit were bestowed gifts of ministry, whether for the edification of the body of Christ, or for the work of the evangelist. But by the Spirit's power alone are those gifts made effective. In connection with the revival we speak of, this great truth was recovered, and the result was a ministry such as had been unknown since apostolic days, and worship in spirit and in truth became once more a reality. Christians again became intelligent worshippers, and the exercise of their privileges, as a holy priesthood, was revived. They also edified one another, according to 1 Corinthians xii. There has often, alas! been failure, but the principle was recovered, and what was more, acted on, and with most blessed results.

Here, as in that earlier day, revival meant a return to the beginning, and a recognition of the outstanding truth of the dispensation. Only as we maintain this, at all costs, can the blessings of that revival remain. The danger of slipping back into carnal and human arrangements is always present; it is so much easier to organize and arrange than to exercise faith; the former leaves more room for man to display himself, and seems so much more likely to be successful, and is more in harmony with his tastes and ideas, that the bait Satan offers is easily swallowed, and so it needs to be continually emphasized that only as faith is in exercise and our entire dependence upon the Holy Spirit recognized, can

the blessings recovered for us a hundred years ago be retained. The flesh is ever clamouring for recognition, and what appeals to sight and sense should have a place; but the Holy Spirit is our one and only resource, and apart from Him there is neither true worship nor service. Nor can there be any lasting result.

IV

All this stands closely related to another great fact, perhaps the supreme fact of all, viz., that this remnant of the nation of Israel was brought back for one special purpose, viz., to build the House of God in Jerusalem. They were not brought back to build their own houses, or even cultivate their fields, in the first instance; the paramount interest was the Temple of the Lord. And only while this paramount interest was maintained did they prosper. The proclamation of King Cyrus contains these words:

"Who is there among you of all His people? His God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the House of the Lord God of Israel."

No other purpose is mentioned. The rebuilding of the city and the wall, no doubt, were included, as we learn from Nehemiah, but the supreme object was to rebuild the Temple. And this is confirmed by the solemn words contained in Haggai, when, through opposition, the work ceased for a time, and other interests engaged the people's attention (Ezra iv. 23-4). "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now, therefore, saith the Lord of Hosts: Consider your ways." And again, "I smote you with blasting and with mildew and with hail in all the labours of your hands. . . . Consider now from this day and upward . . . even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it . . . from this day will I bless you" (Hag. i. 4-6; ii. 17-19). And as a result, in Ezra vi. 14, we read, "And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesy-

ing of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel."

We have the exact counterpart of this in what took place a century ago. The people of God again found blessing when they began to concern themselves with the order of God's House. Then it was God blessed His people as He had not blessed them for centuries. And that this was so is proved by one very important fact, amongst others, viz., that again there was a prophetic ministry, in the sense that His Word, in its present application, was brought to bear upon the hearts and consciences of His people. Such a ministry, so comprehensive, for it embraced every truth, including prophetic truth and the Second Coming of Our Lord ; so spiritual, as may be judged by the effect upon those who heard it ; so clear, in the interpretation of Scripture, had not been known since apostolic days. This fact has been witnessed to by those who never identified themselves with the movement, and is confirmed by testimony of quite an unbiassed character.

For God's House had again fallen into decay, and corruption and confusion reigned everywhere. The question may be well asked : Does the present condition of God's House cause us any sorrow and confusion of face ? Does it give rise to bitter lamentation and confession, such as was felt by those who returned from Babylon ? When Ezra heard of the condition of God's people in his day, how it affected him ! We read :

" And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head, and my beard, and sat down astonished. Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away, and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness, and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my kness, and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God. And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee " (Ezra ix. 3-6).

What marked the Philadelphia revival was confession

and repentance of a similar kind. The more the truth of the Church was recovered, the more clearly the ruin was discerned, and the deeper became the sense of failure. It was felt that the glory had departed, as Ezekiel saw it depart from the Temple of old, and that Ichabod was written upon the walls, as it had been written upon Israel long before when God delivered "His glory into the enemies' hand."

We cannot forbear calling the attention of the reader, in passing, to a most striking passage in the prophecy of Ezekiel with reference to God's House. And although, as to interpretation, it refers to the Millennial Temple, yet in its application it concerns us, for the principles and truths relating to the House of God abide. The House is thus described: "The place of My throne, and the place of the soles of My feet, where I dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever; and My holy Name shall the house of Israel no more defile . . . in their setting of their threshold by My thresholds, and their post by My posts." Here was the sin: introducing that which was of man, where there should be nothing but what was suitable to God's glory and God's presence. "Their threshold by My thresholds, and their post by My posts."

In Christendom we see this sin repeated. Man introduces what pleases himself into the worship of God.

In Ezekiel's day this message came to the house of Israel, and it comes equally to all who have ears to hear to-day:

"Thou son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities, and let them measure the pattern. And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, shew them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof; and write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them.

"This is the law of the House: Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the House" (Ezekiel xliii. 7-12).

We do well to notice the apparent repetition, not only laws, ordinances, forms, and strict adherence to these insisted on, but such terms are repeated again and again, "*all the forms*," and "*the whole form thereof*"; as if God would impress upon His people that there must on no account be any departure or deviation from the laws and ordinances ordained by Him. And all this is summed up in one word, viz., that the place where God dwells is "*most holy*," a place apart and above all others—"Upon the top of the mountain."

It was precisely this truth, coming as it did with power to the minds and hearts of believers a hundred years ago, which found its answer in Philadelphia. They separated themselves from the human systems around, and sought to give effect to all the instructions of God's word. Yet we cannot escape a reflection of a most grievous kind. After a hundred years, and while that period has been running its course, those who profess to be associated with this revival, and to know something of its meaning and character, have added to the confusion. And if there is one thing which should lead us to confession and repentance, accompanied by deep humiliation and sorrow of heart, it is that the very revival itself of which we speak has failed as far as we are concerned, though the truths recovered remain unchanged. But are we acting according to them? And are we in the power of them? Are we affected by the state of God's House as we ought to be? Especially when we think of what it all meant to Christ, told so plainly in these words: "*I have loved thee*," addressed to Philadelphia. What did it not mean to Him that there were those who loved His presence and were seeking to answer to His mind? What did it not mean to Him to be able to utter these words, "*Thou hast kept My word, and hast not denied My Name*"? "*I have loved thee*." Not, in this sense, addressed to all His own, but as a mark of His special favour. What an unspeakable honour, should any deserve it! How the very thought should affect us! Here it is the richest blessing is found, and the same

words apply as of old, "From this day will I bless you."

V

We now come to the last point on which we wish to dwell. In spite of the small number that returned from Babylon, in spite of being in every sense "a day of small things," in spite of being despised by their adversaries and exposed to ridicule, something happened, so unique, that it was necessary to go back to the days of Joshua to find its equal. The feast of Tabernacles was kept with such rejoicing, and in such a manner, that we read:

"And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness" (Neh. viii. 17).

In fact, what characterized that period was a season of gladness and rejoicing such as had not been known for many a generation. Two experiences of a very opposite nature seem combined in the history of this remnant—deep sorrow and a sense of shame at all their failure and that of their fathers, on the one hand, and the greatest gladness and rejoicing, on the other. We read in one place, "God had made them rejoice with great joy . . . so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off . . ." And all this was because they sought to give effect to the words of God's law. They recognized that, in spite of feebleness and failure—no King, no Kingdom, no army, only a small remnant of a nation—yet the law of God must not remain a dead letter. And as they sought to give effect to it, "the joy of the Lord was their strength." There had been nothing in all their history to surpass it. For what *can* surpass the "joy of the Lord"?

Has anything of this nature been realized in a later day? We believe so. There have been seasons of remembrance when the Lord's people have had a similar experience. For what characterized the Philadelphia revival was the celebration of another feast. The Lord's

Supper regained its former place. It became once more the centre of worship, and filled for many the place it occupied in the early days of the Church.

The Supper became central, without the addition of superstitious rites, on the one hand, and yet something more than a bare form, on the other.

Thoughts of His Love which the remembrance of His death awaken, will bring Him to mind, as we remember the varied ways in which that love was displayed. "The joy of the Lord will be our strength." There is no surer evidence of a revival than the hymns it awakens. Here is a specimen, containing lines often sung at the Supper.

" Love that no suffering stayed,
We'll praise true love divine,
Love that for us Atonement made,
Love that has made us Thine.

Love in Thy lonely life
Of sorrow here below ;
Thy words of grace, with mercy rife,
Make grateful praises flow.

Love, that on death's dark vale,
Its sweetest odours spread ;
Where sin o'er all seemed to prevail,
Redemption's glory shed."

The " joy of the Lord " and His strength may still be the portion of those who seek to understand and answer to this latest revival.

LESSONS FROM THE CLOSING CHAPTERS OF JUDGES

CHAPTERS xvii.-xxi.

THESE closing chapters of the Book of Judges present to us a picture of spiritual and moral corruption of the most debased kind; and this not in the heathen world but in Israel, professedly the people of God. We might, at first, be inclined to wonder why five whole chapters—out of a total of twenty-one, that is, a fourth of the entire book—should be devoted to the description of such a scene, including the details of a civil war. But when it dawns upon us that, grievous as is the condition described in the Book of Judges, it is not without a parallel in the history of Christendom, we cease to wonder, and instead, are filled with gratitude, that events of so long ago are recorded for our present advantage and to afford us guidance amidst the perils and confusion of our own day.

So that these chapters possess something beyond a mere historical interest. The scenes therein depicted have been, and are being, enacted over again, though they may assume a different form.

What are the details presented to us in this seventeenth chapter of Judges?

It is a case, first of all, of such lack of conscience that a son steals eleven hundred shekels of silver from his mother. Whether afraid of the curse she pronounces upon the unknown thief, or for some other reason (we are not told), the son confesses his guilt and restores the stolen property; and, instead of the curse, receives

a blessing from the mother in the name of Jehovah, to Whom the silver had been dedicated to make for her son a graven image and a molten image. In due time these images are set up in the house of Micah, and we are told that "the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons who became his priest."

Let us notice next, the prominence given to the mother in this passage. In three verses she is referred to six times. It is she who is the author of this idolatrous system. The silver is hers and she had wholly dedicated it to the Lord for the purpose of making a graven image and a molten image. So that we have an idolatrous system set up, of which a woman is the source, and all this happens amongst the very people who had been called out to be a witness to the one true God.

In Scripture, an idolatrous system is always presented under the form of a woman. In the Lord's message to Thyatira (Rev. ii.) He calls attention to "that woman Jezebel"—she who in Old Testament times had stirred up Ahab to "sell himself to work wickedness in setting up idols." While in Revelation xvii. we have another system of idolatry depicted under the figure of a woman "having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations," and she is described as "the MOTHER of harlots and abominations of the earth." So that although 1,000 years separate these two chapters we have in both a "woman" presented to us as the source of an idolatrous system.

Are not our own ears familiar with the term "Mother Church"? and are we not confronted in our own day with an idolatrous system in connection with the profession of Christianity and what claims to be the true Church? So closely identical are these two pictures—one Israel and the other the Church—that the seventeenth chapter of Judges might have been written yesterday. Have we never heard of a Mother Church which can both curse and bless? and is not this precisely the characteristic of the Mother in Judges xvii.?

Moreover, a marked feature in the chapter before us is that this idolatrous system is set up in the Name of Jehovah. This mother can bless in the Name of the Lord, and the silver had been dedicated to the Lord for idolatrous uses. It is this use of Jehovah's name in connection with idols which is so terrible. The same thing obtains to-day. The idolatrous religious system we are thinking of has been developed and carried on in the Name of Christ. Nay, it claims to be the only true representative of Christ on the earth. Herein lies the terrible evil and deceptive character of these corrupt systems. Souls are deceived and deluded by the fact that the Name of God is pronounced upon all that is done.

But there are still other features in this picture to which we must make a passing reference, if nothing more. We allude to the young Levite spoken of at the end of the chapter. Certain references made to him would lead us to think that he was not one living in the fear of God or walking in His ways. It is no mark of divine guidance when we set out to "sojourn where we can find a place" (see *vv.* 8 and 9). He at length arrives at Micah's house, and seems ready for any job which turns up. He is invited to become a "father" and a "priest" to Micah, and to do this for so much in return. It was the Balaam policy over again. This young man who, being a Levite, had no claim to the office of a priest, was quite prepared to accept "the wages of unrighteousness."

A "father and a priest." Are not these names, again, familiar to us? Do they not fill Christendom to-day? Yet there is not a word in the New Testament to lead us to suppose that God intended the priesthood to be a caste. All believers are spoken of as priests, and no other priesthood on earth is recognized. "A father and a priest"! again we say, might not Judges xvii. have been written yesterday? Christ has said, "Call no man your father upon the earth."

"And Micah consecrated the Levite." As if human

consecration could set aside the order which God had established, or anything being contrary to that order could ever become effective. Yet do we not see the *same methods adopted to-day*? The divine order has again been forgotten, and human ordination and consecration have taken its place. How barren and ineffective both are our own experience may tell us.

The last verse of Judges xvii. is in some respects the most amazing of all. After Micah had filled his house with idols and acted according to his own will, and in defiance of God's ordinance in consecrating a Levite to be his priest, he utters this pious sentiment :

"Now know I that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest."

What ground did this afford for supposing God would bless him? Yet in many quarters things are no better in our day. Are not thousands upon thousands of nominal Christians just as superstitious, supposing that the *performance of certain rites will ensure for them the blessing of God* and that blessing can reach them only through humanly ordained channels? The Gospel is no more understood to-day, by many, than God's ordinances were kept in Micah's day.

In these closing chapters of Judges xvii.-xxi. a statement occurs which is repeated four times. We are told "In those days there was no King in Israel." While twice it is said that "every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Is not this an exact description of the state of things in our own day? Solomon tells us that "where the word of a King is there is power." Who is there to-day, taking the Church as a whole, who can speak with such power and authority that everybody will listen to him? Not one. There is no King in Israel, and consequently, it is more or less true that *every one does that which is "right in his own eyes,"* or, what is little better, what is right in other peoples' eyes. Comparatively few are so free from tradition, on the one side, and party spirit, on

the other, that they will listen to the Word of God and give attention to that only.

Let us come to chapter xviii. Here a different picture presents itself. If in chapter xvii. we have corruption of a moral and spiritual character, in chapter xviii. we witness a scene of *violence*.

From this chapter we learn that the Danites "sought them an inheritance to dwell in," and they send out an expedition of five men to explore the country. They come to Micah's house, and at once recognize the priest as a former acquaintance. The young man confesses that he is hired. He was but a hireling, as many are to-day. "They said unto him, Ask counsel, we pray thee, of God that we may know whether our way which we go shall be prosperous. And the priest said unto them, 'Go in peace; before the Lord is your way wherein ye go.'" Rather enigmatical, we might think, almost as much so as the Delphic oracle of old was wont to be, but quite good enough for one occupying such a position as this Levite, and apparently quite good enough for those who sought his aid. Do we not hear the echo of this kind of thing to-day?

Their expedition is apparently successful, and they return to the tribe, and six hundred men set forth to capture Laish by force. But first they turn their attention to Micah's house. Such spoil was too tempting to be neglected, for men must have gods, even if they are false ones, and so by an act of treachery and violence Micah's graven image and ephod and teraphim and molten image, and his priest into the bargain, are carried off. The argument that it was better to be a father and a priest to a tribe than to one man was quite sufficient inducement for the young priest to forsake his former employer and throw in his lot with those who could do better for him. "And the priest's heart was glad."

Micah, however, does not acquiesce in this lawless procedure without a protest, and he seeks to recover his household gods. But all his appeals are unavail-

ing, and personal violence is threatened if he continues obdurate. How humbling is poor Micah's confession! In reply to the question "What aileth thee?" he says "Ye have taken away my gods which I made and the priest—and *what have I more?*" As if, his idols gone, nothing were left. Fancy an Israelite sinking to such a level!

It seemed as if every true idea of Jehovah had vanished from his mind. Alas! for people when all that they rest in and consider essential can be stolen from them. Yet are there not many to-day who place their confidence in objects of which they could as easily be deprived as Micah was of his false gods?

And so through human agency God's judgment comes upon Micah's graven images and the false system he had adopted. And it will not be otherwise in a day near at hand. All that is characteristic in the false systems to-day in Christendom (do not let the reader suppose we are referring to heathen systems) equally await divine judgment. We have already referred to Revelation xvii., and there we find the end that awaits the false system of to-day, represented by Babylon, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth. As to this it is said in verse 16, "And the ten horns which thou sawest and (not "upon") the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil His will." The same judgment which fell upon Micah of old is appointed for this other idolatrous system. In both cases God employs human instrumentality. And the possibility is that before this happens Christendom may be united, so that every system which God has not established will be involved in the same overthrow.

THE NEED OF DISCIPLINE

In the chapters we have considered there has come before us, in chapter xvii. a picture of spiritual cor-

ruption—idolatry, in fact; and in chapter xviii., a scene of violence. In chapter xix. the scene is changed to one of moral corruption of the most debased kind, though violence is not wanting, and we shall invariably find that spiritual corruption leads to both. There is no darker page in the history of the world than that afforded by the annals of a corrupt Church.

The events described in chapter xix. lead to civil war. Wickedness must be put away. But, as is so often the case, discipline leads to strife. The carnal mind can never appreciate the demands of holiness, or rise to the full height of what the presence of God demands.

The tribes of Israel assemble to consider the matter. We read they "gathered together as one man"; and again that they were "knit together as one man," in their purpose to deal with the evil and put it from them (*vv.* I, 8, and II). A sure indication, this unity, that God is behind the movement. We have here a picture of revival. When God's Spirit is at work, His people become of one mind. And this expresses itself in condemnation of evil and departure therefrom, and in a return to Divine ways and methods.

A message is sent to Benjamin saying, "What wickedness is this that is done among you? Now, therefore, deliver us the men . . . that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel." But Benjamin refused, and civil war is the result.

Few things are more grievous or more disastrous than strife amongst brethren. Yet one thing is more to be dreaded even than that, *viz.*, to allow evil to go unjudged. There are two inevitable results from such a course. First, the forfeiture of God's presence: second, contamination and defilement. The moral and spiritual senses become deadened, and everything is debased to a human level.

Yet an extraordinary thing happens in regard to the case before us. The wrong-doers seem vindicated, for the tribes who are seeking to purge the nation of evil

are twice defeated. They are defeated in spite of the fact that they are right in what they are doing ; and in spite of the fact of having sought counsel of God before taking action. We read, "The children of Israel arose, and went up to the house of God, and asked counsel of God." And God answered them. And that answer did not suggest they were not to go : it implied just the contrary. The stern fact had to be faced that evil must be put away at any cost.

Then why are they twice defeated ? The answer is, they had lessons to learn as well as their brethren. They had to learn what a solemn thing it is to act for God ; and that those who do act for Him must be in a right state themselves. They had also to learn that to deal with evil is no light matter ; especially when it is a case of evil in our brethren. It is perhaps the most solemn business of our lives. Humiliation, contrition, and self-judgment are demanded. We need to make the sin our own in confession before God. And further, we must never forget who it is we are called to fight against—our brethren.

In cases of discipline two factors must always be taken into account. On the one side, there is the evil demanding to be purged away ; on the other hand, the evil-doer may be a brother in Christ. And one reason why, so often, there is trouble and diversity of judgment is because one or other of these factors is forgotten. Some are occupied mainly with the evil, and forget the relationship ; others think almost exclusively of the relationship, and do not take sufficient account of the evil. Now, to the extent to which either factor is overlooked, or due weight not given to it, there will be defective judgment and occasion of strife, and, consequently, failure to achieve the object in view.

Here surely we find the reason of Israel's twice-told tale of defeat. They were thoroughly justified in their action. Never once, through all their painful and

humiliating experience, does God tell them to desist—but God saw defects in them which He could not pass over and which He was too faithful not to remedy. They must come through the ordeal refined and purified. God is always most of all concerned about our character and state, and so He leads His people through a process which shall hide pride from man. Had the tribes been successful at the beginning, pride and haughtiness, harshness and an overbearing spirit might have found room for display.

The process of which we speak is clearly discernible if we follow the narrative closely.

After the first defeat, and when the children of Israel came before the Lord on the second occasion, two significant words appear for the first time. Their inquiry now is, "Shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin *my brother*." "My brother"—this is the difference we are called upon to notice. The answer is, "Go up." Not a hint that they were to desist. But they would go up now in a different spirit, chastened and subdued, and with a sense of how serious was the conflict. They were called to fight against their *brethren*.

Yet again they are defeated! How perplexing are God's ways sometimes! how unexpected! and how slowly He seems to move! Why this second defeat? Why this double humiliation? when all the time they are simply doing what He has sanctioned. Yes, but they are in reality gaining the greatest of all victories—learning how to suffer defeat, and learning the lessons which defeat brings.

They seem now broken-hearted, but they turn to God, despairingly, perhaps, almost desperately, but with purpose of heart and in deep humiliation and contrition. "Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the Lord and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings, and peace offerings before the Lord" (v. 26).

Here we have the mention of the house of God. They were to learn that evil has to be taken account of, not merely as it affected themselves, but from a far higher standpoint, viz., that of God's dwelling-place and what was due to Him Who dwelt in their midst. (See Num. v. 1-3). And it may be said, one reason why our judgment of evil is so partial and so defective is because we so little understand the nature of the house of God and what it involves, and the whole matter is often regarded from our own level, and according to what will suit our convenience.

But not only do they return to the house of God, we read they "sat there before the Lord." This had not been mentioned before. The mere energy of nature was stilled. Only in such quietness and repose can His mind be learned, and our own hearts be put in order and brought into real subjection. There was fasting also. Only in the presence of God, with that presence consciously realized; only with nature excluded—which is really what fasting means—can we hope to see everything clearly, and judge of it according to the balances of the sanctuary.

But there is another side to all this. If we are to have power, and to act in the energy of the Spirit, we must realize our place before God and know what positive communion with Him means, in connection with all that is indicated in the burnt offering and the peace offering. If I am not consciously in a place of favour before Him, consciously enjoying what He enjoys and feeding upon what He delights in, I cannot act for Him. My actions will spring from legal motives or merely from a sense of duty, and not spontaneously from a sense of what He is, and the place of favour I occupy before Him. And so we read now of burnt offerings and peace offerings. There will be opportunity in a subsequent article to say something more upon this deeply interesting and important subject, we can only emphasize now the necessity of being in communion with God about Christ, if evil is to be effec-

tively judged. Only in the power of good can we judge evil or even know it to be evil.

And now the hour of baffled purposes and hopes is over. Israel can go forth to victory and the accomplishment of God's will, for discipline and trial have done their work. "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease?" is the question once more asked; only this time with the words "Shall I cease?" added. No, there is not to be any cessation. Not a word or hint as to that. "Go up" is still the message, but with this promise: "To-morrow I will deliver them into thine hand." And so it proved.

Is there any greater thing God can do for us than to bring us to be of one mind with Himself, so that we may act for Him? Is there any greater thing than this, to enable us to gain a victory over ourselves in order that we may gain a victory for Him? Surely never in all Israel's history, filled as it was with astounding deliverances and achievements, the fruit of the power of God—never did He do a greater thing for them than at this dark and checkered period of their history! He prepared them by painful discipline—He purified them by defeat and humiliation until they were sufficiently self-emptied and dependent, and then they acted for Him in putting evil out of the land, that the Lord God might dwell among them. We are never morally on a higher plane than when in the power of God's Spirit we judge evil. Because this is true love, as it is true holiness, and everything contrary to it mere human sentiment.

Surely this page of Israel's history, like many another, has been written for our learning. Is there any more impressive sight than to see God taking His people in hand and training them for His purpose; until, having learned their lesson, they reach the point of triumph, and God's will is accomplished in and through them?

The lesson of this passage surely is that wickedness,

whether it is doctrinal wickedness or moral, must be put away, and such action calls forth all our spiritual resources and demands all our spiritual energy. And further, the disciplinary hand of God is often needed to make us equal to the task. But discipline is of two kinds. It may be experienced with God or away from God. What a difference between Benjamin and the rest of the tribes! Benjamin did not ask counsel of God; they did not come to the house of God: nor did they sit before the Lord. With them there was neither weeping, nor fasting, nor communion—they are without exercise and without blessing. They sacrifice neither burnt offerings nor peace offerings. In the end, judgment from the hand of God is their portion. The others knew that God was with them; they would never forget the lessons He had taught them, nor would they ever forget that final victory and all that led to it.

So far, our attention has been called to the moral and spiritual condition of Israel in the closing days of the Judges. Spiritual corruption and moral degradation of the worst kind are found there. This has been repeated in Christendom. The Church has a record equally bad. Only the present grace of God can keep us, and unless we are living in daily communion with Him, earnestly seeking to do His will, and availing ourselves of the spiritual privileges that are ours, the tendency is to drift, and sink ever to a lower level.

But we have also witnessed a great recovery. The darkness and degradation which had fallen upon the people had reached such a point that consciences were at last aroused. When things are at their worst they often begin to mend.

This revival occurred in connection with certain Divine institutions. It had been the neglect of these which led to such a serious lapse. While people were sinking into the degraded condition described—turning to idolatry on the one hand, and guilty of the foulest

crimes on the other—there existed at Shiloh, the house of God, the ark, the true priesthood and the divinely ordained sacrifices. So that, on the one side, we have that which God had established for His own glory and the blessing of His people, and on the other apostasy. Our attention is called to this striking fact at the close of chapter xviii. Referring to the tribe of Dan and to Micah's graven image which they had stolen, it is said: "*And they set them up Micah's graven image which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.*"

Who would have believed that at the very time here described—at the very time Micah had his house of gods, a false worship and a fictitious priesthood, as chapter xvii. tells us—the Tabernacle, God's dwelling place, was in the land, with the Ark and the Mercy Seat; and sacrifices according to Divine appointment were being offered by a true descendant of Aaron. All this was a little way over the hills to the north-east from where idolatry was being carried on in Micah's house, situated on Mount Ephraim. Shiloh and Mount Ephraim were only a few miles apart!

Thus, two absolutely opposing systems existed side by side in that day; and what is so important for us to remember is that a condition of things not very unlike it exists in our own day. Christendom has become corrupt, people run after that which ministers to the senses, instead of worshipping by the Spirit of God! Superstition and sacerdotalism prevail on every hand. A false religious system obtains, and we cannot escape from it unless we grasp the significance of what God has established as represented by the four things mentioned in Judges xx. 26-8—the house of God, the Ark, the priesthood and the sacrifices. There is as much need to pay attention to these things and what they signify, at the present time, as there was at the time of which we are speaking. Let us consider, first—

THE HOUSE OF GOD

I

We read in Judges xx. 26: "Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the *house of God*." Here, then, was a return to the Divine order, to the recognition of the house of God; and a most gracious revival followed. Indeed all that ensued—their own blessing, and their final victory—was attributable to this one great fact, that they recognized the provision God had made, and the fact of God having a dwelling place amongst them. All this has its application to us to-day, and consequently the truth as to God's house demands our serious consideration.

When once God establishes a principle, that is, when some principle of action governs His dealings with men, He never departs from it; and, another thing, our blessing depends upon the recognition of that principle. The form in which that principle asserts itself may change, but the principle itself never changes. This is pre-eminently true with regard to God having a dwelling place amongst men. God's first actual dwelling place was the Tabernacle in the wilderness in the midst of Israel, afterwards there was the Temple in the land. He dwells now in a spiritual house, and its ultimate expression is in the eternal state, when it is declared: "The Tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them" (Rev. xxi. 3).

The earliest idea, however, is contained in Genesis xxviii. in connection with Jacob's vision. When he awakes he exclaims, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." As is so often the case in Scripture, where a subject is first introduced there its true character and meaning

are indicated. So here, although it be but a bare reference, although no temple or building of any kind arose, only a pillar was set up, yet the very truth of the house of God is disclosed, and the character here indicated is its character to-day.

The house of God is where God dwells: "Surely the Lord is in this place." This fact leads Jacob to say, "This is none other but the house of God." If we think of all that His presence involves, could there be a fact of more profound importance?

This truth that the house of God is where He is pleased to dwell, is equally manifest when, centuries later, we come to the erection of the Tabernacle. When "Moses finished the work," we read, "Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle." The "cloud" was ever the symbol of the Divine presence. The "glory" is the revelation of Him who dwelt there.

Nor was it otherwise when the Temple was built. Again centuries have intervened, but the house of God still means His dwelling place. And so, when everything is prepared, the Ark brought in, and the priests had lifted up their voice, we read, "Then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord (Jehovah) had filled the house of God."

