



Bible
Notes
and
Expositions

WILLIAM RODGERS

About the Author:

William Rodgers was born in the year 1879 and was saved in early life. Later, he was baptized and received into fellowship in the Omagh Assembly, N. Ireland, with which he was associated until his Homecall on 2nd March, 1951.

Being a boy of unusual intelligence, his education in early life proved very successful. He gained certificates and scholarships in many subjects and, when at College, was a most diligent student of the Hebrew and Greek languages. This resulted in him being recognised in later years as a master of the Greek New Testament.

Mr. Rodgers gave himself wholeheartedly to the study of the Word of God, spending hours upon hours of his life meditating therein and in this way developing a remarkable understanding of the Scriptures for which he became renowned. His voice was often heard at conferences in Ulster and in parts of Great Britain. He also visited the U.S.A. and Canada.

For a number of years, many benefitted from his Questions and Answers in the Believers Magazine, for which he and the late Mr. William Hoste, B.A. were jointly responsible. A selection of these was later compiled in BIBLE PROBLEMS AND ANSWERS which is also published by John Ritchie Ltd.

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Foreword

Lord's Day, the 4th March, 1951, is a day that many in Northern Ireland will never forget. On that day we laid to rest our highly esteemed and beloved brother, Mr. William Rodgers of Omagh, sorrowing most of all that we should never again hear his voice in ministry of the Word.

Now with gladness, through the exercise of responsible brethren, we have reprinted in one volume the treasure of his writings in Old and New Testament Scripture.

Mr. Rodgers had a good knowledge of the original languages. This, coupled with years of diligent study, as well as a long experience in preaching and teaching, enabled him to speak with authority of difficult passages of Holy Writ.

It is, therefore, with joy and confidence that we highly commend this volume of Bible Notes and Expositions, and would encourage all, especially the young, to make good use of it.

Those of us who have had the privilege of hearing our beloved brother minister the Word at Conferences, and conduct Bible Readings, acknowledge how deeply we are indebted to him.

His voice, silent now for many years, is heard again, and very many of the Lord's people at home and abroad will welcome the privilege of having, in permanent form, the teaching of one who was of such help to the Church of God.

THOMAS McKELVEY

Preface

The present volume is a compilation of Bible notes and expositions written by the late Mr. William Rodgers of Omagh, Northern Ireland. He was undoubtedly one of the most sane and balanced teachers given to the Church by the risen Lord in the early part of this century. His oral and written ministry has been a great blessing to saints of God in many parts of the world.

Some of these articles have appeared in periodicals over the past years, such as "Notes on some Psalms" in the Believer's magazine, "Notes on the Epistle to the Hebrews" in Words in Season, and "Notes on Peter's Epistles" in Truth and Tidings.

The brethren responsible for the publication of this book desire to express their sincere thanks to the editors of these magazines for permission to reprint these writings.

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Notes on Some Kings of Israel and Judah

CHAPTER I

THE GREAT SCHISM

The cleavage amongst God's people, which in the reign of Rehoboam broke out in an open rupture that was never afterwards healed, is a subject worthy of careful study ; not only on account of important lessons it has for the saints of God today, but also because, both as to its origin, and as to its subsequent development, much will be missed entirely by the reader who carelessly skims over the story. Such a one must fail to profit by the light thrown on the narrative, sometimes by slight hints given where least expected, and sometimes by a connection between statements situated far apart in the text.

The breach, which is described in 1 Kings 12 and 2 Chronicles 10, may be considered from at least three different points of view, each of which has an importance of its own. Outwardly, it was of course a rebellion on the part of ten of the tribes from the rule of the house of David ; and like those other less successful rebellions, in the reigns of Joash (2 Chron. 22 : 10 ; 23 : 3), and of Ahaz (Isa. 7 : 6, 13-16 ; 8 : 6), it was doubtless prompted by Satan for the destruction, if possible, of the line through which it had been prophesied that "the Seed" should come (see Psa. 89 : 3, 4, etc.).

But another aspect of the matter manifested itself very quickly, which was that, in addition to rebellion against the house of David, there was apostasy from God and from His law. The ease with which Jeroboam won over the great majority of the people to his new religion of the Calves showed that they were already away in heart from the Lord, as did also the fact that never afterwards was there any recovery on a national scale from this form of idolatry.

Again, the sudden and widespread nature of the rebellion on the part of certain tribes, while others remained unaffected by it, suggests that there was a division of mind existent already among them, a division which had reared its ugly head on previous occasions (Josh. 17 : 14 ; Judges 8 : 1 ; 9 : 2 ; 12 : 1 ; 2 Sam. 2 : 8, 9 ; 20 : 1), but which was now to cleave the nation permanently in twain.

As we endeavour to trace both the causes and the consequences of this sad affair, we need to remind ourselves that we are undertaking what is not easy of accomplishment. For of this, and of perhaps every other sin, it may be said that there are two things hard to discern. One is where they begin, and the other where they and their effects end. When we have ourselves sinned, we usually, in our shallow way of thinking, go back to a point of which we say it began where I was tempted and fell. And it may be that we move onward in our thoughts to another point and say, I confessed it to the Lord and was forgiven – that was the end of it. But does sin only

begin when it manifests itself in a certain action which we have to call by that name ; and is it really done with, when we confess it and get the Lord's forgiveness ?

Take, for example, the case of David's adultery, perhaps the most outstanding instance in the Scriptures of a saint falling into sin. When did it begin ? Was it when he "sent messengers and took" (Bathsheba) (2 Sam. 11 : 4); or was it on that "evening" (v. 2) when, instead of walking within his house with a perfect heart, and setting no wicked thing before his eyes, as he had promised to do (Psa. 101 : 2, 3), he walked upon its roof and first saw her ? Was it not, indeed, already existent in the slothfulness implied in the statement that he "arose from off his bed" at that late hour of the day ; or even in the earlier manifestation of this, suggested by the words, "At the time when kings go forth to battle . . . David tarried still at Jerusalem" (v. 1) ?

And again, where shall we place the end of the sin ? Slothfulness led to adultery, and adultery to Uriah's murder ; probably also to David's cruel treatment of the Ammonites, recorded in chapter 12 : 31); for the events there mentioned no doubt took place while he was away from God, although his private history has been carried beyond this point in the preceding paragraphs. But at length there came the time when David, as the result of Nathan's message, was led to confess his sin (chapter 12 : 13) and was assured that the Lord had put it away. Was that the end ? Nay, because, forgiven though he was, he had to reap in bitterness what he had sown. "He shall restore . . . fourfold" was his own judgment, and fourfold it had to be. The child born of Bathsheba died. Amnon, after being guilty of grievous sin, similar in kind to David's own, was murdered by the order of his brother Absalom, even as Uriah had been by his order. Absalom having, during his rebellion against his father, fulfilled the fearful prophecy of 2 Sam. 12 : 11, 12, met his end amid the boughs of an oak tree, at the hand of his quondam friend Joab. And a fourth son, Adonijah, who also turned rebel, was put to death by Solomon.

But who dare say that even then the sin was done with ? What of the word spoken by Nathan in 2 Sam. 12 : 14, "By this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme" ? Has not this, in its truth and application, reached down to our own days, and given weight to many a blasphemy against the Lord and His people ?

Let us then, though thus made conscious of the difficulty of our undertaking, seek to trace at least some of the roots of the evil described in 1 Kings 12, etc., as well as what its truth afterwards turned out to be.

CHAPTER II

JEROBOAM'S SIN

What then, or who shall we say was the cause of the rebellion, division, and apostasy of 1 Kings 12, which had such disastrous effects upon the testimony of God's people ? Shall we blame Jeroboam, who took the leading part in bringing it about ? We certainly cannot clear him ; for even on that day when, having been promoted by Solomon to be "Ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph" (chapter 11 : 28), he had bought a new

coat in honour of the occasion, and had gone out to display himself in it (v. 29), the prophet Ahijah could address him as one who already had a "desire" (v. 37) to be king over Israel. The announcement made by Ahijah on that occasion, that the Lord would give ten of the tribes to him, in no wise authorised his rebellion, and the turning away of the people to the Calf worship seems to have been altogether due to him.

When he had to flee from Solomon's anger (chapter 11 : 40) he went to Egypt, which had always been the chief centre of this cult ; and when he now came to the decision that a new religion was necessary in order to prevent the people from going to worship at Jerusalem, and so being drawn back to Rehoboam, its form was doubtless determined by what he had seen while there.

He was, however, crafty enough to recognise that some of his subjects might have a bias in favour of that to which there clung ancient and ancestral associations, and therefore, while he placed one calf at Dan, where another "Modernist" religion had already become popular (see Judges 18 : 29, 31) he set up the other in Bethel, a spot with hallowed memories of their father Jacob, having indeed been named by him, "The House of God" (Gen. 28 : 17-19). With the same object of pleasing everyone as far as possible, he framed the proclamation of verse 28 ; of which one clause suggested that he sought the welfare of his people by making provision against their having to take the long and troublesome journey to Jerusalem ; while the other was couched in the very words used on the occasion when their first high priest Aaron had set up for worship an earlier golden calf, and it was said, "These be thy gods, O Israel, who brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (Exodus 32 : 4, compared with 1 Kings 12 : 28).

Thus, although he could not produce a "This is the thing which the Lord commandeth" (Exod. 16 : 32 ; Lev. 9 : 6 etc.) for his innovations, he could at least refer to "the authority of the fathers", to Aaron and even to Jacob ; as many still do when they wish to justify some man-made religious system, and cannot do so from the Scriptures. As for his pretence of having the well-being of the people at heart, it was only in keeping with what he had already been doing, when he professed to champion their cause in the presence of Rehoboam (verses 3, 4). Listening to him on that occasion, one would have taken him to be full of zeal for the redressing of their wrongs ; yet it was merely a blind to enable him to carry out his real object of attaining pre-eminence.

Has not something similar to this been seen at times amidst companies of God's people in later days ; when, under cover of seeking to remedy a grievance, or to champion the cause of younger members of the meeting, or even to stand for truth, there has been hidden a desire to be on top, or some other equally unworthy motive ? And has it not also been seen, in other religious circles, that what used to be considered wrong beyond all question, becomes right in the eyes of the majority, when political or other expediency demands it, just as it did in the case of the ten tribes ?

It is interesting, however, to notice that not all in the northern part of the land were willing to embrace the new religion ; and that Jeroboam's artifice, shrewd though it was, lost to him the very best of his subjects. If he imitated Aaron in calf-making, the Levites that had cities in his territory followed the example of those earlier Levites who took the Lord's side on that occasion (Exod. 32 : 26). We read in 2 Chron, 11 : 14 that

“the Levites left their suburbs and their possessions and came to Judah and Jerusalem”, thus showing themselves willing to suffer loss for conscience sake. Not only so, but “after them out of all the tribes of Israel, such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel came to Jerusalem to sacrifice unto the Lord God of their fathers” (verse 16). Well it may be added as it is in verse 17, that “they strengthened the kingdom of Judah”; for men have firm principles, and are true to what the Lord has taught them, are a tower of strength, wherever they are found.

All who have read the two books of the Kings with any degree of attention will have been struck by the frequent statement that the successive kings of Northern Israel “walked in the ways of Jeroboam”, and by the reiteration, some twenty times, of the said refrain concerning him, “WHO MADE ISRAEL TO SIN”. That the latter phrase has mainly to do with the setting up of the calves, is made clear at several of its occurrences (see 2 Kings 10 : 29 ; 17 : 21 ; 23 : 15 ; etc.), and its constant repetition shows how heinous in God’s sight his new religion must have been. It also affords another illustration of the point emphasised in our last chapter as to the long continuance of sin and of its effects.

CHAPTER III

A FOOLISH SON

Jeroboam, as we have seen, was much to blame for the havoc wrought amongst God’s people at this time, and more particularly for the apostasy of the Northern Tribes from God ; yet in his guilt he stood not alone. On the very surface of the narrative it is evident that Rehoboam, by his childish and petulant arrogance, contributed largely to what took place.

When we read in the book of Proverbs the intensely practical exhortations (more than twenty of them) which begin with “My son”, though it is but right that we should hear in each of them our God addressing us as His children, it may be well, at the same time, not to lose sight of – what doubtless must have been present to Solomon’s mind as he wrote them – the effect which these and the other similar exhortations of the little book should have had upon his own son Rehoboam. This view of them is justified by the expressions used in the fourth chapter, where the writer, as he sets before his children the “instruction of a father” (v. 1), makes it clear (vv. 3, 4) that he is but passing on to them what his own father David had taught him. It is interesting to notice that the first lesson mentioned in this connection (v. 5) is “Get wisdom ; get understanding”, which would suggest that when Solomon, at the beginning of his reign, responded to the Lord’s offer in 2 Chron. 1 : 7 to give him whatever he would request, by asking for wisdom and understanding, he was following the advice given him by David as recorded here in Prov. 4. Similarly, that other great exhortation of this chapter, “Keep thy heart with all diligence” (v. 23), may be considered as a passing on by Solomon to his children of the warning David had given him in 2 Chron. 28 : 29, “Thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart”.

Are there, then, any exhortations in the book of Proverbs which, if heeded, would have preserved Rehoboam from the folly of which he was guilty on this occasion ? One saying that comes to mind as applicable not only to

him but to all who had to do with the sad affair in any way, is in Prov. 17 : 14, "The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water ; therefore leave off contention before it be meddled with". Its aptness was sadly evident, when that small trickle of a few rough words, spoken on either side, widened itself out into a mighty flood that carried all before it, just as has been the case on many another occasion since then.

But even more to the point, so far as Rehoboam himself is concerned, are the words of Prov. 15 : 1, "A soft answer turneth away wrath ; but grievous words stir up anger". Indeed, it would seem as though the old men, to whom the king first turned for advice regarding the reply he should make to the people's demand, must have framed their counsel upon this verse, when they said, "If thou wilt . . . answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever" (1 Kings 12 : 7). But good advice, whether of his father's divinely inspired writing, or of the men of experience whom he had consulted, was lost on the headstrong young king. When the time appointed came, he "answered the people roughly" (v. 13) in "grievous words" that stirred up their anger ; and immediately the cry was raised, once before heard in his grandfather's own days, "What portion have we in David ? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse ; to your tents, O Israel". One foolish speech had cost Rehoboam the bigger half of his kingdom.

We still have Prov. 15 : 1 in our Bibles ; and it is still as true as when it was written that "A soft answer turneth away wrath". We quote it at times, and one sees it hung up as a framed text in Christian homes. Yet, when the opportunity comes our way to put it to the proof, how seldom we do so ! Irritation because of what has been done to us, or of what has been said about us, shapes our answer, rather than Prov. 15 : 1 ; and quickly there develops a repetition of the old competition, as to whether "the words of the men of Judah", or "the words of the men of Israel" will be the fiercer (2 Sam. 19 : 43).

But there is another and very important aspect of the matter to be considered, when answering the question. Who was to blame ? The previous chapter (1 Kings 11) shows that Solomon himself was the main cause of the trouble, and that it had been already announced to him (vv. 11-13) as part of God's judgment on him because of his sin. Not only so, but it was the natural outcome of that sin, a reaping of what he had sown. Solomon's love for "strange women" had led to the building of grand temples where they could worship their idols ; and this in turn caused him to place a burden on his people, by conscripting them for compulsory manual labour, a thing which in the early part of his reign he had to a large extent avoided. See this made clear in 1 Kings 9 : 20-22, where it is said that he levied bondservice only of the children of other nations that had been left in the land, and NOT of the children of Israel. Of such strangers there were more than 150,000, according to 2 Chron. 2 : 17, 18 and 1 Kings 5 : 15 ; and the part time levy of some Israelites, mentioned in 1 Kings 5 : 13, 14 was doubtless to be in control of them, as hinted in 1 Kings 9 : 22.

The statement of 1 Kings 4 : 20 that during this part of Solomon's reign Judah and Israel were "eating and drinking and making merry" shows that no cause of complaint on the lines of 1 Kings 12 : 4 existed at that time ; and yet on the other hand it could scarcely be possible that the

complaint had no foundation in fact. It would seem, therefore, that those who were at first employed in official and honourable positions while Solomon was in a good state of soul, and was engaged in building God's house, found themselves later bearing a heavy burden, when his wives had turned away his heart, and he was building idolatrous temples for them. His case is an example of what is at all times almost universally true, that a saint who gets out with God will also get out with the people of God, and will have but small concern for their interests.

In keeping with this view of the matter, it will be noticed that, instead of repudiating the charge that his father had made their yoke heavy, Rehoboam in verse 14 assents to it, and even adds to it the additional words of his own. "My father also chastised you with whips". And later, as a crowning act of folly, instead of sending after the rebels some person likely to be acceptable to them, he sends Adoram who was "over the levy" (verse 18, R.V.) whom, as might be expected, they promptly stoned to death.

CHAPTER IV

PRECEPT OR EXAMPLE ?

In our previous chapter Solomon is introduced in two very different connections. On the one hand, reference is made to the effect which his precepts, as contained in the book of Proverbs, might have had in preventing the great rebellion, had they been heeded by his son ; and on the other, it is pointed out that his conduct was the main cause of bringing on that rebellion. Rehoboam, as it turned out, followed his father's bad example rather than his good counsel, with the disastrous results which we have been considering.

Now it was not alone Rehoboam, but all the other kings of Judah who came after him, that had to choose whether they would follow their ancestor's precepts, or imitate his practices ; and, like Rehoboam, far too many of them made the wrong choice. It is an interesting study to compare the failures of each with the wise maxims contained in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, and to note how they might have found amongst these what would have guided them aright in every case. It is also of interest to trace how much they appear to have been influenced to attempt things which Solomon before them had done. Some points in this connection we may present more fully in succeeding chapters, but here, by way of illustration, we shall mention just two kings.

Of Asa, when like Solomon he went astray in his old age, it is said that "he oppressed some of the people the same time (2 Chron. 16 : 10-12), which was the very complaint that had been made against his ancestor. Not only so, but his oppression of them was likely of the same character as that of Solomon, for it was almost certainly connected with the episode of 1 Kings 15 : 12 where he raised a "levy" of them from which "none was exempted" for some work he wanted done. Moreover, he displayed himself as an example of the "old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished" of Eccles. 4 : 13 by rejecting the message that God sent him through Hanani.

His son Jehoshaphat, faithful though he was in many ways, disobeyed more than once Solomon's injunction of Prov. 1 : 10, "My son, if sinners

entice thee, consent thou not" (see 2 Chron. 18 : 1, 3 ; 19 : 2 etc.). Yet he too was a great imitator of Solomon ; for like him he joined "affinity" with other kings (2 Chron. 18 : 1 with 1 Kings 3 : 1); he built "cities of store" (2 Chron. 17 : 12 with 1 Kings 9 : 19); and he made ships to go from Eziongeber to Ophir for gold (1 Kings 22 : 48 with 1 Kings 9 : 26-28).

But perhaps the most remarkable, as well as the worst, of the examples given us of the effect of Solomon's practices, in contrast with that of his precepts, is the one mentioned in 2 Kings 23 : 13. There we learn that the high places he had built in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, for the worship of Ashtoreth, Chemosh, and Milcon had been spared up till that time, that is for about 360 years. Asa, Jehoshaphat, and others had pulled down idolatrous high places throughout the land ; Hezekiah had gone further than any of these by destroying even those where the Lord was worshipped; yet no one until Josiah's days had ventured to touch the ones which had been reared by Solomon. And thus to Josiah falls the great honour of having wiped out finally both the idolatry of Jeroboam and that of Solomon (1 Kings 23 : 13 and 15).

An interesting sidelight is thrown on Solomon's career by the statement made in 1 Kings 14 : 21 and borne out by the parallel passage in 2 Chron. 12 : 13 that Rehoboam was forty-one years old at his accession to the throne. According to 1 Kings 11 : 42 and 2 Chron. 9 : 30 the reign of Solomon lasted but forty years, therefore he must have married Rehoboam's mother, who was "Naamah an Ammonitess", before he ascended the throne, and during the lifetime of his father David. When we take account of this, it sheds light on the anxiety shown by the latter on more than one occasion as to the state of his son's heart. When in 1 Chron. 28 : 9 he warned him, Thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart"; and when in 1 Chron. 29 : 19 he prayed for him, "Give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart"; he had evidence of the young man's weakness in this respect, since he already had taken an Ammonitess as wife.

Doubtless it was the fact that in the early part of Solomon's reign his hands were filled with service for God, which prevented further development of the weakness just then. But when the Temple had been built and some other works he had taken in hand were completed, he had time to get into mischief ; and 1 Kings 11 shows us to what extent he did so. The fears that his father had for him were fully justified when (v. 4) "his wives turned away his heart after other gods ; and HIS HEART WAS NOT PERFECT with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father".

What a pity it was that he himself did not "attend" (Prov. 4 : 20) more carefully to the great lesson which, with others, as already pointed out, he attributes in the beginning of that chapter to his father's teaching, and which in verse 23 he passes on to others in the words, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life".

CHAPTER V

THE MAN OF GOD FROM JUDAH

An interesting episode in the history of Jeroboam is recorded in 1 Kings 13; though the interest centres, not so much in the king himself, as in the

messenger whom God sent to rebuke him. Yet it would scarcely be going too far to describe the incident as Jeroboam's last opportunity for repentance. The words of verse 33, "After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made AGAIN (cf. chap. 12 : 31) of the lowest of the people priests of the high places", suggest that repentance was still a possibility at that stage ; whereas the dreadful course pronounced on him and his family by Ahijah shortly afterwards (chap. 14 : 7-11), implies that it was so no longer.

When we notice how close is the connection between the last part of chap. 12 and the beginning of chap. 13, it will appear that the events narrated in the latter took place on the occasion of the dedication of Jeroboam's new centre of worship at Bethel. The somewhat strange wording of chap. 12 : 30 would suggest that the Dan sanctuary came into use before the Bethel one was ready, probably because of the religious cult that had already been in existence there, with its priesthood all complete ; since the time of the Levite Jonathan, son of Gershom, son of Moses (Judges 18 : 30, R.V.). This, too, would account for the final clause of chap. 12 : 32, where it is said, "He placed in BETHEL the priests of the high places which he had made". Dan had its priests already, the descendants of the complaisant Jonathan ; so it was mainly for Bethel that a fresh supply had to be provided.

Bearing all this in mind, we shall be in a better position to understand why this feast of the eighth month is given more prominence than the rest of Jonathan's innovations, and why the king himself is represented as performing the priestly functions (see chap. 12 : 32, 33, R.V. and 13 : 1, 4). The entire scene is an attempt on his part to imitate Solomon's dedication of the Temple, which took place before and during the feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month, though the actual building had been completed in the eighth month of the preceding year (see chap. 6 : 38 and 8 : 2, 65, 66). It would have been only a pale imitation at its best, but the shattering of the altar, and the paralysing of the king's arm, completely upset his little display, and must surely have recalled to the memory of at least some of those present that other very different scene when, at the conclusion of Solomon's prayer, "the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices ; and the glory of the Lord filled the house" (2 Chron. 7 : 1).

As we turn to the latter part of the story of the nameless man of God from Judah, we cannot but feel sympathy for him. He had executed faithfully the mission upon which he had been sent, and he had stood out against the professed friendliness of Jeroboam just as firmly as he had already faced his anger. Now, while on his way home, wearied after what he had gone through, the old prophet comes along to tempt him with his invitation to sorely needed refreshment. Is it at all wonderful that he brought himself to believe that this older "brother" (v. 30) had indeed a message from God for him, countermanding the instructions which he personally had received before setting out ?

He did wrong, of course he did, for our God would have us to walk in the light He has granted to ourselves, not according to that which others, even though older than we, claim to have. But is it not rather remarkable that some who condemn strongly this man's failure to do so, are the very ones who condemn with at least equal energy the persistence of another

man of God, the apostle Paul, who continued his journey onwards to Jerusalem in keeping with the light which he himself had upon the matter (Acts 20 : 22 ; 21 : 11-14), instead of yielding to the persuasions of various prophets, etc., who would have had him turn aside ?

As to the old prophet, more than one motive may have brought about his treacherous conduct. There doubtless was jealousy of the man whom God brought along and used, instead of himself, possibly also curiosity to find out what sort of a man he was. There may even have been a wicked desire to nullify the effect of the other's message, by causing him to turn aside from the stand he had taken. In any case it was certainly not to the old prophet's honour that, while unwilling or unable to be present at the Bethel ceremony himself, he permitted his family to go (v. 11). It rendered any testimony on his part against the evil thing impossible. And it set an example which has been followed by many an "old prophet" from his day until now, who have brought up their families on the same wretched plan of allowing them to frequent places that the parents, if only for shame's sake, dare not attend themselves. On the other hand, it is worthy of note that the man of God from Judah, despite his failure, was honoured after his death ; as is made evident by the fact that, centuries later, when his prophecy was being fulfilled by Josiah (2 Kings 23 : 17, 18), there was still to be seen a "monument" (R.V.) inscribed to his memory.