All this is true with regard to the house of God to-day. Little as we might think it, feeble as is our apprehension of this stupendous fact, God dwells amongst His people even now. On the day of Pentecost, nineteen hundred years ago, and many centuries after the Temple was first erected, a new house was formed. Not this time a material structure, but "a spiritual house"—God's own work in human hearts and lives: believers were "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 22). That Spirit—the third Person in the ever blessed Trinity, descended at Pentecost, came to those who "were all with one

accord in one place" and "filled all the house where they were sitting," and "sat upon each of them." The great distinction is that here it had to do with persons—persons born again and redeemed—but the cloud and the glory were there just the same, though manifested in a different way. What a moment! God so near to men and His power manifested through men. His presence filled all the house where they were sitting. Yea, more, "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance." As it is said, "I will dwell in them and walk in them . . . and be a Father unto you" (2 Cor. vi. 16-18). They thus became His dwelling place, His temple—a sanctuary for Him in a world that had rejected His Son.

Here then we have this great fact, and we will now proceed to notice some of the consequences which flow from it.

II

God dwells amongst His people that He may reveal Himself. What made Jacob exclaim "Surely the Lord is in this place," was the fact that God had been pleased to reveal Himself to him in a most wondrous manner. There was Jacob, a fugitive and utterly forlorn, not a friend or relative near him, and, worse than that, in disgrace; but at the moment, perhaps, when he needed least consideration he learns what the grace of God will do for him. Without even a mention of his failure, and without conditions, the most lavish promises are made, both as to the land and his posterity: "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." And to crown all—whoever else may fail you, says God I never will: "I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest." It was according to such terms God addressed him. Is it any wonder Jacob says, "The Lord is in this place"? Who else could speak in such a way?

But is not all this equally true to-day with regard

to the house of God in its present aspect? In Ephesians ii. we have precisely this same grace brought before us with regard to ourselves. The Apostle unfolds in the earlier part of the chapter our state by nature, whether Jew or Gentile, and the wondrous grace displayed to those who had no more claim than Jacob. In verse 2 it is "ye" (Gentiles) and in verse 3 "we" (Jews), all alike dead towards God, and then we are shown the wonderful place God has, in the riches of His mercy and the greatness of His love, given us in Christ in heavenly places.

What is he able to say of those thus privileged and having such a place?

(a) *They are made nigh.* "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (v. 13).

First, nigh to God and then nigh to one another (vv. 14-16).

(b) *God has revealed Himself in Christ.* "And came and preached peace." It is the Father running to kiss the prodigal.

(c) *There is access to God.* "For through Him (Christ) we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father."

(d) *God's house is a sanctified place in the midst of this polluted scene.* "An holy temple in the Lord." All these things are true of God's habitation now. We are in the presence of One fully revealed, yet made fit for that presence, and we draw nigh. In nearness to God and in the enjoyment of the revelation of Himself, we worship.

The house of God always speaks of nearness. Think of those boards of the Tabernacle, covered with gold and resting upon their silver sockets, that formed the holiest of all; they stood in the very presence of the cloud of glory. They represent the believers' position now. They speak of our being in Christ and tell us we are as near as Christ.

In His House we are in His presence, and the blessed

effects of this no one can describe. When they reached God's house, as we read in Judges, we are told they "sat before the Lord." There they learned His mind and were enabled to act for Him.

III

But Jacob not only mentions "the house of God," he speaks of "the gate of heaven." Now a gate is a means of approach and of access and egress. This illustrates a further truth in connection with the house of God. God dwells there that He may be approached. This has already come before us in Ephesians ii. "For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." The prodigal was not only kissed outside, but he was brought inside. The father came out to bring him in. And the one must precede the other. The inside place would have no attractiveness if One dwelt there we did not know. But, if we have received the welcome outside, we shall want to find our way in. To be near the One who ran to meet us, and kissed us as we were, will be our supreme joy. Especially when we learn that the Father has made us suitable for His presence. The first word the father in the parable uttered was not one of reproach or condemnation, but "bring forth the best robe." Have we ever noticed that no word is spoken to the prodigal? The occasion is too deep for words. The embrace and the kiss told more than words, and suited the occasion better.

It is through Christ we enter there. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. But it is by the Spirit. He makes us conscious of what God is to us and that the Father has made us meet, and He brings us in. It is through His power and under His conduct that we reach the Father. We taste the blessedness of being in the Father's presence.

This thought of approach, in connection with God's House, is further developed in another passage of Scripture—we refer to 1 Peter ii. 3-5. Here, again,

the truth is presented in the same order. First, there must be an experience of God's grace. "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." We are attracted to One whose grace we have tasted. Thus we are drawn to Christ as the living stone—or as Paul puts it, in the passage already referred to, "the chief corner stone." He is raised from the dead and we share His life, and as living stones we have come to understand our association with Him, and are thus "built up a spiritual house," God's dwelling place, "a holy priesthood," those who have right of access, "to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." In connection with the Temple we read that when the glory of Jehovah filled the house of God the priests could not stand to minister. We stand now, because of the value and efficacy of Christ's sacrifice, in the presence of the assembled rays of that glory, and there we minister, offering up "spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

We read of Jacob that he was *afraid*. The sacrifice of Christ had not then been offered. In contrast with this, in Hebrews x. 19, we read: "Having therefore brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near." What advantages and privileges are ours!

IV

Another important aspect of the truth is found in Genesis xxviii.—the house of God is for a witness. The Tabernacle of old was called the Tabernacle of testimony. It was a witness to the presence of God and to His character. Jacob, we read, set up a stone for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. A pillar is a witness. Often they bore inscriptions, and in 1 Timothy iii., where the house of God is spoken of as the pillar and base of the truth, it has been pointed out that the lines composing the various statements which follow, commencing with "God was manifest in the flesh," vary in length, as is usual in an inscription on a pillar.

The house of God to-day is where God dwells, not only to reveal Himself to those who are His, and where He may be approached, but to put Himself in touch with men. We who compose that house are by our lives and by our preaching to convey to men what God's attitude towards them is, that of a Saviour. We are to be a witness to this truth—"God will have all men to be saved." Those familiar words: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and again, "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, Who gave Himself a ransom for all, a testimony . . . in due time," furnish the testimony connected with God's House. And what a responsibility is ours to represent God's character and make Him known as a Saviour! This is why, in the first epistle to Timothy, where the subject is the house of God, Paul emphasizes the character of the message, and also of the one who bears it, and consequently insists, again and again, upon godliness. Thus the Church is the pillar and base of the truth. The pillar and the base—the truth supported by godliness; for apart from this latter, the truth falls into disrepute and becomes ineffective. No one will listen to the truth proclaimed from ungodly lips. We are to say to men everywhere: "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." That water of life flows from Christ, but it flows *through us*; in other words, from the house of God, according to the saying of our Lord, "He that believeth in Me . . . out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John vii. 38).

Yes, the house of God should be the very gate of heaven, as Jacob described it. We have spoken of the gate in connection with approach, but a gate is also the means of communication with the outside world. Through the house of God men should find heaven. It should be the link between heaven and earth. Our message is: "And let him that is athirst

come, and whosoever will let him take the water of life freely." Come where? Where the living water flows—from Christ through us. Alas, how futile the Church has become! It fails to bless man because it fails to represent God. And the reason is, it has forgotten the anointing oil. Of the pillar we read, Jacob poured "oil upon the top of it." Only as we are anointed—that is, only as we are in true separation and in divine power and intelligence can we effectively represent God to men. All depends to a large extent upon separation. The Church has mingled with the world and lost its power, forgetting that the House of God is God's dwelling place, and that it is holy, a place apart, though a witness to His saving grace, because composed of saved sinners.

Can we not see, then, the greatness and importance of this truth? We who form God's House dwell in the presence of the manifestation of Himself in love. The love and grace thus manifested produce in us the divine nature, and we are built up. We draw near. His house is where He is approached. We have access to the Father. We become worshippers. And lastly as we know these things we become a witness to men of His saving power, and a blessing in this dry and thirsty scene.

But the Spirit alone can make this effective, and unless we walk in separation His power cannot be known, nor can these blessings we speak of be enjoyed. May God exercise many of His own as to these things, for Christ's Name sake.

If these things are true (and who can dispute their truth?) how flagrant, how mischievous, how dishonouring to God, is the corrupt state of His house to-day, brought about by the sins of Christendom! May God deliver us from sinking to such a level!

THE SACRIFICES, THE ARK, AND THE PRIESTHOOD

We have been dwelling upon the great fact of the House of God—God's chief interest on earth. Unless we apprehend what God's chief interest is, we cannot properly be right anywhere; everything, in fact, is thrown into confusion: forfeiture of blessing and decrease of power result; the character of worship and service is lowered, and both God and men suffer loss. Surely it does not require any argument to prove that if God is pleased to dwell amongst men, this fact must be fraught with the utmost consequence to those who form His dwelling place. He dwells that He may bless; that He may be approached; that He may be known. The river of water of life of which God is the source flows from the House and men are invited to drink. Those who dwell in His house should be still praising Him, and should be a witness to His goodness and His power to save, a power which extends to men everywhere; for He "will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

The House of God, then, is where His presence is known and enjoyed. In Thy presence is fulness of joy. But, if that is to be realized, there are three things we must take account of, and these we propose now to consider. These three things are, the Sacrifices, the Ark, and the Priesthood; all of which are mentioned in Judges xx. 26-8.

I. The Sacrifices

We read, they "came unto the House of God . . . and sat there before the Lord . . . and offered burnt offerings, and peace offerings before the Lord." Sacrifice is the only way of approach to God and ground of relationship with Him. We have no standing before Him apart from it. Thus the brazen altar

stood just within the court of the Tabernacle, and confronted all who entered its precincts.

It is to be noticed that in the passage before us only burnt offerings and peace offerings are mentioned, out of the four principal offerings. The reason perhaps is that it is the significance of these two offerings we need more especially to understand when approaching God. Moreover, the two were very closely associated, for we read "And Aaron's sons shall burn it (the Peace offering), on the altar upon the burnt sacrifice" (Lev. iii. 5). Real communion with God is based upon the understanding of the burnt offering, for the burnt offering was God's part.

We are not speaking, at the moment, of what opened the way into God's presence, but of our apprehension and enjoyment of it when there. The blood of the Sin offering gives us title to enter, but it is the burnt offering engages our attention when we have entered. To realize that the death through which the way was opened up into the Divine presence more than met our need, that there was that in it which was acceptable to God—this enables us to sit before the Lord with infinite delight. So many, though they be true Christians, seem to stop at the sin offering (even if they apprehend all that is involved therein) satisfied with their title, but they do not joy in God. And, consequently, they are more occupied with their own blessing than with all that obedience, devotedness and love presented in the sacrifice of Christ, which ascended to the Divine Majesty from the very place of judgment, and rose as a savour of a sweet smell to God. What a thought, that where man's sin came to light in all its enormity, there also was manifested in the Person of the Son of God nothing but what was fragrant to the Father's heart! "By the eternal Spirit He offered Himself without spot to God." And it is as we apprehend God's part in the sacrifice Christ offered that we touch the burnt offering aspect of the death of His Beloved Son, and are able to render acceptable worship.

Next, the Peace offering. To be in God's presence with the sense that what has brought us there is something in which He finds His own satisfaction and rest, that the Cross means something to Him, is to enter into fullest communion with Him; and this is what the peace offering sets forth. The Cross is both the source and inspiration of our Communion. We partake of that of which God Himself partakes. The Apostle John could say: "Truly our Fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." No wonder he adds, "These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."

We do not mean that fellowship with the Father and the Son was revealed in the Old Testament, or in connection with the offerings under the Jewish economy, we are only translating these things into the terms of Christianity. When the Apostle Paul speaks of the Lord's Table—1 Corinthians x.—he is thinking of the peace offering. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" "We are all partakers of that one bread." "Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?" The altar was God's altar, and that which was placed on it was for Him. There is that in the peace offering which is peculiar, viz., that part was for God; part for Aaron and his sons; and part for the priest who offered; while the one who brought the sacrifice also had his portion. The breast was the portion of Aaron and his sons. The right shoulder for the priest, who did the work—he who offered the blood and the fat. Certain parts were offered on the altar with the fat and the blood, and is called the "food of the offering." This was God's portion. Aaron and his sons, typical of the Church, as a priestly family, shared the breast, for we feed upon the love of Christ, while to the offering priest, representative of Christ, was allotted the right shoulder. Thus God and Christ and the worshipper are in communion. Sin has been put away.

All that is left is that which speaks to God of the excellency of Him Who bore its judgment. How good to be in the presence of God free from all fear of imputation, and without any sense of sin, conscious only that the death which removed our guilt has glorified Him, so that there is nothing in His presence but what is suited to His glory. The love and obedience of Christ, take the place of our sin. When we realize what Christ has done for God and what He is to God, and that He fills the whole scene where we now find our place, what worship this inspires !

II. The Ark

The ark was to preserve intact what was placed within it. Three things are associated therewith : "The golden pot that had manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant." All spoke of Christ : (1) as the humbled and subject man on earth : (2) a priest on high in the power of resurrection : (3) the One Who did God's will and answered to His mind, and in Whom He found all His pleasure. "I delight to do thy will . . . yea, thy law is within my heart" (Psalm xl. 8). It was called (1) "The ark of the covenant," for it was the highest symbol of God's presence and of all that He undertook to be to them ; (2) "The ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth," for it was, in fact, God's throne in the midst of Israel, the pledge of world-wide dominion ; and (3) "The ark of Thy strength," for it was a standing witness to the fact that Jehovah would fulfil all His promises. The mercy seat formed the lid of the ark. The cloud of glory rested upon it, and the symbols of Divine justice and government crowned it.

Pre-eminently, as we have seen, it spoke of Christ. Thus we read : "All the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him, Amen, unto the glory of God by us" (2 Cor. i. 20). Interpreted in the light of Christianity it means that those who form God's House to-day, have light as to His purposes, and are in the presence

of His glory ; Christ is the One in Whom and through Whom His glory will be displayed, and all those purposes will be accomplished. "We see not yet all things put under Him, but we see Jesus"—the true ark of the covenant. He is crowned with glory and honour (Heb. ii. 6-9). God's purpose is to bring many sons to glory and conform them to the image of His Son. Foreknown, predestinated, called, justified, glorified, are declarations concerning believers of God's unfailing purpose in Christ, and the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory, is the portion of the many sons. But He is going to fill the earth with His glory too. The vision which Jacob saw is yet to be translated into actual fact. Heaven and earth are to be united in the Son of Man. God will "gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth ; even in Him." (See also John i. 51 ; Psalm viii., and Heb. ii. 5-9.) So, in Revelation xi., where all this is about to be made good, and the Kingdoms of this world become the Kingdoms of Our Lord and of His Christ, we read : "The temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His testament." His own Son has become Man, and therefore God is not likely to forget what are His purposes for Man. Thus the ark speaks of all that is secured in Christ both for God and for the believer.

III. The Priesthood

All these matters we are considering have special reference to the House of God. His House is where we serve Him as priests. It is of all importance therefore that we should understand Christ's present priesthood and our own. "Behold, bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord, which by night stand in the House of the Lord. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord. The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion." (Ps. cxxxiv.)

Priesthood has a double aspect—Godward and man-

ward. This is true even in the case of Melchizedek. He blesses Abram, and he blesses the Most High God. The Apostle Peter speaks of Christians as a holy priesthood and a royal priesthood. We praise God, and we also show forth His praises to men. Of Aaron God said to Moses, "Take Aaron . . . that he may minister unto Me."

When we turn to the epistle to the Hebrews we find these two sides developed. Our Lord Jesus Christ ministers to us, and He ministers to God. One day, as the true Melchizedek He will minister to men. He succours His people and sympathizes with them, but He is also a Minister of the Sanctuary. "Every High Priest," we are told (chapter v. 1-2), "taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God . . . who can have compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way." And again, in chapter viii. 3, it is stated: "Every High Priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices."

But although there is this double aspect, yet all is in view of fitting us for the service of the Sanctuary. If we are to bring to God our tribute of praise, and offer spiritual sacrifices, we must be free from every burden on our side. The cares incidental to this life, whether they arise from the difficulties and trials of the way, or from bereavement, sickness or sorrow, must not press heavily upon us, or we should be sighing instead of singing; at all events, the outlets of praise and worship would be more or less choked. How unspeakably precious, then, it is to know that the One Who ministers to God in all the holiness and unsullied glory of His Majesty is One Who was in all points tempted (tried) like as we are: "Who in the days of His flesh . . . offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears," and now in His exalted position "feels afresh what every member bears"—He succours and He sympathizes.

These two forms of ministry—succour and sympathy—may be needed at one and the same moment, or

they may not. Sometimes there are circumstances where it is not so much a question of help and support as of sympathy. At other times, sympathy alone might almost seem a mockery. The rich, the great, the powerful may need sympathy, under certain trials, in a very peculiar way. Others who are differently situated need, above all, succour. Christ has passed through this scene, and tasted all its bitterness and woe in order that He may give us both. And the culminating point, as far as this aspect is concerned, is reached in Hebrews vii. 25, "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them."

The experimental value of all this is that we are attracted. What is there attracts like sympathy and succour? We are not only relieved of the pressure, but we are drawn to the Person from Whom the relief comes; "For such an High Priest became us." He became us because we are often weak and weary, and He has had such experiences; but He becomes us too because He is made higher than the heavens, and equally suited to minister to God, and to present to Him the gifts and sacrifices we bring. And so in chapter vii. we pass from one side of priesthood to the other. He Who is able to save us from all fear and fret, able to support us under a load of care, able to enter into our feelings, and to reach down to us, is also "Holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners and made higher than the heavens." He is equally able to reach up to God. The breastplate was four square being doubled. A span each way. He can span all our necessities and equally all the requirements of the holiness of the Majesty in the heavens. He is the Son, perfected for evermore. That is, in life and in death, He has qualified for the office He now fills, whether it is to succour us or minister to God. How suitable He is to enter the presence of God on behalf both of a failing people

in the wilderness, or a worshipping people in the Sanctuary!

But we are to join Him there. We are a "holy priesthood," and "He is not ashamed to call us brethren." As borne upon His heart and shoulders and thus relieved of all our care, we are to draw nigh to God. "We come unto God by Him." It is "By a better hope we draw nigh unto God." "Let us draw near" (Heb. vii. 19, 25; x. 22). We are exhorted to come boldly unto the Throne of Grace that we may *obtain*: that is the wilderness side; but we are also to draw nigh that we may *give*: that is the sanctuary side. And this is the character of our worship on the Lord's Day morning. "Wherefore," it says, "it is of necessity that this man (Christ) have somewhat also to offer." But what does He offer? That which we bring. He ministers to God, but not apart from us, for He declares: "In the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto Thee." Just as Aaron of old presented to God that which Israel brought, so our Great High Priest, Who has passed through the heavens into God's presence, offers what we bring, so that all is suited to, and acceptable to, the Divine Majesty.

"To all our prayers and praises,
Christ adds His sweet perfume."

When the High Priest of old entered the Holiest he went in not only with blood, but with incense. We read: "and he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the Mercy Seat" (Lev. xvi. 13). So in Hebrews x., where our entrance into the Holiest is in question, not only is the blood mentioned, but it states, "Having an High Priest over the House of God, let us draw near."

That is, just as Aaron was head of a priestly family, so Christ is over us—Christ as a Son over His Own House, Whose House are we" (iii. 6). We are all of one—one stock, one family—we form part of that

priestly company of which He is the Great Priest, and we offer up "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." May we know more of what it is to join Christ in the holiest, where He ministers and we minister in association with Him.

What a scene is thus opened to us, and what service we are called upon to render! We are before God in the company of Christ. Glory fills that holy place, where Christ ministers, and we draw nigh through Him. He is the sacrifice, by which we are perfected forever. He is the Ark of the Covenant crowned with glory and honour. He is the High Priest with the "garments of glory and beauty." "We see Jesus"—Sacrifice, Ark, and Priest. To such a scene are we brought, and in such a scene we worship.

Had Israel apprehended what the service of the Sanctuary meant, and the provision it contained for their own needs—in one word, had they realized all that was involved in God's dwelling being in their midst and maintained what was due to it, they never could have reached the level of moral and spiritual corruption to which they sank. If we are to be preserved from every form of corruption we must maintain the order and sanctity of God's House. We are never safe if we content ourselves with some lower elevation than the one God has given.

LAODICEA : OR CHRIST'S LAST MESSAGE

REVELATION iii. 14-22

THESE addresses to the Seven Churches have a peculiar charm and impressiveness all their own. They are equally solemn. Christ is here taking account of those who stand in a recognized relationship to Him. In the most accurate way and with undeviating equity He is assessing their merits and defects, their achievements and failures. Their condition comes up for judgment, especially as it is reflected in their attitude towards Him. This frequently calls for a stern and scathing rebuke. In the end, He speaks of utter rejection. One very important point needs to be borne in mind, and it is this—these local churches are representative, and through them the whole Church as a professing body is weighed and judged.

As we read these addresses, let us bear in mind two things. First, the Speaker ; second, the persons addressed. The One Who speaks is presented to us in chapter i. as the Son of Man, in the aspect of a Judge ; His eyes as a flame of fire, His feet like unto fine brass, Who walks in the midst of the seven candlesticks. And John is told that the seven candlesticks are the Seven Churches. Moreover, He is so glorious that although to each Church He presents Himself in a different character, His glories are so varied, whether they be Personal, official, or moral, that there is no exhausting them. Some of the greatest are mentioned last.

But to whom are these messages addressed? A mistake here is fatal. It is not the world, nor those outside the Churches, but the Church itself which is addressed. And being seven, the number of spiritual perfection or completeness, they represent the whole Church. In one aspect they stand for actual Churches existing in John's day, but even then in a representative character; in another aspect they represent the Church for all time, and embody and foreshadow its history down to the close. That is, even in John's day these addresses did not concern merely the Seven Churches of Asia. Loss of first love was characteristic of the Church as a whole. While each phase, actually true, in some sense, even then, foreshadowed some particular phase of Church history. And this it is which lends such importance to the address to Laodicea. It has a direct message for ourselves, and does not merely concern a period which has long since passed away never to return.

One further matter needs to be borne in mind, and it is that this history, taken as a whole, never can be repeated. The history of the Church has proceeded from Ephesus to Laodicea, by well defined and easily recognizable stages—stages which are matters of history; there will never, for instance, be a recovery of first love, never be another Reformation, the period covered by Sardis.

One word more. The aspect of the Church, as viewed in these addresses, is not that of the Body of Christ nor the Bride, but the Church in its responsible character as a witness on earth. That is why it is presented under the form of seven candlesticks. In these addresses, therefore, we are listening to the voice of the Spirit—the Spirit as dwelling in God's House to maintain the interests of Christ and what is due to Him.

I

Each address opens with "These things saith," and then follows a description of the Speaker in some

aspect of His varied glories, either Personal, moral, or official.

Why, in every instance, does Christ thus present HIMSELF? First, because He is addressing those who stand in outward relationship and responsibility to Himself; second, because everything depends upon the Church's thoughts of Him, and whether her condition is consistent with His character and what is due to Him. The place He has in her apprehension and affections is everything. Lastly, because the presentation of Christ Himself alone can affect the heart and life, and produce any change. Every revival is a rediscovery of the glory of Christ. What we think of Him and what He is to us is *everything*. Moreover, it will be found that the character of the presentation has an intimate relation to the state of the Church addressed.

He presents Himself to Laodicea as follows:—"These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the Creation of God."

(a) "The Amen": He is Presented as One Who
can never fail

"All the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen" (2 Cor. i. 20).

If everything fails on earth and in relation to man, there is no failure in Christ. He is the same at the end as at the beginning. How appropriate then, as well as impressive, that in this closing address to a Church in its last and worst stage of corruption, about to be utterly rejected, He presents Himself as the Amen—the Verily. The One in Whom all will yet be made good. No promise shall fail, no word shall fruitless fall.

(b) He is the Faithful and True Witness

In chapter i. He is declared to be the faithful witness, but He is also the true Witness. Nothing will fail in His hands, for He is faithful: and He is true,

for He is altogether that which He says He is. Here, again, there is contrast. The Church should have been a "faithful and true witness." She has not been faithful, for she has failed, and God's interests and man's have suffered; she has not been true, for she bears a false character before the world, and there is a want of reality. What need then to turn more than ever to Christ, Who alone is the faithful and true witness, His witness as to God, as to Himself, as to sin and its consequences, as to the Scriptures, may be accepted in the face of Modernism, and all the varied and discordant voices of the hour. There is still One to Whom we can turn. He will never fail us, never disappoint. He declared that He came to bear witness unto the truth.

(c) He is also "the Beginning of the Creation of God"

The creation of God referred to here is doubtless "new creation." The order of things originally established, with Adam as Head, is breaking up and hastening to its dissolution. It is marked by sin and sorrow and suffering, by revolt against God and unrestrained lawlessness, and must give place to a new order, in which God will find His rest. Christ is here said to be the beginning of it. When He was raised from the dead this new creation came into being and a new order was established, where all that marks this present scene—death and judgment and sin and sorrow—will have no place. It is called "the creation of God," for everything will be according to God and for His pleasure—the result of His power and love. The heavens will be opened upon a Man, the angels of God will be His Ministers, and all will rest upon the work and centre round the Person of the One Who in grace gave Himself for sinners.

What a relief to turn away from all the failure of the Church to Christ, who presents Himself in **this** three-fold way—the Amen; the faithful and true Witness; the Beginning of the Creation of God. The One in Whom all will be fulfilled; in Whose hands

nothing can fail ; Who bears witness to eternal realities ; and Who is the Head and Centre of a new order where all is according to God and for His pleasure, and in which the believer finds his part.

II

Christ having spoken of Himself in such terms, now proceeds to characterize the Church. Let us remember that there can be nothing untrue, nothing exaggerated about this judgment. Is there anything more solemn for us to consider than that He takes notice of us and is able to form an exact estimate of our condition ? In principle, this not only refers to the Church at large, but to local assemblies and to individuals :

“ I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot ; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth. Because thou sayest I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”

We need to remember that the Lord is depicting a general condition of the Church, and we have only to look around us to see this condition everywhere present before our eyes. The prevailing condition to-day is just that described by the words “ neither cold nor hot.” In confirmation of this assertion take one sentence which appeared in a weekly religious paper a short time ago from the pen of a not unfriendly critic : “ To-day Protestantism takes up no decided attitude to anything.” This spirit is manifest everywhere, and in relation to almost everything. “ Neither cold nor hot ”—no words could describe more exactly the prevailing tendency.

Again, let us remember it is not the world that is here addressed, but the Church. And the solemn fact is that the state described is a condition Christ loathes. “ I am about to spue thee out of My mouth,” He says. For what is worse than indifference—when nothing moves us—one thing considered to be as good as

another, incapable of being roused to indignation—without zeal or passion for anything? Simply prepared to let things go because too unconcerned to think it matters. Nor are we left in doubt that this lukewarmness principally concerns Christ Himself. They were indifferent towards Him. He is presently seen outside.

This state of lukewarmness is rendered more serious by a condition of self-satisfaction which is amazing. Self-approbation and self-complacency seemed to rise in proportion as their appreciation of Christ declined. And the worst feature of all is they seem perfectly content with their state, unconscious apparently how nauseous it was to Christ. Had there been some sense of their unhappy and dangerous condition, had they felt it to be an occasion of reproach, there might have been hope of recovery, but the next words enable us to realize the depth of spiritual torpor which had been reached: "Because thou sayest I am rich and increased with goods, *and have need of nothing.*"

Do not these words again describe the condition most manifest in the Church to-day, especially in Protestantism? The boast, heard on every side, of advance; the repeated reference to the "new learning"; the glorying in the achievements of science and "higher criticism," accompanied by the absence of the sense of sin and need; and alongside of this, the increase of material riches, displaying itself in costly buildings, etc.—in one word, a form of Christianity that advertises itself in carnal display of every description, until the Church seems possessed of everything except devotion to Christ and true spiritual power. But to the discerning eye, what poverty is discovered amidst abundant human resources, and what squalor can be detected beneath the outward show! Just, in fact, what the Lord says: "And knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." But how few believe that this is a faithful description of the Church to-day! May God awaken many to realize it!

For what can be worse than to say, "I have need of nothing." Especially when, all the time, we have need of everything. Are we willing to accept Christ's estimate of things, or are we content with our own and the world's? What a difference between Christ's estimate and theirs!

Is it not easily possible for any of us to form quite another estimate of ourselves or of others than His estimate? How overwhelming should be the thought, not only that He can weigh us up, but that He does so—that He actually has formed an estimate, not only of the Church at large, but every one of us! And is anything so calculated to overwhelm us, unless we are past feeling, as the thought that He may think quite differently of us from what we think of ourselves? Could any of us bear to be in His presence and hear Him tell us this? Are we content with a Christianity of a merely formal nature? Are we neither open infidels nor earnest believers? Or, if Christianity, in our case, has taken on a deeper tone than that, and we are found at the commemoration of the Lord's Supper, and engage in Christian work—Sunday School and evangelistic effort—yet is it easily possible to be Laodicean the while, Christ having really but a small place in our aims and affections? We prefer popularity to reproach; we like to be in the swim of things; we love the opinion of others more than the truth; and are more concerned with what others will think of us than with what Christ thinks. Are we content with a neutral tint that will awaken no opposition but will enable us to be on good terms with everyone?

In the Epistle to the Ephesians, chapter v., we find the Apostle Paul dealing with the human relationship of marriage, but as a mystery, that is, as representing a spiritual relationship, and so he sums up his argument in these words: "I speak concerning Christ and the Church." But there is an immense difference between the Church as presented in that passage and the aspect now before us in Revelation iii. In the first instance,

the Church is viewed from a Divine standpoint. All is according to God's purpose and counsel, and is seen as the result of His work—it is the Church that Christ loved and gave Himself for, His Body and His Bride, which He continues to sanctify and to nourish, and which He will present to Himself glorified, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. In the other instance, it is the professing body—the visible Church as committed to man's responsibility, a witness for God here in the world, but which has failed, and is about to be spued out of Christ's mouth in consequence. All that is real having first been separated from it and received up in glory at the coming of our Lord.

Nothing can be much more solemn than to look at the Church as she appears before the eyes of men in the world to-day—corrupt and powerless—a huge system, which seems to exist more for the glorification of men than anything else. We, of course, speak of the Church in its entirety, the whole professing body—identified with the Name of Christ and in a direct line of descent from the Church as established by God at Pentecost. This is why such solemn words as we have been considering are addressed to her. We are reminded of those other words, equally solemn, in 2 Timothy ii. 12, "If we deny Him, He also will deny us." We have already seen the difference between Laodicea's own estimate of itself and Christ's estimate. No more serious mistake in life can ever be made than to form an entirely erroneous estimate of ourselves, our condition, character, and capabilities. This claim to be rich and in need of nothing is disallowed by Him, Whose judgment cannot err. His judgment is—"Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

Some one, perhaps, may raise the question: "If I am a true child of God, what has all this to do with me?" The answer is: (1) That, from the standpoint taken here, no one is to assume that he is a true child of God unless he is different and to be distinguished from this

corrupt state of things. It is not enough to say I believe—Christendom believes also, and so do the devils. *Are we different?* That is the question. Are our zeal and love for Christ apparent? (2) The seven candlesticks represent the whole Church, and the seven candlesticks are in review here. Their gold has become dim, their light fails. If we make any profession at all we form part of this system, and cannot escape from it. And our whole spiritual state depends, to some extent, upon whether we accept or refuse Christ's message to these Churches. (3) We are called to overcome, but can we succeed in this unless we are aware of the character of things to be overcome? Or should we be called to overcome a state of things which did not concern us?

Thus it will be seen that the matter under consideration is of the deepest practical importance to all.

III

And now we come to our third point, the solemn admonition couched in these words:

"I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see."

The reason why the Church is thus addressed is not far to seek: Independency of Christ and indifference, self-sufficiency and self-satisfaction, mark her, and Christ says, as it were—"The beginning of recovery will be when you find out how much you need Me, and that what you most urgently require I alone can supply." "I counsel thee to buy of Me." As if He said, "You are a commercial centre; your City is widely known as a Mart for certain goods; you are wealthy; but you have overlooked the essential things. The gold of this world you do not lack, but that is of a perishing nature. You can supply fabric for dresses, but you yourself are unclothed; eyesalve is a commodity you are famous for, yet you yourself cannot see."

Why does the Lord say "buy"? In Christianity, is not everything free? Some one has said: "We receive forgiveness and eternal life, and much else as a gift to begin with, but, if there is to be progress, everything else we have to pay for." Which means that there can be no true progress without surrender. The weights have to be laid aside—old friends, old habits, old customs may have to be given up. We can do nothing to merit or earn eternal life, but to *follow* Christ, and thus find the fullest blessing, a man may have to forsake all that he has. And so the Lord says, "Buy of Me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich." That is, exchange all that which may seem so necessary and valuable, but is really so worthless, and which one day will be burned up, for what I have to give—gold tried in the fire—lasting as it is precious."

"White raiment" speaks of approval. However costly the raiment in which we deck ourselves, and however fine people may think we look, what matters it if He approves not? Learning, eloquence, wealth, machinery, music—we may deck ourselves with these, but they are but shame if in any sense they take the place of Christ and true spiritual power. The one question is—Have we the approval of Christ in all that we are and all that we do?

And lastly, "eyesalve." This word recalls our Lord's solemn utterance to the Pharisees. They had no spiritual perception, yet all the time they imagined they could see. To see is to perceive Christ. The blind man we read about in John ix., not only had his natural sight given to him, but his spiritual sight became more and more clarified, for he made ever fresh discoveries of Christ. But the Pharisees had cast him out, and they rejected the One who had healed him. Thus the Lord, at the close, says:

"For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with Him heard these words, and said unto Him, Are we blind also? Jesus

said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin ; but now ye say, We see ; therefore your sin remaineth."

Does not this very state of things confront us to-day ? Was there ever a time when people proclaimed more loudly, " We see " ? They pretend to look back millions of years and profess to see what happened in that dim, remote age. They can search immensity with their telescope, and tell us what they have seen ; and they can examine a drop of water and report the wonders that are there. But how much do they perceive of Christ ? He is the test : " For judgment I am come into the world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind." And is not this equally true now ? We only see as we perceive Him.

" Gold tried in the fire " ; " white raiment " ; " eyesalve "—these are what Christ offers, and we have them only as we realize our own emptiness, and need, and nothingness, and turn to Him.

" All the fitness He requireth,
Is to feel our need of Him."

This is what we sang at the beginning, and this is what we felt, and we must continue to feel it more and more, right on to the end. If possible, we need Him more as Christians than we did when, as sinners, we first looked to Him. What grace it needs to be a Christian ! What grace to refuse all that ministers to self, and to be able to say, " For me to live is Christ " !

Philippians iii. presents to us one who had learned this lesson—he had discovered the gold and the white raiment and the eyesalve. Paul is the perfect contrast of a Laodicean. No confidence in the flesh characterized him—and in religious flesh he had least of all. Every thing that proved a gain to him, in that way, he counted loss for Christ. He had found the gold. Christ was his gain, and, in comparison, all else was as refuse. And in the power which comes from knowing that

Christ is everything, and He alone counts—the power of His resurrection—for what else counts but Christ in the scene to which resurrection introduces us?—he could enter into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, even enduring crucifixion itself.

And why was this? What accounts for it? He had received the eyesalve. His eyes had been anointed. "He was three days without sight," we are told, "and neither did eat nor drink," his eyes were closed to all of this world as the result of having seen Christ in glory. The scales fell from them, and when they were again opened, "the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto him in the way" was henceforth the object of his soul. Such a man is sure of the "white raiment"—he is sure to be approved—because he knows what he has been apprehended for and lives for that.

How different in regard to those mentioned at the end of that same chapter! These are described as "the enemies of the cross of Christ." Their walk was of such a character as made the Apostle weep. Yet these were within the Christian circle—even in that day—and professed to be Christians.

IV

We are now called to listen to one of the most tender appeals that ever fell even from the lips of the Saviour.

"As many as I love I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent."

Is not this what our Lord is doing to-day? In the midst of a scene of indifference He is calling upon His people to be zealous, and in order that they may be, He administers rebuke and brings them under discipline. On every hand this is apparent, so that we know we are in Laodicean times, not only by the general condition around us, but by these particular dealings with those who are the objects of His love.

"As many as I love"—why "as many"? Do not these words again remind us of the aspect before

mentioned—not the Church seen in its purely Divine character as that which Christ loved, but a vast professing body, bearing His Name, yet to a large extent faithless and unreal. In the midst of this there are those Christ loves. Are you, my reader, one of these? Am I? Have we learned His love and responded? We have not, if we are boasting we are “rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing.” But if ever we had the sense that we were in need of *everything*, and sought Christ in repentance and faith, and made the tremendous discovery that the need we are conscious of He died to meet, that His blood atones for our guilt, and His Person satisfies the heart—if we have come to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge—then, indeed, we can take our place amongst the “as many.”

But it may be asked, “If He loves me, why does He rebuke and chasten?” These are some of the very tokens and proofs of His love, and they are by no means the least of them. Are we conscious of such dealings? To be let alone—in cold contempt apart—given up to our indifference and the enjoyment of that which ministers to our self-satisfaction—this is not to be loved, but to be left. But if He is taking from you one thing after another, only to make you richer in finding out more of what He can be to you; if He is laying upon you one burden upon another, just to make you lean harder upon Him; if one sorrow after another is allowed to darken your life, only that the brightness of His presence may be known; if rebuke and chastening are your lot, and you are repenting—then, indeed, you may rejoice, for God has put the marks of sonship upon you, and you are loved. Thus you will become conscious of all that that love wants to do for you. You will have discovered that this love is so real, that it cannot leave you to be wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. But the fruit—the most precious fruit—of those rebukes and of that chastening will be that you will love Him, and, loving

Him, nothing will satisfy you but His company. Thus you will be prepared for the blessing which follows :

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock ; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

The supreme blessing Christ offers here is His company. And what greater or more desirable blessing could there be ? What are riches, possessions, gifts, if the presence of the loved one is unknown ? At the beginning of the Church's history she was richly endowed. Powers and gifts were conferred upon her which are unknown to-day—God bore witness to His word with "signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost." Yet amidst all the blessings of those earlier days, when great grace was upon them all, and miraculous powers were manifested, none was superior to what is promised to the overcomer to-day : "I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with Me." For can there be anything greater than Christ Himself ? anything sweeter than communion with Him ? If He gives Himself to you He gives everything. And this is the promise here to the one that will open to Him.

But, notice where He stands. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock." He stands outside, and, so closed is the heart to Him, He must draw attention to the fact—He knocks. In chapter i. He is seen in the midst of the seven candlesticks. Here that same One is outside, with those inside, "rich and increased with goods, in need of nothing." A somewhat similar scene is depicted in the Song of Songs. The bride says, "I sleep, but my heart waketh ; it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled." Do we realize all that we are in the eyes of Christ as expressed in those endearing epithets—"My sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled" ? It is as if He could not tell us all that we are to Him. But what is the reply : "I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on ? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them ?" She is thinking of

herself—her own ease and comfort and condition. In her drowsy contentedness she refuses at first to be disturbed! Shall we be like that?

In the passage before us, Christ is at the door, and draws attention to the fact. What response shall we make? He speaks. He addresses the heart. Immense buildings—buildings erected in His honour—are on every hand throughout Christendom, costly, ornate, sumptuous, attractive. He is not represented as standing outside these, but He seeks a place in your heart and mine. In John xiv. He speaks of the many abodes in the Father's House, and tells His disciples He is going to prepare a place for them. In the meantime, He asks for a place in our hearts, and promises to come and manifest Himself to the one that loves Him. In Genesis xviii. the Lord supped with Abraham first, He shared what Abraham provided—He came to him—and then Abraham supped with Jehovah; "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" The Patriarch had the inconceivable honour and privilege of sharing the thoughts and purposes of the heart of God, and of interceding with Him. God brings Abraham into His secret. So in Luke xxiv. the Lord Jesus sups with the two in their house at Emmaus; but in John i. the question is, "Master, where dwellest Thou?" "And they came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day." They sup with Him. What must it mean to be with Him, where He abides and reveals what He knows! In John xiv. again, there are two comings. "I will come again and receive you unto Myself." That is one coming, in connection with being where He is in the Father's House. But lower down there is another coming. "I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you." That is now. To the one that loves Him, Christ comes. And He does not come alone, but He and the Father. "If a man love Me, he will keep My word (not words), and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." Such is the company promised to

the loving heart. Let us dwell upon these words—"My Father will love him." The Father's love—that is where Christ sups and we may sup with Him. He prepares an abode for us in the Father's house and we are to prepare an abode for Him in our hearts. In the midst of a vast profession He is seeking hearts that appreciate Him and will entertain Him. A time of failure and weakness may prove a gain in this respect, that it leaves the soul at liberty to be the more occupied with Christ. The day of small things may thus prove a day of great things to the soul that knows the secret of His presence. In a scene of failure and apathy the best may still be enjoyed by the devoted heart.

How unique, too, is the promise to the overcomer. If we give Christ a place in our hearts now, He will give us a place on His throne in the Kingdom by and by. No one may know now that Christ comes to us and sups with us and we with Him; every one will know when we sit with Him on His throne. The one is secret and known only to Christ and to the heart that welcomes Him, the other will be public and before the gaze of all.

This is the only occasion in these seven addresses that the Lord speaks of Himself as an overcomer—"Even as I also overcame." Is it because the circumstances in the Church to-day are somewhat similar to the conditions which confronted Him? On one occasion, it will be remembered, He quotes the solemn words of Isaiah as applicable to His generation—"This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." Is not this characteristic of our day? A zeal for tradition, but not for truth; the commandments of men more considered than the word of God. What we have to overcome is the lukewarmness and indifference of the present day.

May God grant to us an ear to hear this last message of Christ to His people—to "hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches."

THE SEVEN CANDLESTICKS : OR " BEING TURNED "

" HE IS OUR PEACE " (Eph. ii. 14)

" And I turned to see the voice that spake with me, and being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks. And in the midst of the seven candlesticks, one like unto the Son of Man " (Rev. i. 12, 13).

JOHN was in the Isle of Patmos " for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." And he gives us this description of what occurred: " I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and heard behind me a great voice, as a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last ; and what thou seest write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches that are in Asia. . . . "

There are several things we do well to notice here. First, the necessity at times of being apart, if we are to receive divine communications. John was in Patmos. Next, we need to observe the spiritual condition required. " I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day." We have power neither to receive nor to communicate spiritual things except by the Spirit. He alone can teach us all things, and form in us the mind of Christ. But the mention of the Lord's Day implies that something else is essential. We must in spirit be outside the sphere and influence of man. How necessary this is in order that we may be brought under divine influence. The Lord's Day is the resurrection day. As Lord He rules in a sphere outside that in which the will of man is exercised. Physically, John was in Patmos and con-

fined to that place ; spiritually, he was free and beyond all earthly confines—he was in a sphere where Christ rules and reigns.

Further, the announcement is concerning Christ. “ I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.” And lastly, what is communicated is for the Churches.

We are now directed to the attitude of John. “ And I turned to see the voice that spake with me.” And this act of turning is emphasized : “ And *being turned*, I saw . . . ” This is deeply significant and important. He tells us, first of all, the voice was *behind* him. And then, twice over, he mentions that he “ *turned*.” Now why this ?

Are there not times when we need to have our attention diverted from what is engaging us ? We have become occupied with the superficial or the transitory ; our minds are taken up with what, after all, is only secondary. We may have become engrossed with the form merely, and missed the spirit. We need to have our attention recalled to what is higher, and of supreme importance, to what is, after all, really essential. Is not this why the voice came from behind ? It summoned John away from what was engaging him. And, further, the fact that he had to turn showed the importance of these new objects that were to occupy him. “ And I *turned* to see the voice that spake with me. And *being turned*, I saw . . . ” So great was this new prospect that he had to turn away from everything else to behold it. Just as when God spake to Moses of old in the burning bush, Moses said, “ I will now *turn aside*, and see this great sight ” (Exod. iii. 3). Sometimes we are called to “ turn ” because God would summon us to higher things.

Is not this what all God's people need to do at the present time ? They need to *turn*. Not, it may be, because we are occupied with what is bad, or unprofitable, or useless, but we get into mental and spiritual ruts, our outlook becomes confined, we are apt to look every man on his own things, while worst and most deadening of all,

we become satisfied, if not enamoured, with a state of things in our Church life, and with our own individual Christian life, which should be very far indeed from satisfying us. We need to hear a voice *behind* us. We need to turn.

And when John turned, what did he see? "I saw seven golden candlesticks." In other words, he saw what represented the Church according to its divine pattern and character and its original brightness—"seven golden candlesticks." And he was reminded of what should be the character of its witness here on earth.

Now, if there is one thing more than another we all need to-day it is to see the Church of God according to its divine pattern, as it originally existed as a divinely established witness on the earth. There is no mistaking the figure, for the One in the midst of the candlesticks interprets it for us. "The seven candlesticks," He declares, "which thou sawest are the seven churches" (v. 20).

The Church here is presented according to one aspect, and one aspect only, that of the lightbearer, the vessel for the display of God's character and testimony—God's witness on earth. But it represents the Church, and we do well to think of the Church of God, for a moment, in its completeness, the pillar and base of the truth, the house of God and the body of Christ, looking for a moment beyond the immediate symbol. And as we do so, are we not convinced that we have all settled down with a very imperfect apprehension of it, and that, as we have said, we all need to turn from our inadequate conception and to have a fresh vision of the real thing. From all our church organization and arrangements, our views of church order and fellowship, so far as any of it is a departure from the original, we need to turn, and take another look at the Church as it exists in the divine mind—we need to see the seven golden candlesticks.

How varied is the condition of things that at present

occupies different sections of the Lord's people. There is what the mustard tree stands for—as the Lord speaks in Matthew xiii.—overgrown ecclesiastical establishments. We need not mention their names, they are known to us all. They are very impressive to the eye, and they attract a great deal of attention. Wealth and learning and a good deal of machinery of various descriptions are found there. And much, no doubt, that the Lord commends, but if our eye has once rested upon the seven golden candlesticks, we see at once how disfigured everything has become, and we cannot fail to detect the departure from the original pattern.

But what beside these? Beside these there are scattered groups composed of those who profess to have caught a sight of the original pattern and to have returned to the church order which obtained at the beginning. But do not *we* also (for the writer would like to include himself amongst these last) need to turn, and to take a fresh look at the "seven golden candlesticks"? We began with gathering, we have at length succeeded in scattering. We began with welcoming every member of the body of Christ; some now welcome only such as belong to certain meetings. In the early days every gift bestowed by the Head was recognized, it made room for itself; now it is necessary to have a passport. In some cases it consists in belonging to a recognized group of meetings, and in others in holding certain views as to a particular rite, and Christ's authority and administration are set aside and the truth of the Church is practically, though not theoretically, denied. Christ might as well have abdicated His functions as Head of His Church, so far as bestowing gifts is concerned, for unless the pastor, teacher, or evangelist happens to have found his way amongst a particular group (often a mere matter of chance) he is of no use to them, because he is not recognized, and if he happens to be of use to one section the probability is he is of no use to any of the others. Yet these groups hold the same doctrines—including every fundamental doctrine of Christianity—and are charac-

terized in every respect by similar practices, yet as to church fellowship they are as far apart as the poles, and in the strongest antagonism.

What is the remedy? And "being *turned* I saw seven golden candlesticks."

These seven candlesticks, though in a wider signification, are seen in the epistle to the Ephesians. One very characteristic term in this epistle is "saints"—and repeatedly this has the accompaniment "all"—"all saints"—this is what we are called to contemplate, and to take account of. "All saints," and nothing narrower, form the circle which is the extent of our affections and of our fellowship. The "saints" will be the vessel in which God's glory will be displayed in that new creation scene which Christ fills and will fill for ever as Man (i. 18). They possess all the rights and privileges of the household of God and form His dwelling place on earth, "builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit." This will subsist for eternity (ii. 19, 20).

Only with "all saints" can we apprehend the full purpose of God concerning Christ and the scene He will fill with these very saints as His companions, as co-heirs with Him of that vast inheritance given to Him of the Father—"the breadth and length and depth and height" (iii. 18). The saints are the sphere of ministry—and nothing short of this (Eph. iv. 12). And, finally, it is for "all saints" that we are to pray (vi. 18).

Now, how insufficient, how poor, how confined are all sectarian thoughts and mere human limitations in comparison with the Divine idea, whether they take the form of definitely organized systems or groups of meetings!

Thus, to begin with, our affections and our fellowship—our church association—must be bounded only by "all saints." We shall come in a moment to the difficulties of these days and what is called for in face of all the corruption and failure by which, practically, saints may be surrounded, but it is the "seven golden candlesticks" we must look at first. Otherwise, we have no standpoint from which to view things, and no standard by which

to measure them. And the consequence will be we shall be calling good evil, and evil good.

Let us see further, from this Epistle to the Ephesians, how closely the saints are united, and the unity which has been formed. Only in the light of this can we see what sectarianism means, or shall we be able to detect it, or have any desire to be free from this evil.

There could not possibly have existed stronger antagonism than did actually exist between Jew and Gentile according to the flesh. They had nothing in common, except mutual hatred. But the Cross has removed all these differences by removing the man after the flesh. "He is our peace," says the Apostle to the Gentiles, himself a Jew. He "hath made both one." The distance is gone: the middle wall of partition is gone; the enmity is gone: "For to make in Himself of twain one new man"—"one body." Could there be greater nearness, greater similarity, or more complete unity: "one new man"—"one body"? Moreover, they are alike indwelt by "one Spirit," and are placed on an equal footing entirely. This is the "unity of the Spirit," the Apostle goes on to refer to in chapter iv., and which we are exhorted to keep. We are not told to keep the one new man or the one body, for these are facts before God which cannot in themselves be affected by any conduct or malpractices of ours, but nevertheless the keeping the unity of the Spirit is all in the direction of walking and acting *according* to, and in the recognition of, these truths. If we revive differences, for instance, which belong to the flesh, and which have no recognition in the new man, then we are not endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit. And so with the "one body," any fellowship based on narrower lines than this cannot be the unity of the Spirit. The unity of the Spirit is necessarily bound up with what the Spirit has formed. To try to form some other unity or some agreement on narrower lines is to deny the unity of the Spirit.

It is needful, therefore, to keep two things in mind. First, in what the unity consists; and second, how it is to

be kept. Many Christians have no conception of the nature of the unity, and alas, those who have known something of its nature have missed the way to keep it.

The unity is the oneness of Ephesians ii. 14, 15, 16: "made both one": "one new man": "one body," and this unity is further enlarged upon in chapter iv. 4-6. Only as these things are recognized can the unity be kept. But the way to keep it is in the uniting bond of peace. Alas! this has been overlooked, or altogether forgotten, and the consequence is, instead of unity there has been division.

Unity is the Divine idea and the Divine purpose. The passages already quoted prove it, and the importance of unity may be gauged by the fact that the Devil's one aim seems to be to mar it. Let anyone try to promote discord amongst the saints, and he will more often than not be successful. Let him try to promote unity when there has been discord, and he will soon discover the opposition he has to encounter.

In further proof of how absolutely unity is of God, Ephesians iv. reveals the fact that all the gifts are bestowed, and all ministry is to be exercised with this very end in view: "Till we all come into the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God." Ministry is to the end that Christ may be better known, because the better He is known the more divergence and discord will cease. True ministry is the unfailing promoter of unity, because thereby all are drawn to one centre—Christ.

So far as our abstract view of the Church is concerned we are all agreed probably. We all admit there is one body and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling. Our difficulties begin when we propose to walk together: and strangely enough, they centre in that holy rite—the Lord's Supper. And the reason of this is as strange as anything else in this whole strange business, and it is that we allow our attitude towards some real or imaginary evil (often imaginary) to practically set aside and obliterate, as far as this is possible,

that which God has established for His own glory, and our own happiness and blessing, thus rendering God's provision for His people without effect. Does it never strike us that there must be something in all this entirely wrong? If evil so occupies us that we cannot secure the good, cannot enjoy and profit by the fellowship and the ministry which God has established, we must have missed our way somewhere.

In view of these things what need for us to *turn*—to look once more at the Church as it is in God's account—to turn from our divisions, our parties, and all our ecclesiastical blunders. "And I turned to see the voice that spake with me, *and being turned*, I saw seven golden candlesticks." The whole psychology of the situation lies there—"being turned." We question whether there is a single saint of God on earth who has not, in the course of his experience, become occupied with something from which he may well turn, something that never properly belonged to "the seven golden candlesticks." These seven golden candlesticks—perfect in their number, perfect in their light, perfect in their divine character and workmanship—would make everything that is out of keeping with them impossible.

But is that all that John saw? He tells us of something else. "In the midst of the seven candlesticks, one like unto the Son of Man."

Now is it not worth while to turn to get such a sight as this? What is there that is occupying us that for a moment can be compared with such a vision—the seven golden candlesticks and one like unto the Son of Man in the midst?

We are not forgetting that there have been changes since then in the Church, or that in the address to Laodicea Christ is seen outside—yes, outside the door—a very different situation from in the midst of the seven candlesticks. Nevertheless, the record of chapter i. stands for our consideration still, and we cannot afford to ignore it. If John turned, it was that he might see the Church in relation to Christ, and Christ in relation

to the Church. Be it well noted that it was the double aspect that confronted him. And if we learn from this what the Church is to Him, and His place in it, then two things will happen.

1. *We shall mourn over its present condition.* Nothing is more surprising than how little we are affected by the failure of that which should have been a witness for God on earth. Our thoughts seldom travel beyond our little local sphere which interests us and our own service. The condition of the Church as a whole, when we remember from whence it has fallen, and what it has become, and what all this means to Christ, ought to break our hearts.

2. Though we can never set the Church right or restore it, we shall earnestly endeavour to act for ourselves according to the laws of God's house, and tolerate no departure from the original pattern.

Yes, if we are to be right to-day, if we are to have a true conception of things, if amidst all the present confusion we are to have right and true ideas, and respond to Christ's wish for the moment, we must turn and look at this twofold vision—Christ and the Church.

Recovery for the people of God always depends upon two things—a re-discovery of the glories of Christ, and a return to the truth of the dispensation—or in other words, to God's chief interest.

Recovery for us to-day will surely be found just along these two lines. A vision of the "seven golden candlesticks"—God's chief interest—and a re-discovery of the glory of Christ.

What is meant by a re-discovery of the glory of Christ? We do not mean that there is to be some entirely new revelation, or that our minds need informing as to some new title or truth regarding our Lord, of which at present they are ignorant. We need a re-discovery of the glories of Christ, so that what we are mentally acquainted with should become fresh and vivid in our hearts by the power of the Holy Ghost. For this there must be exercise, and there must be prayer. There

must be exercise, for we are in danger of being perfectly satisfied with our present condition, and if so we shall refuse to turn. This is Laodiceanism, and as this is the present state of the Church generally, we are all in danger of lapsing into this condition, if we are not already in it. And we need prayer, for it is only in response to prayer that the Holy Spirit works.

John was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and no doubt he had been much in prayer. We cannot imagine such a man a prayerless man. And a prayerless man is not necessarily one who never prays, but a man or woman who prays little, or to no purpose. John is responsive to the voice because of his spiritual condition. Are we always responsive to Christ's voice and to the Holy Spirit's leading?

John turned to see, and *being turned*, he saw. Had he ever seen Christ like this before? He had seen Him asleep in the boat in a storm; he had seen Him stooping to wash His disciples' feet during the last supper, and had leaned his head upon His bosom afterwards; he had seen Him on the Cross; he had seen Him ascending up through the open heaven—but he had never seen Christ as he saw Him now: "*One like unto the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.*" All betoken the aspect of a judge—the long robe, the restrained affections. The Son of Man is in the midst of the seven candlesticks, but He is there as taking account of their condition rather than as the Bridegroom expressing His love to His Bride. And so He is girt about the breasts with a golden girdle. He knows how and when to serve His Church, and what kind of service to render, whether to wash our feet or "fight against us with the sword of His mouth." Divine righteousness will not flinch from the latter, any more than love will forget the former. He who once was girded with a towel, is here girded with a "golden girdle."

His judgment of everything is characterized by per-

fect purity—no “bribery and corruption” can find any countenance with Him, nor is He moved by mere sentiment or feeling. “*His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow.*” His judgment is penetrating and discerning. Nothing can escape His searching scrutiny, for “His eyes were as a flame of fire,” and He has not only ability to detect what needs to be judged, and authority to pronounce judgment, but he has the power to execute it. “*And His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace.*” Judgment will be executed according to Divine righteousness, testing man in responsibility, and everything below the standard will be trodden under foot. Perfect majesty and authority accompany all this, for the voice is next referred to: “*And His voice as the sound of many waters.*” Justice and mercy—strength and compassion—unite in Him.

“*And He had in His right hand seven stars.*” He maintains and supports those to whom He gives authority. They derive authority from Him to whom all power and authority belong, and He upholds them with His right hand.

“*And out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword.*” Has not this some connection with the angels—the seven stars? Ought not they to make use of this two-edged sword so that God’s people are taught to distinguish between good and evil, and be separate from the world? Are we not reminded of Hebrews iv. 12? “For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” And it is to the angel of the Church in Pergamos our Lord presents Himself in this special character as “*He which hath the sharp sword with two edges,*” for was it not at the period represented by this Church that the line of demarcation between the Church and the world was becoming obliterated? All this is very significant, and has a voice to us to-day. We need to remember

that this sharp two-edged sword proceeds out of Christ's mouth. It is Christ who speaks to us through His messengers, if in any sense their message is what it ought to be. "Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me," says Paul to the Corinthians. How solemn, how searching, and yet how blessed! It is His own mouth speaks the word, through the channel of some human voice. Two-edged! it smites, yet it heals: it breaks down, yet it builds up: and the one who uses it has to feel the edge of it himself before he can effectually use it upon others! Sometimes we may feel the edge keenly, and if the message does not seem pleasant it may be all the more profitable.