CHAPTER VI

HOW SOME WERE WON

Although, as has been remarked, the division, which took place at the beginning of Rehoboam's reign, was never afterwards healed, there were at least two occasions when members of the northern tribes came to Judah and Jerusalem ; in addition to those who came at the first and who are mentioned in 2 Chron. 11 : 13-17. The causes which stirred them to do so differed to some extent in each instance, as set forth in the passages which deal with them, and are deserving of consideration.

In the case of that first company of Levites and others referred to above, it was, as we have already seen, their own exercise of soul and desire to seek the Lord, which drew them from their homes and their possessions, doubtless at much temporal loss to themselves. The next recorded movement of any kind took place in Asa's reign, and is spoken of in 2 Chron. 15 : 9 in the words, "They fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that the Lord his God was with him". That is to say, they were drawn by the prosperous condition of Judah and its king, when, having sought the Lord, they were enjoying His blessing. The third occasion was in the time of Hezekiah, and is described in 2 Chron. 30 : 11 where "divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem". This humbling was the outcome of wisely written letters of invitation sent them by Hezekiah, in which he besought them to return, not merely to Judah, but to the Lord and to His Sanctuary. And it was the more easily

brought about because of the wretched condition in which the remnant of the Ten Tribes found themselves at this time, which was probably just a year or two before they were swallowed up in the Assyrian captivity.

In contrast with these movements, in which both the motive and the method were good, and from which some good fruit at least was produced, there were two attempts to bring God's people together, which, though opposite in character, were alike in this, that God did not and could not bless either of them. The first was when Rehoboam, immediately after the division had occurred, gathered the warriors of Judah and Benjamin "to fight against Israel, that he might bring the kingdom again" to his own rule (2 Chron. 11:1). This purpose he was prevented from carrying out by a message from God through the prophet Shemaiah (vv. 2-4). The other was when Jehoshaphat, after a continuance of hostilities between the two kingdoms which had lasted through the reigns of Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:30), Abijah (1 Kings 15:7), Asa (1 Kings 15:16), and part of his own (2 Chron. 17:1), became friendly with Ahab king of Israel, and married his son Jehoram to Ahab's daughter Athaliah (2 Chron. 18:1 and 21:6); doubtless hoping that the young pair might ultimately rule both kingdoms as a reunited nation. How far wrong he was in his calculations we shall see later, but for the present it will suffice to point out that the Lord utterly condemned his course of action in the message sent to him at 2 Chron. 19:2.

Now in the record of these movements there is much to be learned that is of present day value. The bringing together of God's people is a laudable and scriptural aim, but there are wrong ways as well as right ways of setting about it. To fight with those who hold views differing from our own is certainly not a right way; but neither is it right that we should "join affinity" (2 Chron. 18:1) with such as are walking in disobedience to truth plainly taught in the Word of God, and which we ourselves profess to have learned therefrom. Union brought about in that way will prove costly in the end, even as it did for Jehoshaphat and his descendants.

On the other hand, if while seeking to walk according to the Scriptures, we have manifestly the blessing of God in our Assemblies, and fruitfulness in our service for Him, it will surely, as in Asa's days, draw to us such as are exercised in heart about "the way of the Lord" (Acts 18:26). And even when there has been failure and declension, so that this happy state of things no longer obtains, and we have to lament that "the former days were better than these"; if we turn to our God in lowliness of heart as Hezekiah did, we shall, probably, be still an influence for good to others, as was the case with him. But we shall not increase, but rather lessen this influence by slighting truth that in former days we valued highly.

Psalm 133 comes to mind in this connection, with its two beautiful illustrations of how good and how pleasant a thing is unity amongst God's people. Of course it was unity in Israel that the psalmist thought of as he wrote, and it is noteworthy that he did not visualise this unity otherwise than as manifesting itself at God's centre in Zion, where he had caused His name to dwell, and where indeed the writer himself, according to the previous psalm, had been used of the Lord to find "a habitation for the Mighty One of Jacob". How fully Hezekiah shared this view is made clear in 2 Chron. 32:12, where it is actually brought as a charge against him by Sennacherib; that he would have God worshipped at no other place.

CHAPTER VII

ASA

The story of king Asa, as set forth in the 14th, 15th and 16th chapters of 2nd Chronicles, is one of mingled success and failure, of strength and weakness ; and it is on that account the more like our own. He got out of touch with God (ch. 16 : 7; he acted "foolishly" for himself (v. 9) ; he became angry with the prophet who rebuked him (v. 10) ; he ill-treated some of his people (v. 10). Yet it could be said of him, "The heart of Asa was perfect all his days" (ch. 15 : 17) ; and when he died, he was given a more honourable burial than almost any other king of Judah (ch. 16:14).

While there is much to encourage us in his history, there are also solemn warnings suggested by his errors, the most prominent of which were :

1. That he failed in what appeared to be his strong point, his trust in God. Contrast ch. 14 : 11 with ch. 18 : 7, 12.
2. That his last days were his worst.
3. That he originated at least two evils which were often copied by others in after times. One was that of seeking outside help when fighting with his brethren (ch. 16 : 2-4). Another was his persecution, even to imprisonment, of the man who spoke God's message to him (v. 10).

His long reign of more than forty years may be divided into three periods; a period of rest during its first ten years (ch. 14 : 1-8); a long period of success and prosperity, lasting from the war with the Ethiopians to that with Baasha king of Israel (ch. 14 : 9 to ch. 16 : 1); and a final period of troubles brought on by his own failures, which occupied its five closing years (ch. 16). Through all the events of these periods, however, there may be traced a regular sequence of cause and effect, each incident recorded being a natural development, though not always a good one, from those which preceded it.

At ch. 14 : 1 the reign opens with a time of peace, of which Asa takes advantage to start a reformation of religion (vv. 3-5), and to make arrangements for his country's defence (vv. 6-8). The latter are put to the test before long, for Zerah the Ethiopian invades the land with an army of a million men, in which emergency Asa cries to God and is granted deliverance and victory (vv. 9-15). This deliverance, together with the word of cheer sent him immediately afterwards through the prophet Azariah (ch. 15 : 1-7), encourages Asa to resume his work of reformation (vv. 8-18), and so manifest is the resultant blessing on himself and his people that a multitude from the Northern Kingdom came over to Judah in order to share in it.

This defection of so many of his subjects at length stirs up Baasha king of Israel to take measures to put a stop to it (ch. 16 : 1) and a war ensues, in which the deterioration that the long spell of prosperity had wrought in Asa is evidenced by his seeking help, not from the Lord, but from the king of Syria (vv. 2-4). For doing so he now gets a message from God of a very different character from that which he had formerly received (vv. 7-9), one of which so enrages him that he puts the messenger in jail. And, as though he had to give vent to his anger in other ways, it is added in the record that he "oppressed some of the people the same time" (v. 10) ; thus affording another illustration of the point to which attention was called

in connection with the story of Solomon, that a saint who gets out with God will also get out with the people of God, and have little care for their welfare. The diseased feet of ch. 16 : 12 are doubtless the Lord's chastisement for what he has done, but instead of taking the view of that matter which his great ancestor had suggested in Prov. 3 : 11, 12 Asa "sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians", who prove in his case to be "physicians of no value", since his death ensues shortly afterwards.

The lessons of permanent value which these occurrences in the life of Asa teach us are more than can be dealt with, however briefly, in our "Notes"; but there are a few points to which we would at least direct attention. One is Asa's prayer in ch. 14 : 11, a prayer so short that it occupies but a single verse, yet so full that to add anything to it would be to spoil it. What confidence in the Lord it expresses, and on the other hand what humility of mind ! Asa had by this time gathered quite a large and well equipped army of his own, yet he trusts not to it but to his God. "We rest on Thee", he cries, "and IN THY NAME we go . . . , let not man prevail AGAINST THEE". Is it any wonder that the deliverance granted is described in verses 12-15 in a similar strain, "THE LORD SMOTE . . . they were destroyed BEFORE THE LORD, AND BEFORE HIS HOST"?

This thought of the Lord acting FOR and WITH His people forms also, it will be noticed, the basis of Azariah's message to the victorious king in ch. 15 : 2, where it is used both as a promise and as a warning. "THE LORD IS WITH YOU WHILE YE BE WITH HIM ; and if ye seek Him He will be found of you ; but if ye forsake Him He will forsake you". It is the same message that David had given to Solomon (1 Chron. 28 : 9) seventy years before, and it has not grown out of date even today. Asa had already proved the promise to be true, and he was later to find out that the warning was equally so.

Another point deserving of mention is the firm attitude taken by Asa towards the queen mother Maachah (ch. 15 : 16), an idolatrous woman who had been humoured and spoilt all her days. The various forms of spelling her name, and the various relationships assigned to her, in the passages where she is named (1 Kings 15 : 2, 10, 13 ; 2 Chron. 11 : 20, 21, 22 ; 13 : 2 ; 16 : 16), are somewhat confusing ; but by putting them together it appears that this woman was the child of Absalom's only daughter Tamar (2 Sam. 14 : 27) who was married to Uriel of Gibeah (2 Chron. 13 : 2) and who named her babe after its great grandmother Maachah, daughter of the king of Geshur, and mother of Absalom (1 Chron. 3 : 2). This explains how she can be called "the daughter of Uriel" (her actual father) in 2 Chron. 13 : 2, and yet "the daughter of Absalom" (actually her grandfather) in 2 Chron. 11 : 20, etc. And if, as seems probable, Absalom's three sons of 2 Sam. 14 : 27 died in early life without issue (see 2 Sam. 18 : 18) the term "daughter of Absalom" might suggest that, through her mother Tamar, she became his sole heiress, and that her name is linked with his on this account.

Maachah had got doing pretty much as she liked in the reign of her husband Rehoboam (2 Chron. 11 : 21, 22), and in that of her own son Abijah (ch. 13 : 2), so it must have required more than ordinary firmness on the part of her grandson Asa to oust her from her long held position as head of the royal household, and to smash her favourite idol. Yet reformation, like charity, must begin at home, for how could the king set his

subjects right, if he could not, as the would-be bishop of 1 Tim. 3:1-5, rule well his own house ?

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST WAYS

It is a striking fact, and withal a solemn one, that nearly all the good kings of Israel and Judah were at their best in the early part of their reigns, and failed in one way or another as they grew older. Solomon and Asa, as we have already seen, were outstanding examples of spiritual decline in their later years, and we shall find it also in Joash (2 Chron. 24 : 2, 17, 18). Amaziah (2 Chron. 25 : 2, 14), Uzziah (2 Chron. 26 : 4, 5, 16), and even Hezekiah (2 Chron. 32 : 25).

But perhaps the most remarkable of all the references to it is one made incidentally and by implication in 2 Chron. 17 : 3, where we read that Jehoshaphat "walked IN THE FIRST WAYS OF HIS FATHER DAVID". Here it is clearly suggested that even in David's case, his first ways were his best ; a thought which was unacceptable to the translators of the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament that they omitted the word "David" in their rendering, and thus made the statement to refer to Jehoshaphat's immediate father Asa. In this they have been followed by some modern commentators who make the suggestion that the word "has probably crept in from the margin", though what "David" was doing in the margin they do not explain.

But is it not true that David's early days were his best ? His sin with Uriah's wife occurred after he had well settled down in his kingdom, and the pride which led him to number his people developed at an even later stage in his life. While he was still an unknown shepherd lad, and during the period of his persecution by Saul, and his struggles with enemies on all sides when first he attained to the throne, he appears to have maintained to a large extent his devotion to God ; for to this part of his life belong most of those psalms in which his own personal soul experience is prominent. But in later years idleness begot lust, and prosperity begot pride, as has been the case with many others as well as David in similar circumstances ; and though he did not end his career away from God, as some of the others we have mentioned seem to have done, he certainly had much need to pray for himself the prayer of Psalm 71 : 18, "Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not".

It is interesting and profitable to trace the causes and the progress of deterioration in those who have been named, and in others. It will be found that idleness and pride, the twin causes of David's failures, had much to do with those of others also. We are plainly warned in Prov. 16:18 that "Pride goeth before destruction"; and that other old proverb, "Satan finds some mischief for idle hands to do", though not a Biblical one, is none the less true. Even the ruin of Sodom, it will be remembered, is attributed in Ezek. 16 : 49 to "pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness".

These things have been "written for our learning", and it is well that we should give heed to them. Had we but one record of failure in old age amongst the kings, we might not incline to lay much on it. Had we found half of them thus turned aside, we could scarcely fail to see in this an

impressive warning. But when we discover that in nearly all cases the tendency manifested itself it becomes almost startling. Are we to expect, today, that most of those who have begun well and gone on well for years amongst the Lord's people will deteriorate in old age? We may thank God there is no need that it should be so; and we thank Him too for the many examples we have seen of those who "still bring forth fruit in old age" (Psa. 92 : 14). But let us give full weight at the same time to the warning our records contain.

There is ever present the danger of taking things easy as we grow older. There is danger when persecution becomes less, as it did in David's case, and, as it often does, through time. There is danger when family ties bind us more closely than in former years, and we find that we have others to please besides the Lord (1 Cor. 7 : 33, 34). There is danger, as even Paul realised, of becoming "exalted above measure" through the abundance of the privileges God has granted us. There is danger that things which in early Christian life we learnt the evil of, and walked apart from, may become less hateful to us, until at length we can "join affinity" with them. But this last point brings us to Jehoshaphat's failure, which we shall further consider in our next chapter.

CHAPTER IX

JEHOSHAPHAT

That the twenty-five years of Jehoshaphat's reign was a period of much interest in the history of Judah is evident from the fact that more space is devoted to it by sacred writers than to the reign of any other Judaeen king except Hezekiah. But of all that has been put on record concerning it, the most outstanding feature is the change which, in its ninth or tenth year, took place in Jehoshaphat's attitude to the northern tribes, who had turned away from God and His house. How radical this change was may be seen by comparing the opening section of 2 Chron. 17 with that of the chapter following.

In chapter 17 : 1 the first thing mentioned about his reign is that he "STRENGTHENED HIMSELF AGAINST ISRAEL". And then at verse 5 we are told that, in consequence of the stand which he took for God in those early days, "HE HAD RICHES AND HONOUR IN ABUNDANCE". Turning to ch. 18 : 1 we find the latter statement repeated word for word, but with the addition, "AND JOINED AFFINITY WITH AHAB". It would seem, therefore, that what had been the reward of his early faithfulness to God became afterwards a cause of his departure from the old path, and allying himself with "the ungodly" and the haters of the Lord, as the prophet Jehu described these friends of his, when denouncing his actions in chapter 19 : 2.

So completely did Jehoshaphat surrender himself to this new line of things, though he listened respectfully to what Jehu had to say, and did not imprison him for his outspokenness, as his father Asa had done to Jehu's father Hanani (ch. 16 : 7-10), yet he went back into it again and again; joining himself not only with Ahab, but also with Ahaziah and Jehoram and two sons who succeeded him on the throne (ch. 20 : 35-37 and 2 Kings 3 : 6-27). What made it more difficult for him to resist these

alliances was the fact that, at the beginning of them, his own son Jehoram had been married to Ahab's daughter Athaliah (ch. 21 : 6) ; a union through which as was suggested in a former chapter, Jehoshaphat probably hoped to bring about the reunion of the two kingdoms, but which, instead, almost caused the extinction of the royal family of David (ch. 22 : 10-12) through the plotting of that evil woman.

In the well-known exhortation of 2 Cor. 6 : 14-18 against being "unequally yoked together with unbelievers", the variety of forms which such yokes may assume is suggested by the variety of terms employed in the five questions that follow the command. These deserve careful study, for they appear to hint successively at business life, political life, social life, marriage, and religion ; and our reason for referring to them is that Jehoshaphat's alliances seem to have touched in some degree upon all these five spheres of life.

To begin with, there was the MARRIAGE of the young folks already mentioned, and connected apparently with this was the SOCIAL VISIT described in 2 Chron. 18 : 2, in the course of which Ahab "killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people that he had with him". Following upon that there was the attempt to take Ramothgilead from the Syrians (1 Kings 22 : 3), an expedition in which there was A RELIGIOUS ELEMENT, since Ramoth was not only, as Ahab said, an Israelite city, but also a Levitical city and a city of refuge for the manslayer ; the latter point being of interest in view of the fact that the murderer Ahab met with his death in the battle at its gate. Another war in which Jehoshaphat joined with Ahab's son Jehoram and with the Edomites, and which nearly brought about the destruction of them all (2 Kings 3 : 6-13) had not even the lame excuse of a religious motive, but was entirely POLITICAL, to break the growing power of Moab. Finally, there was the BUSINESS VENTURE, in which he was associated with Ahab's elder son Ahaziah, and which also ended in disaster (2 Chron. 20 : 35-37).

From all these entanglements Jehoshaphat had kept clear in the early years of his reign, while he walked in the path of separation, and it is evident that in his case, as in that of David, and the other kings mentioned in our last chapter, his "FIRST WAYS" were the best, and that when he became broadminded (?) and learned to repeat the little rhyme, "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people" (see 1 Kings 22 : 4, compared with 2 Kings 3 : 7), he opened the door to a host of unnecessary troubles, for himself, for his family, and for his subjects.

The Corinthians in New Testament days were inclined to a similar course, and thus we have the warnings of 1 Cor. 10 and of 2 Cor. 6, warnings which were never more needed by the Lord's people than they are today.

CHAPTER X

JEHOSHAPHAT'S VICTORY

Amongst the alliances into which Jehoshaphat entered with the two kings of Northern Israel, we mentioned one in which he joined with Jehoram, son of Ahab, and with the king of Edom, to make war against Moab, a war during which the ill-assorted allies were brought to the verge of de-

struction (1 Kings 3:4-27). It is a pleasant change when we turn from that event to one in 2 Chron. 20 : 1-30, where we read of a previous war between the Moabites and Jehoshaphat, which took place just after Ahab's death, during the short reign of his first successor Ahaziah. The approximate time of its occurrence may be fixed by giving due attention to the "after this" with which the narrative begins in ver. 1, and to the other 'after this' which follows it in ver. 35.

In this case the Moabites were definitely the aggressors ; and it was they, and not Jehoshaphat who had allies to strengthen them, for they had with them Ammonites and Edomites, and were already marching to attack him before the king of Judah became aware of the threatened danger. The Moabites had been tributary to king Ahab, having probably been subdued by his father Omri ; but at Ahab's death they had rebelled (2 Kings 1 : 1); and their expedition against Jehoshaphat and Judah may have been planned in order that, by defeating him first, they might prevent him from giving aid (as indeed he afterwards did in 2 Kings 3) to his friends of Northern Israel in their effort to put the rebellion down.

Had Jehoshaphat been given time to make plans of his own, he would probably have sought Ahaziah's assistance ; but the urgency of the need cast him directly upon God, with the result that signal deliverance was granted to him, and the record of it is here for our encouragement today. Seldom if ever in the history of battles was a victory gained so easily, for the king and his friends had but to look on, while their enemies slaughtered one another.

An interesting feature of the story is Jehoshaphat's prayer in vv. 6-12. It is a much longer one than that of his father Asa under similar circumstances in ch. 14 : 11, but is on the same lines, the main theme in each being that although we have no might of our own, God's power to deliver us is in no wise hindered by that.

In vv. 6-9 the king sets forth the grounds upon which his appeal is based. They are :

1. Thou art the God of our fathers, the all-powerful God who rulest over the nations (v. 6).
2. Thou art our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land, and gavest it to Thy people Israel (v. 7).
3. This is the house which they built for Thy Name, and where Thou didst promise to hear and help when they cried to Thee (vv. 8, 9).

Then in vv. 10-12 he brings before the Lord the present need, in words which link themselves with each of the above pleas successively :

1. Some of those nations have now come against us (v. 10).
2. They seek to cast us out from our inheritance (v. 11).
3. We do now in this house cry to Thee, acknowledging
That we have no might.
That we know not what to do.
That our eyes are upon Thee (v. 12).

Jehoshaphat and his people had not long to wait for an answer. As they stood there before the Lord, His Spirit came upon one of their number to prophesy both their deliverance and the form it would take. And here we come to another remarkable feature in the narrative, the prominence given in it to the Levites. For it was Jahaziel, a Levite of the sons of Asaph,

who was the chosen instrument to utter God's message, and it was, as of course might be expected, the Levites who led in praising the Lord, both then and during the march out to meet their enemies on the following morning.

The Levites had shown their faithfulness to the Lord and to His worship after Jeroboam's rebellion, by leaving their possessions in other parts of the land and coming over to Judah (2 Chron. 11 : 13, 14); yet Jehoshaphat appears to have been the first king after Solomon to give them their due place as ministers of the Sanctuary, and teachers of the people. He had them sent forth in the early part of his reign with the Law of God in their hands to instruct throughout the cities of Judah (ch. 17 : 8, 9) ; and afterwards he had made some of them judges of the people (ch. 19 : 8-11).

One result of Jehoshaphat's victory, mentioned in verse 25, is that he and his people gathered "abundance of riches" from the spoils. Now we had already noted that even in the early days of his reign he had "riches in abundance" (ch. 17 : 5), and that at a later period the same expression is again used of him (ch. 18 : 1). One would have thought that, with the further addition now made, the king would have had more than enough. Yet it was "after this" (v. 35) that he joined with Ahaziah in a shipping business, the object of which, according to 1 Kings 22 : 48, was "to go to Ophir for gold". Thus Jehoshaphat, like his ancestor Solomon whose nautical exploits he was perhaps seeking to emulate, was guilty of disobedience to the command given in Deut. 17 : 17 that a king of Israel was not to "greatly multiply to himself silver and gold".

The usual New Testament word for covetousness (pleonexia—"the desire to have more") well expresses what the trouble was with Jehoshaphat ; and that others as well as kings, and of a much later day, have been afflicted with it, is made evident by the frequent warnings there against this sin, and the exhortations to be content with what we have (Heb. 13 : 5 ; 1 Tim. 6 : 8, etc.).

CHAPTER XI

AHAB

Of all the kings who reigned over Northern Israel the most prominent in the Scripture narrative is Ahab. This is not on account of his goodness ; for it is said of him in 1 Kings 16 : 30 that he "did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him"; and, as though this did not emphasise his wickedness sufficiently, it is added in verse 33 that he "did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him". Moreover, when we compare the comments afterwards made on the kings who succeeded him, though all of them were wicked men, we find none concerning whom anything so severe as this is said, and we therefore conclude that he was also worse than all who came after him on the throne. This is confirmed by a still stronger statement in 1 Kings 21 : 25, where we read, "There was none like unto Ahab which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up".

It is, however, of interest to notice that, in all these passages, which assess the character of the various kings, stress is invariably laid upon what we

might call the ecclesiastical evils of which they were guilty, rather than on their conduct in other respects. In the verses between the two statements which are cited above from 1 Kings 16 : 30, 33, we are told that his wickedness consisted of this, that he "went and served Baal, and worshipped him, and he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he had built in Samaria". Similarly in the passage quoted from ch. 21 the explanation is added that "he did very abominably in following idols". And if we turn to the record in 2 Kings 21 : 1-9 of Manasseh, who is compared to Ahab, it may be observed that the greater part of the wickedness charged against him consists of various acts of idolatrous worship of which he was guilty. So it is also in the passages that deal with Jeroboam, Ahaz and other evil kings. Is there not a lesson in this for us who live in a day when the general tendency is to treat ecclesiastical evil, and ecclesiastical disobedience to God's Word, as a comparatively unimportant matter, against which it is mere bigotry, we are told, to take a firm stand? Might we not in this connection say with old Eli, "If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him?"

In reading the story of Ahab's reign, one is struck by many references to individuals who stand out prominently in the narrative as influences for good or evil in those days. The first of them is Hiel the Bethelite, who is introduced at 1 Kings 16 : 34 as having the hardihood to risk the curse which more than five centuries earlier had been pronounced by the Lord through Joshua on the rebuilder of Jericho. Possibly he was influenced by the success which, a few years before, Ahab's father Omri had made of building the city of Samaria (ch. 16 : 24); but, however that may be, he discovered that the age-old curse was still active. As he began to lay the wall foundations, his first born son was taken from him; and, by the time he got as far as the setting up of the gates, his family, down to the last and youngest, was wiped out by death. It is somewhat remarkable that a curse appears to have clung to the city for a while afterwards, for we find the citizens appealing to Elisha in 2 Kings 2 : 18-22 to heal their water supply, which had been causing death.

In contrast with Hiel stands Naboth, the simple peasant of Jezreel, who held the old views concerning God's commands and prohibitions; and, believing that they still had force, uttered a determined "The Lord forbid" (1 Kings 21 : 3) when asked by Ahab to sell the inheritance of his fathers to him. This the Lord had forbidden (see Lev. 25 : 23; Num. 36 : 7); and, though it meant the loss of a profitable exchange, and of the king's favour as well, Naboth would go by the Book.