There still remains one more feature: "*And His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.*" Who can look upon the sun shining in his strength? What brilliance, what majesty, what purity are all concentrated in a countenance that can be thus likened to the king of day!

No wonder John fell at His feet as dead. Do we not all need to be found where John was found? There we *lose* everything, and at the same time *find* everything. Lessons are learned there that can be learned nowhere else. Dead! How that word speaks to us. Dead as regards everything that is not of Christ, and according to Christ. Dead as regards ourselves, our ambitions, our place, our importance. Dead as to every aim and aspiration that has not Christ for its object; and dead as regards every project and undertaking that has not the Holy Spirit as its inspiration. Dead as to all ill-feeling, jealousy, and suspicion, and alive only to all that promotes the glory of Christ, and which provokes unto love and good works. May we so continually live in His presence, and be found at His feet, and be occupied with His glory, that we shall be dead to sin, to the world, and to self, and to all bitterness and strife. Occupation with Him is the only power for this.

If John fell at His feet as dead he soon found it was the place of life.

"And He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last and the Living One, and I became dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen, and have the keys of death and of hades."

John felt that right hand of power laid upon him: that right hand which had touched the leper, which had raised Jairus' daughter to life, which had sustained Peter when he was sinking—that right hand was laid upon John. Thus "at His feet as dead" becomes the place of power. For power can be entrusted only to those who are in the place of death. May we one and all covet the experience to have His right hand laid upon us.

"Fear not." John had nothing to fear from Christ; and with that right hand upon him he had nothing to fear from anybody or from any quarter—nothing even from Cæsar, Christ was all. For He declares Himself to be "the *first* and the *last*—the Living One." Why does He *thus* speak of Himself? Was it not precisely the revelation needed at the moment? He is able to reveal Himself to us according to our special need at any particular time. Are we in sorrow or in need of help? He reveals Himself as our Sympathizer and Succourer. Are we faced with danger or threatened by foes? He makes Himself known as a high tower, our rock and our refuge. John was in tribulation at that moment, suffering persecution, a prisoner of the powers of this world, and there were many others of Christ's saints either actually in a similar position or soon likely to be. John is really writing to such, and describes himself as "your brother and companion in tribulation." Could there be a more appropriate or stimulating message than the one John receives? Was the world great and menacing? It would pass. Christ was before it and would be after it—"the first and the last." Could the world inflict death? Could it throw the sheep of Christ to the lions? There is no death, and suffering does not appal, in the presence of Him who declares, "I am the Living One." He had been through death—"I became dead," He

says, "and behold, I am alive for evermore." Death could never touch Him again, and His own, whatever may happen to them, are safe in His keeping. His "verily" confirms this—He has "the keys of death and of hades." He is Lord of the unseen world. His authority and power extend to the realm of spirits—the departed are in His keeping. However savagely this world may eject them, He is on the other side to welcome them.

Was not this just the message for a time of persecution? Christ had been through death and had triumphed. The world had done its worst to Him, but He had "overcome the world." What an encouragement all this afforded to those who presently in their thousands would suffer martyrdom and be banished to the unseen world; but Christ would receive them. That same right hand which could be laid upon them in this world held the key of the other. What becomes of either the terrors or the glories of the world in the presence of this Conqueror of death?

Is it not worth while for us to turn, as John turned, and fix our attention upon this vision of Christ and the Church? Should we not find a cure for our divisions, our heart burnings and our differences, as well as deliverance from every obsession that afflicts us, if we were all together at the feet of Christ? Filled with Himself there would be no room for self-occupation, or for our pre-occupations.

Again we ask, is it not worth while to *turn* when such a vision awaits us? What is it really occupies us? Is it the place we are in, which we think perhaps the only true one amid all the wreckage? John found his at the feet of Christ, having first been filled with His glory. Room is *there* for us all. Are we pre-occupied with the failure of others? There was no failure in the One that occupied John. Or are our thoughts fixed too much upon our section of the Church? The cure for this is to behold the seven candlesticks. Is there not enough in the Living One "Who became dead and is alive for

evermore " to detach us from occupations that do not edify? As we think upon Him, and all that there is involved in the words He uttered, shall we not turn? " Being turned I saw seven golden candlesticks, and in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks one like unto the Son of Man."

A hundred years ago many of Christ's own heard His voice and they *turned*, and being turned—one from this and another from that—they saw the seven golden candlesticks, and One like unto the Son of Man, and the fruit of that vision is in some measure here to-day. But we need that vision again—we need to turn, and if only we turn, the same vision awaits us, and in a measure it will produce the same results.

LESSONS FROM CORINTHIANS AND CHRONICLES

“**S**IRS, ye are brethren.” These words have re-echoed down the ages, and the occasions have been seldom when their reminder has not been needed. They are the words of Moses, and are found in Acts vii.—standing as part of Stephen’s address before the Council—though not given in the historical account in Exodus. It is recorded that Moses showed himself unto two of his brethren as they strove, “*and would have set them at one again*, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren.” They remind us of even earlier words, spoken by Joseph, “See that ye fall not out by the way” (Gen. xlv. 24).

“Variance” and “strife” are mentioned in Galatians v., as amongst the works of the flesh. And the flesh is with us still, and is ever prone to manifest itself under these particular forms.

A very different picture is presented to us in Psalm 133. Here we are called to contemplate brethren dwelling together in unity. The Spirit of God draws attention to it, and invites us to behold it. “How good!” “How pleasant!” is the divine comment. Three things are associated with it—the precious ointment, the dew of Hermon, and the blessing. The first two are figures of the Holy Spirit. The ointment permeates, and imparts a fragrance to, everything it touches; while the dew speaks of freshness and of that which is of heavenly origin. Fragrance and freshness! how blessed when these are found in combination. They are the accompaniments and the fruits of the Holy Spirit’s presence. And it is to the ointment

and the dew the Psalmist likens brethren dwelling together in unity. And the significant fact is added, "there the Lord commanded the *blessing*, even life for evermore."

In agreement with all this are the words of the Apostle at the opening of chapter iv. of his epistle to the Ephesians: "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Here again it is unity that our attention is called to, and it is the unity of the Spirit; while all is connected with the fact that "there is one body." And we are reminded that this unity can only be secured as we walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, "*with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.*" What a wonderful unity we are here invited to contemplate—"one body, one Spirit." The unity of the Spirit stands in direct and most intimate relation with these two facts. But it needs to be remembered that while these two facts can never alter, and never be other than facts, the practical unity which flows from them—the manifested unity—can only be enjoyed in the "uniting bond of *peace*."

"Sirs, ye are *brethren*." What a sweet, comprehensive, all-sufficing name! Alas, that it should ever have become necessary, or even possible, to add any definition to that name, by which our Lord called us after He was risen! Surely the reason must be that in some way or other we have lost sight of Him Whose "*brethren*" we are. Oh that there might be a return to *Him*, on the part, at least, of some of His people, in these closing days! It would set everything right. It would mean the salvation and preservation of that movement which He—we cannot doubt it—which HE inaugurated a century ago. Was it not primarily for His own glory and satisfaction? Do not let us ever forget what it has meant to Him to have little companies of His people throughout the world, gathered by the power and preciousness of His Name, and coming together simply with the desire to remember Him—

to give Him the chief place on the first day of the week—to extol Him—and through Him to worship His Father and their Father in spirit and in truth!

This movement had the character, too, of Philadelphia—brotherly love. Did not the very terms in which brethren came to address one another, both in their conversation and in letters, testify of this? Lapse of time may have rendered these expressions stereotyped and to some extent hackneyed, but, nevertheless, the very fact that they were ever adopted reveals the power and meaning of the movement which gave them birth. One of the chief glories of this movement was the revival of the love of Christ, and the love of the brethren. Alas, what failure there has been, and to what depths have we not sometimes sunk! until the solemn admonition of the Apostle to the Galatians has become applicable to our own case: “If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.” And the Lord’s Supper, which reminds us that we are one bread, one body, has become the very point where we have disowned one another and refused to acknowledge the bonds He Himself has formed.

These strictures may not apply as much in some directions as in others, but we have already sufficiently indicated where danger and division lurk, in whatever quarter we may look. Does not one remedy for the present state of things lie in the recognition of what the Apostle insists upon in his first epistle to the Corinthians?

1. God has called us “unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (i. 9). This tells us that we have not to *make* a fellowship. Our one concern should be not to *mar* one already made, and which still exists. The only fellowship, in this connection, that God recognizes. We have simply to acknowledge it and be true to it.

2. *The acceptance of the Cross*, which leaves no room

for flesh to glory. The recognition of our calling. Which means as to ourselves the practical application of the Cross. So that we take the only place that properly belongs to us, i.e. amongst the "foolish," the "weak," the "base," the "despised." The Cross leaves no place for man, and where this is fully owned the glory of God and His presence fill the house (i. 17-31).

3. Where the Cross is accepted and man shut out, there will be the demonstration of the Spirit and of power. The Spirit brings to our understanding the things of God. The things which eye hath not seen nor ear heard are revealed to hearts which the Spirit has taught to love God (chap. ii.). We shall have the mind of Christ, and the carnal mind which is always prone to give a fictitious value to externals and to be occupied too much with the instruments God uses (Paul or Apollos) will have no place. And the effect will be we shall build with material that will stand the fire, gold, silver, precious stones, instead of with worthless material, such as wood, hay, stubble. *For our character is always revealed in our work.*

4. We pass to the fellowship of chapter x.—the basis and expression of Christian fellowship. It is the fellowship of the *Lord's Table*, be it noted, not of *sections* of believers, not of circles of meetings, not of particular views, *but is as wide as Christianity itself*. For the Communion spoken of is distinctly and *only* connected with the one sacrifice. In virtue of which we are entitled to a common share in common blessings. This is the communion spoken of—a common partnership—communion in blessing, and it is the communion of the blood of Christ and the body of Christ. Is not this common to all? It is the introduction of other conditions—purely a human introduction—which has tended to alter the character of what is otherwise so simple.

5. The Supper. In which we call to mind the One Who loved us and gave Himself for us. His death in all its fragrance and preciousness to God is before us,

and the love that shines through all occupies our thoughts. Christ, in connection with the glory of His Person and perfection of His work, is remembered. Thus we announce the Lord's death till He come. This is inconceivably great, for it means that for us, as for God, that death is the one supreme thing in connection with this world, until He returns to occupy His rightful place in it. The act also expresses our allegiance, in contrast with the betrayal, in connection with which the Supper is introduced. The Supper brings Christ into view, and He by this means becomes the food of our souls.

6. Next comes the place of gift, with a very important reminder that "there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all." If the important and far-reaching principle underlying these statements had only been remembered much trouble and contention, not to say division, might have been avoided. There may be diversity yet the utmost unity, and unity even in diversity. The very same chapter which speaks of the one emphasizes the other.

7. Nor can the contents of chapter xiii. be overlooked. In many respects the most important of all. But how we are rebuked, and how small we are if measured in the light of it. But, at least, may the words with which chapter xiv. opens find a place in every heart—"*Follow after LOVE.*"

8. And last, but not least, comes the Gospel (chap. xv.) And surely there can be no real prosperity unless the work of the Gospel is accorded its true place. Gospel effort both at home and abroad formed a conspicuous feature of the movement we have spoken of, from its earliest days. Nevertheless, let us notice the divine order, for departure from it always spells failure, sooner or later. The movement referred to was a *Church* revival first. It affected God's people before it touched

the world. And it took account of the order of God's house first and before everything. This, be it noted, is exactly in accordance with the way things are presented in the epistle we have been considering. The order of God's house, the doctrine, the fellowship, the ordinances, the ministry proper to it, first; then the Gospel. What instruction this affords and how powerfully we are thus warned against any departure from it. The Gospel without the Church (where there is any Gospel at all) is the order of the day in Christendom, and this means not only damage to the converts, but the diminishing of God's glory. Oh, that it may be our aim at all costs, whatever the shame and reproach, to maintain first of all what God has established here for His own glory, by having respect to the law of His house, and we may be quite sure that this method will also secure the highest good of man.

One or two suggestions may be offered before closing. Will it seem strange to invite the reader to turn to an Old Testament Scripture, viz., to 2 Chronicles xiii. ? We shall find certain principles here which have their application to our own day.

The circumstances set forth in this chapter are peculiar. There is war between Abijah and Jeroboam, and the former delivers himself of a speech before the battle which is surely unlike any address ever given on a similar occasion. Next, it is civil war that we are called to contemplate, and not war with an external foe. It is also war against a *corrupt system*. And these are some of the reasons why the passage contains important instruction for ourselves. Our chief danger to-day is not from an external foe, but the opposite. We are called to wage a ceaseless war with a corrupt Christendom. A false system, as corrupt in its way as anything established by Jeroboam, confronts us on every hand. Jeroboam's chief sins were the setting aside of the divine order of gathering and of worship and the setting up of the golden calves of Bethel and

Dan along with a fictitious priesthood. Under his direction the whole religion of Israel became corrupt. This sad history has been repeated. We speak of the principle. The details are of little consequence. Satan's object is to deceive, to substitute the false for the true, and he uses forms and methods best adapted to attain that object at the particular moment. Jeroboam had alienated the people from God's purpose, they were no longer ruled by David's heirs: he had established a new centre in place of Jerusalem, the divine centre; and had set up an entirely false system of worship. How does Abijah meet this condition of things? We shall see that the whole of his speech is directed against this apostasy.

1. Addressing himself to Jeroboam and all Israel, he says: "Ought ye not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt?" In other words, he seeks to remind them of God's purpose. David was the one chosen of God, and to whom He gave testimony, "I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will." And in Acts xiii., after quoting these words, Paul adds, "Of this man's seed hath God according to His promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus." Thus David is a type of Christ.

At the very start, then, we see, that if we are to withstand the corrupt system around us and be any testimony for God, we must first of all apprehend the purpose of God. Thus Paul prayed for the Colossians that they "might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." This purpose may be presented in a fourfold way:

1. God's eternal purpose is to have man in heavenly glory, in the Person of His own Son, and the Church—"the many sons"—is to share that glory with Him (John xvii. 22-4; Eph. i.).

2. His purpose also stands related to the Church as "the body of Christ," "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all,"

and to the Church as His dwelling place, "built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit." Throughout eternal ages, in nearness to Himself, the Church will be the tabernacle of God. It is where He dwells now, and will dwell forever. (Eph. i. 22-3; ii. 19-22; iii. 18-21.) Thus we see this purpose has a present as well as a future application. God's dwelling place, and the maintenance of its true character, is of chief importance.

3. A third aspect of this purpose is stated in Ephesians i. 10: "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him." This includes Israel's blessing, the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, and the times of restitution of all things (Acts iii. 19-21).

4. In view of the fulfilment of these purposes, and standing as part of them, God's present purpose is to save men by the preaching of the Gospel (Eph. i. 13; iii. 6-8; iv. 11-13; 1 Tim. iii. 4-7).

But in whatever way we view this purpose, CHRIST is the centre of all. And those who apprehend God's purpose will preach Christ with all their hearts, both to the saved and unsaved, and further, will preach Him not simply as the only remedy for the sinner's need, as if that were the beginning and end of all, but preach Him in connection with His own glory, and the place He fills in God's purpose, even as Paul preached Him. "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us . . . was not yea and nay, but in Him was yea. For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him amen, *unto the glory of God by us*" (2 Cor. i. 19-20). Alas, on what a low level our preaching sometimes moves, as though the sinner's benefit was the beginning and end of all, and *Christ but a means to that*, and nothing more! Did not Paul, even when seeking to reach the vilest, ever keep in mind the unsearchable riches of Christ and the glory of God in connection with the Gospel?

In the light of all this do we not see the importance of Abijah's reference, "Ought ye not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant

of salt?" It is true that man had failed, and the kingdom, as a consequence, had become divided, but God's purposes do not alter. David and his sons were alone, in God's account, the rightful rulers over all the tribes of Israel. The action of Jeroboam, though permitted of God on account of human unfaithfulness, is looked upon as rebellion. In spite of the failure, however, Abijah insists upon God's purpose.

And is there not rebellion to-day, and that in the very house of God? Christ is not accorded His place. His Word is not obeyed. God's purpose is not understood. How we should cherish the thought that a century ago, nearly, God awakened some of His people to a sense of this, and Christ was seen, once more, to be the centre of all God's thoughts and His supreme object. And those words addressed long ago to Philadelphia found their meaning and fulfilment in Assemblies of God's people gathered once more definitely to God's centre, and understanding something of His purpose.

"These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works; behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it; for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My Word, and hast not denied My Name" (Rev. iii. 7-8).

What ample reward is indicated here for any shame attaching to such a path, and how fully it was realized. There was conformity to the character of Christ, and what was unholy and untrue was forsaken. And there was faith which led men outside the organized systems of Christendom, a faith that counted upon the Head of the Church to open doors and sustain His servants, believing that He who had "the key of David" had control of all. Alas, what danger there is of slipping back from all this! May we still covet His approval as expressed in the words, thou "hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name."

2. Abijah's second challenge is, "Have ye not cast out the priests of the Lord?" Not only had they

rebelled against David but they had departed from the order of God's house. The sons of Aaron were alone in that day the true priests. Do we not see something akin to this in our own day, in the establishment of a professional priesthood? How few believers, comparatively, understand what it means to be a "*holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*"

Abijah can say, "But as for us, the Lord is our God, and we have not forsaken Him; and the priests which minister unto the Lord, are the sons of Aaron, and the Levites wait upon their business; and they burn unto the Lord every morning and every evening burnt sacrifices and sweet incense: the shewbread also set they in order upon the pure table; and the candlestick of gold with the lamps thereof, to burn every evening; for we keep the charge of the Lord our God; but ye have forsaken Him."

We have no thought of attempting to enlarge upon these references to the order and service of God's house. But we do call attention to the fact that the divine order was preserved and the divine service was duly performed; *and that victory followed as an inevitable consequence.* Abijah's speech may appear, at first sight, to have little or no bearing upon the terrific conflict that confronted him. It seems almost like a waste of words. As a matter of fact, it was entirely relevant. It was because God's purpose was apprehended, and the order of His house maintained, that Abijah can say, "*Behold, God Himself is with us for our Captain.*" And when God is our leader what enemy can stand before us?

All the time Abijah was speaking of these things (how unpractical, some would say, when the matter in hand was a battle!) Jeroboam, taking advantage of the inaction of his enemies, "caused an ambush to come about behind them . . . and when Judah looked back, behold, the battle was before and behind." It seemed for a moment as though all were lost. But God was with those who had put His interests before all else,

and "God smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah."

This incident seems to furnish a threefold lesson, of all-importance in this day.

1. To keep steadily before us the purpose of God concerning His beloved Son. That purpose in its fullness embraces the Church, Israel, and the nations, but Christ is the centre of the vast scheme which God has promoted for His own glory and for ours. May Christ then, Who is the centre of all the divine counsels, "dwell in our hearts by faith."

2. It is incumbent upon us to give effect to a double ministry to which allusion is made in the narrative before us. Abijah speaks of "*the priests, which minister unto the Lord,*" and also of the Levites which "*wait upon their business.*" We are, first of all, a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices. May we never fail, when gathered together in this character, to place before God what He asks and expects from us. Do not let us occupy Him with our sins, nor merely with the forgiveness of those sins, nor with the benefit that has accrued to us through Christ's sacrifice, but with what God Himself found there. Abijah refers to the "burnt sacrifices and sweet incense." That is, to all that Christ was to God in death as the "burnt offering," and to all those personal perfections and moral graces which rose to God as a sweet incense both in life and death. May we know how to minister to the Lord in respect of these things. What a delight to His heart when we can fill our place as priests and render priestly service.

And then follows that other service—the Levitical service. The Levites were given to Aaron to minister unto him (Num. iii. 6). They were also given to Aaron and his sons (v. 9). Aaron, doubtless, is a type of Christ. Every true servant takes his directions from Christ. He ministers to the Lord first; He waits upon Him, and the Lord intimates His mind (Acts xiii. 1-4). Be not ye the servants of men. "The Levites

wait upon their business." It claimed their attention and devotion. The business of the Levites had to do with the outside and not the inside, and their employment would illustrate more the work of the Gospel.

May these two forms of service never be neglected. Let us first of all *look up*, and worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. And then *look abroad* upon the fields white already to harvest, and go forth and gather fruit unto life eternal (John iv.).

3. And, lastly, the lesson is that if these things are maintained God Himself will be with us. Only as we sedulously care for God's interests and are occupied with His purpose for the glory of His beloved Son shall we be able to maintain our ground against all the disintegrating and demoralizing forces that are around us to-day, not merely in the world, but worst of all, in the Church. Let us beware of giving Levitical service even the primary place, much more of according it an exclusive place. Victory—in its full sense—will only be ours, we shall only overcome the forces arrayed against us by a wily enemy—we shall only escape his ambushments as well as defeat his frontal attacks, as we keep steadily in view, and maintain at all costs, the order that God has imposed upon us in His word. His grace will not fail us, if with full purpose of heart we seek to give effect to all His revealed will.

THE WISDOM OF THE WISE : OR CHRIST'S ANSWER TO ALL OUR QUESTIONS

MARK xi. 27—xii.

QUESTIONS of the deepest and most fundamental nature come up for solution and find their answer within the limits of the above Scripture. A point of utmost importance is that they all come up for settlement by Christ. Whatever the question man raises, He can give the answer, no matter whether it refers to this life or the next. In fact, to whatever realm the question may apply where God and man have their interests, the answer Christ gives is as complete as it is authoritative and final. The fact is, Christ Himself is the answer. "There at this place," as a recent writer has said, "all the questions in heaven and earth were being settled. Christ was the question that settled all others."

I

The first question raised concerns the matter of authority. The chief priests and scribes and elders—the religious leaders of the day—inquire of Christ: "By what Authority doest thou these things, and who gave thee this Authority to do these things?" Now, the question of Authority is one of supreme importance. It touches life from its centre to its circumference. Our Lord does not assume it to be an unnecessary or irrelevant question. He could not do so. No one knew better than He the absolute necessity of Authority;

the world being what it is and men what they are. And in the religious sphere it is more needed than anywhere.

Without authority, what we should soon have is confusion, and, ultimately, chaos. The most deplorable state imaginable is when no authority is recognized, but every man does as seems right in his own eyes. This is generally recognized in the ordinary affairs of life—in the realm, for instance, of law and government; but what does not seem so generally conceded is that people need authority more in the religious sphere than anywhere. Or if they agree that authority is necessary, they differ profoundly as to what constitutes the final Court of Appeal.

The Lord meets the question by asking another: "The baptism of John, was it from heaven or of men?" The point of our Lord's question seems to be that His authority could be gauged by deciding as to the source of John's mission, seeing that John bore witness of Him. When we are called upon to accept certain facts, God always provides sufficient evidence to enable us to believe in them, if we are willing to believe. Christ did not appear unannounced. People were not shut up to His own testimony, whether His words or works. There was the testimony of John, "a man sent from God," "a burning and a shining light." And so our Lord demands an answer to the question: "The baptism of John, was it from heaven or of men?" Seeing that John bore witness of Him, the answer to this question would be decisive as to His own authority. But the Pharisees and Scribes were not willing to believe, and therefore nothing could be done. They would not answer. No one is so blind as those who refuse to see; or who think they see when all the while they are blind.

The question we have to decide is, What is our authority to-day? Have we any authority, and if so, where is it? We are confining our question to the religious sphere. To this question all sorts of conflicting

answers are given. And the disorder of the present time—the prevailing perplexity and uncertainty, the wide differences of opinion, as witnessed in the disputes over the Prayer Book revision—are due more to this fact than to any other.

Some say the authority is within ourselves—that conscience is the final arbiter. But conscience is an extremely unsafe guide. People have, before now, done most outrageous things with a good conscience. Witness Saul of Tarsus, who could say, “I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” Yet during part of this time he had persecuted the Church of God. Just as a sundial will not tell us the time of day unless the sun shines upon it, so conscience cannot guide us unless it is an enlightened conscience. An uninstructed conscience is as useless as a sundial without the sun.

Others look to an infallible Church. But in the first place, what claims to be such is only a section of the Church. And in the next place, the claim has never been verified. Indeed, such a claim is of comparatively recent origin. Others, again, rest upon tradition. But the dim and uncertain light of tradition will not carry us very far or answer many of our questions. Indeed, it raises more questions than it answers.

Where, then, can we turn? Is there any voice that will speak to us with authority? Is there any supreme authority to which men can turn in religious matters? In answering this we must remind ourselves again of our Lord’s question: “The baptism of John, was it from heaven or of men?” Whatever claims to be the authority must be able to satisfy the condition that it is from heaven. There is one authority and only one, which can satisfy this demand; the authority we seek can be found nowhere but in the Scriptures. The question our Lord asked about the baptism of John must be asked, and answered, concerning the Scriptures. The Bible, is it from heaven or of men? No less authority must ever satisfy us than one of a heavenly

source, for none lower is of any use. This authority the Scriptures possess.

The Bible is from heaven. We do not mean the printing or the paper, but its Message. Any lower estimate of the Bible is neither true nor adequate. How are we to know that the Scriptures are the supreme and all-sufficient Authority? (1) Christ makes this claim on their behalf, or His words mean nothing. "Ye search the Scriptures, and they are they which testify of Me," He says, meaning that their testimony was sufficient. In the very passage under consideration He refers to Scripture, and quotes it more than once as something authoritative and final. He says to the rationalists of His day: "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures." "Have ye not read the Scriptures?" He inquires, and asserts, "David himself saith by the Holy Spirit." Again, "The Scripture cannot be broken." Christ's testimony to the Scriptures is as emphatic and unequivocal as is their testimony to Him. The place He accords the Scriptures leaves no doubt as to His estimate of them. On all occasions He referred to them as an Umpire whose decisions were decisive. One of the last things He did for His disciples was to open their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures. Do we need anything more to tell us what He thought of them and the place He gave them? (2) The Scriptures themselves claim to have this authority. They claim to be God's Word. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." They assert that the Holy Ghost is their author. Paul speaks of them as "the oracles of God." "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," says another inspired writer. (3) Because of their character. They speak with authority. They are "Quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb. iv.). They are "incorruptible." "They live and abide for ever" (1 Pet. i. 23). What higher or more sufficient authority could we have than that which claims to be oracles of God inspired by the Holy Spirit?

All these reasons can be given why the Bible is the authority. But there is no necessity to argue the point, for the Book asserts its authority wherever it is allowed to do so. "It pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit." Strange, indeed, would it be if we possessed authority everywhere but where it was most needed—in the State, in the family, and in our relations one to another, but not in matters which concern the spirit and our relation to God.

God has given us all needed direction in a book. In Revelation iv. the first thing seen is a throne and one sat upon the throne. But in Revelation v., coupled with the authority of the throne, is the authority of a Book. Authority in its supreme aspect is vested in the throne, that is the highest symbol of Authority. But that authority is set forth in laws and statutes. They must be written. Unwritten laws are not of much practical use. God has given us a revelation of His will in writing. The answer to our first question, then, is, the Bible is the supreme authority, because the Bible is from heaven. It bears heaven's stamp.

II

At the beginning of chapter xii. another subject is introduced. Our Lord refers to Israel under the figure of a vineyard. Israel was to be His witness to the nations that He was the one and only true God. They were to be a peculiar treasure, a kingdom of priests and an holy nation. That is, side by side with the witness of the Bible there is to be the witness of a people.

Four lessons may be learned from this parable. (1) There is always some special testimony for God in the world, i.e. some work He is doing in and through men, and as a witness to men and for their blessing. (2) This involves man's responsibility. At the season the husbandman sent to receive the fruit of the vineyard. God looks for a result from His work. (3) The object is not only the blessing of men but the glory of Christ.

"Having yet one Son, His well-beloved, He sent Him."

(4) God's judgment on man because of unfaithfulness. This has happened in the case of Israel. Israel is set aside.

Christ changes the figure, and speaks of "the stone" which the builders rejected, in order to indicate what has taken the place of Israel, and the character of God's work to-day. He still goes on working, but His work assumes another form, not now a vineyard but a house. The Church is God's dwelling-place and His presence should be known in such living power that there should be a witness to all men of His goodness and saving grace; that He would have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

But the Church has failed as lamentably as ever Israel did. As one looks round at the Church to-day, can anyone say that God is getting the fruit? The history of Christendom is a record of confusion and corruption.* Man has sought his own ends, until he has filled the house of God with disorder. What is to be the end of it all? The Lord predicts that the most solemn judgment is to fall upon Christendom, even as it fell upon Israel. "Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken"—this refers to Israel, they stumbled at that stumbling stone: "But on whomsoever it shall fall"—when the Lord returns—"it will grind him to powder" (Luke xx. 18). Christendom will come under Divine judgment.

The important fact presented to us here is that God is always doing some work in the world, a work intended to be a testimony of Himself to men. Of old it was, He gave them rain from heaven and fruitful seasons. Later, He separated the nation of Israel and gave them special promises and privileges. To-day, it is the Church.

* We do not mean, of course, that this history contains nothing else.

III

We now pass to another aspect of things altogether, and a further important question arises. We have been looking at a sphere where God works, but side by side with this is man's sphere, and, we may say, Satan's sphere. There is what is called "the world," and Satan is said to be the god and prince of it. With reference to the powers of this world, the question asked of Christ is this: "Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar or not?" We need to note the answer, for from it we learn what the Christian's attitude is to be with regard to this present evil world and the powers that govern it. A more important question could scarcely be raised. For God's earthly people to be under the heel of a foreign power, even though through their own fault, was the most grievous and humiliating situation conceivable. What to do in regard to this was the burning question of the hour. Notice, Christ does not tell them to offer resistance. His reply is, "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's." This is all the more remarkable, because the conditions then existing were wholly contrary to what God intended, and Christ could easily have altered such conditions had He wished. But He leaves the matter just where it was. The fact is, He never interfered in the world's matters, and if He did not, was He likely to advise others to do so? He found the Romans in power, and He left them in power. He was born under their yoke, He died under it. It was the Roman power that crucified Him. Christ never once resisted that power. The only time He used force was to drive the money-changers out of the temple. But the temple was his Father's House, God's things.

The point for us is that the Lord did not allow Himself to become embroiled in the politics of the world, nor would He sanction the use of carnal weapons. The burning political questions of His day He left on one side. Amongst His disciples were found Simon Zelotes,

who represented one party, and Matthew, the publican, who stood for another. But we do not find that Christ encouraged either; and both Simon and Matthew were content to be His followers, and to leave other matters alone. Simon Zelotes was called away as much from his adherence to the party in opposition to Rome as Matthew had been called from the receipt of custom.

What profound wisdom is displayed in the answer we are considering! The Lord can settle the whole question as to our relation to the powers that be in a sentence: "Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's."

They might well marvel at Him. He does not say, "You have got to put Cæsar right," nor does He put His people in Cæsar's place. Well would it have been for both the Church and the world if the Church had attended to God's things. In descending from her own high calling she has injured the world as well as herself. Instead of rendering unto Cæsar she has sought sometimes even to be above him. One thing which has contributed as much as anything to the ruin of the Church as a witness for God, and made her ineffective in the service of men, has been her interference in the affairs of the world. Christ said, "My Kingdom is not of this world, if My Kingdom were of this world then would My servants fight." This was His good confession. Do we know better than He? The world's things, as such, do not bear Christ's image and superscription, or God's, any more to-day than formerly. The only superscription that the world has so far given Christ has been an *accusation*. "And the superscription of His accusation was written over"—an accusation written above His head—on a Cross. And all the world was concerned in it, for it was written in Greek and Latin and Hebrew. The world did not acknowledge His claim. It was not an acknowledgment, but an accusation. And this has never yet been revoked. No believer, surely, wants

to govern a world of this description, for it is the same world still. Paul, in Romans xiii., explains further the attitude of the Christian, "Be subject," "Pay tribute," "Render to all their dues."

So there are God's things and Cæsar's things. Let us be careful that we render to God the things that are God's. In this way we shall render the best service to the world. In reality, the conflict is between God and Satan, for Satan is the prince of this world, and man cannot cast out Satan, only God can do that. One day God will answer the accusation we have referred to, but it will be by overturning the powers that be, and all rule and authority and power will be vested in Christ.

IV

So far, we have been thinking of this world. The question now to be considered is, Is there any other world? Here we are face to face with one of the deepest problems imaginable, a problem that has always exercised the mind of man. Does death end all? Is the world that we can see, are the things which we can touch and taste and handle—the world of the senses—is this all? Is life for us limited to this world, and is there nothing whatever beyond? In our Lord's day there were those who denied the resurrection, and therefore did not believe in a future life. They were materialists of the most pronounced type. To them there was no hereafter, no spiritual world. There are some who think so still.

Crude as was the way in which the matter was presented to the Lord, He not only meets their difficulties, but answers in a most profound way the question that lay at the back of them. How does He do it? In three ways.

(1) He refers to the teaching of Scripture; everywhere they testify to another life. The question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" is really a very old one. And the answer of Scripture invariably is,

he shall. It is quite true that in the Old Testament no doctrine of a future life is developed, nevertheless it is there, as our Lord discovers to his astonished hearers. What a place our Lord gives the Scriptures. He does not speak of the Old Testament as modern criticism speaks of it. His reply to these rationalists virtually amounts to the assertion, The Scriptures can answer all your difficulties; they can tell you all you need to know, and what they say is the truth, and if you believe their Testimony your difficulties would vanish.

(2) The next reason for believing in a future life our Lord finds in the power of God. The future life will certainly be the result, and may be the final exhibition of the mighty power of God. To man, a future life, or in other words, resurrection from the dead, often seems not only incredible but impossible, and to many undesirable. And how much there is that seems to confirm unbelief and warrant it. The bed of death is silent and seems the end; the grave gives no answer to our questions; nor has anyone ever returned from the beyond to tell the tale. Spiritism we dismiss, not only on account of its folly and because Scripture condemns it, but because, if it were true, it would cast a slur upon the character of God. For it would mean that He had been so indifferent to the interests of His creatures, to their deepest concerns and most ardent longings, as to tell them nothing about their future, but had left them to grope in the dark for ages for something which they ought to have known, and which He could easily have told them had He been pleased to do so. Those who believe in Spiritism cannot believe, in any real or true sense, in either God or Christ or the Bible.

Our Lord refers to the power of God. If there is a God, a God of infinite love and power (to which both creation and the Bible bear witness), then resurrection presents no difficulty. Creation is a testimony to the Almighty power of God, but we believe it is not saying

too much to state that a future life and all that belongs to it will be still greater evidence of His power. That future life will be worthy of both His power and His goodness. The Sadducees tried to puzzle the Lord with difficulties. There are people to-day, Christians even, who have difficulties about the resurrection of the body. They think of all that may happen to the body, and then they ask in an incredulous tone, How are the dead raised up? It is always a mistake to ask, How? The How, God has not told us, but He has told us the fact. We wait for the redemption of the body. Does any believer mean to say that God's power just comes short of that? Is it possible for the body of one of His own to get beyond His reach though nothing else can? No, a body that Christ gave Himself for, a body that He regards as His property, and one of His members, a body that has been indwelt by the Holy Ghost, is not a body that is going to be absorbed in the earth or in some fish's stomach and never be recovered in any sense whatever. Our Lord says respecting the resurrection, "Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God?" Christ links these two things together. The one is as sure as the other.

(3) But He gives an additional reason. "God is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living." Christ finds a reason for the resurrection in the essential nature of things, yea, in the very nature of God. People are so apt to look for a truth to be stated in some exact way. That is, they become slaves to the letter of Scripture. Now the letter of Scripture is never against the truth, and yet the truth is not given us in neat syllogisms. Our Lord found the truth of the resurrection in the statement, "I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." What is of all-importance for us to discover are the consequences of certain statements—what they involve: God being who and what He is, what are the legitimate deductions to be drawn from certain things predicated? The

fact of resurrection is really bound up with another tremendous fact, viz., God is not the God of the dead but of the Living. And as if to show there was no greater folly than to question the fact of another world and a future life, our Lord adds, "ye therefore do greatly err." As much as to say: That future life is the very scene of God's activity and power, and is as much in His keeping as the present life. It is more sure and certain than even life here, and infinitely more blessed. There all that afflicts us here will be removed. In that scene God's power will be displayed in a different way, maybe, from here, but in a higher way. We shall be children of God because children of the resurrection. The power that placed us in a scene where sin and sorrow and suffering and death can never come, will be the power that will sustain us in it, and the love behind the power will be our portion forever. There "All live unto Him," for all live in the enjoyment of what He is. That resurrection world will be a final testimony to His power, His goodness, and His love—a complete answer to all Satan's suggestions and man's unbelief.

V

We now come to the religious question. A Scribe asks, "Which is the first Commandment of all?" In other words, he raises the ever recurring question—the question that every devout soul puts up in a more or less articulate way, at some time or other, What does God require of me, What is the one thing I am to seek? What is the supreme good?

We need to observe the way in which our Lord begins His answer. To-day, theology is at a discount. We are told it is not a question of how we think of God or Christ, or a matter of creed or doctrine, but of life. Theology need not concern us, say these Modernists. Our Lord overturns at one stroke all such reasoning. He begins by stating a theological proposition, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord."

The necessity of this is obvious. Wrong thoughts about God will give us wrong thoughts about what He requires. Moreover, if to love Him is the supreme thing—and this is what Christ was about to tell His inquirer—we must know the one we are to love. Further, it is due to God that I have right thoughts about Him. Nor is it too much to say that everything begins and ends with knowing Him.

Thus, the opening words of our Lord's reply sound the death knell of much twentieth-century teaching. The importance of our Lord's initial statement becomes increasingly evident from what follows. The first of all the Commandments is "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." But as already indicated, how can we love Him as we ought unless we have correct thoughts as to His nature and being?

What a profound statement, "The Lord our God is one Lord"! One in His essential Being, and equally one in all His ways. "He cannot deny Himself." Nothing inconsistent with His character marks any of His ways. Nor are His ways inconsistent in themselves.

The Apostle Paul asserts the same truth when he is considering the question of law and grace, in his epistle to the Galatians (chap. iii.). He asks, "Is the law then against the promises of God?" "God forbid," he replies—"God is one" (vv. 20-1). The God who gave the promises gave also the law. Thus there is no contradiction between His character as revealed in the Old Testament and in the New, as some would have us believe. Judgment on evildoers is as much part of His ways, and in accordance with His nature, as is love to sinners. It is one God Who creates, governs, judges and redeems.

Love to God is the supreme thing. If it be suggested that our Lord was answering a question which had to do with the old dispensation, and that His answer did not go beyond the requirements of law, the reply is that Paul, in writing to Timothy, gives precisely

the same answer. "The end of the Commandment," he declares, "is love out of a pure heart and of a good conscience and of faith unfeigned" (i. 5.) It will be seen, therefore, that in this respect there is no difference between the old dispensation and the new. Love is the end in view in both cases. The difference between law and grace is not a difference of aim, but a difference of means and motives. Under law, it took the form of command, without supplying the motive to obey it. Under grace, the God Who invites us to love Him is One Who has first loved us and has made His love known. It is mainly a difference in revelation. Though the command to love God contained within it a revelation that He loved.

"By all that He requires of me
I know what God Himself must be."

His demand for love proved His own love. We do not commonly ask for the love of those for whom we have no regard. The reason a mother wants her child's love is because of her love to the child. So when God says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," etc., it reveals His own love. He loves us so much that nothing short of our love will satisfy Him. For only love in response to love can satisfy. Hidden it may be, but what a profound and touching revelation of God this first command contains! Whether it was the dispensation of law, as formerly, or as now, the dispensation which is in faith, love was, and is, the one thing which counts above all else. So Paul, writing by the Holy Spirit in the full blaze of Christianity, says, in effect, what the Lord Jesus Christ says, that the end of the commandment (i.e. the end in the sense of reaching an object) is love. First, love to God, and then love to man. And here, again, our Lord's words correct the prevailing tendency of the hour, for humanity, with some people, is the beginning, middle and end of their religion and their thoughts. But the first of all the Commandments is "Thou shalt

love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength." And in order that there be no mistake, it is added, "This is the first commandment."

(1) "With all thy heart." He claims such love because He loves us with all His heart, so He must be the Chief Object of ours.

(2) "With all thy soul." The affections and emotions must be controlled by Him. No object of sense must be preferred to Him.

(3) "With all thy mind." Mere thoughts and speculations, especially when opposed to the revealed truth of God, are to be refused, and we are to say with David, "I hate thoughts, but Thy law do I love." To some men the mind is specially the avenue of Satan's approach, through which he tempts them to wander, and accomplishes their fall. It is the special snare of the present day! "Fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind." We are to love God with all the mind: "Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

(4) And lastly, "With all thy strength." Heart, soul, mind, strength, these embrace man's entire being, and God has the *first* claim upon every part. This is a great demand, but it is because He loves us with a great love. And our love to Him is to engage all our powers. But this is not all. And what a testimony to God's character is what follows! For next, the complement of our love to God is love to others. And the Apostle sums it all up both in Romans xiv. and Galatians v.: first on the negative side, and then on the positive. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour," next, "By love serve one another."

In the passage already quoted from Paul we notice three things as the necessary accompaniments of love: (1) A pure heart. (2) A good conscience. (3) Faith unfeigned. A pure heart is a heart purified in obeying the truth (1 Pet. i. 22). For love cannot be separated from truth, or it ceases to be love. A good conscience

and faith unfeigned are the banks through which this river flows, or love degenerates into licence.

The Scribe's comment upon the reply given by the Lord Jesus Christ follows; and in the light of the fact (which we learn from Matthew's account) that he was not altogether sincere in putting his question, his words are remarkable. His response shows an appreciation of the truth one would scarcely have expected. How often it is so, and a hard or careless exterior may hide from view desires and longings unsuspected. This man discerns the difference between what may be nothing more than the observance of external rites, and that which alone gives value to the worship and service of God. There may be even whole burnt offerings and sacrifices without that surrender of heart accompanying them which alone can make them acceptable.

Before quitting this particular subject, we may notice our Lord's reference to the Scribes, and the way in which He calls attention to the poor widow. For both stand in close relation to the matter which has just occupied our attention. On the one hand, the empty formality of the Scribes, with self, and not God, as the object; with outward display of sanctity, but corruption and wickedness within; and on the other, a widow, destitute of all external display, but with a heart devoted to God and to His interests. This to Christ was the most attractive thing He could contemplate. He warns us to beware of the one, and to admire the other. In the one case, all was outward show, to be seen of men, but rottenness within; on the other, a heart that beat only for one object. She loves God with all her "heart and soul and mind and strength," and it is certain she would love her neighbour as herself, for self evidently had no place. She gave all she possessed (see Luke xxi. 4).

What lessons this chapter affords! lessons which have their application now as much as ever. For if there is one thing the human heart is prone to more

than another, it is to rest in something sensuous or spectacular, some mere form—some outward show—of which men can take account—while the life which alone can animate the form, and the spirit which alone can give it value in the sight of God are absent. How easy it is to mistake the shadow for the substance, and the letter for the spirit. Whole burnt offering and sacrifice were right in their place, and wholly commendable when they expressed a right state of heart and sprang from real communion with God, but when these things were absent they lost their value, nay, they became an abomination. This is the solemn lesson of Isaiah i. If the heart is not right, the most correct forms are of no avail. To make a parade of religion, to suppose that the essence of it is found in dress and ceremonies and ritual and outward observances is to miss true religion, and it becomes nothing better than an empty shell. The widow to whom the Lord directed attention embodied the opposite of all this, and Christ calls attention to her and has caused her to be remembered through all generations—one who sought no place and made no display, only poor and dependent, with little to give, but what she offered was more acceptable to Him than costly gifts because given out of love to God and concern for His interests.

The widow thus becomes an object lesson. She herself is the real answer to the question of the Scribe, "Which is the first commandment of all?"

VI

And now we come to the close. The questions presented to our Lord for solution are at an end. They have been asked and answered. It is now His turn to ask a question—the most momentous that could be asked—"What think ye of Christ?" It is in this form that Matthew records it: "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?"

Here is the one question which our Lord chooses to ask. When all other questions are over, questions

as to authority—our relation to the powers of this world—as to a future life, and as to what God requires of us in this life, He in His turn asks a question and He selects one having the widest range and of the greatest importance, as being most central and most commanding. So great is He that if He asks a question it can only be about Himself. And we can see how it supplements and completes all the questions which have gone before. Is it the question of Authority? Do we ask which is the supreme, absolute and only Authority in the world to-day? The answer is, as we have shown, the Bible. But why the Bible? Mainly because it reveals Christ. "The sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow" are its theme. Whatever other matters it may deal with, every type points to Christ, and to Him all the prophets give witness. The Bible is the one outstanding authority, because the Spirit of Christ breathes through it. The living Word and the written Word are one.

Is it a question of God's present purpose—the building of His House—the Church? Christ is the Chief Corner Stone and the Head of the Body. He is a Son over His own house, whose house are we. Or is it a question of the course of this world, the sphere of man's activity, where man exercises his power and works out his schemes? Christ determines the believer's path in it and through it. He is rejected, and the true believer accepts that place of rejection with Him. He does not seek to govern in a scene where his Lord is disowned. Or is it the resurrection? He is "the Resurrection and the Life"; He has "the keys of death and the grave." He is "the Lord of dead and living." Nor is there any communion with God, or love to God, or life for God until Christ is known—and the measure of all is the extent to which He is known.

What a momentous question, then—What think ye of Christ, whose Son is He? The latter half of this question carries our thoughts back to David when he returns from the slaughter of the Philistine. Being

brought before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand, he stands before us as a type of Christ, Who through death destroyed him that had the power of death. The question Saul raises as he sees David go forth against the Philistine is, Whose son is this youth? It is to be noticed this question is twice asked, once when he goes forth and again, on his return. In the first instance, no one can answer. When David returns victorious, the Conqueror himself answers. So Christ is declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. Resurrection attests His Sonship—He is God's Holy One Whom He did not suffer to see corruption. And then it is, when the question as to David is raised and answered—answered by David himself—we read, "The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." And in his devotion Jonathan stripped himself of all that gave him distinction—even to his sword and to his bow. All of which went to declare that he had been taken captive and that he surrendered all. What a testimony to David!

What response shall we make as we hear a far greater than David asking, "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?" Is He not great enough and worthy enough to carry us captive? In His presence do we not feel that all that belongs to us and would give us distinction must be laid at His feet? The answer, "The Son of David," only very partially describes Who He is. He is David's Lord as well as David's Son. "David in Spirit called Him Lord." Or as Mark puts it, "David said by the Holy Ghost, the Lord said to my Lord, sit Thou at My right hand till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool." What intelligible meaning could such words have on the lips of that One Who stood before men in the Temple on that occasion, and Who had answered all their questions, but this: These words were spoken of Me, they refer to Me, I am David's Lord, and I am about to sit on the right hand of God.

“What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?”

What answer shall we make to such a question? We have seen how He can answer all our questions: what answer shall we make to His question? For it is *the* question He asks every one of us. And it is the question of questions. Everything turns upon the kind of answer we are prepared to give. Our own personal state as Christians, our worship, our service, are all affected by what we think of Christ. How do you place Him? And then, what place are you prepared to give Him in your own life? We cannot place Him too high, for God has placed Him at His own right hand. In one of those sublime descriptions of God found in the Old Testament, the question is asked, “What is His Name, and what is His Son’s Name, if thou canst tell?” (Prov. xxx. 4). From one point of view there is no answer to that question. If He is God’s Son, He must be as much beyond the creature’s grasp as God Himself. “No man knoweth Who the Son is but the Father.” And yet there is an answer. The Son has become Man, and a real man stood in the Temple on the occasion we have been looking at, stood amongst men, answering their questions. And when He asks, What think ye of Christ? He does not do so as one altogether beyond our reach. How shall we answer it? We see Who He is, but then, How much is He to us? As we think of all He is and all He has done, what answer shall we give? On the one hand, He Himself is the answer to all our questions, the one adequate solution of every problem, but, on the other, there still remains this question He puts to us, and how shall we answer it? What think ye of Christ?

“GATHERED TOGETHER UNTO MY NAME”

MATTHEW xviii. 20

IN Matthew's Gospel Christ is never seen leaving the earth. Having once placed His foot on it, He never leaves it, as some one once said. Consequently, in this Gospel, we have no ascension ; instead we have, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age.” In keeping with this, the same Gospel has more to say about the Church than any of the others. The Church represents Him, and holds the ground for Him until He returns. In accordance with this, we have the declaration : “Where two or three are gathered together unto My Name, *there am I in the midst of them.*” And the Apostle says, with regard to the main purpose for which we do gather : “For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup ye do show the Lord's death *till He come*” (1 Cor. xi. 26). In spite of all opposition, He builds His Church, and no power on earth or in hell can prevail against it.

The Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is not yet established in manifest power, but, during this present dispensation, it is in mystery. It takes the form of the rule of God in the heart—righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Mystery is the opposite of public display. Thus in Matthew xiii. our Lord speaks of “the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven.” But during this period He builds His Church, and invests it with all the power and authority which His presence and His Name can give. Power

towards man to bind and loose ; and power towards God to ask and receive an answer : " It shall be done for them," says our Lord, " of My Father which is in heaven." Such is the potency of Christ's Name, and such are the privileges and responsibilities of those who know what it means to be gathered unto it. Let us seek to comprehend the force of the words which form the subject of this article and what they involve.

It will help us to understand the teaching of Matthew xviii. if we consider it in conjunction with 1 Peter ii. 1-5. This passage reads as follows :—

" Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies and envies, and all evil speakings, as new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby : if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

We shall find as we proceed a marked similarity between this passage and the one in Matthew xviii.

The opening words of Matthew xviii. have an important bearing upon our subject. The question is asked : " Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven ? " Doubtless the apprehension of the disciples as to the true character of their Master was rapidly developing, and visions of the glory of His kingdom more and more occupied their minds. All this may have been strengthened by the occurrence recorded at the close of the previous chapter. And they now ask, " Who is to be greatest ? "

" And Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, ' Verily, I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.' "

Here we have the tremendous fact brought to our

notice that the true preparation for knowing the Lord "in the midst" is to see the little child "in the midst." What an object lesson! A little child in the midst of grown men—men whose names were to be linked with the greatest Name in heaven or earth, and who presently were to turn the world upside down. "Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them." They had asked about becoming the greatest. The answer is, you can only become great by becoming small. Their minds were occupied with grandeur and display. The Lord talks to them about being converted. They must turn from all their thoughts and ideas of the Kingdom and behold a child, and become like that. They were thinking of exaltation, but He tells them to humble themselves. In this school what slow learners we are, and what little progress we seem to make, if one may speak for others!

All this has its bearing upon what we find in verses 15-20. Only as we become as little children—only as we possess such a character—can we take our place rightly in His Church, without abusing its privileges and the power and authority conferred upon us. Here we find the secret of the gigantic failure of the Church. The secret of its worldliness, its corruption, and its weakness is that in all ages people have sought to exalt themselves instead of being humble and child-like. They have been anything but little children. The lesson of Matthew xviii. 2-5 has been forgotten. And this applies to the Church to-day, for many have never begun at the beginning and been converted and become as little children. Yet the indispensable moral condition insisted upon by Christ for being gathered to His Name, the one qualification for using that Name—whether in dealing with men or in prayer to God—is to become as a little child and to humble ourselves. To seek greatness and prominence and power, to exercise authority without first of all being characterized by humility, is to get away from Christ and to lose the sense of His presence. For He said, "Whoso shall

receive one such little child in My Name receiveth Me." As much as to say, I am nearest to those who are as little children, they are my true representatives! And just as we must see the child in the midst before we can discern Christ in the midst, so, receiving a child in His Name, that is, discerning the character of things He connects His Name with, must precede gathering unto His Name. How often in the past and present history of the Church His Name has been connected by His followers with anything but what was child-like in its simplicity and purity!

The Parallel of 1 Peter ii.

If we turn now to the passage in 1 Peter ii. we find an exact parallel. How does it begin? "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies and envies, and all evil speakings, as new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby" (up to salvation). "Except ye become as little children," says Christ: "As new born babes," says the Apostle. Both are in view of being gathered to Christ. Can we mistake the significance of Peter's statement any more than that of our Lord?

We must be careful not to confound Peter's use of "babes" with John's use of the term. The latter speaks of the various grades in the family of God, and from that point of view we ought not to remain babes. Peter speaks of *character*, and such character is ever to be retained, yea, it should become more pronounced. For although we are to desire the sincere milk of the Word that we may grow thereby up to salvation, we do not cease to be babes, but, on the contrary, the things he mentions from which we are to be saved—malice, guile, hypocrisies, etc.—are what is contrary to the simplicity and purity of a babe. The pure, unadulterated spiritual nutriment of the Word, while it will cause us to grow, will produce in us a child-like character in the sense in which Peter speaks. To desire the sincere milk of the Word

means to desire what is of God, what is in accordance with His character. Christ selected a little child as that which was nearest to God and most like Him.

"New born babes!" "A little child!" What a place they have in Christ's estimation and in His Father's! He says, "In heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven." We need not speculate as to angels and their ministry or inquire too deeply as to who these particular angels are, but rather let us seek to grasp the grandeur and simplicity of the utterance. What should engage our attention rather than the angels themselves, is not their guardianship but what they behold. "They behold," says our Lord, "the face of My Father." The mystic representatives of these little children are admitted to His immediate presence and to audience with Him. "The face," Christ says—"the face of My Father" is what they behold. There is nothing between the little children and that face.

Only they who have something of the characteristics of a child, however old they may have grown in years, can look upon that "face" with uninterrupted joy and communion; and they only can truly represent Christ on earth, who are privileged to be thus represented before the Father. All this is the necessary and indispensable condition of being gathered to Christ's Name. Need we wonder, then, at what is recorded at the opening of Matthew xviii., or that the Apostle Peter exhorts us, in view of coming to Christ as a living stone, and of our association with Him, to lay aside malice and those other evil characteristics he mentions, which would prevent our enjoyment of the face of our Father. As new-born babes, what the Apostle exhorts us to put away is everything that would come between us and the face of our Father; so that nothing should disturb us when in the presence of Christ or hinder the enjoyment of His company when gathered to His Name.

Tasting that the Lord is Gracious

The Apostle Peter passes now to another aspect of the truth which finds its illustration in our Lord's discourse in Matthew xviii. And this helps us further to understand how the two passages are linked together. The words to which we refer are these: "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious."

In other words, grace is the power that gathers us. An experimental knowledge of the grace which was prepared for any sacrifice that we might be recovered and blessed, is the way in which Christ attracts us, for our great desire will be to reach the company of the One Whose goodness we have proved.

Turning back to Matthew xviii, we find these words: "For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost." And then follows the story of the one sheep that went astray, and how the ninety and nine were left and the one followed until found. The point in the narrative is the value of the one sheep to the owner. We do not read that a dozen went astray, it was enough that one was missing. The proprietor might have ninety and nine left, but he goes after the one. We read, "He goeth into the mountains and seeketh that which is gone astray." He braves every danger and accepts every risk, no difficulty or obstacle is too great; the dark and desolate places are searched until the wandering sheep is found. And all this for a single sheep. What a profound and touching illustration of the truth of our value individually to Christ! It is the value of one. What each is to Him.

And if to any extent we can realize what is wrapped up in those words "lost," "gone astray"—then we can understand in some measure what He went through to save us. "Gone astray" from God and all that was good, from health and home and happiness—and therefore "lost." The depth of that word "lost" no human plummet can sound. The only

measure for it is the sacrifice made to save us, and the place He took—the place to which He must follow us if ever we were to be found. He “goeth into the mountains and seeketh that which is gone astray.” All that separated us from God, those mountains of sin, had to be crossed—those awful barriers sin had erected between us and God—the distance and darkness had to be entered, and there away from God He found us. Beyond the face of God He had to go, for had He stopped short of that He would have stopped short of the place where alone He could find us. That cry, “Why hast Thou forsaken Me?” tells us what it is to be lost, but also reveals the way we were found.

What, then, must we be to Him? You and I? For it is one sheep that is sought. He sought *you*—He sought *me*. He does not find us in groups but individually. The shepherd went after one sheep. The point lies in the discovery of what *you* are to Him. We are not left in doubt. “If so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.” Have you discovered what you are to Him? That He rejoices over you? If you have, what will He not become to you? You will want to be where His presence is known.

All this is involved in the meaning of the words: “If so be ye have *tasted* that the Lord is gracious.” If you know that He sought you, and *where* He sought you; and you have realized only a little (for it is but a little at the most) of what it cost Him to find you; if you have discovered that He rejoices over you and that you are precious to Him, then indeed you have tasted His grace, and you are prepared for what follows. You are attracted. And the greatest joy your heart can experience will be to learn that you are associated with the One Who has become everything to you. Where He is in the midst is where you will seek to find your place.

"TO WHOM COMING?"

We have, so far, looked only at the preparation for this great privilege. We are now to consider what it is to be gathered to His Name. Or, to adopt the language of the Apostle Peter, to try to understand what is involved in the words—

"To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye also as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

Christ becomes the great attraction for all His people. How far there is response is, of course, another matter. Grace produces unity and we are drawn to a common centre: we gather to the One in Whom that grace has been displayed. We should, one and all, come under the spell of the same attraction, and thus be drawn to the One Whose grace we have tasted.