He lost even more, for Jezebel had him falsely accused and slain; but he "witnessed a good confession" the record of which remains to this day. His story stands also in marked contrast with that of Shemer of Samaria (1 Kings 16 : 24), who willingly and gladly disposed of his hill farm to Ahab's father for two talents of silver, and who received, in addition, the earthly honour of having the city which the king built on it called after his name.

Then we have Obadiah (1 Kings 18 : 3-16), the man who managed the very difficult task of being a servant of Ahab and a servant of the Lord at the same time; and who, timid though he shows himself to be in verse 12, yet had risked his life to save a hundred prophets from the murderous

Jezebel. And we have Micaiah (ch. 22 : 8) who, like Elijah, stood up alone against four hundred false prophets to proclaim the message God had given him, even though it brought to him persecution and imprisonment.

But, most prominent of all, we have Elijah and Jezebel, the two great protagonists of that time ; concerning whom the Scriptures have so much to say, historically and figuratively, that it would require space far beyond what we could here give them, to deal with them satisfactorily. James shows us how to get help in a simple way from the story of the former by taking him as an example (Jas. 5 : 10 and 17) ; and he incidentally reveals to us what we should not otherwise have known, that the bold speech with which Elijah is so abruptly introduced in 1 Kings 17 : 1 was preceded and accompanied by earnest prayer "that it might not rain".

The prayer was a strange one, but it came from a heart that was exercised about the dreadful state of things amongst God's people at the time. It doubtless was Spirit led, and was certainly based on such Scriptures as Deut. 11 : 16, 17 and Lev. 26 : 19, 20, in which God had spoken of using famine, amongst other means, to bring back His people when they had turned away from Him. Moreover, since Baalism was a debased form of Sun-worship, it was a particularly suitable means to employ on the present occasion. They were to be left for more than three years to the unrestricted influence of that Sun which their deity represented. This connection with the earlier Scriptures may perhaps give increased fulness of meaning to Elijah's word in 1 Kings 18 : 36, "I have done all these things at Thy Word". And this deep soul exercise of Elijah for the restoration of God's people may help us to understand more fully and with greater sympathy the deep depression which took possession of him, when, after his public victory at Mount Carmel in 1 Kings 18 : 38-40, he found that Jezebel seemed to be as powerful for evil as ever (see ch. 19 : 1-4, etc.). "O Lord, take away my life", he said, "for I am not better than my fathers". That is to say, I have accomplished no more than they.

Yet his work was not so unsuccessful as it then appeared to him. It doubtless rendered possible, or at least much easier, the extinction of Baal worship by Jehu some twenty years after, as recorded in 2 Kings 10 : 28, etc. Indeed, the Lord gives His downcast servant a hint of this in 1 Kings 19 : 16, 17 ; and couples with it the assurance that He had still seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. What encouragement and help to these Elijah's victory on Carmel had been was known to none save themselves and God. No truehearted service for God is ever done in vain.

CHAPTER XII

JOASH OF JUDAH

Concerning the four kings who were immediate successors of Jehoshaphat and Ahab but little is said in the sacred narrative, and what we do learn about them is not to their honour. In reading the record of their times we must be careful to distinguish between them, since the two families bore the same names, though in reverse order ; Ahab being succeeded, first by his son Ahaziah, and then by another son Jehoram ; while Jehoshaphat was followed in turn by his son Jehoram, and by his grandson Ahaziah. All four came to their end by the judgment of God, and as to their relation-

ship with their subjects, what was said of Jehoram of Judah at his death might probably have been said of each one of them, that "he departed without being desired" (2 Chron. 21 : 20). During the entire period of their reigns they were under the evil influence of two strong-minded, wicked women, that of Jezebel in the northern kingdom, and that of her daughter Athaliah in Judah.

The latter, having escaped the slaughter wrought by Jehu and his partisans, in which her mother Jezebel as well as her son Ahaziah and her brother Jehoram fell, immediately organised a slaughter on her own account, for she "destroyed all the seed royal" (2 Chron. 22 : 10), and took the throne of Judah for herself. In so doing she sought to wipe out all that was left of the direct line of David's descendants ; thus completing a process which had been going on for some time, and of which Jehoshaphat's ill-advised alliance with the house of Ahab was the originating cause. Her husband Jehoram, doubtless with her encouragement, began it by killing all his brothers as soon as Jehoshaphat his father was dead. Certain Arabians and Philistines carried it a stage further by slaying Jehoram's own family with the exception of Ahaziah the youngest (2 Chron. 21 : 16, 17 and 22 : 1), and recently Jehu had killed, not only Ahaziah, but forty-two of his nephews besides (2 Chron. 22 : 7, 8, and 1 Kings 10 : 14).

Behind all this, one can scarcely fail to see an attempt on the part of Satan to destroy the family through which it had been announced that the promised "Seed" was to come. It is one of a number of such attempts, amongst which were the murder of Abel, the drowning of the male children in Egypt, the conspiracy in the days of Ahaz to set aside "the house of David" and to place a usurper "the son of Tabeal" on the throne (see Isa. 7 : 6, 14 ; 8 : 6, 12, 14 ; 9 : 6, 7), and finally, the destruction of the children of Bethlehem by Herod. Some of these efforts seemed likely to succeed on account of the failure and wickedness of those who at the time represented the line of the "Seed"; but however man might fail, the purpose of God could not, and He could ever say, as He did on one such occasion, "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this" (Isa. 9 : 6, 7).

It is remarkable that on three of the occasions above named an infant, whose preservation was of importance for the furtherance of God's purpose, was hidden away and saved from the general destruction. Moses was thus concealed by his parents, and so was Jesus Himself ; while in the history now before us, the child Joash was secreted by his aunt Jehoshabeath, wife of the high priest Jehoiada, and remained for six years a hidden king, type, perhaps, of what our Lord Jesus is at the present time.

Be that as it may, Joash personally turned out to be, like many another among God's people, a weakling in character. He got on well enough so long as he had the guidance and backing of the old priest Jehoiada, and, indeed, seemed at times to quite outstrip his teacher in zeal (see 2 Chron. 24 : 6). But when Jehoiada was dead he could not stand alone, nor had he the wisdom to seek other counsellors of a like kind. He "hearkened" to the princes of Judah (v. 17), who speedily weaned him from the narrow views of religion in which he had been trained by Jehoiada, and taught him the value of the "groves" and the "idols". So thoroughly did he imbibe the new line of things that no warning of the prophets whom God sent to reprove him had any effect ; and at length he for ever disgraced himself by committing one of the blackest crimes recorded in the Scriptures, the

murder of his own cousin Zechariah, son of his great benefactor and of the aunt to whom he owed his very life. Jehoiada had refused to allow the House of the Lord to be desecrated by the killing in it of Athaliah, murderess though she was (2 Chron. 23 : 14) ; but Joash did not scruple to shed in it the blood of Jehoiada's son, and that for no other crime than speaking God's message to him and to his people.

It is evidently to this incident that Christ makes reference in Matt. 23 : 35 when He speaks of the blood of the martyrs from Abel to Zacharias (or Zechariah) as being required of the generation which He was then addressing. The only difficulty in the way of so understanding Him is that Zacharias is described as the son of Barachias (or Berechiah), whereas the Zechariah of 2 Chron. 24 : 20 is said to be the son of Jehoiada. But the latter may well have borne, or have been given by the people who so highly honoured him at his death (see v. 16) this other name Berechiah which means "The blessed of the Lord". Or, since he was an extremely old man all the days of Joash (see v. 15), there may have been an unnamed generation between him and Zechariah ; just as Jehu is sometimes called the son of Nimshi, and Athaliah the daughter of Omri, although these were their grandparents.

In other respects this murder well merits its position alongside that of Abel as samples of the deeds which were to be "required" (see Luke 11 : 51). Both sprang from bitterness engendered by differences as to religious worship, in both cases the murdered and the murderer were akin, and in both narratives reference had already been made in the Old Testament to requital. Of Abel it was said, "Thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground" (Gen. 4 : 10); while Zechariah himself exclaimed as he died, "The Lord look upon it and require it". Moreover, the striking contrast between the honour done to Jehoiada at his burial (v. 16) and the treatment of Zechariah, seems to be almost suggested in the words of Matt. 23 : 29-31, "Ye build the tombs of the prophets and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous . . . ye are the children of them which killed the prophets".

Another interesting comparison lies between the honourable burial of the priest Jehoiada "AMONGST THE KINGS", and that which was given to Joash himself, "NOT IN THE SEPULCHRES OF THE KINGS" (2 Chron. 24 : 16, 25). The contrast is heightened by the fact that Jehoiada was praised for the good he had done "toward God and toward HIS HOUSE", although it had seemed at the time as though Joash were more energetic (see v. 6) in repairing the House than he. Might this not illustrate the injunction in 1 Cor. 4 : 5 to "Judge nothing before the time".

CHAPTER XIII

THE HOUSE OF JEHU

The line of kings that began with Jehu lasted longer than any other which reigned over northern Israel. God had promised him that, as a reward for executing judgment upon the house of Ahab, his children to the fourth generation would sit on the throne, and so it came to pass. His son Jehoahaz succeeded him, and was followed by his grandson Joash, his great grandson Jeroboam II, and finally by a son of the last-named, Zachariah. Their united reigns occupied more than a century, and two of them, Jehu himself, who reigned twenty-eight years, and Jeroboam II, who reigned no less than

forty-one years, were on the throne longer than any other of the northern rulers.

They were a race of valiant fighters, almost continually engaged in warfare with the Syrians and others, but like all the rest of the kings of the Ten Tribes, they "departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin". Indeed, even the grosser idolatry of Baalism, though temporarily destroyed by Jehu, appears to have been at least tolerated during the reigns of his descendants (see 2 Kings 17 : 6 and Hosea 2 : 8, 13, 17), though not perhaps practised by the monarchs themselves.

During the period of their dominion, the nation had experience of both extremes of circumstances, favourable and unfavourable. At times God for their sins brought them so low that it could be said, "There was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel" (2 Kings 14 : 26) a fulfilling of the old prophecy of Deut. 32:36. At other times, pitying their affliction, He granted them deliverance so great that at length, in the reign of Jeroboam II, in accordance with a prophecy which had been given through the wayward servant of His, Jonah the son of Amittai, the entire northern and eastern border of the kingdom was "restored" to something approaching what it had been in the days of David and Solomon (2 Kings 14 : 25-28).

In the course of the narrative in 2 Kings many hints are given of the interest shown by the Lord in the condition of things in northern Israel during this period, and of how both their defeats and their victories were due, as above stated, to His intervention. We see, to begin with, how Jehu was not only appointed king, but also anointed by God's express command (2 Kings 9 : 3, 6), an honour accorded to no northern ruler but himself. For though the first Jeroboam was told by the prophet Ahijah that he was to be king, there was no anointing in his case. After this, successively, we read of the Lord's promise to him about the duration of his dynasty, followed immediately by a description of his failure and of the resultant chastisement on him and his people, when the Lord "began to cut Israel short" and permitted the loss of their territory east of Jordan (2 Kings 10 : 30-33); then of further similar losses in the time of Jehoahaz, and of a measure of deliverance granted when that king humbled himself to cry to God for it (chap. 13 : 3-7); then of the promise of victory given to the next king, Joash, at the death bed of Elisha, a promise lessened even while it was being given, owing to his lack of faith (chap. 13 : 14-20); then of the fulfilment of this promise to Joash, in a passage prefaced by a beautiful statement as to the Lord's compassion for Israel and the basis of it (chap. 13 : 23-25); and lastly, of the restoration already mentioned of the borders of the land in the reign of the second Jeroboam (chap. 14 : 25-27).

Besides these references made in the history to God's concern for the northern tribes, and to His dealings with them in the days of Jehu and his descendants, we have yet stronger evidence of it, as well as of the spiritual condition of the people at that time, in the writings of Hosea and Amos, who were prophesying just then, and whose ministry was directed mainly to them. The pictures that these prophets draw of the scenes amid which they moved are extraordinarily vivid, and they clearly show how grievous was the state of things, and how miserably poor and shortlived was the fruit of Jehu's boasted "zeal for the Lord" (2 Kings 10 : 16).

Zeal is a thing highly commended in many scriptures, and is spoken of

in a great variety of associations, as zeal for God (Num. 25 : 13), zeal for His people (Col. 4 : 13), zeal for clearing out evil (2 Cor. 7 : 11), zeal for giving (2 Cor. 9 : 2), zeal for good works (Titus 2 : 14), and so on. With most of us the trouble is that we have far too little zeal, and are content to drift along in a very easy going way. But at the same time we need to remember that zeal is only commendable when it is of the right kind and rightly directed. Certain men had a great zeal for the Galatians, but it was "in no good way" (Gal. 4 : 17, R.V.), for they wished to gather a party around themselves, and to bring the saints into legal bondage. This was sectarian zeal. King Saul had a "zeal for the children of Israel" (2 Sam. 21 : 2) which led him to do what he had no command from God to do, that is, to slay the Gibeonites, and he thus started a trouble that came to a head long after his death. He had not been so particular about slaying, when he would have been obeying the Lord by doing so, in the case of the king of the Amalekites. His was uninstructed zeal. Our friend Jehu, like many another, had great "zeal" and drove "furiously" (2 Kings 9:20) so long as there was fighting to be done, and advancement in it for himself, but had none to continue in God's ways afterwards. His was temporary zeal and selfish zeal.

"It is good", says Paul in Gal. 4 : 18, "to be zealously affected"; but he adds two qualifications. It should be "in a good thing", and it should be "always" (R.V. "at all times").

CHAPTER XIV

AMAZIAH

In Amaziah, son of Joash, king of Judah, and in Uzziah, his son and successor, we have two men of similar type, both the good and bad features in the career of the father being reproduced and emphasised in that of the son. Amaziah had peace and a measure of prosperity in the early part of his reign, and so had Uzziah to even greater degree. The former made use of the opportunity thus afforded him to enrol and equip a large army (2 Chron. 25 : 5); and the latter on a still greater scale did the same (2 Chron. 26 : 11-15). Amaziah met with success in his war with the Edomites (2 Chron. 25 : 11-13), while Uzziah conquered the Philistines and Arabians, and extended his fame to the borders of Egypt (2 Chron. 26 : 6-8). The father, owing to his success, became "lifted up" with pride to his own ruin (2 Chron. 25 : 19, 23); so did the son in a yet more daring way, and with a still more dreadful outcome (2 Chron. 26 : 16, 19).

From the religious point of view both men, like their predecessor Joash, began fairly well but finished badly; all three being marked examples of that failure in later life, to which attention has more than once been drawn in these notes. Amaziah, we are told, "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, yet not like David his father; he did . . . as Joash his father did" (2 Kings 14 : 3). And of Uzziah we read, "he did right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah did" (2 Chron. 26 : 4). The underlying cause of their weakness is made clear in 2 Chron. 25 : 2, where we read of Amaziah that he "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, BUT NOT WITH A PERFECT HEART"; and one way in which this imperfection showed itself is stated

in 2 Kings 14:4 to be that "the high places were not taken away ; as yet the people did sacrifice and burnt incense on the high places". This, as will be pointed out more fully when we come to deal with Hezekiah, does not necessarily imply that they were guilty of idolatry ; but that they worshipped God in unauthorised places, and in an unauthorised manner, a sin into which many of the Lord's people have fallen in almost all times right up to the present day, and which many who should know better seek to minimise as far as possible.

The incident in the life of Amaziah which is narrated in 2 Chron. 25 : 6-10 is one that should surely have a lesson for our own times. To assist in the war against Edom, he had hired "an hundred thousand mighty men of valour out of Israel (i.e. the northern tribes) for an hundred talents of silver". It seemed a wise move on his part, and the associating of the people of the northern kingdom with those of Judah was a project for which he could have pleaded the example of a good man, Jehoshaphat. But the Lord would have none of it, and the message of the unnamed "man of God" in verses 7, 8 made it plain that in gaining the help of these "mighty men" he would not only forfeit God's help, but would also experience His power to "cast down". Somewhat reluctantly Amaziah sent them home again, for it meant the loss of the hundred talents which he had already paid to them ; and the war was fought and won without their aid.

Instead, however, of profiting by this experience, Amaziah shortly after was guilty of an act of almost incredible folly. He brought home with him the idols of the conquered Edomites, and set them up to worship them ; idols which, as pointed out by the prophet sent of God to rebuke him, could not deliver their own people from his attack. Moreover, instead of submitting to the prophet's rebuke, as he had done on the previous occasion already mentioned, he threatened him with corporal punishment (2 Chron. 25 : 14-16).

In this passage it is interesting to notice the word-play on the same or kindred terms for "counsel", though in our English version it is obscured by rendering in one instance "determined" and in another "advice". In verse 16 the king sarcastically asks the prophet, "Art thou made of the king's counsel", to which the latter replies, "I know that God has counselled to destroy thee, because thou . . . hast not harkened to my counsel". It is as though he would say, "I am acquainted with the purposes of a far greater counsel than thine". Then in verse 17 we are told that Amaziah took counsel with regard to his intended challenge to Joash, king of Israel, but doubtless none of his counsellors foresaw what the consequences of that foolish step were to be.

In contrast with Amaziah, the king of Israel shows up creditably throughout this episode. He, too, offers counsel to his challenger, and advises him to stay at home and mind his own business. When Amaziah insists on fighting, he defeats him easily in a single battle, and captures both him and Jerusalem itself. Yet he does not seek to retain possession of the city, but permits Amaziah to resume his throne ; an act of grace which it is unlikely that the latter would have shown to him, had he been the victor, if we may judge by his treatment of the captured Edomites in verse 12.

Although Amaziah lived fifteen years after his defeat, he never recovered his testimony, nor regained the confidence of his people ; and it is re-

markable that the conspiracy which led to his death is said to have arisen "from the time that Amaziah did turn away from following the Lord" (verse 27, R.V.).

CHAPTER XV

UZZIAH

Although, as has been shown, the reign of Uzziah resembled in many respects that of his father, it was more prosperous, not only than Amaziah's but also that of any other king of Judah since the days of Jehoshaphat. When he succeeded to the throne, Jeroboam II had been reigning for some time over Northern Israel, and doubtless had already begun to gain those victories over the Syrians which brought about the fulfilment of Jonah's prophecy of 2 Kings 14 : 25, that the northern and eastern border of the land "from the entering in of Hamath unto the sea of the plain (i.e. the Dead Sea") would be restored. Is it not interesting, then, to learn from 2 Chron. 26 : 6-8 that Judah's king was at about the same time recovering the western and southern border, as far as Eloth on the Red Sea and "the entering in of Egypt" ? Thus on all sides the boundaries of Israel were temporarily extended, almost to what they had been in the days of David and Solomon (compare 1 Kings 8 : 65).

But the mercy which God at this time extended to His people in their affliction was ill repaid, both by Jeroboam and by Uzziah, and was soon withdrawn. The Assyrians, who had been the objects of Jonah's missionary expedition, within a very few years became the instruments of God's chastisement on both the Northern and Southern kingdoms ; and nevermore did the Israelites regain their former possessions and power.

With the exception of Solomon, no king of Israel or Judah seems to have had such a variety of interests and accomplishments as Uzziah. We might say of him that he was : (1) a king (2 Chron. 26 : 1); (2) a warrior (v. 6); (3) a builder (vv. 6, 9, 10); (4) a husbandman (v. 10); (5) an engineer (v. 15); and that, not satisfied with all this, he sought also to be (6) a priest (v. 16); but the outcome was that he ended his days as (7) a leper (v. 21).

When dealing with Solomon in an earlier chapter it was said that the kings of his line who came after him could choose whether they would follow the wise precepts of their great ancestor, as contained in the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, or imitate his doings which, at least in the latter part of his reign, were not always in accordance with those precepts. Some examples were given of kings who made the worse choice, and Uzziah may well be added to their number, for he seems to have been an ardent imitator of Solomon in the general character of his rule.

Eloth, the Red Sea port, of which we read in 2 Chron. 26 : 2, that Uzziah "restored it to Judah", had not been mentioned in the narrative since the reference to Solomon's presence there in 2 Chron. 8 : 17 ; and it is probable that the king's object was to make it, as his ancestor had done, a starting point for voyages to the East. In his building and planting too, which was done on a large scale in all parts of his kingdom, there seems to be a conscious imitation of his predecessor ; and even his intrusion into the Temple, which had such dire consequences, may have been suggested by remembrance of the prominent place Solomon had occupied at its dedication in 2 Chron. 5. On the other hand, had the king respected the warning of Proverbs 16 : 18,

"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall", and other similar warnings in that book, we should not have had the sad record in verses 16-21 of what took place when "his heart was lifted up to his destruction".

Like his grandfather Joash, Uzziah in the early part of his reign had the guidance and help of a good man. In verse 5 we read that "he sought God in the days of Zechariah who had understanding in the visions (Heb. "seeing" as in margin) of God ; and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper. About this Zechariah was know nothing more than the statement here made ; but from it we can see what influence for good he had, and that this influence was based on his experience of the "seeing" of God. Such a man would unquestionably be humble-minded, and anyone influenced by him would be humble-minded too. But when that influence was removed by Zechariah's death, the king, like so many others, was found unfit to stand alone, and the pride of his heart manifested itself.

That wonderful seeing of God which Isaiah experienced, and which he describes for us in his 6th chapter, took place, he tells us, "in the year that king Uzziah died", and the scene of it was that very Temple in which Uzziah's trespass had taken place. No doubt the leper king's recent death, and the remembrance thus stirred up of his sin and its punishment, helped to produce in the prophet the feeling of his unworthiness to be present in such surroundings of holiness and majesty, which led him to cry out, "Woe is me, for I am undone ; because I am a man of unclean lips (that is, "a defiled and defiling leper (see Lev. 13 : 45); and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips ; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts".

Thoughts suggested by this experience, and by the judgment which had befallen the king, seem to meet us here and there throughout Isaiah's entire book. Such, for example, are the frequent references to "the unclean", as in chapters 35 : 8 ; 52 : 1, 11 ; and especially in ch. 64 : 6, where the R.V. rendering make it clear that an unclean person and his polluted garment form the simile before the prophet's mind. So also the graphic description given of the nation in ch. 1 : 5, 6 appears to be that of a person covered from head to foot with leprous sores in various stages of development. On the other hand, when we find that Isaiah, no less than twenty-five times, speaks of the Lord as "the Holy One of Israel", a title found not more than seven times in all the other Scriptures, we cannot but feel that Uzziah's fate and his own vision had left a powerful impress upon his spirit.

One further point of interest should be mentioned ere we take our leave of Uzziah. His name signifies "Strength of the Lord", and this seems to underlie the references to "strengthened" and "strong" in 2 Chron. 26 : 8, 15, 16. And the other name "Azariah", by which he is usually called in the record of him in 2 Kings, means "Help of the Lord", and is even more clearly hinted at in the references to "help" in 2 Chron. 26 : 7, 13, 15, for it is in each case the Hebrew word "azar", from which the name Azar-iah is compounded. This is the more remarkable because of the fact that Chronicles never uses the name Azariah as his (apart from its occurrence in the genealogy of 1 Chron. 3 : 12), but mentions it in verse 17 as that of the priest who withstood him. The "Strength of the Lord" was for Uzziah's "help" so long as he sought Him and kept humble ; but when "his heart was lifted up" in self-will, it was put forth against him. And the leper king is not the only person who has found this to be true.

CHAPTER XVI

AHAZ AND MANASSEH

In Ezekiel 18 there is a remarkable passage which, for the vindication of God's dealings with men, depicts several generations of a family as being righteous and wicked alternately ; and it is interesting to note how closely parallel these are to the kings who succeeded Uzziah upon the throne of Judah. In verses 5-9 of that chapter we have the description of a righteous man, corresponding to Uzziah's immediate successor Jotham (cf. Chron. 27 : 6). In verses 10-13 this man's son turns out to be an exceedingly wicked man, as did Jotham's son Ahaz. In verses 14-17 there follows a son of this wicked person, who, seeing the evil of what his father had done, turns to the Lord and walks righteously before Him, which was the case with the son of Ahaz, Hezekiah. Finally, in verses 21, 22 there is seen another evil generation, but in this instance the wicked person ultimately repents and is forgiven. And that this was the experience of Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, we learn from 2 Chron. 33 : 12, 13. Thus the Israelites who first heard Ezekiel's message had concrete examples in the histories of their own recent kings of what he was endeavouring to set before them.

Hezekiah's character was such that he would have stood out prominently amongst the kings of Judah, no matter where in the line his lot had been cast. But the fact that, as shown above, he comes in between the two most wicked of them all, Ahaz on the one hand, and Manasseh on the other, enhances much the brightness of his reign. So evil were these two men that the writer of 2 Chronicles seems to be almost at a loss for language to describe the grossness of their idolatries, and to stand in doubt as to which of them should be assigned the palm for depravity. In chapter 28, after a long passage in which he depicts the sins of Ahaz and their consequences, he sums the matter up in the words, "HE MADE JUDAH NAKED, and transgressed sore against the Lord" (verse 19) ; and having done so, he stands back, as it were, and looking at the picture he has drawn, he adds, "THIS IS THAT KING AHAZ" (verse 22). Again in chapter 33, having dealt in like manner with Manasseh, he says, "So Manasseh made Judah . . . to do WORSE THAN THE HEATHEN whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel" (verse 9).

In comparing them, the one point of the credit of Manasseh is that he alone of the two ultimately repented, and sought to undo at least some of the mischief he had wrought (2 Chron. 33 : 12-16). But on the other hand he outdid the wickedness of Ahaz in one respect, that of cruelty and murder. It is the writer of 2 Kings who dwells upon this, telling us in chapter 21 : 16 that he "shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another"; and again reminding us in chapter 24 : 4 that he "filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which THE LORD WOULD NOT PARDON". This last statement suggests that although Manasseh may personally have been forgiven on his repentance (2 Chron. 33 : 13), yet he had brought the kingdom to a stage which nationally was beyond forgiveness, and which became the chief cause of the Babylonish captivity. Indeed, the passage of which it forms a part (2 Kings 24 : 1-4) distinctly says this, as do also several others, 2 Kings 21 : 11-14 ; 2 Kings 23 : 26, 27 ; Jeremiah 15 : 4, etc.

But even in this respect Ahaz does not stand clear, for he it was who first

brought the great kings of the north into contact with Judah, by invoking the aid of the Assyrian against Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Syria (2 Kings 16 : 7-10). And he did so wilfully, after having been warned against it by God through His servant Isaiah (Isa. 7 : 1-20).

This episode in his history, although mentioned in the account of Ahaz both in Kings and in 2 Chronicles, is set forth from a more interesting point of view in the Isaiah passage just named. There we learn (v. 6) that the kings of Syria and Israel not only had confederated to fight against Judah, but also had actually arranged to dethrone the house of David, and to set up as king a creature of their own choosing, who is called "the son of Tabeal". And Isa. 8 : 6 etc. suggests that the plan was favoured by certain of Ahaz's own subjects. Behind the scenes this, like the attempted destruction of David's line by Athaliah from which the baby Joash was saved, was no doubt one of Satan's many plots to wipe out the family from which the promised "Seed" was to spring forth ; and one that seemed the more hopeful of success because of the king's great wickedness, but was "broken in pieces" against the promise and purposes of God (Isa. 8 : 8-10).

An understanding of these things will enable us to read this section of Isaiah more intelligently ; and to see why in ch. 7 : 2, 13 we have the expression "House of David", where we might have expected the personal name "Ahaz"; and why there follow so many remarkable prophecies of, and references to the coming Messiah—the virgin's Son who was to be called "Immanuel" (ch. 7 : 14, 15 ; 8 : 8); the Sanctuary who was yet to be a Stone of stumbling and Rock of offence (ch. 8 : 14); the Great Light which was to shine in Galilee of the nations (ch. 9 : 1, 2); the Child born Who is also a Son given, and whose Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace (ch. 9 : 6, 7) ; the Rod out of the stem of Jesse (ch. 11 : 1), Who at the same time is Jesse's Root (verse 10).

Links between all these passages and the circumstances under which they were spoken might easily be pointed out. They are well worthy of study, and as we consider them we shall scarcely know whether to marvel more at the obduracy of the man who, from listening to these glorious promises, could turn away again, and plunge more deeply into his idolatries ; or at the persistence of the Lord in carrying through His purposes, despite all the failure and wickedness of Ahaz and Manasseh and many others like them.

CHAPTER XVII

HEZEKIAH

With relief one turns from the sad records of Ahaz and Manasseh to that of the great and good king who reigned during the interval between them. It is claimed for Hezekiah that "after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him ; for he clave to the Lord and departed not from following Him, but kept His commandments" (2 Kings 18 : 5, 6). Also that "in every work that he began, in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart and prospered" (2 Chron. 31:21). Moreover it is stated that when he died, "they buried him in the chiefest of the sepulchres of the sons of David, and all Judah . . . did him honour

at his death" (2 Chron. 32 : 33). These tributes were no more than his due ; and the Holy Spirit has shown His approval in another way, by dealing with his reign at much greater length than is the case with any other king of Judah. Not only have we three chapters in 2nd Kings and four in 2nd Chronicles concerning it, but four in Isaiah as well.

When Hezekiah came to the throne the condition of things in Judah was worse than it had ever previously been. Ahaz had subjected himself and his people to the overlordship of the Assyrian king (2 Kings 16:7, 8); and after introducing various innovations in the Temple, had at length closed its doors, and set up idolatrous altars "in every corner of Jerusalem" (2 Kings 16 : 10-17 ; 2 Chron. 28 : 24). It was a difficult state of affairs for his young successor to deal with, but Hezekiah acted promptly and with wisdom. In the first month of the first year of his reign he "opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them" (2 Chron. 29 : 3), at the same time commanding the priests and Levites to sanctify themselves, so that they might cleanse the Holy Place and restore the worship of the Lord. The Levites responded heartily, as they had done on other occasions of crisis (Exod. 32 ; 26 ; 2 Chron. 11 : 13); and we read (2 Chron. 29:34) that they showed more zeal than the priests, whose leader Urijah had himself been implicated in the idolatrous innovations of 2 Kings 16:10-16. By their aid the Temple services were soon set going again.

But quickly though they wrought, the set time for that year's Passover arrived before matters were sufficiently advanced for its observance. So the king, who seems to have read the law of the Lord to some profit, suggested that the nation as a whole should take advantage of the provision made in Numbers 9 : 10, 11 for an individual Israelite, who through uncleanness or other cause was unable to keep the feast at its due time, and was permitted to do so a month later. This arrangement was acceptable to all, and based as it was on God's own Word, stands in marked contrast with the alterations introduced by his father Ahaz, which were not so ; and in even sharper contrast with Jeroboam's arrangement to hold a feast in the eighth month, an ordinance which, we are told, "he had devised of his own heart" (1 Kings 12 : 32, 33).

An interesting feature of Hezekiah's character is seen in the steps he took (2 Chron. 30 : 1) to publish this Passover, and indeed in connection with the earlier sacrifices of chapter 29. He appears to have had in large measure that delightful combination of zeal to keep all God's commandments and a heart to take in all God's people. For in ch. 29 : 24 he had commanded that the burnt-offering and the sin-offering should be offered "FOR ALL ISRAEL"; and now in chap. 30 : 1 he sends his letters of invitation to the feast "TO ALL ISRAEL AND JUDAH". Yet it was to no "occasional fellowship" that he invited his brethren of Ephraim, as the text of his letters given in verses 6-9 will show. See especially verse 8, "Be ye not stiffnecked . . . yield yourselves unto the Lord, and enter into His sanctuary . . . and serve the Lord your God". And on the other hand it was no Pharisaic spirit that he wrote, as may be seen by comparing with them the closely similar words he had used in his confession on behalf of Judah and himself in chapter 29 : 6-9.

The king's invitations met with a mixed reception. By the majority of those left at that time in the northern kingdom his messengers were mocked and scorned ; but in verse 11 we read that "divers of Asher and Manasseh

and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem”, while from verse 18 we learn that some of Issachar and even of the proud tribe of Ephraim were also present when the feast came on. So far as Judah was concerned they were “of one heart” to do as the king commanded ; and since verse 12 in which this is stated ends with the expression “by the word of the Lord”, we may take it that there was prophetic confirmation, doubtless through Isaiah, of what Hezekiah had planned to do.

Among those who came of the northern tribes, many were not ceremonially cleansed in time for the feast, and Hezekiah’s prayer for such well expresses what their position was. He asked the Lord to “pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God . . . though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the Sanctuary”. They had the desire to be right, but lacked time to accomplish what was required. But there was one act of cleansing that the congregation which had gathered could do and did do, ere the feast began. They went around the city, and having dragged from their “corners” (ch. 28 : 24) the altars that Ahaz and others had set up, they cast them into the brook Kidron (ch. 30:14).

So much did the assembly enjoy their seven days together that they decided to have seven days more of it ; and their testimony at the end was that “since the time of Solomon . . . there was not the like in Jerusalem” (verse 26).

CHAPTER XVIII

HEZEKIAH (continued)

The overthrow of the altars and idols in Jerusalem, which took place (2 Chron. 30 : 14) previous to Hezekiah’s Passover, was followed, when the feast was ended, by a still greater destruction of them, not only in the other cities of Judah, but throughout Ephraim and Manasseh as well (ch. 31 : 1). So zealously was this accomplished that it is said, “They utterly destroyed them all”.

In this connection it should be noticed that Hezekiah’s pulling down of high places and altars differed in one important respect from that done by earlier kings of Judah ; and this difference, when it is understood, will enable us to “reconcile”, as the commentators call it, certain statements about those earlier kings which, to a careless reader, appear to be contradictory. We read, for example, in 1 Kings 15 : 14 that “the high places were not removed” in the days of king Asa ; yet in 2 Chron. 14 : 3 it is said that Asa “took away the high places”. Similarly, in 1 Kings 22:43 we are told that in Jehoshaphat’s reign “the high places were not taken away”; but in 2 Chron. 17 : 6 that he also “took away the high places”. The apparent discrepancy is made much of by such commentators as have lax ideas of inspiration, and they begin to discuss which of the accounts is the more reliable. The matter, however, becomes more difficult to settle when it is discovered that the writer of Chronicles, who in the passages above named has stated that Asa and Jehoshaphat took away the high places, elsewhere agrees with the writer of Kings that they did not do so (see 2 Chron. 15 : 17 and 20 : 33). And to render it still more complicated, it may be seen that the writer of Kings, in the very context of his statement that the high places were not taken away by Asa, asserts that he

“removed all the idols”, and even “removed” the queen-mother Maachah for having an idolatrous place of worship for her private use (1 Kings 15 : 12-14).

The explanation of all these differences is simply that there were two kinds of high places, high place of idolatrous worship and high places where they worshipped the Lord only (see 2 Chron. 33 : 17). Even Samuel (1 Sam. 9 : 12), and Solomon prior to the building of the Temple (1 Kings 3 : 2, 3) sacrificed in high places of the latter kind ; but the contrast suggested in the last named verse seems to imply that David did not. Asa and Jehoshaphat destroyed the idolatrous high places, but left the others ; and it may be noticed that each passage which asserts the destruction makes mention in some way of the idolatry, whereas those which deny it contain no reference to idols at all.

In contrast with all the above, Hezekiah made a clean sweep of both kinds of high places, and could therefore in truth be said to have “utterly destroyed them all”. So alien was this procedure to prevalent ideas of what was the right to do, that the messenger of the Assyrian king, in his speech to the men of Jerusalem, drew their attention to it as a reason why they could not expect the Lord to help them. Said he, “Hath not the same Hezekiah taken away His high places and His altars, . . . saying, Ye shall worship before ONE altar” (2 Chron. 32 : 12). And it is quite likely that some of those who listened to him shook their heads doubtfully, and thought that their king had perhaps gone a little bit too far in his bigotry against other centres of worship.

Yet in what he did Hezekiah acted in strict accordance with what he found written in Deut. 12 : 8-14 etc., and especially with the injunction, “Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offering in every place that thou seest, but in the place which the Lord shall choose in one of thy tribes”. In this matter, as in the case of the second month Passover, he showed himself a diligent student of the Law of the Lord, and moreover, of the very book, Deuteronomy, which would-be clever critics tell us was only discovered, or even written, in the days of his great grandson, Josiah. And what the Lord thought of these acts of His servant is made clear by His commendation of him in 2 Kings 18 : 5, 6 and 2 Chron. 31 : 21.

We may still profit much, if we are willing, from Hezekiah’s example. It is surely as important today as it then was that we should act according to what we find written in God’s book, instead of doing “every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes” (Deut. 12 : 8). And we, like Hezekiah, have on every hand “high places” of varying character, some of them so honeycombed with evil doctrine that no real child of God could have fellowship with them, but others so like the right thing that our Asas and Jehoshaphats would spare them, and even our Samuels would at times venture into them. We need to hear again the rallying call, “To the Law and to the Testimony”, which went forth in the days of Hezekiah’s father Ahaz (Isa. 8 : 20), and which was so well responded to by his son.

CHAPTER XIX

HEZEKIAH’S LETTERS

That the sending and receiving of letters is no innovation of modern times we may know from the various references made to them in the Old Testa-

ment. And that they may be used for evil purposes, as well as good, is evident from the fact that the greater number of those alluded to in the Scriptures is of this class. Such was the first mentioned one, the letter of David to Joab suggesting a plan to bring about Uriah's death (2 Sam. 11 : 14, 15); and the second, that of Jezebel to the elders of Jezreel suggesting one for Naboth's death (1 Kings 21 : 9-11). Compare also the letters of Jehu to the elders of Samaria which led to the death of seventy persons (2 Kings 10 : 1-7); the letter of Shemaiah to the priests and people of Jerusalem urging them to imprison Jeremiah (Jer. 29 : 24-29); the letter of the adversaries of Judah to Artaxerxes, and his reply, which for a time caused the building of the Temple to cease (Ezra 4 : 7-23); the letters of Haman to the provincial rulers of the Persian empire ordering the destruction of the Jews (Esther 3 : 12-15); and the letters carried by Saul of Tarsus for the arrest of the saints at Damascus (Acts 9 : 2).

In the story of king Hezekiah we have mention of letters both good and bad, the former sent by him (2 Chron. 30 : 1, 6, 10), and the latter received by him (2 Kings 10 : 14 and 20 : 12). To the former reference has already been made, and the combination of humility of mind, love for God's people, and zeal for His commandments, which they display, has been pointed out. How often has our own letterwriting, however well meant, been a failure because we were lacking in one or other of these characteristics ! In Hezekiah's case they produced fruit after their kind ; for some who received the letters humbled themselves (2 Chron. 30 : 11), and some manifested one of heart (v. 12), and carefulness to obey (v. 13, etc.).

But even greater interest attaches to what we may call Hezekiah's inward mail, the letters received by him from Sennacherib, king of Assyria, and from Merodach-baladan, king of Babylon. These could scarcely have differed more from one another in substance than they did, the one being full of threats and blasphemies, and the other of good wishes and compliments. Yet Satan doubtless had a hand in the inditing of each, for he does not always go to work in the same way.

Sennacherib's letter was an evil and unpleasant communication to receive. Some of us may have had experience of getting letters of this character, and even at times from those who had not the manliness to sign their names to them. If so, in what Hezekiah did with his we have an example of the best way to deal with them. Instead of giving Sennacherib tit for tat in a return letter, he "spread it out before the Lord" and prayed about it, telling the Lord all he had to say about him, and putting the matter into His hands. And of course the Lord took up His servant's case and fought his battle for him. He sent His angel that very night to make a surprise attack on Sennacherib's hosts, and he did it with such success that in the morning a hundred and eight-five thousand of the flower of the Assyrian army lay dead. One has written :-

"Self-vindication shun. If in the right,
 What gainest thou by taking from God's hand
 Thy cause ? If wrong, what dost thou but invite
 Satan himself thy friend in need to stand ?
 Leave all with God. If right,, He'll prove thee so ;
 If not, He'll pardon ; therefore to Him go".

But if Hezekiah acted wisely on this occasion, the same cannot be said

of how he dealt with the letter of the king of Babylon in 2 Kings 20: 12, 13. It was a nice friendly letter, and was accompanied by a present ; so he did not think it necessary to show it to the Lord at all. He just knew how to handle this matter himself, and in the first place he must treat kindly the postmen who came with it. So he took them right through his palace from the attic to the basement, and showed them all his treasures. Solomon, when visited by a great queen from a distant land, had showed his treasures to her, but he was careful at the same time to show her something of his spiriual life, "the ascent by which he went up to the House of the Lord" (1 Kings 10:5). But we do not read of Hezekiah doing anything like that. These ambassadors of Babylon would have had no interest in it, and he did not wish to do anything which would offend them.

Soon, however, the king had his complacency disturbed, for Isaiah came to him, and after a few searching questions, announced that not Assyria but this very kingdom of Babylon was to be the instrument used in punishing Judah and bringing about their captivity ; and that the treasures he had so proudly displayed would serve as a bait to lure the Babylonians to come and seize them. The fact is that Hezekiah had never stood in greater need of seeking counsel from the Lord than on this occasion, on which he did not see any need for it. When Satan had come as a roaring lion in the guise of Sennacherib, the danger was less than when he came as a beguiling serpent in that of the king of Babylon. What it was in the latter instance we shall point out in our next chapter ; and meanwhile shall close with another verse from the poem already quoted :—

"Be wise, be watchful. Wily men surround
Thy path. Be careful, for they seek with care
To trip thee up. See that no plea be found
In thee thy Master to reproach. The snare
They set for thee will then themselves enclose ;
And God His righteous judgment thus disclose".

CHAPTER XX

HEZEKIAH'S ILLNESS AND ITS OUTCOME

Hezekiah's sickness, the story of which we get in 2 Kings 20 and Isaiah 38, divides his reign into two nearly equal portions. He was granted fifteen years of his life after it ; and since his whole reign lasted twenty-nine, he must have already been on the throne fourteen years when it occurred. Moreover, according to 2 Kings 20 : 1, his illness was shortly after the great Assyrian invasion, and this, we learn from 2 Kings 18 : 13, took place in the fourteenth year of his reign.

He was at that time but thirty-nine years old, "the noontide of my days", as he calls it in Isa. 38 : 10 (R.V.); which may help to account for his horror at being, as he says, "deprived of the residue of my years". And while the "writing" (v. 9) in which he thus speaks, and which was penned by him on his recovery, might give one the impression that his thoughts when faced with death had been almost entirely of self, yet the fact that God, while promising him additional years in verses 5, 6 adds, "And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria", suggests

that part at least of what had been troubling him was the danger to his people of renewed invasion after he was gone.

Hezekiah does, however, seem to have come short of the depth of soul experience and knowledge that was gained under a similar trial by the writer of Psalm 116, from which in this "writing" of his he so largely quotes. He may use the same or allied phrases, "the Lord in the land of the living", "the gates of Sheol", "the dead praise not the Lord", etc., but he has not learned, as the earlier writer had, that "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Psa. 116 : 15). And while, like the other, he may answer the question in verse 12 of the psalm, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards me?" by making vows as to his future behaviour, yet in his case it has to be recorded, "Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done to him" (2 Chron. 32 : 25).

Let us see what these vows of the king were, that we may be able to judge how he kept them. In Isa. 38 : 15 he says that he will go softly all his years ; in verses 19, 20 he promises to praise the Lord all the days of his life ; and in verse 19 he undertakes to teach the truth of the Lord to his children. Now whatever else the expression "go softly" may signify (see R.V. margin), it certainly implies humility ; yet in 2 Chron. 32 : 25, 26 we read that shortly after this Hezekiah's heart got lifted up with pride. And it is rather unlikely that he did much in the way of fulfilling his promise to praise the Lord on that day when he was displaying his treasures to the Babylonish ambassadors. As to what he taught the child born to him during the fifteen years by which his life had been extended, all one can say is that when Manasseh succeeded him at the age of twelve, he showed no signs of having been trained up in the way he should go.

But Hezekiah's main failure in this part of his career, and the one which the Scriptures emphasise, was in the affair of the embassy from Babylon ; and it is in connection with this that it is written, "God left him, to try him, that He might know all that was in his heart" (2 Chron. 32 : 31). Indeed it might also have been written that he himself left God out on this occasion, for, as was remarked in our last chapter, he did not consider it necessary to seek the Lord's counsel about the matter at all.

It is interesting to note that two ostensible reasons are given for this embassy, yet behind them lay a third – the real cause of it – which is only hinted at. In Isa. 39 : 1 we are told that Merodach-baladan "sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he had heard that he had been sick and was recovered". That was very thoughtful and kind of him. In 2 Chron. 32 : 31, however, it is said that they were "to enquire of the wonder that was done in the land", which was of course the going back of the sun's shadow by ten degrees on the dial of Ahaz. Well, why should they not kill two birds with the one stone, since everyone knew that the Babylonians were keen astronomers. But what then is meant by the words in 2 Kings 20 : 13, "And Hezekiah harkened unto them" ? Although they are followed by a statement that he showed them all his treasures, they are not preceded by any request on their part to view these, and it is most unlikely that they mean no more than this. It is now well known from Assyrian and other records that Medodach-baladan had all his days been struggling against the power of Assyria, and had been endeavouring to stir up rebellion against that empire wherever he could. There can, therefore, be little doubt that the real object of his embassy to Hezekiah was to obtain his aid and alliance;

and if so, the display of the treasures follows naturally upon the statement that he hearkened unto them, as an endeavour on his part to show them how valuable his alliance would be.

This view of the matter also furnishes a reason for the severity of the message delivered immediately afterwards by Isaiah to the king (2 Kings 20 : 14-19), which is beyond what one would expect, had it been merely a rebuke for childish vanity and love of display. The prophet had pronounced warnings previously against going down to Egypt for help (see Isa. 30 : 2 ; 31 : 1, etc.); and we may be sure that alliance with Babylon was no less hateful in God's sight, while the great deliverance recently wrought for Hezekiah and his people rendered it inexcusable that proposals for such a thing should be "hearkened to" by him.

In spite, however, of his failure on this occasion, Hezekiah stands out prominently among the kings of Judah as one who wrought faithfully for God and for the welfare of His people, and he well deserved the honours they accorded him at his death. Such passages as 2 Chron. 31 : 2-21 and 32 : 26-30, in addition to those already dealt with, place this beyond question, as does also the little note in Prov. 25 : 1 concerning his activities in connection with the preservation of the Scriptures.

CHAPTER XXI

JOSIAH

More than half a century had elapsed from the day on which Hezekiah had honourably been laid to rest in "the chiefest of the sepulchres of the sons of David", when his great grandson Josiah became king at the early age of eight years. The intervening period, the reigns of Manasseh and Amon, had, for the most part, been spent in undoing all the good work which he had wrought ; and when Josiah ascended the throne idolatry was rampant everywhere, and the House of God lay deserted and defiled.

A casual glance at the story of Josiah's reformation might lead us to think of him as merely an imitator of his great ancestor, but as we study more carefully what is written of him, we must acknowledge that he deserves a higher place in our esteem than this. Even the first statement made about him, that "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the ways of David his father, and **TURNED NOT ASIDE TO THE RIGHT HAND OR TO THE LEFT**", is stronger than had been spoken of any previous king ; and it is of interest to note that its final clause is one used four times in the exhortations of Deuteronomy, and that one of its occurrences there (ch. 17 : 20) is in the very paragraph which contains instructions for the conduct of future kings of Israel. It is also found in Proverbs 4 : 27, which reminds us that Josiah was one of the few successors of Solomon who followed his wise precepts rather than his foolish doings ; a point which receives rather remarkable confirmation when in 2 Kings 23 : 12-15 we read that he not only brake down the idolatrous places and objects of worship erected by Ahaz and Manasseh, and those of Jeroboam at Bethel (as it had been prophesied he would do 350 years before he was born, in 1 Kings 13 : 2), but also destroyed those set up by Solomon himself for his heathen wives, which appear to have been spared by even the best of the kings who went before him.

In comparing him with Hezekiah, there are two outstanding statements in the record of each of them which are worthy of our attention. Concerning the Passover kept by Hezekiah in the beginning of his reign, it is said that "since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem" (2 Chron. 30 : 26) ; but of that kept by Josiah we read, "there was no Passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet, neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a Passover as Josiah kept" (2 Chron. 35 : 18). Again, of Hezekiah personally we are told that "he trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him" (2 Kings 18 : 5); while of Josiah it is written, "Like unto him there was no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the laws of Moses ; neither after him arose there any like him" (2 Kings 23 : 25).

As these latter sayings might appear to contradict one another, it will perhaps be helpful to notice that the emphasis in Hezekiah's case is upon his trust in the Lord, while in that of Josiah it is upon the wholeheartedness of his turning to the Lord ; and also that to say, "There was none like him" does not necessarily imply that in all respects he was better than every one else.

The estimation in which Josiah was held by contemporaries is best seen in the attitude towards him of Jeremiah who was one of them, and in the words spoken of him by that prophet. In 2 Chron. 35 : 25 we learn how he and others lamented over the king at his death and afterwards ; and part at least of the lamentation is preserved to us in what we call the Book of Lamentations, where in ch. 4 : 20 we read, "The breath of our nostrils, the Anointed of the Lord, was taken in their pits ; of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen". The primary reference here is evidently to Josiah, and the expressions used suggest that when godly Israelites looked upon the splendid dawn of the young king's reign, the thought presented itself to their minds ; might he turn out to be the Promised One for whom we have so long been waiting ?

In Jer. 22 : 15, 16 we get yet more of what the prophet has to say as to the character of Josiah's rule, in a passage where he contrasts him with his son Jehoiachim. He asks, "Did not thy father . . . do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him ? He judged the cause of the poor and needy ; then it was well with him". Here, too, we find expressions used of Josiah, which in Psalm 72 and elsewhere are associated with the reign of the Messiah.