"To *Whom* coming." It is to a Person we come. It is not a creed we have here, far less a party cry; nor is it some school of thought to which we gather. Ecclesiastical arrangements and ritual are absent. We are drawn to a Person, "To WHOM coming." Let every reader of these lines ask himself or herself, Have I felt the *attractive* power of Christ? And if so, Have I been drawn to Him?

It is easy enough to become a Christian and join a sect, without in the least comprehending what the Apostle means when he says, "To Whom coming, as unto a living stone." What attraction has Christ Himself?

"As unto a living stone." The emphasis is not only on the fact that it is a Person to Whom we come, but that we come to Him in a certain character. Many overlook or misinterpret the words "*As* unto a living stone." It is not "*as* unto a Saviour." What we are now considering is an advance upon that. We know Him as Saviour when we taste that He is gracious.

Here we know Him in another character altogether, viz., in connection with the place He occupies in resurrection as the gathering point of God's people. The position He has in resurrection, and our association with Him, are in view here. As Saviour, He came into the world to save us. He came to us. In the character now before us, we come to Him, in identification with Him outside the world. As Saviour He came to our side of things. Here we come to His side of things. He, the living Stone, the Head of the Corner, rejected by men but chosen of God, and we "as living stones" are built up a spiritual house. We are brought into association with Him. Entrance into this truth involves untold blessing.

"Disallowed indeed of men." We cannot understand the meaning of being gathered to Christ's Name, nor in any way answer to such a privilege, unless we are prepared to accept rejection with Christ. Man has given Christ no place—God has given Him the highest place. Do I share in some measure God's appreciation of Him? When I learn the place He has in God's estimation and see the place I have in association with Him, the One Who is precious to God, it becomes a wonderful moment. There is identification with Him outside in rejection; but, blessed be God, there is identification with Him inside in His place before God. And we are built up in proportion as we apprehend what it is to be brought into the closest association with the one Who is "chosen of God and precious."

Gathered Unto the Name

All this helps us to understand somewhat the force of being gathered unto Christ's Name; but we shall obtain further insight into the matter if we now turn again to the chapter which speaks of it. Here everything depends upon the NAME to which we are gathered. A Name so great that it must exclude every other.

In one sense, the idea contains nothing new. In Exodus xx. 24 we read: "An altar of earth thou shalt

make unto Me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep and thine oxen; *in all places where I record My Name* I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." The Name sets forth what is true of a person, and therefore implies a certain revelation. Here it is connected with sacrifice. The blessing is in keeping with what God is pleased to reveal of Himself. His people gather in the light of what He is. In that day, all was centred in Jehovah, God's covenant Name.

Turning now to Numbers vi. 22-7, we have a further intimation of the meaning of the Name. Jehovah gives direction to Moses as to the terms in which Aaron and his sons should bless Israel. The blessing being threefold, doubtless, had some reference to the Trinity of Persons in the Godhead. The closing words are very impressive. Not only is there the threefold blessing, but it is added: "And they shall put My NAME upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them." The blessing was commensurate with Jehovah's Name.

Now how great must be our Lord that He can put Himself in the place of Jehovah and speak of being gathered to His Name! For a mere man to do this would be blasphemy. Yet Christ does it unhesitatingly. "Where two or three are gathered together unto My Name." We gather together in relation to all that Christ is. The announcement of our Saviour's birth is accompanied by this injunction: "Thou shalt call His Name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." No such announcement had ever been made of any previous deliverer. No one ever raised up by God had been capable of saving them from their sins, only from external enemies, but of this One it is said, not that He would save them from the Romans, but from the deadliest and most tyrannical of all enemies—their sins.

The Name to which Christians gather not only covers all that Christ is but all that can be known of God.

The revelation of God is now complete. To gather to Christ's Name is to gather in the light of all that that Name reveals. The blessing and greatness of the Church is commensurate with the Name. In both the Old Testament passages quoted, blessing is mentioned. In Exodus we read, "I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." How is it that the thought of blessing is omitted from Matthew xviii. 20, though sometimes inadvertently added? The reason is found, we believe, in the difference between the two dispensations. We are already blessed according to the Name in which we gather, before we come. While quite true that we cannot find ourselves in His presence without receiving a blessing, yet we do not come for that. We come to meet the Blessor and to remember Him. We have tasted the cup of blessing before we drink of the wine in remembrance of Him.

Just one more New Testament reference to the Name before we leave this aspect of the subject. We refer to 1 Corinthians vi. 11.

"And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

"Justified in the Name." Justified and blessed according to all the worth and dignity, the power and authority of that Name. Blessed according to all that He is, and God's estimate of His worth. As gathered to His Name therefore we are covered by all the perfection and comeliness of Him in Whose Name we gather—the Name which is above every name. Everything else is excluded. How careful we should be that that Name alone is exalted, and everything of ourselves kept under and kept out when in His Presence!

We are "called unto the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." This is the Name. "His Son" speaks of One Who in every way is the expression of God to us, and Who as Man expresses all that delights

the Father's heart. "Jesus" Saviour: the One Who has met all our need. Just as Son expresses all that meets God's need. Christ—the Anointed Man, the Head of His Church, and the One in Whom all God's purposes in heaven and earth will be accomplished. "Our Lord"—the One Who is Lord, first of all for blessing, and then as to Authority. We are to submit to it ourselves, and exercise it towards others. And the former must precede the latter. In being partakers of the Lord's table, we are participators in all the benefits of His death. But then this supposes that in all things we seek His glory and are subject to His authority. If the Name is so great, how great must be the assembly thus gathered!

The Privileges and Responsibilities of Being Gathered to Christ's Name

We come to a Person in all the sense of His grace to us and sufficiency for God. One, too, Who is a Sanctuary to us, but a stone of stumbling and rock of offence to the world. Disallowed, indeed, of men, but chosen of God and precious. As we come to Him, realizing His preciousness to God, and how God's interests and purposes centre in Him, we are built up a spiritual house. In other words, we realize God's presence as dwelling in our midst. And we have "access by one Spirit to the Father." God dwells and reveals Himself in order that we may approach Him in worship, and fulfil the functions of a holy priesthood in offering up spiritual sacrifices. We present to God what we have tasted of the grace and preciousness of Christ.

There are three discoveries I must make before I can enter into the greatness of these things. First, I must learn I am precious to Christ. I was lost, but He went after me and found me, and now He rejoices over me. Second, He is precious to me. Third, He is precious to God. Then the most attractive thing to me will be His company, and to be with

those of whom He can say, "There am I in the midst."

"Two or three": could anything be much more surprising than such lowly figures! Christ does not demand that two or three thousand shall assemble before He will be present. Architecture and ritual, great buildings and imposing ceremonies seem absent from His mind altogether. Two or three who have been attracted to Him—"gathered"—two or three who come together in the light of what His Name reveals, that is all. "There am I in the midst of them," He says. Surely He looked on to remnant days, when side by side with a vast and imposing organization bearing His Name, there would be two or three, here and there, who desired to meet in His Name only. To such Christ's presence means more than music or oratory or education or ritual. How simple it all is when Christ is all. Just two or three and Christ. That is what describes a Christian gathering. How completely Christendom has missed its way!

"A spiritual house." This is how the Apostle Peter designates the Church. On every side to-day we are confronted with churches, ornate and splendid, but material. How much do we know of a *spiritual* house? Christianity is spiritual (for Christianity is Christ), and is known only in the power of the Holy Spirit. As we apprehend and approach Christ in His preciousness to God, and learn our association with Him, we become spiritual, and are built up, and God dwells in us.

Thus we become worshippers, and learn to exercise the functions of "a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." Those who gather to Christ's Name partake of the Supper in remembrance of Him. The symbols of His death are present. It would scarcely be appropriate for the Church to assemble without the presence of the memorials of that which is most precious to God, and

apart from which we have no place or standing before Him. We "announce the Lord's death until He come," That death, with all that it reveals, feeds our worship. We enter into all that was there given to God and given for us. The contemplation of it fills our hearts with a sense of Divine love; and we become conscious of our fitness for the Divine presence.

Turning again to Matthew xviii., we become aware of other privileges. "If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven." This is made to depend upon what follows: "For where two or three," etc. This suggests that prayer, here, is not praying about our own things but about Christ's interests. The "two of you" are two belonging to the company to which Christ grants His Presence. The promise is absolute: "It shall be done for them"; but no absolute promise is ever made that prayer as to our own personal, private, interests will be answered. Prayer moves on two separate planes, a higher and a lower. The higher is here in Matthew xviii., and also in John xiv. 13-14; the lower is found in Philippians iv. 6-7. And in this latter passage two things are omitted. Neither asking in Christ's Name, nor any promise of the request being granted, is found there.

Note the conditions in Matthew xviii. and the unique character of the privilege. "If two of you shall agree on earth." Observe the smallness of the number. "Two of you." "Two or three gathered together in My Name." Here, again, we see it cannot be our individual interests which are in question, for "two" must agree. This promise is not to one. And there must be *agreement*. This implies and involves the work of the Holy Spirit. He, alone, can produce such oneness of desire in two of the Lord's people that their petition shall be granted. And, further, He alone can inspire them to pray for that which is in perfect harmony with the will of God and the interests

of Christ on earth, for the prayer is connected with His Name.

What a place prayer has! And what a place the "two or three" have! Ought we not to covet to be amongst the number? The very interests of Christ and all that is connected with God's work and testimony on earth bound up with our prayers, and all proceeding in answer to them.

But more. What is equally connected with prayer and being gathered to the Name of Christ is the authority and power to bind and loose. "Verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." All this flows from the fact of the Lord in the midst. In Numbers v. the reason given why every leper, etc., should be put out of the camp was in principle the same: "That they defile not their camps *in the midst whereof I dwell.*"

Our Lord has been speaking of the case of a brother trespassing against another. This not only affects the two brothers in question, but affects the Lord and also His assembly. Is the offended brother to say: "I will have nothing more to do with the offender"? or is he to disregard the matter? Neither. The instructions are, "Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee thou hast gained thy brother." What does this mean, but that we are to act towards those who trespass against us precisely as our Lord acted towards us; for these instructions immediately follow the story of the man going after the sheep that went astray. The object of the offended one is to be this: to *gain* his brother.

Do we not see here, once more, the importance of the first part of the chapter, for how could we act in the spirit indicated towards one who has trespassed against us except we have the spirit of a little child? Or, to employ the language of the Apostle Peter, only as we lay aside all malice, and all guile, etc., and become as simple and unsophisticated as new-born babes,

could we approach an offender in such a way as to win him.

If this effort to gain the offender fails, there is to be one more attempt. "Take with thee one or two more." What wisdom and patience are manifest here! And then, in the final resort, the instructions are, "Tell it unto the Church." With this consequence: "If he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." Then follow the words as to binding and loosing. But this is only effectual as done in Christ's Name, that is, according to the holy character of it. Surely the teaching of our Lord is that only such as are little children can be trusted with this authority. The voice of the true Church is not heard in some Papal decree, it is heard only in the voice of those who have the spirit of the Master, who have been converted and become as little children.

May the attractive power of Christ—the grace which shines in Him—be known by some in these days, and being drawn to Him may we realize what it is to be gathered to His Name; and knowing how to maintain what is due to it, be able in meekness and lowliness to exercise the power and authority conferred upon us.

PIETY : PERSONAL AND PRACTICAL

"He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly ; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh ; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly ; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter ; whose praise is not of men but of God " (Rom. ii. 28-9).

I

LORD MELBOURNE, Prime Minister in the early part of the reign of Queen Victoria, is credited with saying, "No one has a greater respect for the Christian religion than I have, but when it comes to interfering with our private lives——" he was not prepared for that. Christianity for State occasions—baptisms, marriages, coronations—was quite in accordance with his views, but the kind of Christianity that challenges a man's heart and life and that claims to regulate both, he did not relish. Formal ceremonies he had no objection to, but inward convictions leading to outward reformation were inconvenient and disturbing, and were things for which he had no taste.

Are there not many like him, with an outward regard for Christianity, but who do not intend that it should interfere with their ambitions and enjoyments ? Are there not others who, while not so candid as Lord Melbourne, practically accept his dictum, and whose Christianity is largely a matter of creeds and ceremonies ? They are conformed to this world instead of being transformed. And again, is not the habit far too common of paying deference to the letter of Scripture without obeying its precepts ? Must it not be confessed that piety everywhere is at a low ebb ?

"It is *the* problem of life," said a well-known preacher, "Why does Christianity do so little for men?" When we think of the Person of our Lord and how Infinite He is, and what God has done and suffered for men; of the Incarnation and the love poured out without stint in Christ's life and death—if we reflect, too, upon the glorious lives that have been lived as a consequence, and of all that God proposes to do for us and with us—and then think of the ordinary level of Christian living to-day, can we help being amazed? or resist the impression, which at times seems utterly disconcerting, that, as far as the lives of Christians are concerned, Christianity seems to have done so little for them? Would it be out of place for each reader of these lines to ask himself and herself, Why has not Christianity done more for me?

It was not otherwise with God's ancient people. With all their privileges and opportunities, the nation of Israel often sank to the lowest level. This fact is brought to our notice in the chapter from which the text at the head of this article is taken.

"Behold thou art called a Jew," says the Apostle. Just as he might say to-day to us, "Behold thou art called a Christian." But is there any more profit in being *called* a Christian than in being merely *called* a Jew? "And retest in the law"—not that they kept it. Just as people rest in their religiousness to-day. "And makest thy boast in God." This is possible without really obeying Him. "And knowest His will." It is not recorded that they *did* it. How easy it is to be content with mere knowledge! Forgetting our Lord's words, "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the Word of God and do it." And they were so familiar with the letter of the law that not only could they argue and discuss religious questions, but regarded themselves as capable of instructing others, yet, after all, they possessed nothing more than "the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law." They taught without having learned; and preached but did

not practise ; until the Apostle sums up his terrible indictment with the charge : " The Name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you."

Might not parts of this indictment apply to us ? The fact is, all of us come within its scope in one respect or another. What does it mean but that we all know a great deal more than we do ? And more, we are very often satisfied with knowing—deceived by the very fact that we do know. For if we gave practical effect to what we know to be God's will, would there not be a considerable difference in our lives ? Yes, what Paul declares of the Jews is equally true of ourselves : we can know God's will without doing it, and we can teach and preach while our own lives remain unaffected.

We remember hearing of a professional man who entertained a devoted servant of the Lord for some six weeks in his house, and who, at the end, had his mind crammed with truth and knew all the doctrines of Christianity by heart. He could discuss and talk. Yet not so very long after he went back into the world from which he professed to have been saved.

Oh, how easy it is to be deceived in this way ! To think that to know is enough, and to allow our Christianity to evaporate in talk. So liable are we to be deceived by mere knowledge, and to mistake preaching for practising, that one said, " I sometimes wonder if I should not have been a better Christian if I had not been a preacher." And we cannot forbear quoting words touching this very point addressed to some who contemplated devoting their lives to preaching :

A Preacher's Advice to Preachers

" Believe me, things are not easy for one's soul in the ministry, and you must be upon your guard. Others turn out of the rush and babble of the world, and the hush that comes from contact with spiritual things acts like a cool hand upon a fevered forehead ; but we are always handling these sacred mysteries ; and

they can lose some of their awesomeness through long familiarity. . . . The Word of God can grow to be only a hunting-ground for texts ; and we can preach, meaning intensely every word we utter, yet in reality only lost for the moment like an actor in his part, or at least leaving it to the folk to live it out ; for us, bless me, we have no time for that, but are already immersed, poor harried souls, in determining what we shall preach on next ; *that is our bit of it*. If you are not to drift into unconscious hypocrisy, or at least into using great words with little meaning, live close to Jesus Christ."

"St. James," some one has said, "has no patience with any unreality or affectation in religion. He says again and again that in his own opinion people talk too much about religion. There is, at any rate, he declares, a danger that we all talk more than we act, and that many even talk themselves asleep, supposing that by talking they have accomplished something."

A rector warned his curate that if he went to London and became a popular preacher "the devil has you for a certainty." You cannot keep giving away without becoming poor. The expression of religious emotion reduces its intensity. "After a great sermon on love and gentleness, the preacher comes home to snarl at his wife and scold his children." But he is not a hypocrite ; he has given away in his sermon what he possessed of those qualities, "and had none, or very little, left when he got home."

Those who preach do well to remember the description given in Isaiah vi. of the Seraphim. "Each one had six wings, with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly." The active life must not be in excess of the hidden life. The proportion here is two-thirds hidden. "He covered his face" : we must serve consciously in His presence Whose servants we are and in self-abasement ; "With twain he covered his feet" ; we must not be occupied with our service, or with our activities. What engaged

the attention of these mystic beings was God's holiness. "One cried unto another, Holy holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts," then they were ready for the appointed errand: "With twain he did fly." Of one preacher it used to be said that he preached so beautifully and lived so badly that when he was in the pulpit they wished he was never out of it, and when he was out of it they wished he was never in it. We need to remember those words in Isaiah xlii., "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings." Not merely the words, but the feet. "How beautiful are the feet." As a servant of the Lord once said, We need Christianity in "boots" as well as in "books."

While no doubt preachers have their special temptations, and are in peculiar danger of thinking that to talk about the truth is enough, our remarks are not confined to any particular class. Many are afflicted with an insipient antinomianism. The character of their walk does not trouble them as long as they are at rest in a fancied security. One such, who in former years had engaged in Christian service, but had been lured into the world by prosperity and had forsaken his old godly ways, met a friend with whom in bygone days he had often been associated in happy service. He invited him to his house, telling him, however, that he was not to speak to him about religion. "But," he added, "you know I am born again and can never be lost." What evidence did he give that this was true? Had he said to his old companion, "Come to my house and help me to recover lost ground—help me to get back and regain my former joy and communion with the Lord," it would have been different. The Apostle Peter tells us we make our calling and election sure by addition. Add in your faith courage, self-restraint, godliness, and so on. This man seemed to think that his calling and election were still sure though he adopted the policy of subtraction. He had thrown away a good deal, and yet seemed to think this made no difference.

The Rich Miser

He reminds us of an account we read the other day of a rich miser who was afflicted with cataract in both eyes. It cost a hundred dollars to remove one cataract. He decided to have only one removed, that would enable him to count his money, and would save a hundred dollars.

"The half-and-half Christian wants only one eye opened. He believes in justification but not in sanctification. He believes in a Christ that will take him to heaven, but he is not prepared to follow Him on earth. He deliberately chooses a one-eyed religion—that which sees Christ as Saviour, but ignores Him as Sanctifier."

Was not this the trouble with Israel of old? They were willing to have a God who provided for their needs and delivered them from their enemies, and gave them a good land to live in; but they did not want a God who was ever setting the way of holiness before them. They forsook Him on that account, and turned to idolatry. As early as Exodus xix., as soon as He had brought them out of Egypt, God makes known His real purpose: "Now, therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My Covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people . . . and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, *and an holy nation*. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel." This was the end God had in view; and there can be no doubt that though it has never yet been realized, He will reach His end some day. All the prophets declare this with one voice. Amidst all those future glories so graphically depicted in page after page, there is one golden thread which is never absent; a time is coming when God will "put His laws into their mind and write them in their hearts." In Isaiah xxxv., where we are told "the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose," "and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads,"

the way to it will be "The way of holiness." That is the highway to the realization of all the promises. While Jeremiah exclaims, as he contemplates them in the last stage of their history, "O habitation of justice and mountain of holiness!"

A passage in Luke i. adds emphasis to what has been said: Zacharias in his prophecy declares that God had raised up a horn of salvation that "we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us." But this was only one part of God's intention. His purpose in delivering them out of the hand of their enemies was that they might "serve Him without fear in *holiness* and *righteousness* before Him."

Nor is it otherwise in our own case. The Lord's prayer for His own was that His people might be sanctified. Paul writes to the Thessalonians: "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification." We are made free from sin and become servants to God to have "our fruit unto holiness," he declares in his epistle to the Romans (chap. vi.). We are warned in the epistle to the Hebrews that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord," and that all God's discipline is with a view to our being "partakers of His holiness." To be "holy and without blame before Him in love" is His final purpose for us (Eph. i. 4). Can we authenticate our Christianity by our piety?

There is a story told of Gustave Doré, the eminent French painter, that on one occasion, when travelling, he found, on reaching the frontier, he was without his passport. He went up to the Customs officer and said, "I am Gustave Doré," thinking that a name so well known might be sufficient. The official looked at him. The mere mention of the name was not enough. He invited the painter to come into his office. He then provided him with paper and pencil, and said, "Make me a sketch." Gustave Doré did so. With a few masterly strokes he represented what had just taken place outside. When the Customs officer looked at it he exclaimed, "Pass, Gustave Doré, no one but a great

artist could do that." It is not enough to *say* we are Christians, just as it was not enough for Gustave Doré merely to mention his name. Can we authenticate our Christianity? Those early converts in Thessalonica had authenticated theirs. "Ye became followers of us," says Paul. "So that ye were examples to all that believe . . . so that we need not to speak anything." The description recently of one who professed Christianity was to this effect: "A sanctimonious old rogue. He seems to combine religion and fraud, and has done fifteen months."

Travelling the other day we were amazed and saddened at the testimony of a commercial traveller on this very subject. Owing to a matter of public interest which had been introduced, the conversation in the railway compartment had become general, and this business man declared before all present that whenever his firm opened a new account, and it was discovered that any of the partners were professing Christians, special inquiries were made. Indeed, there was a department for this very purpose. And another testimony to the same effect came from a preacher of the Gospel: "We have to mourn that our best efforts have been made null by the fact that professing Christians are not as worthy as some of those who make no profession—not as clean in business, not as generous, not as straightforward. These men have missed the meaning of their baptism."

When we have made all allowance for unjust criticism—and the criticism of the world is often unjust—and a certain margin for failure to which even the best are occasionally liable, does not the above recital bring the blush to our cheek, and make us resolve to walk more warily lest we should justify the poor opinion which a certain section of the world, at all events, seems to have of the professed followers of Christ?

Madame Humbert's Safe

Perhaps some of our readers will remember a very famous trial which took place in Paris some thirty or

forty years ago. It was occasioned by the fraud of a certain Madame Humbert. A country girl of humble origin, but clever and exceedingly ambitious, she was anxious to figure in the best Parisian society. She had married above her station, and in order to achieve her purpose she gave out that she was immensely wealthy. That on one occasion, as the story went, while travelling, an old gentleman in the next compartment to her had been taken seriously ill, and she had been able to save his life, and, out of gratitude, he had bequeathed to her all his property. The deeds of this property were supposed to be in a certain safe which Madame H. kept in her *salon*, and which was sometimes on view, bearing on its front a plentiful supply of sealing-wax. Fabulous tales were circulated as to the value of this property, and this designing woman was able, in virtue of such reports, to borrow money to the extent of millions of francs. This went on for several years, until at last the creditors began to get uneasy. We need not go into all the details of the history, which were extraordinary beyond belief. At length, however, the matter was brought into the law courts. In the end, the Judge decided that the safe must be opened in the presence of witnesses. This was done. The sealing-wax was broken, the massive doors were unlocked, and lo! all that the safe contained was a copper coin not worth a halfpenny!

We are sure that no one who professes to be a Christian wishes to be a fraud. Yet is it not easily possible, for a time at all events, to trade upon a false reputation? May not outward display be accompanied by inward poverty? If our Christianity could be tested and exposed to view as was Madame Humbert's safe, would the same emptiness be revealed? Plenty of sealing-wax without but very little within.

In contrast with this, a beautiful story was in circulation a while ago with reference to something which had occurred at 10 Downing Street. We cannot vouch for its truth, but it appeared in the columns of a leading

religious weekly. Whether true or not does not, in this case, make much difference ; it will serve as an illustration. The story ran that a new drawing-room carpet was asked for in place of one which had done good service. The reply came that the state of the public exchequer did not warrant the expense. A second request was preferred, viz., that the carpet might, at all events, be beaten and cleaned ; and to this consent was given. On being taken up there was found underneath a layer of felt, which when removed *disclosed a Persian carpet of unimaginable beauty !*

After all, the real question is, What is beneath ? "The Lord looketh on the heart." What a contrast is presented between Madame Humbert's safe and the Persian carpet ! In the case of the safe, investigation revealed only emptiness. In the other case, there were hidden an unsuspected beauty and worth. We may often misjudge another's actions simply because we do not know all, and are unacquainted with the real motives. Happy for us if, were everything stripped bare, a deeper excellence would be found than was suspected. The Pharisee in the parable was like Madame Humbert and her safe. There was plenty of outward display and boasting : "I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." The publican was more like the Persian carpet hidden from view ; there was an undiscovered excellence, unknown to man, but known to God. "He smote upon his breast saying, God be merciful to me, a sinner."

How easy it is to be a Christian outwardly, especially in these days ; just as formerly it was easy to be a Jew outwardly. Let us recall the words of our text, and in order to their present application let us paraphrase them thus :

"For he is not a Christian, which is one outwardly ; neither is that Christianity which consists in outward rites and ceremonies ; but he is a Christian which is one inwardly ; and Christianity is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter ; whose praise is not of men, but of God."

How easy it is to drop into a Christianity which is, if not wholly, yet to some extent, in the letter! We may not be like the man of whom it was said he only quoted Scripture when he was under the influence of drink, but we may easily talk heavenly truth and be sordid and mean. Who does not know the kind of individual who, if judged by his words, would be placed high among the saints, yet when he is asked for help will button up his pockets; one who does not hesitate to quote the words, "We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren," but when put to the proof finds it difficult to lay down sixpence for them?

We were reading the other day of one who used the Book of Common Prayer and the Bible to learn choice words so that he might write good English. We may think to ourselves what a low use to make of them! Yet we ourselves may be guilty of something almost as bad. "Choice words!" the letter kills, the spirit alone gives life. We may know a great deal in our heads which never finds its way into our hearts and lives. May we obey from the *heart* that form of doctrine whereto we were delivered (Rom. vi.).

It is the difference between the Pharisee and the Publican over again. Are we tempted to think the Publican had not advanced very far? Let us test ourselves by what he uttered, and see. The words that came from his mouth express reality through and through, and reveal an insight into the depravity of his own heart and an inward exercise before God to which not every one attains. His religion was inward, that of the heart, in the spirit, and its praise not of men but of God.

May heart and spirit so be brought under the power of God's Word and application of Christ's death—the true circumcision, that everything which is merely of the flesh may be detected and judged, and so we may be amongst the elect of God. In that very chapter in which we read of the Pharisee and Publican—Luke xviii.—we read also of God's "own elect." It is remarkable

that in Scripture, though not always in theology—employing that word in its common use—"the elect of God" are they who manifest by their character and conduct that they are such. "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering" (Col. iii. 12). And again, Peter speaks of our calling and election being made sure, as certain characteristics mark us. "For if ye do these things," he says, "ye shall never fall" (2 Pet. i. 5-8).

"But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, Who *without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work*, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear. . . . Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies and envies, and all evil speakings, as new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby up to salvation" (1 Pet. i. 15-17; ii. 1-2; 2 Pet. i. 5-10, R.V.).

"O largely give, 'tis all Thine own,
The Spirit's goodly fruit;
Praise issuing forth in life alone,
Our loving Lord can suit."

II

The other day we heard a very sad story. It was about two young men, who were bosom friends; both, apparently, earnest Christians, and engaged in Christian work. A sad catastrophe befell one, and as a consequence, the other seems to have abandoned his Christian profession entirely.

How are we to account for this? We venture to suggest that, probably, some other reason might be found than the ostensible one. A gradual process of disintegration and declension probably had been going on, and what appeared to be a sudden change was not so sudden after all. Something, however small, had

been gradually usurping the place which Christ should have had in his heart. If so, then what appeared to be the cause was, after all, only the excuse.

It is very seldom that anyone is suddenly led to abandon all that he has professed, and enter at one stride upon a new path, or who is led by a single occurrence to adopt an entirely new moral and spiritual outlook. The apparent cause of such a *volte face* is not the real one, nor is such a climax reached by a solitary step, but lies at the end of a series of steps. In this young man's case there was probably something antecedent to the loss of his friend. All this reveals the importance of keeping in close touch with God. For what is piety, but setting the Lord always before us, and referring every matter to Him?

The pious man is described for us in Psalm xvi. And how does this Psalm begin? The opening words are: "Preserve me, O God." But why? A reason is given: "For in Thee do I put my trust." If there is continued trust in God and continual prayer, we shall be preserved. And what is the next thing? Keeping the right company. How many have been turned aside by their companions! Our safeguard is in keeping the company of the excellent, and finding all our delight in them and in what they seek. Three distinct marks of piety follow. Making the Lord our portion; seeking His counsel; and setting Him always before the soul. Then we shall be able to say with the Psalmist, "Thou maintainest my lot"; "My reins also instruct me"; "I shall not be moved."