Several dates, suggestive of what we might call the spiritual progress of the king, are given prominence in 2 Chron. 34. In verse 1 it is stated that he was only eight years old when he succeeded to the throne. In verse 3 it is said that in the eighth year of his reign, or in other words when he was sixteen years old he began to seek after the God of David his father, an expression that sounds like a conversion of New Testament type, with its very date placed on record. In the twelfth year, that is to say at the age of twenty, according to the same verse, he began to exercise his kingly authority by purging his kingdom from idolatry. This seems to have required six years to complete, for it was not until the eighteenth year of his rule (verse 8) that he was able to restore the Temple and its service.

It is clear from verse 1 that his entire reign lasted thirty-one years, so

there were at this time thirteen years of it still to run ; but of that period we know nothing, save that at its close we see him no longer guided by Solomon's book of wisdom, for he comes to his death by "meddling with strife belonging not to him" (compare Prov. 26 : 17 with 2 Chron. 35 : 20-22). On the other hand, his being taken away at thirty-nine, the very age which Hezekiah had spoken of as "the noontide of my days" (Isa. 38 : 10, R.V.) was perhaps fulfilment of the promise made to him in 2 Chron. 34 : 28 that his eyes should not behold the judgment which was soon to be poured out on his country ; as well as of the somewhat earlier prophecy of Isa. 57 : 1, that "the righteous is taken away from the evil to come".

CHAPTER XXII

A ROYAL CEMETERY

As we have walked through some ancient burial ground, and gazed on the various memorials of those whose bodies lie mouldering to dust in it, we have doubtless seen much that was of interest and, it may be, have been not a little profited as well. Now let us walk through a cemetery more ancient than any you have thus far visited, in the hope that we shall find it, too, both interesting and profitable.

It is the burying place at Jerusalem of the royal house of Judah, and if it is inquired, How are we to get there ? the reply is, it is quite easy, for we have but to open our Bibles at the Second Book of Chronicles. There we find a series of particulars, which are not elsewhere recorded, as to the place and manner of the burial of the kings, of whose times it contains the history ; and, unlike the records usually inscribed on tombstones, which tell only what is good of the person lying beneath, we shall find that these appraise each man at his actual worth, as estimated by those left behind him.

When a king of Judah died his subjects appear to have had it in their power to decide where and how his burial should be ; and however much they may have flattered him in his lifetime, having now nothing either to fear or to hope from him, they seem to have made their real opinion very manifest in each case. They proved themselves shrewd judges too, and even where they had allowed their king to lead them into wickedness while he was alive, they showed that they still knew the difference between good and evil, when it came to a question of his funeral.

Thus it may be also with ourselves. We may have been flattered and fawned upon, until we have come to hold much too high an opinion, both of our spirituality, and of our ability. But behind all this flattery, we have been scrutinized carefully ; and it would perhaps surprise some of us very much, were we to see ourselves as others see us, and to learn how well our measure has been taken.

But come along to this royal cemetery and let us see what is to be found there. Like every other place of the kind, there are in it some positions more honourable than others ; and here in the very best place of all we find a well-known name. It is the tomb of Hezekiah, concerning whom the record is, "They buried him in THE CHIEFEST OF THE SEPULCHRES of the sons of David, and all did him honour at his death" (2 Chron. 32 : 33). Well they might do so, for since the days of David himself there had been no king like him (2 Kings 18 : 5). There had been good men, no doubt,

but none of whom it could be said, as it was of him, "In every work he began, in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments to seek his God, he did it with all his heart and prospered" (2 Chron. 31 : 21). There had been kings who sought to put down idolatry; yet the brazen serpent, which had been turned into an idol, was let alone until he destroyed it (2 Kings 18 : 4); and the high places where unauthorised worship of the Lord was carried on (as distinct from those devoted to false gods) were not interfered with until he put an end to them (2 Chron. 32 : 12). And there had been those, as Jehoshaphat, who desired to bring together the two parts of the divided nation, but none made a definite effort in that direction on a scriptural basis until Hezekiah did so in 2 Chron. 30 : 11.

But moving onward, we notice another sepulchre which, like Hezekiah's, is evidently that of someone held in high esteem. On reaching it, we find to our surprise that, although in the royal cemetery, it is not the tomb of a king at all, but of the high priest Johoiada. This man, while not himself a king, might, like a certain earl famous in English history, have been called a king-maker, for it was to him king Joash owed his crown, and through his instrumentality God was pleased to preserve the line of the house of David in a time of deadly peril. Of him we read, "They buried him in the city of David **AMONG THE KINGS** ; because he had done good in Israel, both toward God, and toward His house" (2 Chron. 24 : 16).

Passing by other honoured tombs, such as that of Josiah who, as we have seen, lost his life prematurely by meddling with strife which did not concern him (2 Chron. 35 : 20-25), and that of Asa, who seems to have outlived his usefulness (2 Chron. 16 : 12-14), we arrive at the boundary of the royal cemetery proper, though beyond it there lies an extension of the field in which it is situated. Placed away by itself in this portion we see the sepulchre of Uzziah, the leper king, as lonely in his burial as he was during the latter years of his life. His story is that of a good man, who allowed his testimony to be ruined beyond recovery in a moment of pride. Concerning him it is said, "He was marvellously helped till he was strong, but when he was strong his heart was lifted up to his destruction". And when he died we read, "They buried him **IN THE FIELD** of the burial of the kings, for they said, He is a leper" (2 Chron. 26 : 15, 16, 23).

Still further away from the resting place of Judah's great ones, we come on quite a group of tombs, those of the men concerning whom it is written, "They buried him in the city of David, but not in the sepulchres of the kings". Among them we find Joash, who got on well so long as he allowed himself to be guided by the good priest Jehoiada, but who showed himself in his true colours, as soon as the prop was removed, and evil associates got his ear (2 Chron. 24 : 25). Here, too, lies Ahaz, the man who sought to improve on the order of God's worship by arrangements of his own (2 Chron. 28 : 27 with 2 Kings 16 : 10-17). And here in the uttermost corner is the neglected tomb of Jehoram, concerning whom it was written, "The people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers . . . and he departed **WITHOUT BEING DESIRED**" (2 Chron. 21 : 19-20). Possibly when he first ascended the throne, it might have been said of him, as it was of Saul, "On whom is all the **DESIRE** of Israel, is it not on thee"; but if so, he speedily manifested himself to be a troubler of the nation, until at his end God's people were glad to be rid of him.

Before bringing our walk to a close, let us visit the grave of yet another king ; but we shall have to travel some distance to get there ; for not only must we leave the royal cemetery, and its environs, but we must go outside the walls of Jerusalem itself. Moreover, we shall have difficulty in discovering the exact spot, for there is no memorial stone, and the nearest indication we are given is that it lies in the place where the citizens buried their dead asses. It is the grave of Jehoiachin, and the record is to be found, not in 2 Chronicles this time, but in Jer. 22 : 18, 19, where we read, "They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah my brother . . . he shall be buried with the BURIAL OF AN ASS, drawn and cast forth, beyond the gates of Jerusalem". This was the end of a man who trampled on everyone's rights (vv. 13-17) in order to gratify his own selfish whims. Small wonder that there was no one to say, "Ah my brother" when he died.

Now let us remind ourselves that these things have been "written for our admonition", and it is for us to profit by the lessons which they teach. If the Lord were to remove us, would our funerals be like that of Stephen, over whom "devout men made great lamentation" (Acts 8:2); or that of Dorcas, where "all the widows stood by, weeping and showing . . ." (Acts 9 : 39)? Or would it be with us, as with Jehoram, that our departure would be looked on as a relief by the people of God? Let us remember that our record is being day by day set down, not by our fellow-men merely, but by God Himself. And ahead of us there lies, not alone the rough and ready justice which those who knew us may mete out to us on the day of our funeral, but the judgment seat of Christ, where we shall all be made manifest as we really are, and where the Lord will honour us, according as we have honoured Him here.

Notes on Some Psalms

INTRODUCTION

By way of introducing these, a few prefatory remarks may be helpful ; and first I would say this. If I wish to study my Bible, and more particularly the Old Testament part of it intelligently, I should never begin my consideration of a passage with the question, What has this Scripture to say to me ? And yet, if it is my desire to read the Word of God so as to profit thereby, I shall not lay aside the study of any passage, until I have asked myself that very question, or one of similar import. All Scripture, being inspired of God, is profitable to me, but it is not every Scripture that is concerned with me directly ; and therefore my first inquiry should rather be, In what connection were these words written, and what was the standing and condition of the person or persons they have in view ? Those who neglect this, though they may get precious and helpful thoughts from their reading, will miss very much, and will have but a confused idea of God's Word as a whole ; while those who pass to the opposite extreme of caring only for clearness as to the strict dispensational or prophetic bearing of the various parts of Scripture, may in doing so miss the practical lessons for themselves, which are everywhere present in abundance.

These considerations are nowhere of greater value than in the study of the Psalms, because many who read them, and many, too, of those who have written on them, fall into one or other of the two extremes mentioned. Some, especially in bygone days, have taken them as if they were the Christian's hymn-book, and have thus been encouraged to fight what they looked upon as the battles of the Lord with the arm of flesh. The Puritans, we are told, marched against their foes singing the Psalms of David, and Cromwell is said to have sent forward his troops to attack at Dunbar with the words, "Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered". On the other hand not a few in more recent days have become so obsessed with the fact that the Psalms are not ours but Israel's hymn-book, and so taken up with the importance of their prophecies for tribulation and millennial times yet to come, that they would make us offenders for singing such words as

"The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want";

There must surely be a middle path for us between these two extremes.

As most Bible students are aware, the Psalms, in the Hebrew Scriptures, are divided into five books, which are marked for us in the R.V., and are as follows :

- Book I – Psalms 1 to 41
- Book II – Psalms 42 to 72
- Book III – Psalms 73 to 89
- Book IV – Psalms 90 to 106
- Book V – Psalms 107 to 150

These divisions seem to have existed from the beginning, for as one compares them, it will be seen that each book bears distinct characteristics; and doubtless in a day yet future their distinctions will appear even more

clearly, and will possess a very special value. It has also been at times said of them that there is a certain parallelism between them and the five books of the Law ; and while there may be the danger of carrying such a comparison too far, and of imagining links of connection where none really exist, there are some interesting similarities which lie on the very surface. For example, it is in Book I., or what might be called the Genesis of the Psalter, that we find the two great Creation poems, Psalms 8 and 19. In Book II we have much as to the redemption of God's people, with some striking references to their Exodus history at Psalms 44 : 1 ; 51 : 7 ; 66 : 6, 11, 12 ; 68 : 7, 8 etc. In Book III all the psalms except one are ascribed to Levites, and in these the Sanctuary with its service comes into much prominence (see Psalms 73 : 17 ; 74 : 3-7 ; 77 : 13 ; 78 : 60-69 ; 83 : 12 ; 84 : 1-10 ; 87 : 1). Book IV begins with a psalm of Moses which deals with the wilderness sins of Numbers, and it ends at Ps. 106 with a very full account of those same wilderness sins ; while in the passage which ends Ps. 95, well known to us as being quoted and commented on in Heb. 3, we have a distinct reference to Num. 14). In Book V, as in Deuteronomy, we get much recited of what God had wrought for and with His people (see Psalms 107, 114, 135, 136, etc.); and we find special prominence given to the Word of God (see Psalms 107 : 11, 20 ; 138 : 2 ; and all of Psalm 119 ; as compared with Deut. 4 : 2-8 ; 6 : 6-9 ; 8 : 3, etc.).

Many other points of interest there are, in connection with the Psalms generally, on which we shall not at present stay to dwell, but to some of which we may refer later, when dealing with psalms that illustrate them. Meanwhile we shall briefly consider the opening psalm of the collection, a psalm which well fits the place that God has assigned to it. For, let us remember, not only are the words of the Psalms inspired of God, but their very order bears the mark of His divine arrangement ; and in many instances we shall be helped much in the understanding of a particular psalm, by taking note of its setting, and of such connections as we may be able to discover between it and those immediately before or after it. For example, Ps. 1 is, as we shall show, intimately connected with Ps. 2. Psalm 3, a morning psalm (see v. 5) is closely linked with Ps. 4, which is for the evening (see v. 8); and a similar relationship exists between Pss. 5 and 6. Indeed it is to be doubted if there is a psalm in the entire collection that is meant to stand alone.

That being so, we may reasonably expect to find in the first psalm what will form a suitable preface to all the others, and in this we shall not be disappointed. Its opening verse introduces us to a man, and its second to a book. In its third verse we see the prosperous outcome of a combination of the man and the book. Taking its first three verses together, we have in them one way of living set before us, and in its other three an exactly opposite way of living. Now this man is God's Man, and this book is God's Book. These ways are, as the closing verse tells us, "The Way of the righteous", and "The Way of the ungodly". Go then through the rest of the Psalms, marking out all references to God's Man and God's Book. Go through them again, removing all that is descriptive of The Way of the righteous, and of The Way of the ungodly. What have you left ? Nothing at all, not even a skeleton. That is to say, the subjects to which we are introduced in Psalm 1 are the subjects which occupy the entire Book of Psalms.

PSALM 1

While the first Psalm is, as we have seen, linked with all the 149 that follow it, there is, as was remarked, a particularly intimate connection between it and the second, which indeed may be said to share with it the honour of forming an introduction to the whole. As in Psa. 1 we have God's Man, so in Psa. 2 we find God's King. And as in the one case God's Man is set in contrast with the ungodly, so in the other God's King is set in contrast with those who rebel against His authority. These two, the Man and the King are not, of course, different individuals, but the same ; for while none but the Lord Jesus can fill the picture given to us in Psa. 2, it is just as true that none other ever fitted as He did the character described in Psa. 1. It is therefore the Righteous Man of Psa. 1 who becomes the Righteous King of Psa. 2. He who delighted in God's Law, and meditated therein day and night, becomes its Administrator, and executes judgment upon those whose delight is in lawlessness (Psa. 2 : 3), and who "meditate" (v. 1, margin. Same Hebrew word as in Psa. 1 : 2) rebellion against the Lord. Indeed the one position is to some extent the outcome of the other, for do we not read of the King in Psa. 45, "Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness (as in Psa. 1) ; therefore God thy God, hath anointed Thee (as in Psa. 2) with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows" ?

How this close connection between the two psalms assists us to understand them, becomes more evident, the further we examine the points of contact between them. In Psa. 1 the blessed man "walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly". We do not wonder at this when we read in Psa. 2 that these "take counsel together against the Lord, and against His anointed". That, let us remember, is the direction in which the counsel of the ungodly will always tend, whatever the occasion for counsel may be.

Again we read that the righteous man refuses to sit "in the seat of the scornful"; the outcome of which in the next psalm is that the One who "sitteth in the heavens" exalts him to His own throne, and sets him to judge the scorers. What a turning of the tables will then be, and how clearly will it appear that to stand alone for God pays better than to hobnob with the ungodly.

This thought suggests a further connection between the psalms – that it is in Psa. 2 we see fully realized how much is implied in the blessedness pronounced on the man in Psa. 1. Something of it that psalm itself conveys to us in verse 3, where we read that, "Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper"; but the full extent of this prosperity only dawns upon us when we see him in Psa. 2 seated on the throne, with "the uttermost parts of the earth" given him for his possession. To outward view, our Lord did not, in His lifetime down here, appear to be one that prospered in all that He did ; and to the same outward view, the course of His faithful followers may seem anything but prosperous. But for them as for Him,

"The crowning day is coming
By and by".

Even the last part of Psa. 1, which describes the way and the fate of the wicked, has light thrown on it by its companion psalm. In the former they are "like the chaff which the wind driveth away"; in the latter they are dashed in pieces "like a potter's vessel". In Psa. 1 their "way . . . shall

perish"; in Psa. 2 they themselves "perish from the way" when the Lord's wrath is kindled. Just as the fulness of the blessing on the righteous man is to be seen in Psa. 2, so also is the completeness of the judgment on the ungodly.

Quite as interesting as the links between the two psalms are those between Psa. 1 and other parts of Scripture. These would, however, require, not an article, but a book to deal with them. We will refer to but two – that with Josh. 1 : 7, 8, and that with Jer. 17 : 5-8. Just as in the New Testament we find quotations from the Old, so in later books of the Old Testament who have quotations and semi-quotations from the earlier books. These are, of course, less noticeable, for they do not begin with "It is written", or "That it might be fulfilled"; but nevertheless they are there, and it is helpful and profitable to watch for them in our reading. Amongst other things they afford convincing proof that books of the Old Testament were written in the order and at the time which they claim for themselves, and not in the disorder so dear to the hearts of the Higher Critic.

The three passages named – Josh. 1 : 7, 8, Psa. 1 : 1-3, and Jer. 17 : 5-8 – afford a good example of this. When they are carefully read together, the repetition of words and phrases, and in the two last, of the same illustration, is very striking, and proves conclusively that the writer of Psa. 1 had Josh. 1 before his mind as he wrote, and that Jeremiah in turn had been a reader of the first psalm. Nothing more than an intelligent weighing of the passages together, as we have them in our English Bible, is required to show that any other order than this is unthinkable.

In Joshua the words come from the mouth of the Lord directly. He says to His servant, "Turn not (v. 7) from My Law to the right hand or to the left. Meditate in it (v. 8) day and night ; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous". Notice in passing that there are more ways than one of flouting God's Law. When the Pharisees turned "to the right" by adding to it their own traditions, they were making void the commandment of God (Matt. 15 : 6) just as effectually as their fathers were when they turned "to the left" in open transgression. And both methods are still extant.

Coming back to Psa. 1 we notice that the writer has evidently been doing what the Lord urged Joshua to do. He has been studying God's Book, and Josh. 1 as part of it. Now as he writes, the words he has read are brought before his mind by the Spirit in a series of pictures. As he hears the plain "Turn not" of Josh. 1 : 7, he sees a man refusing all compliance with lawbreakers, who will not sit with them, nor walk with them, nor go by their advice. And as his mind reverts to the command of Josh. 1 : 8, "Meditate therein day and night, . . . then thou shalt make thy way prosperous". Instead of the man he sees a tree, green of foilage, and fruit-bearing, when everything else is parched and dry. He notices the cause for this in the "rivers" or courses of water which have been led around its roots from the nearby stream ; and this further suggests to him the thought that there is nothing accidental about the tree being where it is. It has been "planted" there by One who knew what He was doing.

Jeremiah had read Psa. 1, and the pictures in it broadened out and filled up, as he viewed them in his mind. He sees a second man, a "cursed" man; one who does walk in the counsel of the ungodly, for he "trusteth in man" (Jer. 17 : 5); who does stand in the way of sinners, for he "maketh flesh

his arm"; who does sit in the seat of the scornful, for "his heart departeth from the Lord". This man, too, appears (v. 6) like a plant to him, but it is a naked, leafless shrub of the desert, withered and useless. He turns his eyes to the first man. There he is, just as the Psalmist had described him – an evergreen, fruitbearing tree, planted by the waters, its roots spreading towards the head stream (v. 8), from which the little watercourses had been made to run. To drop the figure, not only does he delight in God's Word, but he "trusteth (v. 7) in the Lord". It was doubtless his trust in the Lord that had led him to meditate in His Word first of all ; and now, as he drinks in that Word, he is led on to still greater confidence in the One who is its source.

Do we know anything of this experience ? or have we failed even as the Psalmist himself did, when he, whose constant habit it had been to inquire of God, was found listening to the counsel of Ahithophel instead ? For we read, "The counsel of Ahithophel . . . in those days was as if one had inquired at the oracle of God . . . with David" (2 Sam. 16 : 23). If, as is probable, the first two psalms were written during or after the Absalom rebellion, in the light of this verse there lies underneath them a bitterly learnt lesson. It was a sad experience which had taught David the folly of seeking the "counsel of the ungodly", when the very one whose counsel he had valued was found with others, plotting and counselling against himself the Lord's anointed.

We have before mentioned that Psalm 3 and Psalm 4 appear to form a pair, one being a Morning Song (see Psa. 3 : 5), and the other a corresponding Evening Song (see Psa. 4 : 4, 8). When, however, these psalms are examined together, the connection between them is seen to be much closer than merely this : for they have evidently been written with references to the same occasion, and on very similar lines to one another. Nor are we left in doubt what the occasion was, for the title of Psalm 3 is, "A psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son", and with this the subject matter of both psalms is in agreement.

For example, the opening cry of Psalm 3, "Lord, how are they *increased* that trouble me", recalls to us the statement in 2 Sam. 15 : 12, that "the people *increased* continually with Absalom"; while its second verse, "Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God", reminds us that amongst these "many" was Shimei of the house of Saul, who came to throw stones at David, and to throw also at him bitter words, which struck even harder than the stones. "Thou bloody man", he said, "the Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood . . . and behold thou art taken in thy mischief" (2 Sam. 16 : 5-8).

On the other hand we have, in this same incident, an illustration at least, if no more, of what is meant by the fourth verse of Psalm 4, a verse the opening part of which, "Stand in awe and sin not", in a form almost unrecognisable to the English reader, but taken from the Greek version of the Old Testament, is quoted at Eph. 4 : 26, as "Be ye angry and sin not"; while the remainder of the verse, "Commune with your own heart upon your bed and be still", is paraphrased or explained by the apostle in the words, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath". If ever a man had occasion to be angry, it was surely David at this time, for so far as his dealings with Saul and his house were concerned, he had a clear conscience, and deserved none of the taunts of Shimei. And if ever a man was tempted

to let his anger lead him into sin, it also was David just then, when Abishai said to him, "Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head". But the king recognised the temptation and its source, and he put it from him, as he did yet again on his victorious return, when Abishai once more urged vengeance on Shimei. Even the connection between the "Stand in awe and sin not" of the Psalm, and the "Be ye angry and sin not" of Eph. 4 : 26 is illustrated by David's speech here, which shows us that what kept him from being led into sin through his anger, was that he "stood in awe" of God. "Let him alone and let him curse", said he, "for the Lord hath bidden him".

There are a number of other points in the two psalms which suggest a connection with this period, and with one another ; but leaving these for the present, let us consider Psalm 4 in a more general way, noting as we do so some of the links which associate it with various other Scriptures. It will be seen that it is a psalm of deep personal experience, the experience of a man who has proved the Lord to be everything to him.

In verse 1. we are introduced to him as a *saved* man, for he can look back to the time when, in his "distress", God came in and "enlarged" him, or set him at liberty. Very similar references to his past deliverance are made by the Psalmist in Psa. 18 : 5, 6, 19 and in Psa. 116 : 3-6.

In verse 2 he is a *scorned* man, that relationship with his God which was his "glory" (*cf.* Psa. 3 : 3) being turned into "shame" by those who understood it not. Small wonder it was that men who loved "vanity" and sought after "leasing" should see no glory in the bond between David and the Lord.

In verse 3 we find him a *separated* man, a man "set apart" by God for Himself, one mark of which, as he tells us, is that the Lord will hear him when he calls upon Him. In this respect he takes up the position which all Israel should have occupied, had they kept right with God. For Moses in Exod. 33 : 16 says, "Wherein shall it be known here that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight : is it not in that Thou goest with us ? So shall we be separated (same word as translated 'set apart' in Psa. 4 : 3), I and Thy people, from all people that are upon the face of the earth". And again in Deut. 4 : 7 he says, "What nation . . . hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon Him for !"

In verse 4, as we have already shown, the speaker is a *stilled* man. His passions are curbed by the knowledge that what has happened, and is happening, is of the Lord. Therefore, instead of vindicating or avenging himself, he can leave matters in God's hands, thus carrying out, not only Eph. 4 : 26 but also that other New Testament injunction, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto *the Wrath*" (Rom. 12 : 19, R.V. margin).

In verse 5 we see a *sacrificing* man, or shall we say a worshipping man, one whose character and conduct are such that he can offer "sacrifices of righteousness", a term possibly used by way of contrast with the hypocritical sacrifices which David's enemies had been offering (2 Sam. 15 : 7, 12) at this time. It is quoted from Deut. 33 : 19, and is used by the Psalmist again at Psa. 51 : 19, in both which passages it is connected with Israel's future, whereas in our psalm there is given to it a present and practical application.

In verses 6 and 7 we have a *satisfied* man, who finds in the presence of God a "gladness", beyond that which worldlings have when at their very best. It is interesting to note here that verse 6 begins with the phrase he had used at Psalm 3 : 2, "Many there be that say". There they were sneering at the plight in which they supposed the Psalmist to be, as forsaken of God ; while here they are troubled about their own plight, and are asking the old, old question, "Who will shew us any good ?" It is the question to which Solomon in Ecclesiastes sought an answer in all sorts of wrong directions (see Eccl. chap. 2, especially verse 3); but his father David has no hesitation in reply to it in his own way, "Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us". This prayer of his, taken along with the reference to "peace" in verse 8, is practically a quotation of the last third of Israel's blessing in Num. 6 : 24-26. Is it not fitting that words which end the chapter concerning the separated Nazarite should also come in at the end of this psalm concerning the man whom God has "set apart" to Himself.

Lastly, in verse 8 we find a *secure* man, who even when in banishment from his home, can lay down his head and sleep, trust in his God. Most of us, had we been in David's circumstances at that time, would have spent sleepless nights, filled with troubled thoughts as to what had already taken place, and anxious thoughts as to what lay still ahead. But the Psalmist appears to have learned the secret of restful sleep, and here lets us into it. It is to have assured confidence in God, based on His promises. For notice that in these closing words of his he yet again claims for himself personally words which had been spoken in promise to the nation at the beginning of their history. In Deut. 33 : 28 God had said, "Israel shall *dwell in safety alone* ; the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine". Here the Psalmist, having already in the preceding verse made reference to "corn and wine" is led, possibly by the association of this phrase, with it to think of the old promise, and he makes it his own in the words, "Thou, Lord, *alone (R.V.) makest me to dwell in safety*".

PSALMS 14, 15 and 16

These three psalms, though short, are of deep interest. In the case of Psalm 14, its importance is shown by the fact that the 53rd is almost word for word a repetition of it, and by its use in Rom. 3 : 10-18, where all but one of the fourteen Old Testament sayings with which the apostle there sets forth the sinner's wretched state are taken from the Greek version of it. To Psalm 16 like prominence is given by Peter's citation of its last four verses in his Pentecostal address of Acts 2, in which he shows that their ultimate and only perfect fulfilment was in the resurrection of Christ ; also by Paul's similar use of its 10th verse in his address at Antioch recorded in Acts 13. As for Psalm 15, although we have no quotation from it in the New Testament, it bears on its very surface the marks of its importance, for in its elevenfold answer to the twofold question of its opening verse we get a full length portrait of the man who is fit to dwell in the presence of God.

But however interesting are the three psalms separately, they are much more so when linked together, since each one throws light on the others

by the contrasts and similarities between them. The effect of the portrait of the man of God in Psalm 15 is surely enhanced by comparison with the picture of the "children of men" generally which is found in Psalm 14, the one being, as we hope to show, in many respects the very antithesis of the other. Then in Psalm 16 we get the innermost thoughts and feelings of this man of God whose outward characteristics have been so beautifully summed up in Psalm 15 ; for when we compare the two, it is not difficult to see that the same person is presented to us in both.

A striking feature of Psalm 14 is its comprehensiveness. While reading it we at first seem to be transported to the days before the Flood, and to be looking at the men who were then upon the earth, as they are described for us in Genesis 6 and other scriptures, from which the very words used in this psalm appear to have been culled. In the statement of verse 1, "The fool hath said in his HEART . . . NO GOD", we are reminded of that made in Gen. 6 : 5, "Every imagination . . . of his HEART was only evil continually"; and also of the words of Eliphaz in Job 22 : 13-17, where he describes the people "whose foundation was overflown with a Flood" as having said to God, "Depart from us". When we read the next clause, "They are corrupt", etc., and notice that it is closely followed by "The Lord looked down . . . upon the children of men" our thoughts revert to Gen. 6 : 12, "God looked upon the earth, and, lo, it was corrupt". Further on, in verse 4 of the psalm we are told that "they call not upon God", a statement in sad contrast with Gen. 4 : 26, where men had begun to "call upon the name of the Lord". Finally, in verse 5, we meet with the expression, "The generation of the righteous", recalling to us Gen. 6 : 9, "Noah was a righteous man and perfect in his generations" (R.V.).

Now had we begun with the last verse of our psalm instead of the first, we should have found ourselves transported, not backward to antediluvian days, but forward to a time even yet future – to the days of apostasy and of tribulation which will precede the Lord's appearance upon earth ; for it is then that this prayer of verse 7 for Israel's deliverance will arise, and then, too, will all the sayings in the psalm about departure from God and His ways be most fully realized. Yet we are not thereby compelled to lay aside our former view of it, for we remember that the Lord Jesus said, "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man". Nor should we forget the use, already mentioned, which is made of the psalm in Rom. 3, where the apostle applies it to sinners of his own time, and indeed of all times.

Psalm 15 follows closely on this prayer which ends Psalm 14. After the cry that the Lord would appear to the salvation of His people comes the pertinent inquiry, "Who shall be able to dwell in His presence when He does appear ?" A train of thought much like this occurs in various passages in the Old Testament, of which Isa. 33 and Mal. 3 are perhaps the most remarkable. In the former, as in the end of Psalm 14, there is at verse 2 an appeal to the Lord that He would rise to deliver Zion from her enemies. At verses 10-12 we see Him respond to this appeal, and the peoples are burned up like "thorns" at His presence. But immediately the prayer changes to a cry of terror. "The sinners in Zion are afraid", and they ask, "Who among us shall dwell with devouring fire?" ; for this is what His presence seems to them, as well as to their adversaries. Their question, like that of Psalm 15 : 1 is replied to by a series of short clauses descriptive

of the man who, instead of "Devouring Fire" sees "the King in His beauty", and of these the first two, "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly", are almost a quotation from verse 2 of the psalm.

Similarly, in Mal. 3 : 1, 2 we read, "The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to His temple", and there follows the sobering thought, "But who may abide the day of His coming, and who shall stand when He approacheth ; for He is like a refiner's fire ?" Note the clause, "whom ye seek", which implies that in this case also they had been praying for Him to come. Is it not well, when we pray, to search ourselves as to whether we are prepared for the answer ?

As already mentioned, the description of the man in Psalm 15 is the very antithesis of that of mankind in general in Psalm 14. He is an Enoch walking with God amidst antediluvian wickedness. We see in him uprightness and right doing, instead of corruptness and evil doing. Whereas the men of Psalm 14 would "eat up God's people as they eat bread", here is one who "honoureth them that fear the Lord". And back of all the differences is the root one with which the two psalms begin – that those of Psalm 14 want to have nothing to do with God, while the man of Psalm 15 wishes for nothing better than to dwell in His presence continually. So it is not surprising that when we take leave of the former they are "in great fear" (Psa. 14 : 5), whereas the final statement about the latter is that "he shall never be moved" (Psa. 15 : 5).

The last words of Psalm 15 not only stand in contrast with the previous psalm, but also form a link with Psalm 16, in which the speaker at verse 8 says, "Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved". It is indeed but one of many such links, for the two psalms have much in common, especially with regard to those points wherein both differ from Psalm 14. Of these the most important concern the attitude toward God and toward His people in each case. While the "Fool" says, "No God for me", while the one described in Psalm 15 cries, "I want to dwell with God", the writer of Psalm 16 declare, "I have said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord, I have no good beyond Thee" (v. 2, R.V.). And while those of Psalm 14 would "eat up" God's people, but the man of Psalm 15 "honoureth" them, we find in Psalm 16, "As for the saints . . . they are the excellent, in whom is all my delight" (v. 3, R.V.). It is always thus, that the man who has right thoughts of God will also have right thoughts of God's people, but the man who hates God will hate His people too.

In 2 Sam. 7 we find David speaking of the Lord and of His people in a strain similar to this, just after God had promised to build him a house by raising up his seed to sit on his throne. He "went in and sat before the Lord", we are told, and in his prayer there he said, "Thou art great, O Lord God, for there is none like Thee . . . and what one nation in the earth is like Thy people ?" Such were the thoughts which filled his mind then, and like thoughts still occupied him when, some little time after, he wrote Psalm 16 : 2, 3.

For that this is the order of the two passages there can be no doubt, since Peter when quoting from the psalm in Acts 2 makes plain that it was written *after* "God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his loins . . . He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne" (Acts 2 : 25-31). That is to say, it was written after the promise given in 2 Sam. 7 : 12-16 ; so that this promise led, not only to the beautiful thanksgiving of a satisfied

man recorded in the end of that chapter, but also in the writing of the psalm which is pre-eminently, The Psalm of the Satisfied Man – the sixteenth.

We have called Psalm 16 “The Psalm of the Satisfied Man”, and it is not difficult to justify the title. Not only do we find the writer satisfied with his God in verse 2, and satisfied with God’s people in verse 3, but throughout the succeeding verses he has not a single grumble or complaint about anything.

In verse 4, which gives us the other side of the picture shown in the two preceding verses, he professes himself satisfied with God’s path of separation from idolatrous worship, and from those given to it. Not alone will he, as commanded in Exod. 23 : 13, refuse to mention the names of their gods, but he will not even take up into his lips the names of the worshippers themselves, nor give them the slightest countenance. How bigoted he would have been thought today !

Coming to verses 5 and 6, we there find him satisfied with his lot. “The Lord”, says he, “is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup”, and he wants nothing better. It is somewhat remarkable that David, who, of course, was of the tribe of Judah, should thus claim for himself the portion promised to the priests and Levites in such scriptures as Num. 18 : 20 and Deut. 18 : 2. A similar claim is made by the writer of Psalm 119 (who may possibly have been the priest Ezra), when in verse 57 he says, “Thou are my portion, O Lord”; and we have yet another made by the writer of Lamentations (who was, of course, the priest Jeremiah), in the words of chapter 3 : 24, “The Lord is my portion, saith my soul”. This last passage has special interest as being in the very centre of the prophet’s lamentations concerning the loss of the land and city. “Our inheritance”, says he, “is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens”; yet amidst all this, in chap. 3 : 21-33, he “recalls to mind” quite a number of considerations which lighten the trial, and chief amongst them this, that there remains a portion which he personally has not lost, and cannot lose – his portion in the Lord.

Returning to our psalm, we next find the writer satisfied with the Lord’s guidance in verse 7, and satisfied with His protection in verse 8. “I will bless the Lord who hath given me counsel”, we read, and again, “Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved”. Finally, in verses 9-11 he is satisfied, as well he may be, with his prospects for the future – a glorious resurrection, followed by “fulness of joy” in the presence of his Lord for ever. On this strain the psalm closes, and on a similar strain it is interesting to observe the next psalm also closes. “As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness ; I shall be satisfied when I awake, with Thy likeness”.

The last named fact suggests that, just as Psalm 16 has been shown to be closely linked with the two which precede it, so it may be found to have association with the one following. A comparison of the two will confirm this, and may even perhaps leave us with the impression that Psalm 17, which is entitled “A Prayer of David”, contains the detailed petitions involved in the cry, “Preserve me, O God”, with which Psalm 16 begins. There the psalmist had broken off to express his joys in God, and in what God had done for him ; with the result that the psalm contains no further request, nor any explanation of what his cry of “Preserve me” meant. But all this we seem to have in Psalm 17, where the preservation he seeks is shown to be twofold ; firstly, from doing evil himself (vv. 3-5); and secondly, from suffering evil at the hands of his enemies (vv. 8, 9). Or might we say,

firstly, that he might be preserved in the path of Psalm 15 : 2-5, and secondly, that he might be preserved from men like those of Psalm 14 : 4 ?

Even Psalm 18, without any undue flight of imagination, could be said to have its place in this grouping, since we have there David's great song of thanksgiving for answered prayer, in which he recounts the abundant response made by God to the cry of His servant, and shows how the entire framework of heaven and earth was shaken (vv. 7-15), in order that He might fly swiftly to the deliverance of one poor man who had put his trust in Him and cried to Him for help.

But while we have been considering Psalm 16, along with these others, in terms of the personal experiences of David, we, of course, must not lose sight of the fact, already mentioned, that Peter's citation of Psalm 16 : 8-11 in Acts 2 clearly proves the ultimate and perfect fulfilment of those verses at least to be in the resurrection of Christ. And it is doubtless quite as true of the rest of the psalm that Christ fills up the picture therein presented, to an extent to which neither David nor any other could fill it. He was pre-eminently the Man who put His trust in His God, and the Man who was ever satisfied with the portion His Father had given Him. And He, too, is the One who will have pre-eminence in that resurrection "Fulness of joy", of which it is written that He shall "present you faultless before the presence of His glory with *exceeding joy*"; and again, "He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied".

Of Psalms 17 and 18 it is no doubt true also that they have a Messianic fulfilment. In the case of the latter, this is proved by the quotation of a clause of verse 2 as referring to Christ in Heb. 2 : 13. And the tremendous description of the deliverance in verses 7-15 must also suggest an application to Him, while the statement in verse 19, "He delivered Me because He delighted in Me", seems to be a reply to the taunt of Psalm 22 : 8, which was actually used at the cross in Matt. 27 : 43, "Let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him". As to Psalm 17, the protestations of absolute and undeviating integrity which, in common with Psalms 16 and 18, it contains, and which are further emphasised in the R.V. rendering of verse 5, have fuller truth in the lips of the Lord Jesus, than in those of David or any other saint.

By thus seeing our Lord in these psalms we do not lose anything, but gain very much. It means that we have before us in them a far greater Exemplar than David ; and we are in no wise deprived of the right to test our own experiences by the statements made. By so doing we learn to what extent we "follow His steps", who has troden the path before us, and we are thus helped more fully to carry out the injunction, "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God".

PSALM 23

So much has been said and so much has been written on the 23rd Psalm that, "Pearl of psalms" though it be, one feels like passing it over, so far as these "Notes" are concerned. Yet here as previously in our studies we need to remind ourselves of the danger of considering the psalms in an

isolated way, and not giving due attention to the links that bind them with one another and with other scriptures.

It is entitled "A Psalm of David", and it bears his impress upon every line of it. Only a shepherd – a true shepherd such as David was – could give us the picture of shepherd care which we find here ; and the fact that it is by way of setting forth God's care for himself that he does so is proof that the years he spent with his sheep in the fields around his Bethlehem home were not lost. His was a lowly and a lonely occupation, and many of us had we been placed in his position, would have wasted our time and worn out our minds in fretting at the lack of opportunities to show of what great things we were capable. But to David it was a period of training, a time for learning lessons which were of much profit to him in his after career ; and which, had they not been learned then, would probably never have been learned at all.

Others before him, of the greatest of God's servants, had been trained in the same school, and they would not have been the men they afterwards were but for it. How hard a school it was, let the words of his great ancestor Jacob, who had long been taught in it, bear witness. In his speech to Laban, of Gen. 31 : 38-40, he says, "These twenty years have I been with thee ; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee ; I bare the loss of it. Of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. Thus I was ; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night ; and my sleep departed from mine eyes".

Moses, too, foremost perhaps amongst all Old Testament leaders of God's people, after spending forty years at the Egyptian court learning how *not* to rule, required forty more of shepherd training at the backside of the desert to fit him so to lead Israel that long afterwards it could be said of him, "Thou leddest Thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses" (Psa. 77 : 20). And again, "Where is He that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of His flock, . . . that led them by the right hand of Moses" (Isa. 63 : 11, 12). So well did he learn this lesson that when, after another forty years occupied in going before them, God told him he must die, his first thought was, "Let the Lord . . . set a man over the congregation, . . . which may lead them out and which may bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd" (Num. 27 : 16, 17).

This same lesson was amongst those learnt by David, when keeping his "few sheep in the wilderness", as his brother Eliab scornfully described them ; and that he, like Moses, learnt it well is evident from the testimony borne of him in the closing verses of Psalm 78. The previous psalm had finished, as we have seen, with words concerning the shepherd care of the nation's first leader, and this one ends with, "He chose David also His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds. From following the ewes great with young He brought him to feed Jacob His people and Israel His inheritance. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands".

Even more strikingly is this care for them shown in David's own exclamation of 2 Sam. 24 : 17, when he saw the people perishing in the plague brought on by his numbering of them. "These sheep", he cried,

“what have they done ? Let Thy hand I pray Thee be against me”. Like Moses in Exod. 32 : 32, he was prepared to suffer in the stead of his people, both of them thus in some small degree displaying the same feeling which moved a far greater Shepherd than either of them to give His life for the sheep.

Of other lessons which David learned in those early years we shall at present mention but two. Whilst spending his days and nights in the fields with his flock, he learned to trace the hand of God in nature, and to see His creative glory as revealed in His works, to an extent which otherwise would scarcely have been possible ; and as a result of this we have the beautiful opening paragraphs of Psalm 8 and Psalm 19, as well as the vivid description of the Voice of God heard in the thunderstorm of Psalm 29, and many similar references to nature elsewhere.

While thus employed he also learned to very deeply appreciate the truth around which he has woven the 23rd Psalm – that Jehovah was his Shepherd, and that under such care nothing could be lacking to him. All that he himself was to his sheep, that and much more was the Lord to him. Everything which his care provided for them – pastures of tender grass, waters of rest, restoration, guidance, and protection, all this did his God provide for him – a spread table, a full cup, a refreshing anointing with oil (that which Simon in Luke 7 had omitted), goodness and mercy every step of the way, with a final homebringing to the great heavenly fold, to go no more out for ever.

All this the Great Shepherd would do, not only because He loved His sheep, but also “for His Name’s sake” (v. 3). In that expression which is, more often than not, passed over unnoticed when the psalm is expounded, we have a secure basis for confidence that the Lord will never forsake His own. The honour of His Name is at stake in the matter. A shepherd who would desert his charges, or fail to bring them home to the fold, would be unworthy of the name of shepherd ; and the One who has proclaimed Himself Jehovah God of Israel will not sully His Name by failure. As Samuel said, “The Lord will not forsake His people for His great Name’s sake” (1 Sam. 12 : 22).

This reference to the Name suggests that an application of the psalm to the nation as a whole, since it is introduced very frequently in the Old Testament in connection with God’s relationship to Israel. Samuel, as we have seen, uses it thus, and so does Joshua in his plea after the defeat at Ai. “What”, he says, “wilt Thou do unto Thy great Name ?” (Josh. 7 : 9). So also do Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and almost all the prophets. Such an application, too, is in keeping with the references to God’s shepherd care for Israel, contained in the two psalms that follow those two already mentioned as ending with allusions to Moses (Psa. 77), and David (Psa. 78). Psalm 79 concludes with, “So we Thy people and sheep of Thy pasture will give Thee thanks for ever”; while Psalm 80 begins with “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel. Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock”.

Viewed in this light, Psalm 23 may be taken as prophetic of their future, and “The valley of the shadow of death” will find its place in the picture as the “Time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30 : 7). It is not by any means the only passage in which the illustration of sheep and their Shepherd is used of them in that way, as may be seen by reference to Isa. 40 : 9-11 ; 49 : 9-12 ; Jer. 23 : 3, 4 ; Ezek. 34 : 11-15, 23-31 ; of which passages some at least

appear to be definitely based on our psalm.

Its value for David and for Israel, past or future, will of course in no wise lessen its preciousness for ourselves. Though we "are not of this fold", we belong to the Shepherd, the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep, and who will never forget us, nor lose us by the way, nor shall any pluck us out of His hand. And if Israel's prospect of the Lord's shepherd care in millennial times is bright, brighter still is ours. "For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Rev. 7:17).

PSALM 132, etc.

Most of those psalms which are associated with David's life and reign, either by their titles, or by references contained in the body of them, divide themselves naturally into groups, according to the part of his life which they have to do. Perhaps the simplest division would be into four groups as herewith :

(1) The psalms which refer to his early life, previous to the death of Saul, most of which was concerned with his wanderings while persecuted by that monarch.

(2) Those which are connected with the first part of his reign, till the time when he brought the Ark of God to the place he had prepared for it at Jerusalem.

(3) Those that belong to the period ending with Absalom's rebellion, most of which have to do, either with the circumstances of that rebellion, or with David's sin which led up to it.

(4) Those associated with the latter part of his reign.

There are of course some psalms, undoubtedly, of David's composition, which have no marked connection with any particular time in his life, and there are others which seem to have links with more than one time ; but where we can, with a measure of probability, connect certain psalms with the same period, it is profitable to consider such psalms together and compare them, in order that one may throw light upon the other. Especially is this the case when they refer, not only to the same time, but to the same event.

As an example of what we mean, let us consider some of the many psalms which in one way or another appear to have connection with David's bringing up of the Ark. Of these Psalm 132 comes first to mind because, although written later than others of the group, it takes us back to the very beginning of David's project, to a vow which he made in his boyhood. And yet it may be that we should go still further back for a starting point, namely to that afforded us by Psalm 78, where reference is made in verse 61 to the capture of the Ark by the Philistines, and in verses 60, 68 to the change of God's centre of worship from Shiloh to Zion, for reasons which the psalm itself enumerates. As we may, however have occasion to consider Psalm 78 more closely in another connection, we pass on again to David's early days at his home in Bethlehem, or Ephrathah. The latter was the ancient name of the place, and was still used poetically, as may be seen in Ruth 4:11 ; Micah 5:2 etc.; and thus we find it in Psalm 132:6, where

we read, "Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah ; we found it in the fields of the wood".

The "it" of this verse is the Ark, as the context and particularly verse 8 shows, while "Ephratah", as we have said is Bethlehem. It remains to inquire what is meant by "the fields of the wood"; and here the R.V. margin helps us by giving it as "The field of Jaar", and referring us to 1 Chron. 13:5, in which Kirjathjearim is named as the place from which David fetched up the Ark. This word Kirjathjearim is formed of "Kirjath", which means "city", and "jearim", which is the plural of the "Jaar" of the R.V. margin at Psalm 132:6, and means "woods". In view of this there can be little doubt that "The fields of Jaar", or "of the wood", in the psalm, in which David is said to have found the Ark, is but a poetical synonym for Kirjathjearim, "The city of woods", or else the name of that part of it in which was the house of Abinadab, where the Ark had lain.

In that spot it had been for nearly a century, since its return from the land of the Philistines. During the first twenty years of this period there had been some interest taken in it, while the Israelites "lamented after the Lord", who had used the Philistines for their chastisement. This time is described in 1 Sam. 7:2, and it culminated in a revival under Samuel, and a victory gained over the enemy at the very spot where he had defeated Israel twenty years previously (*cf.* 1 Sam. 4:1 ; 7:12).

In that victory God vindicated Himself a second time against these Philistines for the capture of the Ark, as He had already done by the destruction wrought through its presence in their country, and as He yet again did even more fully a long time afterwards, when His servant David, just before his bringing up of the Ark, so thoroughly defeated them at Baal-perazim that it is written : "There they left their images, and David and his men burned them (2 Sam. 5:12). A complete reversal of what had taken place a century before.

The revival in Samuel's days, though it brought victory, did not effect any change in the position of the Ark, which still lay, almost forgotten, in "the house of Abinadab in the hill". Thus matters continued during the reign of Saul, as is shown by 1 Chron. 13:3, "We inquired not at it in the days of Saul". But during this period a young lad had been born and was growing up in Bethlehem, who while he looked after his father's sheep, not only was learning those lessons to which we made reference last month in connection with our notes on Psalm 23, but also found time to think of the neglected Ark of God, which lay, not more than ten miles distant, across the country at Kirjathjearim.

Possibly in his journeyings as shepherd he had even located the very spot where it was, for the expression, "We found it", in Psalm 132:6, is rather a remarkable one. But, however that may be, this young lad who, by his parents and brothers, was looked on as scarcely worthy of the notice of strangers (1 Sam. 16:11), began to think great thoughts in his young mind, thoughts which at length took shape in a solemn vow sworn unto the Lord that never would he settle down in comfort in a house of his own until God's Ark was found a fitting habitation. This is distinctly implied in the words of Psalm 132, "Remember David . . . how he sware . . . and vowed . . . Surely I will not come into . . . my house . . . until I find out a place for the Lord . . . Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah . . . the Ark of Thy strength".

The psalm itself is of course written from the point of view of a later time, for it shows us the vow actually accomplished, and the Ark being placed in the tent prepared for it. But before that stage could be reached, many difficulties had to be surmounted, to some of which we shall refer next month. Meanwhile let us note that our psalm has two main sections, and that while the first part, which so far we have been considering, is occupied with what David "swore" to God, and how he kept his vow; the second tells us of what the Lord had in return "sworn" to David, as to blessing for himself and his family, and how He, too, would "not turn from it" (v. 11).

Thus David found that the path chosen by him in early days of putting God's interests first, was the path which furthered his own interests as well, and that to an extent to which they never could have been furthered by any amount of selfish concentration on them, on his own part. It is a lesson which ever needs to be learned by God's people, as also does this other – that the character of a saint is usually shaped for life by the attitude he takes up in his first days of Christian experience toward God and toward His service.

PSALMS 132 and 30

Reference was made last month to difficulties which had to be surmounted, before David's vow of Psalm 132, that he would provide a fitting habitation for the Ark ere settling in a house of his own, was finally accomplished. The difficulties were of various kinds, one of which the psalm in its opening verse speaks of as his "afflictions". These were indeed many and long-lasting, and were due chiefly to the jealousy of Saul. Quite a number of psalms deal with them, and show how that "out of them all the Lord delivered" him, having first taught him much amidst the trials, that without them he might never have learned.