Piety often decreases as money increases. The accumulation of wealth is one of the severest tests a man can undergo. A Christian, we heard of the other day, once apparently devoted and far advanced in knowledge, made money, but towards the end of his life gradually drifted away. He was talking, on one occasion, so we were told, with another Christian, upon whom he had called in the course of his business, and who during the conversation happened to introduce a subject of

spiritual interest. He immediately turned away with the remark, "I have no time for that."

Personal piety lies at the back of everything, and gives character to every department of Christian life. Without it our public prayers, however high-sounding their phrases, will be empty, and our service will become formal. That God places great importance upon it is evident everywhere in His choice of men. Those He selected as spiritual leaders, or to whom He gave prominence, were always devout (pious) men. Take two examples amongst many. One we read of in the second chapter of Luke, the other in Acts x. Simeon is one and Cornelius the other. The first is a Jew, and comes at the close of a dispensation, his language is, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant *depart* in peace"; the second is a Gentile, and amongst the first to be admitted publicly into that new order of things which God had established in place of Judaism. But whatever differences there may have been in their circumstances, both are described as devout. Their practical piety was unquestioned. Had it been otherwise, God would not have put such honour upon them. Both are singled out in a remarkable way.

As to Simeon, the Holy Spirit is three times spoken of with reference to him. The Spirit was upon him, we are told, and, further, revealed to him that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Finally, at the right moment, he is led by the Spirit into the temple, and is given the supreme honour of receiving the child Jesus into his arms. We may be quite sure God would not have allowed anyone to fill that office. But saintly Simeon can bless God with the Child in his arms, and declare, "Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." It was a man described as just and devout (righteous and pious), who was selected for this supreme honour.

And although in the case of Cornelius the circumstances are entirely different, yet of him, too, it declares, he was a devout man, and the evidences of his piety

are recorded. For God would not select one of an opposite character to be publicly and in a special way identified with His Name and Kingdom. We see, then, to what piety leads, and the possibilities that are open to it. The piety of Cornelius is characterized in a threefold manner. (1) The fear of God : (2) He gave much alms to the people : (3) He prayed to God alway. We may learn much as to piety from these traits which marked Cornelius.

(1) *The Fear of God.* Has the reader ever noticed the conspicuous place that fear has in a life pleasing to God ? There can be no real godliness apart from it. We are not thinking of the "fearful" and "unbelieving," but of the penitential and filial fear that would make us afraid of doing anything we knew would displease God. The Scriptures again and again refer to this fear as something very commendable. The description given of the Church in her palmiest days is this—"Then had the Church rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and was edified ; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, was multiplied" (Acts ix. 31). Could this be said to-day ? Has not fear of this kind almost vanished from the Church ? Many Christians even, not to say the world, are characterized by anything but this fear. They do not sanctify the Lord God in their hearts. There is little reverence for God and His Word.

Take another instance. The Apostle Peter, in his first epistle, writes thus : "And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, *pass the time of your sojourning here in fear*" ! How little this aspect of Christian life is thought of ! We think of our place as children ; of the grace that has been bestowed ; we are ready often to exclaim, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us" !—but here the Father's Name is coupled with fear.

(2) Another evidence of the godliness of Cornelius was, "*He gave much alms to the people.*" The Holy

Spirit is pleased to say "much." Does this feature characterize the Lord's people generally? Can their bounty be described in that way? Or would it be a tremendous exaggeration to employ the word "much" in connection with it? The other day we received a letter in which the writer, speaking of one earning her own living in a small way of business, says: "Hundreds of pounds of her earnings she has spent in books, sending them to all classes." "In the late war, in order to supply the soldiers with books and pocket-cases, her motor-bicycle, one of the finest on the road, with side-car, was sold. Jewellery she had left her went too." Some people are known by their "much speaking" (Matt. vi. 7). Let us be known by our much giving.

(3) Lastly, "*He prayed to God alway.*" The Saviour links these two things—almsgiving and prayer—together in the Sermon on the Mount. Depend upon it we have in this description of Cornelius the three main strands of personal and practical piety; and there can be no true godliness where any of them is lacking. How essential prayer is! We wage an unequal warfare if we do not pray. We come under the influences that are everywhere around us if we do not pray. We fail of the grace of God if supplication ceases. Progress is impossible without prayer.

The hindrance to godliness is often more in little things than in big. "One morning the transmitting apparatus of the high-power station at Daventry refused to work. After an exhaustive examination it was discovered that the cause of the breakdown was the presence of an infant mouse in the plates of one of the main condensers. The mouse had been electrocuted, but its body prevented the oscillation necessary for the transmission of signals. The mouse weighed less than a quarter of an ounce." We are told to "lay aside every weight." Even a little weight may be a great hindrance to communion. Let us be punctilious about little things and we shall escape the greater sins. At a Conference, a speaker was illustrating his point by an anecdote,

relative to one who on a certain occasion was pressing upon his hearers the obligation they were under to pay their debts. While insisting upon this, some one in the audience cried out, "And the boots you stand up in are not paid for." As he related this anecdote a person on the platform turned to another sitting by with the remark, "And he hasn't paid *his* debts either."

How inconsistent we can be! We behold the mote in our brother's eye, and do not discern the beam in our own. May God give us reality—self-examination and self-judgment. It is said that the most powerful engine soon comes to grief if it has not an efficient governor. Our conduct must be regulated under the all-seeing eye of God. It has been said, "It doesn't take much of a man to be a Christian, but it takes all there is of him."

The lack of piety is due to two causes: want of obedience and want of diligence. The secret of all progress in the Divine life, and the attainment of holiness is obedience. In other words, the practical carrying out of what we know. In Romans vi. where the subject is deliverance from sin's bondage and power, the Apostle thanks God that those to whom he was writing had "*obeyed* from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered" to them (or, whereto ye were delivered). This may, and probably does, amongst other things, refer to the fact that they were true to their baptism. To them baptism was not merely a form, but what the form signified they expressed in actual practice. They were walking in newness of life. They were obedient to that which they had been committed to in baptism.

Another inspired writer pursues precisely similar lines. He asserts that holiness is a question of obedience. "As obedient children," he says, "not fashioning yourselves according to your former lusts in your ignorance, but as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation." And

further on he writes: "Seeing ye have purified your souls in *obeying* the truth." In one way only can the truth affect us, and that is by *obeying* it. If only we would seek to give effect in our lives to every injunction and exhortation in the epistles, what a change it would produce. But how often we are hearers of the word and not doers, as James warns us (James i. 22).

The other point is *diligence*. The Apostle Peter exhorts us to give "all diligence" in order that our faith should possess certain qualities and characteristics, so that we should be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Giving "all diligence" seems to imply that we make the acquirement of these characteristics the great business of our lives. Not doing so, is the reason of our spiritual poverty and lack of piety. Christianity is capable of doing so much for us—it is such a stupendous thing—that it is worthy of both time and effort. But we lack diligence; we go about it in a half-hearted way; we almost think the soul can take care of itself, though we never think this of the body, and we spend a great deal more time and thought upon the body than we do upon the soul; and our lack of diligence means we lack many things beside. Let us give all diligence to add in our faith courage; and to courage knowledge; and to knowledge temperance (self-restraint); and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness (piety); and to piety brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness love. What a programme! What possessions! May nothing short of this satisfy us.

THE LORD IN THE MIDST

" Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them " (Luke xxiv. 36).

" The first day of the week . . . came Jesus and stood in the midst " (John xx. 19).

" For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them " (Matt. xviii. 20).

I

THE Lord in the midst ! Have we sufficiently realized the definite and positive character of this truth ? Do we see how profound and important it is ? And do we comprehend the meaning of it ? Not merely so many believers gathered together—blessed, undoubtedly, as that is—but Christ occupying the supreme place. We read of the eleven being gathered together, and them that were with them. Who cannot see the difference between that fact, and what was true a moment after when Christ stood amongst them ? Not only was the whole character of the assembly altered—the very atmosphere changed—but the outlook and standpoint of every one present became different; and the blessing realized was of an infinitely higher order. Each one would be affected. They could not do exactly what they had done before, or, at least, not in the same way. Every eye would be directed to the One in the midst, and His absolute control at once acknowledged, His presence would pervade and direct all.

Are we sufficiently alive to the fact that the picture presented to us both in Luke xxiv. and John xx. is not of some passing phase, but represents a permanent institution ? The double allusion to it in the Gospels—the particularity with which the incident is described, the

action and words of our Lord on the occasion, the striking effect upon the disciples—all combine to show that this event, far from being of a merely transitory character, was intended to cast its light upon the future, and become a pattern for all time.

What preceded the occurrence tends to support this view. Our Lord had employed the earlier part of the day in gathering His scattered sheep. He had accompanied two on their way to Emmaus. His dealings with them became a preparation for what was to follow. Their eyes were holden in order that they should no longer know Him in connection with Jewish hopes, and that they might listen undistractedly to the unfolding of the Scriptures concerning Himself; and then they might see how all that they thought so fortuitous and calamitous had a meaning, and was, indeed, the very fulfilment of Scripture. But He had more to teach them even than this. When He reveals Himself, and they know Him, He vanishes out of their sight (*v.* 31). He will not stay with them. He wanted them to know His presence in the midst of His own. Consequently, when they return to Jerusalem and rejoin the others, He appears in the midst of the company He had gathered, and then He does not vanish. On the contrary, He takes pains to make Himself known. He would have them realize all that His presence meant, and in this manner be brought to realize one outstanding truth of the new dispensation just dawning—a company on earth—separated from Jew and Gentile—to which He would in a special way grant His presence. He and His associated in the closest possible way.

We can understand, then, what it meant to our Lord when the moment came and He could take His place in the midst. Redemption was accomplished, and He had risen victorious over every foe. His own were not only delivered from God's judgment, Satan's power, and the effect of all their sins, but they were associated with Him in a position to which sin and death could never apply. As He had declared to Mary, "*I ascend unto My*

Father and your Father, and to my God and your God " (John xx. 17). The fullest relationship is established, and He comes into the midst of His own with a message of Peace. If one can imagine, in any way, what this meant to Him, do we realize what it means to us? The inconceivable blessedness and unique character of it is apparent. Yet for many centuries the Church well-nigh lost all apprehension of it.

II

Nearly a hundred years ago now, it was given to some of the Lord's people to realize anew the true character of God's Assembly. But amongst all the truths thus recovered none was so important as the one which now engages our attention. It is scarcely too much to say that this was the pivot upon which all turned. The recovery of this one truth really involved the recovery of all. For if Christ's presence is known and enjoyed, it means that forgiveness of sins is known; our place before the Father as associated with Christ is also realized; as well as our union with Him as members of His body. Moreover, Christ's presence cannot be known apart from the presence of the other Comforter. Thus the indwelling of the Holy Spirit becomes a reality. While to be in our Lord's presence without a shade of distance, and be led by Him to the banqueting house where His banner over us is love, means that we understand the results of His work, viz., that in Him we who sometime were far off "are made nigh by the blood of Christ," and "through Him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father." In addition to all this, the greatness of the Assembly is understood, if we realize **WHOSE** presence we are in. Is it any wonder that Satan should seek to rob us of this truth when so much depends upon it? The Lord in the midst, constitutes the gathering together of His people something more than a "Believers' Meeting." We have already pointed out the difference it made when every one became conscious that the Lord was there. There was a moment, as can be

easily seen from the narrative, when only believers were present. A moment after, and the same gathering assumed a new character. And it makes all the difference whether we meet together simply as believers—precious as communion of saints is—to give out hymns and read, and speak upon, portions of Scripture, or whether we meet, first and foremost, to give the Lord His place and wait upon Him. How vast the chasm between the two—whether the hymns and the passages are our own selection, or the taking part in worship is under His direction. The realization of His presence, the submission to His authority and control, are the crux of everything.

We do not understand the difference between some gatherings of Christians and others to be the mere difference as to the number taking part—a question of one or several. If that were all, the one might be preferable to the many. But we understand the difference to be that the Lord's place is recognized in the one to an extent to which it cannot be in the others; and the ordering of a meeting is in His hands, not in those of some official. But such a meeting demands faith; and not only faith, but patience and spiritual discernment, and the refusal of the activities of the flesh. Such an assembly is the most august in the world. It may lack everything from a spectacular point of view; there may be no appeal to the flesh or to sense; it derives all from one thing—the Presence of Christ. The Apostle Paul could write to certain believers in Corinth and address them as *the assembly of God*. And in chapter xii. of that epistle he informs us the gifts bestowed upon that assembly were of the Spirit; the various ministries were under the direction of the Lord; and the diversities of operations were of God. Could anything be greater?

But we say again, this demands *faith*. And faith knows how to wait. It does not rush in to fill up a gap, or terminate a pause. No one is present to *officiate*. Silence may be as truly worship, and as truly edifying, as speech. To regard such a gathering simply as an

opportunity for taking part may degrade it below an ordinary social function (where we should not think of intruding), and rob the occasion of all power and benefit. The fact is, no one has any right to take part, *except under direction*. We have heard of a meeting, years ago, where silence reigned for more than half an hour at the close ; and the assembly broke up without a word being uttered ; but such power was felt, that every one seemed united in one act of silent worship, and each left with a sense that something remarkable had happened. It was not unlike the worship of heaven described by another in the lines :

“ Hark ! Ten thousand voices crying
 ‘ Lamb of God ! ’ with one accord ;
 Thousand thousand saints replying,
 Wakes, at once, the echoing chord !

“ Long with free and glad devotion,
 Universal praise prevails,
 Till, blest fruit of deep emotion,
Voice by voice in silence fails.”

III

Let us turn for a moment to see what occurred when our Lord constituted His Assembly on earth by taking His place in the midst. There can be no doubt, as we have seen, that this final act, as recorded in Luke xxiv., was in view all through, and fulfilled the purpose He had in going to Emmaus, and in His dealings with the two.

First of all, it was necessary to allay the fears of the disciples. *The lesson one learns from this is, that Christ would have us at home in His presence.* There is to be no feeling of awkwardness ; no distance ; no reserve ; only “ great delight.” But this cannot be until Christ has assured us of the effect of His work, and of His love. The heart that is least conscious of sin, is not at home with Christ, really, until these things are known. There is much in our ways and in ourselves calculated to produce misgiving. It was so in the case of these disciples. They had forsaken Him ; and one had denied Him.

Their hearts were full of unbelief—the most natural product of the human heart since sin came in. Christ's first word is PEACE. With that one word He silences all doubts and removes all distance. "Let there be no questions—no misgivings"—it seems to say: "all is settled. You have failed, you have not been all you ought to have been: but that belongs to the *past*—and the past is gone. It is not now what you have been, but what I am; and what I have done." Here we are on new ground entirely. A new history has begun. The old is dead and done with. PEACE! The Victor who has conquered all our foes speaks the word on the morning of His resurrection. Peace with God, peace with one another; peace as to everything: such is the atmosphere of God's Assembly.

But we can go deeper and further. Christ proceeds to say, "*Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself.*" Here were the very marks of His passion. They identified Him. He had come back to them. The marks told of the conflict—of all that had happened since last they had met. The One they had loved, however feebly; and followed, however falteringly, was restored to them. And with how much added to their knowledge of Him, those marks told. He had been through suffering and forsaking for them. And, moreover, in those very wounds they witnessed the fulfilment of their own Scriptures. What meaning they now saw in His death. Those hands and feet told them, as nothing else could, of His love. What mute, but powerful, witnesses they were, with a language all their own.

Do they not indicate to us the meaning of the Lord's Supper? Is it not then He shows us His hands and feet? When we are gathered in His presence it is to remember Him, and to be reminded, specially, of His love. The hands and feet reminded those early disciples of His death. The bread and wine do the same service for us; and His death is the greatest and most forcible expression of His love. The partaking of the bread and wine should mean just this: Christ showing us His

hands and feet. In other words, the emblems remind us of all He went through for us. We should come away from the memorial feast with an ever deeper sense of the love that passeth knowledge.

The Apostle John gives us an additional thought. He mentions the *side* in place of the feet. "He showed unto them His hands and His side." He is the one—the only one—who tells us of the soldier with a spear piercing the side. *The side is nearest the heart.* This seems to bring us closer than even hands and feet. The love that gave all—all for our cleansing and that removes all distance—so that love might find its rest and its satisfaction seems specially indicated here. Who but Christ can show us these things? Who but He can bring us unto such a banqueting house?

Hands, feet, and side! In this way Christ reveals Himself. They remind us of His coming to the world, and His journey through it; the work He has done for us; and the side tells us of the nearness that is ours, as a consequence.

"Close to Thy trusted side
In fellowship divine,
No cloud nor distance e'er shall hide
Glories that then shall shine."

Such is the meaning of the Supper.

IV

Let us now ask, What is the effect of knowing the Lord in the midst? First, gladness. "*Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.*" Their doubts and fears were gone. The clouds that oppressed them had lifted. They were assembled with doors shut, and in fear, but the presence of Christ changed everything. He was with them once more; and they could scarcely believe it for joy and wonder. Have we, to-day, nothing like this? Was it only once or twice, and only to those early disciples, that such seasons were granted? Does the Lord never manifest Himself in the midst of His own

now? Or is it only that He comes at the bidding of priests when they claim to convert the bread into His actual body? Is there *no* PRESENCE? Impoverished indeed is the Church if this is so. But we neither admit nor believe it. Rather do we believe that it is still true—" *I will declare Thy Name unto My brethren, in the MIDST of the Church will I sing praise unto Thee.*" And, "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, *there am I in the midst of them.*"

It is this very fact which is the source of strength and joy to His people to-day. In His presence we forget every care and fear, every want and woe. They cannot come where He is, any more than darkness can come where the sun shines. The past week is forgotten with its toil and trouble; the first morning of another week is commenced with Him, and we are renewed and braced for all that is to follow. But this is only realized when we see the Lord. If we choose to sing and speak about ourselves and our wilderness experiences, we do not, of course, rise above ourselves. Nor is it merely what He has done for us that is to occupy us, but HIMSELF. Only as we behold His glory are we transformed and uplifted. In contemplation of His varied glories—personal, moral, official—His glory as the Son in relationship with the Father; as Man in His relationship to us; and as Lord over the universe of God—we are made glad; and the joy of the Lord becomes our strength.

Another effect of His presence is, *we become conscious of our relationship to God.* "I will declare Thy Name unto My brethren." We meet as His brethren, and He declares to us the Father's Name. His brethren! Are we not content? How much we must be to Him! How much we ought to be to one another! All flows from our relationship to Him. Alas, that we should so often make this holy relation, for all practical purposes, a dead letter. And we treat *His* brethren as if they were not *our* brethren, and deny them the very fellowship He has established.

He regards us as His brethren and His friends. In

the happy and holy seclusion of His presence He leads us into the deep meaning of those words : " Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father and your Father ; and to My God, and your God." We are in His company—He leads us into His own relationship with the Father ; and we *worship*.

Again, *His presence is the place of instruction*. We learn more at such times, either in quiet meditation, or in the ministry which follows, than at any other. The recovery of truth, as the Lord's presence was realized, has been amazing. Nor need this surprise us, in the light of what we read in Luke xxiv. 45 : "*Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures.*" Who but He can make these holy writings—these oracles of God—familiar and intelligible to us ? They all concern Him, and He alone can interpret them. The more we come to know Him, the more light is cast upon the Word ; and it is when we seek His presence He reveals Himself. The reason that darkness began to settle down upon the Church, not very long after the Apostolic Age, was because the truth of Luke xxiv. and John xx. became less and less of a reality ; faith declined ; the Holy Spirit was quenched ; while human arrangements and activities became the substitutes for Divine power.

Further, in the Lord's presence we become qualified for service and receive directions as to it. "*As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.*" It is the Lord in the midst uttering these words. We go forth from Him in more senses than one. And the power for such service is indicated. " Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you, but tarry . . . until ye be endued with power from on high." This is Luke xxiv. In John xx. we read, " He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." The last Adam, risen from the dead, head of a new order, imparts to them life in the power of the Spirit. Not that there is any contradiction between the two passages. In the one case, He is the Son, giving of His own life ; in the other, Son

of Man about to receive the promise of the Father. The Holy Ghost was not officially and actually given until Pentecost.

Such then are the constitution, the privileges, the greatness of God's Assembly on earth. Christ in the midst and what flows from it: the revelation of Himself, in all the wealth of His love and of the Father in Him, the mission on which He sends His own, and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Those privileges belong to all believers. Would that all knew them. It is a question of faith. Those who have acted in faith in these last days, have found the promise true, "Where *two* or *three* are gathered together in My Name there am I." "In My Name" implies the recognition of the authority and supremacy of Christ—that He alone counts. It also implies that He is not actually and visibly present. Yet He is *really* so to those who, in faith and in the power of the Spirit, recognize the meaning and value of His Name and accord Him His place in the midst. All we need is *subjection* to Him and faith to act upon His word.

APPROVED !

"Salute Apelles, *approved* in Christ" (Rom. xvi. 10).

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God a workman that needeth not to be ashamed" (2 Tim. ii. 15).

"There must be also heresies (sects) among you that they which are *approved* may be made manifest" (1 Cor. xi. 19).

IN these three Scriptures, while all refer to the Christian, we have (1) the *individual* approved : (2) the *workman* approved : and (3) the *company* approved.

I

In regard to the first, the Revised Version has "Apelles the approved," which is supported by Alford. Another rendering is: "Greetings to Apelles, that veteran believer." And still another has it, "tested and tried." The real meaning is that Apelles had been put to the proof, and had not failed. He had been tried, as metal is tried, and had rung true. The word has to do with "the process of determining the proportion of pure metal." Apelles was not only in Christ, but approved in Christ.

Few things are more certain in this life than that, sooner or later, we are tested : tested as to whether we will hold to principle at all costs : as to whether we love truth more than reputation, and honour more than success. How many a one—many a Christian—has faltered when the real test came ! Some base metal was there—the fear of man, the dread of unpopularity, the craving for some present advantage—in one word, policy directed the life instead of principle. Self-interest instead of devotion to Christ led to the downfall. The ways in which we are tested are varied—but tested we

are sure enough. Happy the man who is approved. Our Christianity even is tested, as to whether it is the genuine article or counterfeit. But we are thinking, for the moment, of the way true Christians are tested, as to whether the commendation awarded to Apelles applies to us—approved in Christ? It is not a question of our position, but of our behaviour, and of our future reward. A father may say to his child, "I do not approve of your conduct." This does not touch the relationship existing between the two. That is not dependent upon conduct. Nevertheless such a rebuke, if deserved, is not to be regarded lightly. The believer's justification is not the fruit of his behaviour, yet if one could make this a plea or an excuse for bad conduct, it might prove that such a one had never experienced the saving grace of God at all.

There are perhaps few more pathetic passages in the Old Testament than those in which God upbraids His children for their conduct. He is in distress over them. Think of the opening words of Isaiah, where He calls heaven and earth to witness against them. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me" (i. 2). Or these other words, in Malachi i. 6, 10. "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise My Name." "I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of Hosts." They were not approved. No more grievous words could be uttered: "I have no pleasure in you."

Paul could say of some in his day:

"For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the Cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things."

And he was speaking here of professed believers. They were minding earthly things. He would not specify

this of the world. What else does the poor world mind but earthly things? How is it with ourselves? How are we walking? Would the Apostle, if he were on earth, describe us in this way, or would he be able to write of us as he did of Apelles: "Apelles approved in Christ"?

But, probably, with the vast majority the danger lies not in some glaring inconsistency but in neglect, coldness, inertness, indifference, or a more or less self-satisfied condition. There is a lack of diligence and zeal.

How solemn are the addresses to the Angels of the Seven Churches! (Rev. ii. and iii.). With two exceptions they do not seem approved. The exceptions are the Angels of the Churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia.

Let us think of several Scriptures which may help us to earn the commendation, Approved!

Romans xiv. 17-18. "For the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men." The Kingdom of God, to-day, is within the believer by the presence and power of the Holy Ghost. Where there is subjection to the Word of God and obedience to the Will of God there is the Kingdom of God. It consists of the rule of God in the heart. The righteousness referred to here is practical righteousness, that is, the subjection of our own will to God's will; and when this is the case, all that the Holy Spirit can be to us, is our enjoyed portion. Evil is subjugated and kept out, and peace and joy reign within. When this is the case, God approves, and men cannot but approve too.

Romans xvi. 17-19. The doctrines of Scripture must be received and held. And those who act contrary to such doctrines must be avoided. "Good words and fair speeches" are not enough. Alas! how easily people may first deceive themselves, and then others, by their volubility. "Good words and fair speeches!" and yet the hearts of the simple deceived thereby! Words are not enough, there must be obedience. In the next verse

the Apostle says of those at Rome : " Your *obedience* is come abroad unto all men." Obedience will secure Divine approval. If that is lacking there is no substitute. " To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

1 Corinthians vi. 12. " All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient (profitable) : all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." On the one hand, I must guard against legality and a morbid conscience, and, on the other, against indulging in what, after all, yields no return. It is not enough to ask, Is a thing right ? but one must also inquire, Is it profitable ? What return shall I get for my time and effort ? And then, there is still a further question. When I have settled that a thing is lawful in itself and even profitable, it is necessary often to challenge ourselves, as to whether it is obtaining any power over us. It would be easy to mention a dozen things that are right and profitable up to a certain point, but on all hands people are under the power of such things. They live for hardly anything else. If we are to be approved, we must see to it with regard to the ordinary things of life, which may be right and profitable in their place, that we are not under their power.

1 Corinthians x. 5-10. Here we have people for whom God had done great things, of whom it is said, " With many of them God was not well pleased." They were guilty of some glaring offences from which we may be free, but the Apostle mentions one failure which touches us all very closely—they murmured. They were discontented, dissatisfied, complaining of what God did provide, and always hankering after something He withheld, and they were not approved. We are quite sure Apelles was not like that. If we are to be approved we must " be content with such things as we have." " Giving thanks always for all things."

1 Corinthians xi. 28. The word the Apostle uses, when he exhorts us with regard to partaking of the Lord's Supper, to " examine " ourselves—the word " examine "

springs from the same root as that for "approved." We are to examine our lives—put them to the proof, test them, to ascertain if there is anything unworthy about them, any base metal. "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." Is there not a great neglect in these days of this self-examination?

Finally, Paul says in writing to the Philippians, chapter iv. 8-9: "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just," etc., "think on these things. Those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you."

It is not necessary that we should seek for some great thing to do in order to earn the commendation given to Apelles. We are not told what he had done, or anything about him. Simply that when weighed in the balance he was not found wanting. Let us seek to be habitually faithful in all the responsibilities and duties of ordinary life; and in the things of Christ and all that concerns Him let there be a single eye that seeks only His interests, without reference to how it will affect ourselves.

Shall we pause before going further, and ask ourselves honestly and fearlessly, and with searchings of heart, whether anything in our lives renders us undeserving of the commendation—approved? In these days it is comparatively easy to be regarded as a Christian. It is quite another thing to be an approved Christian. Surely we should all covet to be this.

II

Approved as a Workman

Paul writes to Timothy: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Some one has rendered the last part of the verse—"a labourer . . . who drives the ploughshare of truth in a straight furrow." Another translates "rightly dividing" as "cutting in a straight line." These renderings no doubt

contain the correct idea, an idea of great importance, for most, if not all, of the errors abroad to-day are the result of not giving heed to this injunction. There are workmen on every hand, who are not concerned about driving the ploughshare of truth in a straight furrow. When they come to a spot where the ploughshare of truth would cut right through some favourite doctrine or practice, something which they desire should be true, but isn't true, they leave their furrow and make a circuit. People who select a verse here and a verse there in order to bolster up some pre-conceived idea, without reference either to the context or to other parts of Scripture, are never able to arrive at the truth; they do not "drive the ploughshare of truth in a straight furrow." Their aim is to make out a case. To be approved of God, the workman must remember both the ploughshare and the furrow, and let each fulfil its appointed part. Those who drop the ploughshare make no further progress, while those who forsake the furrow fall into error, and wander away.

Certain injunctions given to Timothy in an earlier epistle must receive earnest attention, if we are to be approved as a workman. We refer to 1 Timothy iv. 12-16. And the first concern of the workman must be his own life. "Be thou an example." That servants of the Lord, from one point of view, are only men after all, and sometimes but frail men, is true. God has not chosen unfallen angels to be ministers of the Word, but has selected those who are very often conscious of infirmity and failure. Nevertheless, if there is any glaring inconsistency in the one who speaks for God and exhorts his fellow believers, his words will fall unheeded and fail in their object. If the message has not first affected his own life, he cannot hope that it will affect the hearts and lives of his hearers. How easy it is to expound a chapter and unfold high and heavenly truth! how hard to be an "example"! But surely no servant will be approved if there is failure here.