But there came a time when David no longer had to flee from place to place to escape death at the hands of Saul. The latter was dead, and he had become king, first of a part of the nation, and at length of the whole. Even then however, it was some time before anything could be done with regard to the Ark, because he was at once assailed by the Philistines, over whom the Lord gave him two remarkable victories, the second one resulting, as was mentioned last month, in the capture and destruction of their idols (2 Sam. 5:21), which apparently they had brought into the battle to help them, even as the Israelites had brought the Ark a hundred years before.

Another difficulty at this period arose from the revelation made by God to David (Psa. 78:68) that the place He had now chosen for His Name was Zion; and part at least of Zion was still in the hostile hands of the Jebusites, who had to be dispossessed before the Ark could be brought in. At 2 Sam. 5:6-8 we see this accomplished, and then verse 9 adds, "David dwelt in the fort", a statement which suggests that he was still true to his vow, not to dwell in a house of his own until the Ark was in its resting place.

Just at this point however, an event took place which seemed to render any further adherence to his vow impossible. Hiram the ruler of Tyre showed his appreciation of the victorious king by sending along workmen and materials, who built him a palace of cedarwood in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:11). David could not long refuse to dwell in the house so kindly pro-

vided ; but instead of this resulting in a breach of his vow, it impelled him to get on with the matter at once, by setting up a place for the Ark and bringing it there from Kirjathjearim where it still lay. And it seems clear that he did not take up his residence in his new palace until this was finally accomplished ; for only then do we read (1 Chron. 16:43) that he returned "to bless his house", and only then is it said (1 Chron. 17:1 R.V.), "When David dwelt in his house", which implies that he had not done so previously.

Meanwhile another trouble occurred. The king had "consulted with the captains" (1 Chron. 13:1) about what he proposed to do, but he seems to have neglected his customary practice of consulting God. So often had the Lord blessed him and been with him in what he did that on this occasion he appears to have taken it for granted that it would still be so, especially as the work was His own. The consequence was that, instead of following the "due order" (see 1 Chron. 15:2, 13) which God's Word enjoined, he imitated what the Philistines had done a century previously by setting the Ark upon a new care (1 Chron. 13:7, cf. with 1 Sam. 6:7).

But what was good enough for Philistines was not good enough for David who had God's Word to guide him, and the Lord showed His displeasure by slaying Uzzah. This put David in fear, and evidently dreading lest like judgment should fall on himself, he stopped the work for the time being. Soon however he took it up again in a right way and this time completed it.

Now with this outline in mind, let us turn to Psalm 30, of which the title in the A.V. is, "A Psalm and Song at the dedication of the house of David". This is a quite correct rendering of the Hebrew words, and agrees with that given in the LXX. But the R.V. differs, and renders it, "A Psalm; a song at the Dedication of the House ; *a psalm* of David". Here the additional capitals which begin "Dedication" and "House" are of course not a matter of translation at all, since no distinction of that kind exists in Hebrew, but are inserted apparently to let us know that, in the opinion of the Revisers, the Temple is referred to. The insertion by them of the phrase "a psalm" in italics before the final words "of David" is meant to disconnect the latter from the previous word "house", and is at least unnecessary. Moreover, even if the expression "the house" had to stand unqualified by the final words, it by no means follows that the temple must be implied. The Scriptures do not elsewhere speak of the temple in that unqualified way as "the house", except in passages where the context has already indicated what is meant. On the other hand the term "the house" does actually occur unqualified in the title of Psa. 59 for the place in which David was then dwelling.

There are yet other pointers to guide us in interpreting the title of Psa. 30. One is the character of the psalm itself which, as shown by the constant repetition of "I", and "me", and "my" is of a private nature throughout, and contains nothing that would in any degree connect it with temple dedication. A second one is that in Deut. 20:5 we have dedication definitely associated with a private dwelling-house as being a customary thing. And a third is the fact that David never did take part in the dedication of the temple, since it took place long after he was dead (1 Kings 8:63). The transactions in 1 Chron. 21:25 to 22:1 are in no sense a dedication, and in any case have only to do with the purchase of the ground, whereas the word "dedicate", as used of a building in Scripture, has to do with its completion. Indeed the only thing in David's history, at all comparable

to the dedication of a house of God, was the occasion of which we already have been speaking, when he brought the Ark into the tabernacle he had prepared for it. And that is the same occasion on which he appears to have dedicated his own house, as suggested by the words of 1 Chron. 16:43, "And David returns to bless his house".

We may therefore feel reasonably certain that it is with this time in David's life Psa. 30 is associated, and we shall now see how the words of the psalm itself appear, when looked at in that light.

PSALMS 30 and 101

The first thing which strikes one on reading Psalm 30 is that in it David speaks as one who has been recently in danger of death, or, as he expresses it, of "going down to the pit" (vv. 3, 9). This danger he attributes to God's chastisement upon him for selfconfidence—the selfconfidence which led him to say in his prosperity, "I shall never be moved" (v. 6). The word "healed" (v. 2) may suggest that there had been actual bodily sickness, but not necessarily so, especially as there is no further description of sickness in the psalm, such as we meet with in some others. What is certain is that there had been a hiding of God's face (v. 7), and that this caused "mourning" and "sackcloth" on David's part (v. 11). In his danger he had cried to God (v. 8), urging the plea that in the grave he could no longer either "praise" God or "declare His truth" (v. 9); in other words, that both worship and testimony would be lacking. Ultimately deliverance is granted him, his mourning is turned into "dancing", and instead of sackcloth he is "girded with gladness" (v. 11).

Now it is remarkable that there should be two separate occasions on record in the life of David, in connection with which many expressions used in our psalm appear to be suitable. The first is that which we already have been describing at length, when he sought to bring up the Ark to the place he had prepared for it, but neglected to do so "after the due order" (1 Chron. 15:13). The second is when in his pride he ordered the numbering of the people, and so brought a plague upon them (1 Chron. 21:1, 14). Both these errors were the outcome of selfconfidence, and on both occasions trouble ensued.

We have already given reasons for thinking that the first of them is the one here referred to, and we find nothing in the psalm itself to cause us to alter that opinion. When the Lord showed His displeasure by slaying Uzzah, David is said to have been "afraid of God" (1 Chron. 13:12), evidently dreading lest a like judgment should overtake himself; and from this he had been delivered by the time the psalm was written. On the other hand, at the occasion of the plague on his people, David, instead of being in dread of it, requested that it should fall on himself rather than on them (1 Chron. 21:17). Again, the words, "Thou hast kept me alive" (v. 3) suggests what may well have been his thoughts afterwards, as he remembered Uzzah's fate; and the change of mind which soon took place from being "displeased" (1 Chron. 13:11) at God's vindication of His holy character, is happily expressed in the words, "Give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness" (v. 4). Here once more, as in the title, the Revisers have made an alteration for which there is no particular necessity, by changing the

rendering to "Give thanks to His holy name". The word translated "remembrance" in the A.V. is so translated in most other places where it occurs, and is never elsewhere rendered "name"; while the word translated "holiness" is the word used everywhere that holiness is mentioned in the Old Testament.

If it be objected that it was on the second occasion, rather than the first, that we find David literally clothed in "sackcloth", it may be replied that it was on the first occasion only that there was literal "dancing" (1 Chron. 15: 29), and that the "girded with gladness" of the psalm reminds us of "girded with a linen ephod" in 2 Sam. 6: 14.

By considering Psalm 30, with this connection in view, it acquires increased interest. The vow of David's boyhood has been fulfilled, and the Ark provided with a suitable resting-place. He is now free to take up residence in the house which his friend Hiram has provided for him, and he does so, not full of pride in his accomplishment, but with a chastened spirit, brought about by the lesson so recently taught him, and so well described in the words of the psalm.

There are several other psalms which appear to have their place in this series of those linked with the bringing up of the Ark. Psalm 68 is perhaps the most notable of them, but while we may return to it later, we shall at present draw attention to one not usually thought of in this connection, the 101st. Here once again we find David's house spoken of (vv. 2, 7), no doubt the same house which had been built for him by Hiram, and which he dedicated and began to dwell in after he had brought up the Ark to Zion. The entire psalm is filled with promises or resolutions as to the behaviour which shall characterize this house of his, and those who shall dwell therein (v. 6); and it constitutes, as the little head-note which is in most A.V. Bibles suggests, another vow on the part of David, evidently made at the time when he took up residence in his new home. In other words, we have here something like the very expressions which he must have used at "the dedication of the house of David", mentioned in the title of Psalm 30. Indeed the opening words, "I will sing of mercy and judgment", would themselves point us to Psalm 30, since that is the very thing he has been doing there, while thinking upon the "judgment" on Uzzah and the "mercy" extended to himself.

Be that as it may, we have in Psalm 101 words which might well be on the lips of every young couple of the Lord's people who settle down in a home of their own, as being the very resolve of their hearts, with regard to the conduct which shall be found there (v. 2), the aim which they shall set before them (vv. 3, 4), and the sort of people they shall welcome or keep out (vv. 5-8). Too often there is not the exercise about these matters which there should be on such an occasion, and failure to take a definite stand for God at the beginning results in a spoilt testimony, with spiritual loss and trouble for all concerned.

But since we have seen how well David kept the vow of Psalm 132 made in his early days, as to putting the things of God first we must now ask how did he observe this other one of Psalm 101 made at the height of his prosperity? Alas, about it we have a very different story to tell. He seems to have transgressed within a short time almost every resolution the psalm contains.

He must early have lost control of his family, else the sad events of

2 Sam. 13 could not have taken place. So comfortable was he in this house of his that, "at the time when kings go forth to battle" (2 Sam. 11: 1), he merely sent forth Joab with the army, while he himself "tarried still at Jerusalem". And then, instead of "behaving himself wisely" (Psa. 101: 2) by "walking within his house with a perfect heart" (v. 2), and by "setting no wicked thing before his eyes" (v. 3), he is found (2 Sam. 11: 2) walking on the roof of it with a lustful eye, which brought him into grievous sin and trouble. Instead of showing all kindness to "the faithful of the land" (v. 6) he wrongs Uriah, one of his most faithful servants, and then sends him back to Joab, bearing instructions for his own murder. Instead of keeping away from those who work deceit (v. 7), he himself wrought deceit on a large scale when trying to cover his sin; and through having to take into his confidence in these transactions a "wicked person" (v. 4), Joab, he came to be under fear of the latter all his days.

We need not, however, spread out further the contrast between the promises he made in the psalm and what actually took place. But we call to mind the words of David's son, "Pay that which thou hast vowed: better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay". Like all the rest of what we find written concerning the failures of Old Testament saints, these things have been put down in the Word of God, not to discredit them, but to warn us. Ere we condemn David let us ask, Have we ourselves always paid that which we have vowed? Have our own families been brought up for God? Have our eyes never wandered after forbidden things? Have we been true to God's people and their interests at all times?

Asking such questions, we shall not throw stones at David as did Shimei of old.

PSALM 68

Psalm 68, as has already been mentioned, is another of those associated with the period of David's life when he brought up the Ark of God to the place prepared for it at Jerusalem. Indeed its connection with that event is perhaps closest of any, for it seems to describe the actual occurrence in verses 16-27. At the same time, the scope of the psalm is so wide as to reach from the beginning of Israel's national history to its utmost future. In verses 6-8 we are taken back to their deliverance from the "chains" of Egyptian bondage, and their "march" through the wilderness; while in verses 29-31 we look forward to the day when the nations of earth will be subject to Israel, and to Israel's God.

The thought which binds together the various parts of the psalm is this: that every blessing which Israel ever had, or shall have, is linked with the presence of God amongst them—God dwelling in their midst. And this thought comes in naturally and fittingly in a psalm which has to do with the Ark; because the Ark, with its mercy-seat, was in a very special way the emblem and token of that presence. Seven times at least in the Old Testament God is described as the One that "dwelleth between the Cherubim"; and of these occurrences one, it is interesting to note, is connected with the occasion when the Philistines captured the Ark, and another with the occasion when David brought it up to Zion (1 Sam. 4: 4; 2 Sam. 6: 2).

It will be seen that most of the verses of the psalm suggest in some way the idea of God's presence, or of the effects produced by it ; so that it is unnecessary to cite references to them in detail, especially as they will be better appreciated by reading the whole right through, with this idea in mind. But we may at least point out how they are introduced into the three great sections of the psalm, which, as we have shown, deal with Israel's past, and present, and future.

With regard to their wilderness march, it is said, "Thou wentest forth before Thy people. . . . Thou didst march through the wilderness, . . . even Sinai itself was moved at the *presence of God*" (vv. 7, 8). As to the actual happenings at the time the psalm was written, we read, "This (*i.e.* Zion) is the hill which God desireth to dwell in ; yea *the Lord will dwell in it* for ever : the Lord is among them" (vv. 16, 17). And then the picture of Israel's future in the latter part of the psalm ends with the words, "O God, Thou art terrible *out of Thy holy places* ; the God of Israel is He that giveth strength and power unto His people : blessed be God" (v. 35).

The first reference to the Ark in Psalm 68 occurs in its opening verse, a verse that gives an example of the quoting of earlier scriptures ; which, as was remarked in a former paper, is an interesting feature, and one to be watched for, in the later books of the Old Testament. It is taken from Num. 10: 35, where it is recorded that on each occasion of the setting forward of the Ark to lead Israel's march, Moses spoke the words, "Rise up, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered ; and let them that hate Thee flee before Thee". It seems clear that David has this use of them by Moses before his mind, and repeats them here in view of the similarity of the occasion – the removal of the Ark. Such a connection is made all the more probable by the fact that very soon after, he refers to and describes those old-time wilderness journeys, in which the Ark was so prominent.

The statement made in verse 16 as to the hill which God had chosen *to dwell in*, is of course another link with David's bringing up of the Ark ; for that was the occasion upon which it was first made known that Zion was to be "the place" which the Lord had chosen, "to cause His Name to dwell there" (Deut. 12: 11, etc.). Notice in passing how the mountains of Bashan, "great mountains", "mountains of God" (see R.V.), are described as looking "askance" or enviously at the comparatively insignificant hill upon which His choice fell.

In the threefold statement of verse 18, (1) "Thou hast ascended on high"; (2) "Thou hast led captivity captive"; (3) "Thou hast received gifts for men"; we seem to be gazing upon the very events of that period. In (1) we have the Ark leading the way up to the place prepared for it (2 Sam. 6: 12-17); in (2) the victories gained by David at this time over surrounding enemies, who had formerly enslaved Israel (2 Sam. 5 and 8); and in (3) the good things given to the people on the occasion (2 Sam. 6: 18, 19).

It is scarcely necessary to add here that no events in David's days, however glorious, exhaust the meaning of this 18th verse. Indeed we are not left in doubt regarding the matter, because in Eph. 4: 8 we find it quoted with definite application to our Lord's resurrection and ascension. Of Him the Ark was in many ways a type, and amongst others in this, that being the symbol of God's presence in the midst of His people, it pointed to Him whose name was to be "Immanuel" – God with us.

He it was who ascended up on high, who led captivity captive, who gave

gifts unto men ; that is to say: who (1) returned to His Father, having perfectly accomplished all that He sent Him forth to do ; who (2) conquered Satan and the powers of hell ; who (3) dispenses to men, by virtue of His death, redemption with all the “gifts” related thereto. Thus the three statements present three distinct aspects of Christ’s work: (1) what it meant to God the Father – SATISFACTION ; (2) what it meant to Satan – SUBJECTION; and (3) what it meant to men – SALVATION. In view of such a wondrous provision as all this, it is not surprising that, a verse or two further on, we are warned of the certainty of judgment on “such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses”.

Since there is so much made of “THE PRESENCE OF GOD” throughout our psalm, we naturally may expect to learn from it something as to what His presence with His people does for them, and what fruit it produces in them. In the “wilderness” of the fore part of the psalm, it means to them victory (vv. 1, 2), gladness and praise (vv. 3, 4), comfort and deliverance in trial (vv. 5, 6), all things working together for their good (vv. 7-9), power in testimony (v. 11). Then in the “sanctuary” (v. 24) experience of the latter part it produces effects very similar, but special emphasis is laid on the unity and harmony amongst God’s people which result from God getting His rightful place in their midst. The old-time position of the tribes in their journeyings and encampings had been arranged with reference to the Ark ; and so long as God’s authority and presence were acknowledged, there was no room for quarrelling about precedence. This appears to be once again the case in the picture of God’s “goings” in the sanctuary which is given in verses 24-27. Two northern and two southern tribes are mentioned, apparently as representative of the whole. “Little Benjamin”, as it is called, is not crushed out of the arrangement, nor put into a back seat. The “singers” and even the “damsels” have their due and proper place. All of which goes to show the truth of what has been pointed out in earlier papers, that when God’s people keep right with Him, and so have His manifest presence with them, it will keep them also right with one another, and will be a cure for all ills and security for all blessings.

PSALM 34

In recent papers we have been considering some of those psalms which appear to be linked with the period of David’s life from his ascension to the throne until his bringing up of the Ark to Zion. Let us now turn to one of those which relate to the still earlier period of his persecution by Saul.

These psalms have, for the most part, some reference in their title to the circumstances under which they were written, a feature of which the heading of Psalm 34 affords a striking example. This is a beautiful psalm in itself, but becomes even more so if we associate it in our minds, as we read it, with the occasion when David changed his behaviour before Abimelech, who “drove him away, and he departed”. For its subject matter will be found to agree remarkably well with David’s experience at that time, as we shall endeavour to show.

A careful reading of it will also show that the psalm has some interesting associations with New Testament Scriptures, the most noteworthy perhaps

being that no less than four-and-a-half verses of it (vv. 12-16) are quoted by Peter in his first Epistle (chap. 3: 10-12), and applied to the then existing circumstances of persecution and testing in which his readers found themselves. Paul too applies to his own experiences of trial the words of verse 19, "The Lord delivereth him out of them all", when he says, "Out of them all the Lord delivered me" (2 Tim. 3: 11). And the statement of verse 20, "He keepeth all his bones ; not one of them is broken", is, partly at least, the source of the quotation in John 19: 36, "A bone of Him shall not be broken"; and suggests a prophetic application of the psalm to Christ, an application which is borne out by many other statements in it. Doubtless also, in a day yet to come, this psalm will be found to contain much needed comfort for a tried and persecuted company of godly Israelites, whose "troubles" in the times of the Beast of Rev. 13 will have much in common with those of David in the days of Saul, as well as with those of Peter's readers in the days of Nero.

The psalm divides into two almost equal parts, in the first of which (vv. 1-10) prominence is given to personal testimony, and in the second (vv. 11-22) to the instructing of others. Thus these matters are put in their due order, since a man can best teach others that which he has had experience of himself. The writer of it might well use the words of our Lord, "We speak that we do know and testify that we have seen".

The occasion of its writing was as the title declares, the troubles through which David passed, when he first sought refuge amongst the Philistines to escape the attacks made on him by Saul, as recorded in 1 Sam. 21: 10 to 22: 1. Fearing death at the hand of the king, he had to flee to them; but soon found reason to fear death at their hand, and had to escape back to Judah again. These fears of his are mentioned in the psalm at verse 4, "I sought the Lord and He heard me, and delivered me from ALL MY FEARS"; and the writer seems to set them in contrast with the fear of the Lord, which is mentioned in verses 7, 9, 11. David at this time experienced the truth of the words which were written afterwards by his son, "The fear of man bringeth a snare"; since it was his fear of Saul which led him into what was evidently a wrong path for him – going down amongst the Philistines ; and then it was his fear of them which led him into another wrong course – that of pretending to be mad. The one mistake, as is usually the case, produced another ; and whereas in his own country he had acted like a hero, here in the land of the Philistines we find him acting like a lunatic. Four times in 1 Sam. 18 we read of how, in varying circumstances, David had "behaved himself wisely"; and it is therefore all the more pitiable that, in 1 Sam. 21: 13 and again here in the psalm title, it should have to be said, "He changed his behaviour". While God's people keep right with Him, and have His fear in their souls it will preserve them from all other fears, and they will never need to play the fool.

But it might be said, Was not David's ruse on this occasion successful in saving his life ? I doubt this, for if it were, our psalm, which attributes his deliverance entirely to the Lord's intervention, would lose all point ; and, instead of "making his boast in the Lord" (v. 2), he would have had to boast of his own cleverness. Even the statement in 1 Sam. 22: 1, "David escaped hence", does not sound like the fruit of successful play-acting ; while a clearer indication still that he does not attribute his safety to it, is that in our psalm itself he utters a strong warning against "GUILT" at

verse 13. Yet what, if not guile, was his own action in feigning madness ?

The fact seems to be that, like Jacob his ancestor at Peniel in Gen. 32, he discovered that with all his craft he was in danger still, and that then, feeling himself beaten, he "cried and the Lord heard him ; and saved him out of all his troubles", just as is stated in the psalm at verse 6. It is of interest to note that this verse is followed by one containing yet another coincidence with Jacob's experience, for he, like the Psalmist, had found in Gen. 32: 1 that "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him".

There is another point here in which the order of things contained in our psalm is significant. In verse 4, the first result of seeking the Lord was deliverance from "all his fears", whereas deliverance from the troubles comes afterwards. That is to say, the Lord dealt first with himself and his unbelief, before dealing with the circumstances which resulted from it.

We have just remarked how the experience of David on this occasion was in some respects similar to that of his ancestor Jacob. But for examples of acting in guile we can go even further back than to Jacob. Both Abraham and Isaac had also turned aside to guile, and that too when amongst the Philistines as David was (see Gen. 20 and 26). And in their case as in his it was not their guile which delivered them, but God's intervention. It is peculiar that the name of the Philistine king, both in Abraham's case and in that of Isaac, was Abimelech, and that this is the name used in the title of Psalm 34, although in Samuel the name of the king with whom David had dealings is always called Achish. Part of the explanation doubtless is that Abimelech was a state name or title, used of the kings of Philistia generally, as Pharaoh was of the kings of Egypt. But the fact that it, and not Achish, is used in the psalm suggests that it may be done of purpose to link up the story of David's guile with those of Abraham and Isaac, in the same circumstances and in the same land.

Coming to the use made of the psalm by Peter in his first Epistle, it is not difficult to recognise the association of ideas in his mind, which led him to see in it a fitting lesson for those to whom he was writing. David was being persecuted by Saul ; and these were in the fiery trial of persecution also (1 Pet. 4: 12-16). It meant to David the danger of turning aside from God's path for him ; and of course it meant the same to them. Fear of man temporarily upset David ; and in 1 Peter, as in the psalm, this fear of man is contrasted with the fear of God (see in chap. 3 the contrast between v. 2 and v. 6 ; and between v. 14 and v. 15). Peter, like the Psalmist, holds that one who has the fear of God need have no other fear ; and yet he too had personally failed in this very matter, and is able to warn others by his own sad experience. Fear of man it was that led to his threefold denial of his Lord, and that brought upon him at a later time a public rebuke from his fellow apostle Paul.

The word "guile", to which we have referred as used in the warning given in verse 13 of the psalm, forms another link with these passages in 1 Peter ; since he not only uses it when quoting from that verse in chapter 3: 10, but also in another exhortation in chapter 2: 1, and in a reference to Christ's example at chapter 2: 22. Such warnings against guile are as much needed today as ever they were ; and indeed so is the entire lesson, taught by the Psalmist in verses 11-14, and repeated by Peter at chapter 3: 10-11, of which the substance is :

If you want to have good days,

1. Keep your tongue from guile.
2. Keep your ways from evil.
3. Go in for peace.

If you do these things, whatever may be the persecutions or other troubles which come upon you, the Lord will deliver you out of them all.

PSALM 58

As was remarked last month, many of the psalms connected with that period of David's life when he was suffering persecution at the hands of Saul, have reference made in their titles to the circumstances under which they were written. Amongst these are Psalms 57 and 59, the former associated with the time when he "fled from Saul in the cave", and the latter with the time "when they watched the house to kill him". Between the two we get Psalm 58, the title of which contains no reference to Saul, but does contain a peculiar Hebrew phrase, "*Al-taschith*", which it has in common with those on each side of it, and which, so far as psalm titles are concerned, occurs again only in Psalm 75.

The repetition of *Al-taschith* in the three successive psalms, 57, 58 and 59 may suggest that the middle one is associated with the same period as the other two ; and the idea becomes more than a probability when it is learned that David actually used this very phrase, "Destroy not" (as it is translated in the margin of the psalm), when speaking to Abishai about Saul in 1 Sam. 26: 9. Abishai on that occasion wished to smite Saul to the earth with his spear ; but David said, "Destroy him not" (*Altaschithelu*), and spared his life. Then, having retired to a distance, he roused up Saul and Abner by calling to them, and in a most pathetic speech pleaded with the former to cease his wicked pursuit of him. If, as is likely enough, Psalm 58 has reference to that very incident, the comparison made therein to the "deaf adder . . . which will not hearken to the voice of the charmer" (vv. 4, 5), becomes very striking, reminding us, as it does, of Saul's obduracy on the occasion. Although he replied in smooth words to David, and even confessed himself in the fault, his attitude towards him underwent no change. And it was but a short time afterwards that the words spoken to Abishai by David were fulfilled : "The Lord shall smite him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall descend into battle and perish".