Next, the Apostle exhorts Timothy also to "give

attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." Reading is absolutely necessary, or we shall become dry and monotonous, grinding out the same message with little variety and no unction. Nor must either exhortation or doctrine be neglected. It is easily possible to instruct people in doctrine without producing any exercise of soul as to how far the doctrine bears upon the life or finds its answer in the life. Conscience will slumber where there is lack of exhortation. The servant, if he is to be approved, must give attention to both exhortation and doctrine. To confine ourselves to exhortation is like expecting a horse to work we have forgotten to feed: while to preach doctrine only is like keeping the horse always at the crib. He will be useless, if not a positive danger.

Further, the servant must not neglect his gift. Like every other gift it will grow by exercise. On a subsequent occasion Paul exhorts Timothy in these words—"Stir up the gift of God that is in thee." While the gift is of Divine origin, the servant is put in trust with it, and apart from prayer and exercise the gift will remain undeveloped. Few things are more interesting and impressive than to see a servant of the Lord growing in true power and effectiveness.

Now we come to another most important matter. "Meditate upon these things," he says, "give thyself wholly to them." There is far too little meditation, and in these busy days, with so much rush and activity, probably less than ever. Yet nothing can supply the lack of meditation, for in some respects it is more important than reading. If truth comes only from the head, which will be the case if we confine ourselves to reading, it will not go much further than the head; only as by meditation the message sinks down into our very being and becomes part of ourselves can it produce much effect upon our hearers. Our own hearts must glow under the power of the truth before we can influence others. The freshness of our ministry will largely depend upon the amount of our meditation. Moreover, if we are to be

approved as workmen the work must claim the utmost we can give to it. "Give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all." The Apostle does not say "their profiting" but "*thy* profiting." Do our audiences see that we are growing, that the truth we proclaim is taking a deeper hold upon our own souls, so that we continually minister the Word with more depth and fervour and with greater conviction? Yes, "*thy* profiting," is in order to "*their*" profiting. If our profiting does not appear, it is unprofitable for them and dangerous for us. That workman is already in a parlous state, if the truth he ministers is not ever making a profounder impression upon himself. Only as this is so, can we hope to be "approved."

And now we come to the closing exhortation of the passage we are considering.

"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine, continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee."

How we need to exercise care as to both these matters! There are some who seem to take heed to themselves, but to be careless about doctrine; while others, who may be irreproachable as to doctrine and whose teaching is without a flaw, fail in the other direction. "Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine."

We commonly preach to save others, but are we saving ourselves? It is part of our creed perhaps that only a saved person should attempt to speak to others. But it is possible to put a very limited meaning upon "being saved." The Apostle was not suggesting that Timothy had no faith. What he meant was that a man, though justified before God, has yet in a very real sense to save himself. This is necessary, for in his own salvation may lie the salvation of others. Few need the exhortation, "Take heed unto *thyself*," *Save thyself*, like the servant of Christ. His temptations are peculiar, his position exposing him to dangers from which others less prominent escape. Solemn consideration! Few are so tempted

to neglect their own souls. Tempted to become nothing more than caterers for other people—preparing food of which they never partake themselves. No process is more deadening than to preach sermons to others which have never been addressed to our own souls. Here is where meditation will be of the greatest help to us.

But if the servant of the Lord is to be approved, he must remember another admonition given to Timothy. "That thou mayest know," says the Apostle, "how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." That is, in all his ministry, whether it be to the saved or unsaved, he must have in mind what God has established on earth as a witness to Himself—His House, composed of those already saved, and who are a witness before men of His saving power. This house is where God's presence is known, and it is only as the order of that house is duly observed, and all that is due to Him Who dwells there is taken account of, that we can serve with the fullest acceptance. The aim of the servant must be to lead souls to the source from which the living water flows; and to discover the purpose for which they have been saved, viz., to be "built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood." The all-important fact needs to be borne in mind, that on the day of Pentecost this house was formed, by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the company then gathered, before a single Gospel sermon was preached, and all preaching was to be with a view of further additions to this wonderful structure—that souls might come to Christ as the Living Stone and be built up a spiritual house, God's dwelling place.

One further thought flows from this aspect of the subject. Disorder and confusion have now come into the House of God itself, and the servant will not be approved unless he knows how to behave himself with regard to this. How few are concerned about the disorder in God's house! The majority disregard it and act as if everything were in order. But it is in view of

this condition of things the servant is exhorted to "shun," "depart from," "purge himself," "flee from," all that is contrary to Scripture. Only thus can he be "approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, driving the ploughshare of truth in a straight furrow." To mix with everything that is going on is not to be "sanctified and meet for the Master's use and prepared unto every good work."

If we are to be approved as workmen, we must beware of thinking only or even mainly of which path appears to us to be the one of greatest usefulness. Many and many a one has been turned aside here. At last it will be found that those who have drawn the greatest crowds have not always done the greatest good. Nor is winning the applause of men always the same thing as earning the approval of God.

To be approved then, as a workman, we must, first, give attention to all that is contained in the Apostle's exhortation to Timothy (1 Tim. iv.). Second, save ourselves by bringing our own lives under the power and influence of the Word. Third, we must be sanctified, that is, separate from evil doctrine and practice. And, lastly, we must not forget to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim. ii. 15): in other words, "Drive the ploughshare of truth in a straight furrow."

III

Only a few words remain to be said on the third aspect of our subject—the approved company.

"For there must be also heresies (sects) among you that they which are approved may be made manifest among you."

The vast majority of Christians, probably, have never asked themselves if the Lord approves of their Church association. They are where they are either from personal predilection, or from force of circumstances, or because their parents were there before them. They cannot give any reason from Scripture for their position. There are many who think that such matters are left

to their own choice, and that the Bible has little or nothing to say upon the point. "The ideal Church has never yet been discovered," said a preacher recently. As if God had established a Church in this world, and said nothing as to its character or how it was to be conducted. Would God leave His work in such an unfinished and imperfect condition? Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth than to speak as if the Church were something discovered by man and was to be carried on by man according to his own wisdom and taste, as if God had never spoken on the subject! The tremendous fact is, though to-day it is almost entirely lost sight of, the Holy Spirit is present as the Organizer of the Church and the Power by which its worship and ministry and various operations are carried on.

It is simply a matter of history that the Church drifted into all sorts of disorder very soon after the apostolic era had closed. Clericalism soon manifested itself; the priesthood became a caste, and that of all believers was denied. Formal services took the place of the free action of the Spirit of God. A whole system came into being which had no basis in the Scriptures.

This continued for century after century with ever-deepening darkness and depravity until the Reformation in the sixteenth century cleared the air. But this was only a partial recovery. As we have elsewhere intimated, a hundred years ago God granted a further revival. Many were led back to the Scriptures, and to a realization of what was involved in the Holy Spirit's presence, and, as a result, the true idea of the Church was recovered. There was an escape from Babylon, and this later revival had many of the features of the return under Ezra, and the revival which took place at that time, as we have shown in a previous article.

But again there has been failure. And the question for us to-day is, How are we to walk in regard to our Church association so as to be approved? Certainly not

by going back to Babylon or, in other words, to the confusion of Christendom. We see some doing this, disappointed and perplexed, it may be, while others there are who seem to think that God has some new path for His people to-day. Here, again, the Apostle's statement applies: "For there must be also sects among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." Again we must turn to the same Scripture which has already engaged our attention. If 2 Timothy ii. tells us the kind of workman who is approved, it tells us with equal clearness the kind of company which is approved. And there we read: "Let everyone that nameth the Name of Lord (this is the correct rendering) depart from iniquity" (v. 19). Separation is an essential feature, as it is the unmistakable mark, of the approved company. And it is of all-importance to remember that the "iniquity" spoken of is not merely in relation to the world but to the Church. The iniquity we have to depart from is the iniquity of Christendom. Christendom has deeply erred in departing from the Word of the living God. We cannot leave Christendom, but we need not add to its confusion, or follow its ways.

In verse 22 we have the positive characteristics of the company which God approves. Having purged ourselves from doctrinal and moral evil we are to "follow righteousness, faith, love, peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

Three things are to be noticed here. First, that although what is called "ecclesiastical" separation is clearly contemplated in this chapter—that is to say, our Church life is involved, and not merely our individual life—yet the features of this approved company are moral features. This is of the highest importance. For mere ecclesiastical separation may leave us dry and cold. It is to be noticed that righteousness comes first. Righteousness is rendering to all their dues—both God and man. Righteousness is rightness—straightness: the very opposite of iniquity, spoken of in verse 19. Then

follow faith, love, peace. Happy indeed the company characterized by these qualities.

Second, it is to be noticed that they "call on the Lord." Some one has observed that "there is nothing so salutary at the close of a dispensation, as a hearty return to the principles and spirit of its inauguration." This is exactly what we have here. If we turn back to the first epistle to the Corinthians—the first epistle ever written dealing with Church order—and to chapter i. verse 2, we read: "With all that in every place call upon the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." That was the practice at the beginning: it is to be the practice now. It was the bond then: it is the bond still. We acknowledge Christ as Lord and we own His Authority. "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."

Third, there are certain words added in the epistle to Timothy which we do not find in Corinthians. Things were normal in the one case, they are abnormal in the other. And so we have these additional words, "Out of a pure heart." "Call on the Lord out of a pure heart." A heart that has but one aim and one object—the glory of Christ.

How far removed is all this from mere ecclesiasticism! How foreign to anything like party spirit! Nothing in the nature of a *party* can ever meet with the approval of God. No, not even if it is a party which stands for some particular truth. A party is formed of a collection of people whose purpose is to maintain an idea, or a rite, or a doctrine, or a principle. In other words, it has some badge, or name, or rallying cry. And however true the idea, or rite, or doctrine, or principle may be in itself, and however right in its place, if this is what draws them together, and if this is what separates them from others, it is a party, and nothing better, and no party, we repeat, can be approved. For a party thinks of itself and not of the Church of God. Its outlook and consequently its interests and affections are limited.

Those who follow righteousness, faith, love, peace

are not a party. Such can only be drawn together by spiritual affinity. You cannot tabulate them or arrange them, or confine them within, or certify them by, a list of meetings. You cannot call them by any name.

Each individual is called to follow these things for himself, but he seeks others of a like mind. They flow together. What a company that will be where righteousness, faith, love, peace, predominate !

RIGHTEOUSNESS—To depart from iniquity—ecclesiastical, doctrinal and moral.

FAITH—Light from God as to His Will for His people in the present dispensation—"the dispensation which is in faith" ; as 1 Timothy i. 4 should read. (See Alford.) The soul is in the enjoyment of the revelation God has given.

LOVE—That which removes all coldness and deadness. An atmosphere is produced in which all that is spiritual can expand, and each is led to seek the good of all.

PEACE—Disturbance and strife and bitterness are unknown. The God of Love and peace is with them (2 Cor. xiii. 11). If evil arises there will be power to put it out.

Will not such a company be approved?

THE REMNANT

READ ISAIAH vi. 13; vii., viii.

"But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return." "Shear-Jashub"—"The Remnant shall return" (Isa. vi. 13; vii. 3).

SOMEONE has said, "The remnant is a bit of the original." It is not the original, for God never restores in its entirety what has failed, but it has the characteristics of the original. The remnant is always marked by a *return to first principles*. Twice in the passages quoted above, we have this characteristic presented, viz., at the close of chapter vi. and the opening of chapter vii. What could be more significant than the meaning of the name of the prophet's son: "The remnant shall return"? It indicates the subject of these two chapters, Isaiah vii. and viii.; we shall find in them a description of the Remnant—their calling and characteristics. And as the times in which we live correspond in character with this particular phase of Israel's history (though not always possessing the same features), they have much to teach us.

A word as to the historical setting of the chapters. Syria had become confederate with Ephraim, and with united forces they were marching on Jerusalem, for the express purpose of deposing the House of David, and setting a usurper upon the throne. What a condition is thus revealed! Division amongst God's people; and, even worse than that, one section is seen in alliance with the world: and such an unhal-
lowed alliance is consummated for the express purpose of overturning what God had established, and setting

up a human order in its place. A more appalling state of things or anything more degraded or contrary to God's will could hardly be imagined. No wonder it is recorded of David's house—"And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind."

But it is always under such circumstances a remnant comes to light, and the resources of God are known.

Things are not altogether different to-day. The Church is in alliance with the world, and the world with the Church. And, as a consequence, again there is opposition to God's purpose, and really to God's people. The Divine order is set aside. It is not a question of whether some of the true children of God may not be found within such a confederacy, probably true Israelites could have been found amongst the ten tribes, but this does not alter the truth of what is here stated. A confederacy exists to-day, which in nature, though not in form, is parallel to that which we are contemplating in Isaiah's day; and such a confederacy is as much opposed to Christ's interests now as then. For in all these matters Christ is concerned, for He is the object of the enemy's attack, whether it be the House of David of old or the Church to-day, for Satan is the instigator of all such rebellion. Would that we realized more than we do that the honour and glory of the Christ of God is always involved in these matters.

The chapters under consideration, then, and the truth they contain are of vital importance to ourselves. Are we in danger of being drawn into some confederacy, or do we accept the position of a remnant?

It is not without a purpose that in view of the confederacy brought before us in this chapter, our attention is directed to the words uttered by the Lord to the prophet:

"Then said the Lord unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou, and Shear-Jashub thy son."

Why was Isaiah to be accompanied by his son, except to

occupy us with the meaning of his name—"the remnant shall return"—and to indicate that just as Shear-Jashub was Isaiah's offspring, so there was in existence a holy seed—the remnant. As we read at the close of chapter vi., "Yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return . . . so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof." "The holy seed!" Could anything be of greater interest to us! Even to this present day the Jews have a saying that "Salvation is always found in the remnant." And what does Paul affirm in Romans xi. 5, but the same truth! "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace." Yes, to-day, as always, there is an elect remnant, not always discernible to man, but known to God. The Church as man sees it, and as man has made it, may be corrupt, but there is the "holy seed," and while it remains it preserves the Church from total apostasy and corruption.

As already indicated, one outstanding mark of the remnant is "they shall return." We see this in the return from Babylon in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. There was not only a return from Babylon, but a return to the beginning. The sacrifices were offered, the Temple was rebuilt, and God's Spirit remained among them. They separated from unholy alliances, and the feast of Tabernacles was kept in a way unknown since the days of Joshua. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." This was what characterized remnant times. While we read, "they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo."

Another characteristic is: God grants His presence in a special way to the remnant. And here it is important to notice the sign given to Ahaz. Before doing so let us consider for a moment whether Ahaz was right in refusing to ask for a sign when invited to do so. There seems every reason for supposing he was wrong. Yet we would not place him on a level with the Pharisees and Sadducees who tempted Christ,

desiring that He would show them a sign from heaven, and are rebuked for so doing. The natural man can never understand the things of God. He calls it tempting the Lord, when told he may ask, but when the request amounts to a temptation—when to ask is to become “wicked and adulterous”—he will persist in soliciting an answer. In the latter case, no sign is given. In the former, a sign is granted. Perhaps it would be unfair to place the two occurrences on the same level. God can and does bear with ignorance, when He will not bear with presumption.

And so the Lord grants a sign, and who can measure the significance of it? “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” In Matthew i., where the fulfilment is recorded, we are told the meaning of this Name—“God with us.” Surely, when the enemy comes in like a flood the Spirit of the Lord does lift up a standard against him. The presence of God Himself with the remnant is the sign given at a moment when all the forces of the enemy were arrayed against the truth. The Name Immanuel becomes the resource of the Remnant and stands as a bulwark against the combined attack of Syria and Ephraim. The promise had been given to David that of his seed Christ should be raised up to sit upon his throne, and here is a confederacy between the apostate tribes of Israel and a world power to defeat the very purpose of God in an attempt to overthrow David’s throne altogether. It is at such a moment God intervenes. And how does He do it? He gives a fuller revelation of Himself. The Name Immanuel was to disclose to the House of David the wondrous secret that God was with them; and consequently the confederacy arrayed against them could not prosper.

“God with us.” It is repeated in chapter viii. 10, where faith, relying as it were on the divinely given sign, declares that all confederacies and counsels that are not of God shall come to nought—“for,” it is added, “God is with us.” That is everything. It is always

the resource of the remnant. What can we lack if God is with us? And if He is not, what substitute is there? Was not this the very message to that feeble number which returned from Babylon? There was nothing as far as outward things were concerned to inspire either courage or hope; indeed the very Temple they were commissioned to build seemed as nothing compared with the edifice Solomon had reared, yet the word is "Be strong . . . and work, *for I am with you*, saith the Lord of hosts." Again it is Immanuel. Does not this thought lend a new significance to Matthew xviii. 20: "Where two or three are gathered together"? Why two or three? except the Lord has a remnant in view, although the Church was not then established. And what is the promise? "There am I." Two or three and Himself! Is not this enough, though everything that marks Christendom of a spectacular and imposing nature be absent? And is it not important to note that in our own day a remnant have come back to this and have found their resource here? And again, we find the same thought in Hebrews ii., indeed it is a quotation from Isaiah viii., "Behold I, and the children which God hath given Me" (Isa. viii. 18; Heb. ii. 13). To be associated with Christ, apart from all human confederacies and associations, this is the calling and character of the remnant. Their compensation is the enjoyment of His presence. Never, perhaps, was any day more marked by confederacies than ours. Happy indeed for any who have discovered the preciousness of Christ, and walking apart from them all, find their satisfaction in Him.

This brings us to our third point. It is said of Immanuel, "Butter and honey shall He eat, that He may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good" (v. 15). Then again in verse 22 we read: "For butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the land." Butter and honey in both cases. The food of Immanuel becomes the food of the remnant. Amidst circumstances altogether uncongenial, when all that nature

craves and counts upon disappears, those who are in the enjoyment of God's presence can thrive : God Himself is their resource.

How true this was of Christ ! There was nothing in the scene through which He passed which could afford Him refreshment or minister to Him in any way. He was a root out of a dry ground. All was dry and barren around Him, but God was His resource and butter and honey was His portion. He found refreshment, too, in the remnant of His day—the excellent in whom was all His delight. Here and there He discerned faith. He could exclaim, "I have not found so great faith" : and again, "O woman, great is thy faith." Yes, butter and honey was His portion—"the fat and the sweet." In daily communion with God, and in dependence upon Him He found sustenance. In the path of God's appointment He ever found "butter and honey." "My meat," He said, "is to do the will of Him that sent Me and to finish His work." He knew how "to refuse the evil, and choose the good."

The same must be characteristic of us. The fat (butter), and the sweet (honey), are the portion of the remnant. The company which returned to the land in Ezra and Nehemiah's day found this to be their portion, in spite of their feebleness. The people wept, we are told, as the book of the law was read and understood and as they thought of all that had happened. But the message comes, "Mourn not nor weep. . . . Go your way, eat the fat and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared . . . for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. viii. 10). They kept the feast of Tabernacles, symbolical of all the goodness and prosperity that God will yet procure to them ; "And," we are told, "there was very great gladness." God was with them, and the fewness of their numbers, and the lack of all that could give them importance externally, did not matter.

The counterpart of all this appears in the passage we are considering. Could a more dismal and depress-

ing picture be conceived than that which verses 17-20 of chapter vii. present? The enemies of Israel would make everything desolate. The shaving with a razor tells us how little nourishment would be left—the fields would be bare. Yet, “in that day,” we are told: the day when everything appeared as if it had been shaved clean until nothing remained: “in that day a man shall nourish a young cow and two sheep; and it shall come to pass, for the abundance of milk that they shall give he shall eat butter: for butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the land.”

How true it is, “there is no want to them that fear Him.” “A young cow and two sheep” are not much, and yet it goes on to speak of “the abundance of milk.” There will always be abundance for those whose only desire is to do God’s will, and whose only aim is His glory. God assured them that “butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the land.” It is only necessary to be “in the land”—the land that God cares for (Deut. xi. 12). The reason why so many of God’s people are starved and empty and dissatisfied is because they are looking anywhere but to Him. They listen to doctrines which are but the commandments of men, and seek satisfaction in what appeals to the senses. They know little of butter and honey—the fat and the sweet—and consequently they do not know how to refuse the evil and choose the good. They dwell in a land of briars and thorns. But the promise to the remnant—to those who seek to do God’s will—is, “on all hills that shall be digged with the mattock, there shall not come thither the fear of briars and thorns; but it shall be for the sending forth of oxen, and for the treading of lesser cattle” (vii. 24-5). “Digged with the mattock.” We have only to dig into God’s Word to find the butter and the honey. No briars and thorns are found there. That land is full of pasture. It can sustain oxen and lesser cattle. They who think little of that word and despise it to the extent of criticizing it, prove their folly, for they

know little of "the abundance of milk." If only we refuse the evil and choose the good, butter and honey will be our portion, and our inheritance will be the pasture where briars and thorns are unknown. In the midst of general defection and unfaithfulness, and when, as the result of that there is no pasture and the fields yield no meat, how great the joy and the privilege of those who know the meaning of Immanuel, and that their life is hid with Christ in God. Butter and honey shall they eat, that they may know how to refuse the evil and choose the good.

There can be no more solemn occasion or one fraught with consequences more dire than when the professing people of God are confederate with the world; but, on the other hand, where there is separation and obedience the greatest blessing may be realized, as we have seen.

One reason which gives these chapters and the subject we are considering special importance in these days is that on every hand confederacy is spoken of. An alliance between Jews and Christians has been advocated in the public press, not to speak of one universal Church, to include every abomination under the sun. But it will come to nought, even as the confederacy between Syria and Ephraim did. "Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word and it shall not stand; for God is with us" (chap. viii. 10). God is with the remnant of His people who refuse the evil and choose the good. But this involves separation. And for this many are not prepared, for it costs something. But what saith the Lord?

"For the Lord spake thus to me, with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying, Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid" (vv. 11-12).

Invariably the fear of some foe or some supposed danger drives men into a confederacy, but the word for us is,

"Sanctify the Lord of hosts Himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread." And the consequence of that will be, "He shall be for a Sanctuary."

The fact is, we stand to-day very much where our Lord Himself stood in His day. A most remarkable forecast of which is presented in the closing verses of chapter viii. Our Lord was confronted by confederacies of various kinds, even Pharisees and Sadducees combined against Him! and, at the last, all culminated in that confederacy, described in Acts iv. 2, which was nothing short of complete apostasy, "For of a truth against Thy holy child (servant) Jesus, Whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together." Where did our Lord find His resource? "And I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for Him." Nor did He look in vain: He can say, "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given Me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth in Mount Zion." To those who refused Him He was "for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the Houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem." But there was a remnant: "Bind up the testimony, seal the law among My disciples." That is, there was to be no open manifestation of Divine power overwhelming Christ's enemies and establishing His kingdom in a public way on earth. The testimony was to be bound up. Israel's rejection is foretold in verses 14, 15, and during that period the fulfilment of prophecy is in abeyance. "Bind up the testimony, seal the law among My disciples." God hides His face from those who depart from His word. Christ identifies Himself with the Remnant.

God's method is to give in the way of testimony what He afterwards intends to set forth in manifestation. The effort of Satan always is to neutralize that testimony

or destroy its character altogether, by seducing God's people from the path of separation and leading them to form an unholy alliance. For that testimony is committed to those who take the place of disciples, and is known only to them. "*Bind up the testimony, seal the law among My disciples.*" And again, "To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (v. 20). The mark of the Remnant is that they have light, and they have light because they have returned to the testimony. And what is equally true, the more that testimony is understood and acted upon the more light is given and the more light is enjoyed. The word for the Remnant is, "To the law and to the testimony." Here is the preventive of every false alliance and the correction of every wrong inclination.

The Apostle Paul sets forth that testimony in three remarkable statements, in his first epistle to Timothy. The first occurs in chapter i. 15: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Here we have the mission of Christ—the eternal Son—into this world, set forth in these few pregnant words. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. The full extent of the mercy of the King eternal has been shown forth. The second is found in chapter ii. 4-6: "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus. Who gave Himself a ransom for all, a testimony (margin) in due time." Here we have the eternal truth as between God and men set forth. We have not to search for the truth, as men speak, it is already declared. There is but one God, a God Who can only be known through one Mediator, Christ, and the only ground of relationship with Him is by the ransom paid by Christ with His blood. And this is declared to be the testimony. How far men have departed from it, and are departing from it, is very well known. But if we

are faithful we shall recognize that there is no other truth and no other testimony. And this testimony finds its completion in a final statement in chapter iii. 16:

"And without controversy great is the mystery of Godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."

Here we have the ark of the testimony. The truth as to Christ's Person—the foundation, centre, and corner-stone of everything: The Ark and the Mercy Seat and the glory which crowned it are all here. Indeed the Tabernacle and its vessels, regarded from the widest point of view, seem to come into view in connection with the statements just quoted.

What meets us first, as in the Court of the Tabernacle, is the ALTAR.

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

Next, passing inward, the table of shewbread and the candlestick was reached. Speaking of Mediatorship and testimony. The Spirit's testimony to Christ.

Finally the Ark. God manifest in flesh.

"Justified in the Spirit." The Shittim wood and the gold. Christ—incorruptible and Divine.

"Seen of angels." The Cherubim on either end, with their faces one toward another toward the Mercy Seat.

"Preached unto the Gentiles." The Mercy Seat, "Whom God hath set forth a Mercy Seat, in His blood through faith."

"Believed on in the world." The boards of the Tabernacle, resting on silver sockets and covered with gold. Our place before God.

"Received up into glory." "For the glory of the Lord had filled the House of God." "Crowned with glory and honour." "Glorified together."

The testimony God has given is ever of paramount importance to the Remnant and cherished by them. And, if true to their calling, they will stand for it at all costs.

Another truth of remarkable significance comes before us in these chapters. The names of three sons are mentioned, and a sign is connected with each. First, we have Shear-Jashub, the meaning of which is, "The Remnant shall return." Next, Immanuel, "God with us." Thirdly, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, which means "In making speed to the spoil he hasteneth the prey." This last evidently possesses a character which does not belong to the other two. It is a sign given as a warning to an unfaithful and apostate people. This accounts for the otherwise extraordinary and, what might be considered, repulsive circumstances of his birth. But it represents the actual condition of God's people. They were guilty of an unnatural alliance and of fornication. The ten tribes were confederate with Syria. The son born of an unnatural alliance is intended to bring this home to them. It was also a prognostication of the disaster which awaited both Syria and God's unfaithful people. And so we read, "Before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and My mother, the riches of Damascus (Syria) and the spoil of Samaria (Israel) shall be taken away before the King of Assyria." Overwhelming judgment falls upon an apostate people. "He shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel."

It is very solemn to remember that a similar state of things will exist in Christendom, with similar results. In Revelation xvii. we see an apostate Church confederate with the world-power of the Beast. John sees a woman sit upon a scarlet-coloured beast. The world and the Church unite; and they unite against Christ and the Remnant of that day. But what is the end? "The ten horns which thou sawest and the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire." The tendency to-day is for all the various sects and systems to unite, and one day this unnatural alliance between the Church and the world will be

consummated. In the light of this, how important to remember the other names and what they signify. First, Shear-Jashub, "the remnant shall return": they will have nothing to do with confederacies, but return to the beginning and to God's testimony, and as a consequence they know the meaning of the second name, Immanuel = God with us.

Do we realize the solemnity of our position? The Church has departed from Christ. Not only has it left its first love, but it has become lukewarm—which means indifference to Christ—and at the last He is seen outside: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." That is descriptive of our day. Where are we? Is Christ everything to us? Or are we like God's people of old of whom He had to say: "Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly" (Isa. viii. 6). Christ had no attraction for them. Many to-day are the same. They want stir and bustle and excitement. The waters that go softly are not to their taste. But the word to the Remnant is: "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." And are we not taught to pray for those in authority that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in "all godliness and honesty"? How little quietness is prized in these days! "The waters of Shiloah that go softly" are not appreciated.

At the close of chapter viii. we see the end of all those who forsake God and seek human alliances instead. They have recourse to spiritism. "And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards, that peep and that mutter; should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead?" This is becoming more and more the character of things to-day. Confederacies on the one hand, and turning to the dead on behalf of the living, on the other. In contrast with this the word to the Remnant is: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (v. 20). What sure

and safe direction ! What a resource is the Word of God !

The last verse of chapter viii. describes the end of man's career. No doubt it is a picture of the last days, and describes the end of the apostate nation of Israel under Antichrist. In these two chapters we have, on the one side, human confederacies and to what they lead, and on the other, the Remnant. And, as we have tried to show, in this connection we may find much instruction in the present day. Whatever the apostasy, God ever preserves a Remnant. They are characterized, as we have seen, by a return to the original character of the dispensation. They do not look for a restoration of all that marked the beginning, for theirs is "a day of small things." The Word to them is "I am with you, saith the Lord"—Immanuel = God with us. God's Spirit remains among them and "butter and honey" is their portion. They refuse the confederacies around, and know how to "refuse the evil and choose the good." But "the waters of Shiloah that go softly"; in other words, the company of Christ is what they seek: "Behold I and the children which God hath given Me." There is light in them, because they have respect unto the law and to the testimony.

May God lead us into the enjoyment of such experiences in the closing days of this dispensation.