This view of David, that he should not at that time take vengeance on his personal enemies, was evidently a right one, though in the previous chapter (1 Sam. 25) he had almost departed from it. He had set off with his men to wipe out Nabal and his household, but was prevented from doing so by the timely supplication of Abigail, who reminded him that his work was to fight "the battles of the Lord" (v. 28), and not to "avenge himself" (v. 31). David's reply showed that he saw the intervening hand of God in her action ; for he said, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel which sent thee this day to meet me ; and blessed be thy advice ; and blessed be thou which has kept me this day from avenging myself with mine own hand".

But there is a remarkable contrast between the attitude which is repre-

sented by *Al-taschith* (Destroy not) in the title of these psalms, and some expressions which afterwards occur in them. Particularly do we feel this to be so in Psalm 58, when, having described the judgment on these wicked men, the Psalmist goes on to say, "The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance ; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked". Does it not hint that when the full and final judgment of the ungodly takes place, there will be no regrets on the part of any of the saints, but rather, as the closing verse of Psalm 58 expresses it, "A man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily He is a God that judgeth in the earth"?

Indeed the entire psalm may, without stretching its statements unwarrantably, be given the widest possible application. It consists of two parts, the first of which (vv. 1-5) is occupied with the subject of SIN, and the second (vv. 6-11) with that of JUDGMENT.

About sin, we learn from verse 1 that it is very wide spread, as is shown by the use of the words "congregation" and "sons of men", for those who are being addressed. From verse 2 we discover that it is also deep seated. It springs from their "heart", and is something that they "weigh", rather than an impulse of a weak moment. In verse 3 we are told that it is in men from their birth, for they are "estranged from the womb ; they go astray as soon as they be born"; while in verse 4 we see that it has something in common with the Serpent himself. Finally, in verses 4 and 5 we learn that it culminates in a refusal to harken to God's message, however "wisely" it may be delivered.

In the second part of the psalm, judgment begins with the removal of their power for mischief in verse 6 and their reduction to extreme insignificance in verses 7 and 8. Then in verse 9 utter destruction comes upon them suddenly and swiftly ; while in verses 10 and 11 God and His people are thereby vindicated and avenged.

When that day arrives the cry, *Al-taschith*, "Destroy not, but spare" shall no longer be heard. Those who formerly pleaded for sinners, shall then acquiesce in their sentence ; and the more fittingly so, since they have added to all their other sins that of "stopping their ear" when opportunities to repent were given them. Indeed these opportunities were doubtless in many cases an answer to former pleadings on their behalf. Moses, for example, had thus interceded for Israel, on the occasion of their idolatry at Sinai, using, according to Deut. 9: 26, the very phrase, *Al-taschith* (Destroy not), which heads these psalms. His prayer was answered and they were spared ; but only to sin and rebel against God over again, till ultimately that generation had to be "destroyed". Even then the intercession was not forgotten, for the righteous were not destroyed with the wicked but spared, as is ever God's way.

Another interesting illustration of this last named point, connected with Israel's latter day history, is found in Isa. 65: 8. There someone is represented as praying, probably in a day yet future, "Destroy it not (*Al-taschithehu*), for a blessing is in it"; and in the verses that follow, we see that God will find a way to punish the evildoers, and yet save those who are His true servants. So doing, He can use the words that follow, words the sentiment of which is very much the same as Psalm 58: 5, 10, 11. "Because when I called ye did not answer ; when I spake ye did not hear . . . therefore, thus saith the Lord, Behold My servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry ; behold My servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty ;

behold My servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed ; behold My servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit" (vv. 12-14).

PSALMS 42-48

At the commencement of these "Notes" reference was made to the fact that the Psalms, as is shown in the R.V., Newberry, and some other editions of the Bible, are divided into five successive groups, or "Books", which begin with Psalms 1, 42, 73, 90 and 107 respectively. As might be anticipated, all these five are psalms of more than usual interest ; and since we have not yet dealt with any of them save Psalm 1, it may be well now to consider the others.

In keeping with the suggestion that each of these five "Books" has something in common with its counterpart amongst the five Books of Moses, we may note that, just as Exodus starts with the groanings of Israel for deliverance from Egyptian bondage, so our Book II opens at Psalms 42-44 with a seeking unto God under trouble and persecution ; and just as Exodus closes with the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle, so this Book ends with the glory of the Lord filling the earth (Psa. 72: 19). Moreover, the individual seeking unto God of Psalms 42 and 43, and the collective pleading with Him of Psalm 44, are responded to by the appearance in Psalm 45 of a Deliverer, greater far than Moses, but who, like Moses, seems to have taken unto Himself a Gentile Bride, as is implied by the words addressed to her in verse 10, "Forget also thine own people".

Of this Deliverer the writer of Psalm 45 presents at least four pictures. First, in verse 2 he shows Him to us as a Man who stands out from all others. Moses was "exceeding fair" (Acts 7: 20), and David too was "of a fair countenance" (1 Sam. 17: 42), but this One excels over all, being "fairer than the children of men". In His speech also He stands in contrast with Moses, for "grace is poured into His lips", until even His opponents have to confess that "never man spake like this Man".

Secondly, in verses 3-5 He is set forth as a conquering Hero. We see Him going forth to battle on behalf of "truth, and meekness, and righteousness"; we look upon the conflict as it takes place ; and we behold his adversaries falling under Him.

But the scene changes, and now in verses 6 and 7 He is depicted, not upon earth at all, but exalted as God upon His throne to reign for ever and ever. And finally, in verses 8, 9 and 17 He is represented as the Bridegroom, while in verses 10 to 16 His Bride is shown standing beside Him with her retinue, and entering with Him into His "palace".

Thus we have our blessed Lord portrayed ; First, as He moved about amongst men on earth ; Second, in the conflict with His foes at Calvary ; Third, exalted again to His Father's right hand ; and Fourth, taking possession of His Bride.

Passing on, we come to Psalm 46, where, in spite of the fact that God's Deliverer has been appointed, the trouble seems to have got worse (*cf.* Exod. 5), until the very earth itself is moved by it. Yet "the God of Jacob" is with His people throughout it all, and ere the psalm closes deliverance has come "at the dawn of the morning" (v. 5 ; R.V. margin).

Following upon that, we have in Psalms 47 and 48 “songs of deliverance”, the former rejoicing in the restoration of the nation and indeed of the entire earth, the latter glorying in that of Zion, the “city of God”. He who has proved Himself in the trial to be “The God of Jacob” (Psa. 46: 7, 11), *i.e.* the God who remains with His people to sustain them in it, now proves Himself in the final deliverance to be “The God of Abraham” (Psa. 47: 9), *i.e.* the God who shall fulfil to the very utmost all that He had promised to do for Abraham long ago (*cf.* in the one case Gen. 28: 15, 20, and in the other Gen. 12: 2, 3 ; 22: 17, 18).

And thus His people are able, not merely from Abraham’s experience, and from Jacob’s, but from their own, to pass on “to the generation following”, that “this God is our God for ever and ever” (Psa. 48: 13, 14); so giving triumphant answer to that sneer of the enemy in the opening psalm of the series, “Where is thy God” (Psa. 42: 4, 10). And similarly, to the plaintive cry with which Psalm 44 began, “We have heard with our ears . . . what work Thou didst . . . in the times of old”, they are now able to respond, “As we have heard, so have we seen” (Psa. 48: 8).

From all the above it is clear that these seven psalms (Psalms 42-48) form a group of pictures relating to one and the same event, a mighty deliverance wrought by the Lord on His people’s behalf ; and that their ultimate reference is to “The time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30: 7) yet to come, and to the Appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which it will be ended, and millennial peace and blessing ushered in.

At the same time let us not forget that they have often been used, and may well be used still, for the comfort of the saints in all times of stress and trial. Indeed we have the highest possible authority for so using them, and for taking to ourselves the lessons they convey ; because in Rom. 8: 36 we find the Spirit guiding the Apostle Paul to thus use Psa. 44: 22, “Yea, for Thy sake we are killed all the day long, we are counted as sheep for the slaughter”, making application of it to what in the same chapter he calls, “the sufferings of this present time”. We therefore need not fear to claim the presence with us in trial of the God of Jacob, and the fulfilment of His promises by the God of Abraham ; all the more so when we remember that it is to Gentile converts it was written, “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3: 29). Nay further, let us remember that He who was “The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob”, has revealed Himself thrice over in the New Testament as “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”. As such, He blesses us with all spiritual blessings, as He did Abraham (Eph. 1: 3). As such, He comforts us in all our tribulation, as He did Jacob (2 Cor. 1: 3, 4). And as such, He has begotten us to an inheritance, as was Isaac (1 Pet. 1: 3, 4). Thus we have, not less, but more than ever had saints before us ; and all their accumulated experience of the goodness of God, in so far as it has been recorded in His Word, is there “written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15: 4).

PSALMS 42, 43

We have considered Psalm 42, with which the second of the five Books

begins, in its relationship to the six psalms that follow it, and with it form a closely associated group of seven. But there are many other features of special interest in the psalm itself, and to some of these we shall now direct our attention.

Looking at its title, we notice that it contains the Hebrew word "Maschil", a word found in the headings of some thirteen psalms, of which the first is Psalm 32. In the margin of our Bibles it is rendered into English as "Giving instruction"; but a comparison of its various occurrences, in these titles and elsewhere, would suggest that its reference is not so much to the giving of instruction generally, as to that kind of instruction which is to be gained from the lessons taught by past experiences of God's dealings. If those psalms, the titles of which contain the word, be examined, it will in most cases be quite apparent that they are of this character. The experiences they describe are of various kinds, sin and its forgiveness in Psalm 32, a temporary hiding of God's face from His servant in Psalm 42, God's former dealings with the nation and particularly with the tribe of Ephraim in Psalm 78, and so on ; but in each of them prominence is given to the lessons which that experience should teach us.

The point is an important one, because it is much more pleasant to learn wisdom from these past experiences of others, than to have to do so by passing through similar troubles ourselves. As bearing upon it, it would be helpful and enlightening to examine the various connections in which the word "maschil" (usually in the plural form "maschilim"), occurs in the Scriptures elsewhere, particularly those in Proverbs and Daniel. But the subject is too big to be gone into at present, and must be left for another occasion.

Looking once more at the title of our psalm, we see that it is said to be "For the sons of Korah", and it will be found that it is the first of eleven psalms which are so described. This also suggests a most interesting line of things, but it is one that may be more helpfully considered when we come to deal with Psalm 84, another of these Korahite psalms.

Passing on to the body of the psalm, we find that it is divided into two almost equal parts, or stanzas, each of which ends with the same chorus, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul ; and why art thou disquieted within me ? Hope thou in God ; for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God". There is a slight variation in the last clause in the A.V., but in the R.V. margin both are identical.

A glance at the end of the following psalm, which by the way is without a title, will show that it also ends with this chorus, word for word the same. Not only so, but when we compare the two psalms, we find that in other respects there is a close similarity between them. In both the writer is absent from the House of God, and intensely longs to get back to it, "Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy ?" We shall therefore not be far astray, if we take Psa. 43 as containing what we might call the third stanza of Psa. 42 ; and when we do so we shall discover that the three, if thus read together, are in a certain appropriate order. In the first the psalmist in his trouble looks back to good times he had in days past, and draws consolation therefrom. In the second he comforts himself by the fact that, even in the present, while under "the night" of the trial, he can still sing and pray to the God of his life. In the third he looks forward to the future, and encourages himself with the prospect of ultimately getting

back. He pictures himself reaching, first the "holy Hill", then the "Tabernacle", then the "Altar", and last and best of all, "God his exceeding Joy". (Compare Psalms 42: 4 ; 48: 8 ; and 43: 3, 4).

If inquiry be made as to the writer of these two psalms, and under what circumstances he wrote them, our reply to the first question would be that, although David's name does not appear in them, anyone well acquainted with those in which he is named as author, will feel at once on reading these that he has David's words before him still, and David's thoughts as well. With regard to the second ; though one cannot speak dogmatically, when no definite statement on the matter is made in the psalms themselves, it may be said that they associate themselves better with the period of the Absalom rebellion, than with any other to which they might be assigned.

In the first place it is clear that the writer was, as has already been stated, at a distance from the Sanctuary when he wrote them, and evidently in the direction of the Jordan, or beyond it (Psa. 42: 6). Next, we notice that this absence of his occurred somewhat later than a certain occasion on which he had gone "to the House of God" on a "holy day", together with a joyful, praising "multitude" of people (v. 4). And further, it is plain that the circumstances which occasioned his absence were such as to give his enemies power to reproach him, and to say, "Where is thy God ?" (vv. 3, 10).

Now David's departure from Jerusalem during the rebellion of his son was in the direction of Jordan and across Jordan. Moreover, it took place some time after that wonderful scene described in 2 Sam. 6: 15-19, when the multitude kept a joyous and holy day, on the occasion of the bringing up of the Ark. And further, it was the time when he had to suffer the reproaches of Shimei, whose words in 2 Sam. 16: 8 might well be condensed into the "Where is thy God" of the psalm.

In 2 Sam. 15: 25, 26 we find a remarkable saying of David at this period, which shows how closely his thoughts, as he left Jerusalem behind him, correspond with those expressed in our two psalms. Zadok the priest, together with the Levites, had brought along the Ark, evidently intending that it should accompany David in his wanderings. But the king said to him, "Carry back the Ark of God into the city. If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and show me both it and His habitation. But if He thus say, I have no delight in thee ; behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him". David apparently felt that it was not for him to drag the symbol of God's presence away from the place to which the Lord had guided him to bring it. But the chief point of interest in his speech is the longing it manifests to get back, not to his palace, or throne, or kingdom, but to God's Sanctuary ; and in this, as has been said, it is in agreement with the thirst after God and His House displayed in these psalms.

We must remember however that the 42nd and 43rd do not stand alone amongst the psalms in this respect ; for the thirst after God that longs for communion with Him stands out in many of them as a prominent feature of David's character, which indeed it should be in the character of every true servant of God. It is to our shame that most of us, though possessing knowledge of truth that David never had, and in his days could not have, yet fall far short of him in personal knowledge of God, and communion with Him. How very possible it is to have gotten to God's "Holy Hill", having learnt the truth of His One Centre of gathering ; to have reached

His "Tabernacles", clear in our ideas as to the order of His House ; to have attained even to the "Altar", with an intelligent grasp of what worship really is, and with everything correct as to outward form ; and yet after all this to come short of "God my exceeding Joy".

May these psalms then prove truly "maschil" to us, giving us instruction through David's experiences, and giving us deep exercise of soul and questioning of ourselves, as we read their "Why . . . why . . . why" so frequently repeated.

PSALM 73

Having now briefly considered the subject matter of Psalm 42, with which Book II of the Psalms begins, as well as some connections between it and others ; let us pass on to the opening one of Book III, which is Psalm 73. Of the former we were able to say that although David's name does not appear in the title, both the words and the thoughts appear to be his ; but the 73rd is entitled "A Psalm of Asaph", and when we read it through, it is quite evident that in it we have the language of a writer other than David.

Asaph, who was a Gershonite Levite, is mentioned first in 1 Chron. 6: 39, where he is introduced as one of the three great leaders of song appointed by David, from the three Levitical families. His genealogy is there traced back to Levi through Gershom, as that of his "brother" Heman is through Kohath, and that of Ethan through Merari. He seems afterwards to have become, perhaps through his exceptional ability, the most prominent of the three, as may be seen in 1 Chron. 16: 5, 7, 37, etc. In 2 Chron. 29: 30 he is called "Asaph the Seer", and there also it is plainly asserted that the "words" of some of the psalms of praise, sung by the Levites in the days of Hezekiah, were of his authorship. In the Psalter itself his name occurs in the headings of no less than twelve, of which the first is Psalm 50, while the remaining eleven run in unbroken succession from Psalm 73 to Psalm 83. A perusal of these will show that he well merited the title of "Seer", for he was enabled by the Spirit of God to "see" both *beneath* the surface and *beyond* the present. He saw the great need and failure of God's people, and yet he saw their glorious future. Above all, he saw deeply into the purposes of God in His dealings with them.

If we look upon Book III of the Psalms as corresponding to Moses' third book, Leviticus, it will not surprise us to find that its opening number was the work of a Levite, and that all the psalms composing it, with one exception, have a Levitical reference of some kind in their title, and much that is of a Levitical character in their text as well. We shall find, for example, as we might expect, that the Sanctuary is given much prominence in them, and that in one of them (Psalm 78) the whole course of events is traced, which led to the setting aside of Shiloh, where God's Name had been put at the first (see Jer. 7: 12), and to the choosing of Mount Zion as the place of His Sanctuary instead.

The 73rd Psalm is a story of discontent and failure, and as such comes in strangely after the closing one of Book II, in which we have described the attainment of all that could be wished for by a saint of God in those days. So far indeed is this the case that Psalm 72 closes with the words, "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended (or accomplished)". Yet

in the title of that very psalm we get what may give us some hint as to a possible cause for the trouble of Psalm 73. It is said to be, "A Psalm for Solomon", yet the glowing picture it presents is of course of that righteous rule which will one day be exercised by a "Greater than Solomon". But the early part of Solomon's own reign was a foreshadowing of this, as appears to be suggested by 1 Kings 4: 24, 25, and other similar passages; and the godly Asaph would no doubt rejoice in those days that righteousness and peace had at last met together, and that evil was put down. The latter part of the reign, however, was disappointing. Not only did Solomon change personally, but his rule changed as well. His yoke on the people became "heavy" (1 Kings 12: 14), and yet wickedness again became prevalent, as the king himself so sadly confesses in Eccl. 3: 16; 4: 1; 13: 5, 8; 8: 11. Would not outward circumstances such as these at least help to produce the state of mind which Psalm 73 depicts?

Asaph, though a Levite, a Seer, and a teacher of others (not the "Maschil" in titles of Psalms 74 and 78), was "a man subject to like passions as we are", and it is not only in this experience of Psalm 73, but also in another which he records in Psalm 77, that he came perilously near to a breakdown in his testimony. In the one he is tempted to envy, because he cannot understand the dealings of God with the wicked; while in the other he is tempted to unbelief, because he cannot understand His dealings with His own. In Psalm 73: 15 he will not speak while under the cloud, lest he should cause other saints to stumble – an attitude, by the way, well worthy of imitation; while in Psalm 77: 4 he cannot speak, because his trouble is so great. In both psalms he ultimately gets light and relief in the same place – the Sanctuary (Psalm 73: 17; 77: 13).

When writing on Psalm 16 we spoke of it as "The Psalm of the Satisfied Man", and by contrast we may call this 73rd "The Psalm of the Dissatisfied Man". The writer of the former is content with his lot, and desires to have no truck with the wicked; but Asaph here, through taking his eyes off the Lord, gets into Grumble Corner, envying the wicked, and disparaging his own lot as compared with theirs. Yet he does not remain there, for ere the psalm closes we find him back in the place from which he should never have departed, the Sanctuary of God. When he gets there all the grumbling is at an end, and his viewpoint becomes so exactly that of Psalm 16, that verses 23-28 of Psalm 73 seem to be a repetition of the same thoughts, and almost of the same words.

Like David in Psalm 16: 2 (R.V.), he now rejoices in his relationship with the Lord, and says, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee". Like him, he speaks of God as his "portion" (v. 26 compared with Psa. 16: 5); and is satisfied with the guidance of His "counsel" (v. 24 with Psa. 16: 7), and His "right hand" protection (v. 23 with Psa. 16: 8). Like him, too, he looks forward to the glory to come (v. 24 with Psa. 16: 11), and his "heart" and "flesh" are strengthened thereby (v. 26 with Psa. 16: 9).

Asaph's recovery, as seen in these closing verses, is of course a token that he was a true saint of God. However far such may be led aside, they will return again. "Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand" (Psa. 37: 24). Other marks of reality suggested by this experience of the Seer are:

(1) That very chastisement of which he complains in verse 14, "If ye

endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons" (Heb. 12: 7).

(2) His keeping silent lest he should cause God's people to stumble (v. 15). Contrast how the ungodly "speak wickedly" (v. 8), and "set their mouth against the heavens" (v. 9). Contrast also how, after his restoration, he ends the psalm with, "That I may declare all Thy works".

Two great parts of the lesson which Psalm 73 teaches us are contained in its opening and closing verses. In verse 1 we are taught that "God is good" to His people, and in verse 28 we have the corresponding truth that "it is good" for His people to "draw near" to Him. Both these may perhaps be thought lightly of by us as being commonplace facts which we have known for a long time. But so, no doubt, they were to Asaph, yet he had to learn them over again, as we also may have had to do many a time, when we got away in heart from God. All that he here learned by a bitter experience he could have already known from the Spirit's teaching through David in Psalm 37. There, beginning with "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers; neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity", the writer goes on to draw such a contrast between the present position and future end of these on the one hand, and of the righteous man on the other, as might well have kept Asaph out of the snare into which he fell.

We have mentioned getting away in heart from God, and the psalm itself shows clearly that it was heart trouble from which the Seer suffered on this occasion. In verse 7 he speaks of the wicked as having "more than heart could wish"; but why should his heart have had such wishes at all? He remarks in verse 13, "Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain", and in verse 21 he tells us that his "heart was grieved". But when we come to verse 26 we read, "My heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart"; and thus we are brought back to the lesson of verse 1, that "God is good . . . to such as are of a clean heart".

PSALM 90, etc.

Book IV, the next of these sections into which the Psalms are divided, begins at the 90th, a psalm bearing out well our suggestion that the first in each group may be expected to be of more than usual interest. According to its title it is "A Prayer of Moses the man of God", and its contents, as we shall see, are quite in keeping with this. It may therefore be the oldest psalm in the entire collection, unless one or two others, of those having no author's name, should be from the same hand.

This last remark would perhaps more particularly suggest itself in connection with the psalm that follows it, the 91st; for whether it be by the same writer or not, this psalm is clearly meant to be a companion of the 90th, describing as it does an experience directly the opposite to that which is found in the middle portion of the latter. In the one we see man's helpless misery when God is against him; in the other his blessed security when God is for him. Indeed it might be said that the man of Psa. 91 remains all the time in the place where the man of Psa. 90 begins and ends. The one starts with, "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations"; the other describes an individual who has the Lord for his dwelling-place every day.

It is worthy of note that this fourth book of the Psalms, which commences with one attributed to Moses, contains his name no less than seven times (Psa. 90, Title ; 99: 6 ; 103: 7 ; 105: 26 ; 106: 16, 23, 32); while in all the rest of the Psalter it occurs but once. Moreover, if it be compared with Moses' own fourth book, which is Numbers, we shall find a certain amount of similarity between them. Numbers is pre-eminently the book of the wilderness wanderings and wilderness failures ; while nowhere in the Psalms do we find more prominence given to these than in Book IV. It begins with them, as we hope to show, in Psa. 90, and it finishes by dealing with them at length in Psa. 106 ; while in Psa. 95 we have a most solemn warning grounded on them, a warning which is used over again, centuries later, by the apostle in writing to the Hebrews.

In Psa. 90 itself, and indeed even more so in Psa. 91, words and phrases occur which recall those spoken by Moses elsewhere. For example, the word translated "dwelling-place" in Psa. 90: 1, which is the same as that rendered "habitation" in Psa. 91: 9, is used by Moses in Deut. 26: 15 of God's own "habitation"; and in Deut. 33: 27 he employs its feminine form to set forth, just as here, that the Eternal God is the "refuge" (R.V. "dwelling-place") of His people. In Psa. 91 the references to safety from "the terror", "the arrow", "the destruction", "the lion", "the dragon", etc. would remind us that these are the very judgments threatened in Deut. 32: 23-33 ; while the mention of "thousand" and "ten thousand" together in v. 9 might recall to us Deut. 32: 30, where the same numbers are found in conjunction.

But it is when we come to compare the subject matter of Psa. 90 with the times of Moses that its appropriateness as a composition of his will strike us most forcibly. If it were merely a description of the brevity of human life, it might have been penned by almost any of the Old Testament writers ; but it is rather a picture of lives shortened by God's wrath against sin ; and this suggests to us two definite occasions, both of which may well have been in the thoughts of Moses as he wrote it.

The times mentioned in it, "a thousand years" in v. 4, and "threescore years and ten" in v. 10, also perhaps the phrase "with a flood" of v. 5, would bring before us that great period, reaching from the judgment of the Deluge to the days of Moses himself, during which men's ages were gradually diminished from almost a thousand years, as in the case of Methusaleh and others, to the seventy years which even today is looked upon as their normal limit.

On the other hand, when we read the statement made in v. 9, "All our days are passed away in Thy wrath", it will readily link itself in our thoughts with that fuller one of Psa. 95: 10, 11, "Forty years long was I grieved . . . I swore in My wrath that they should not enter into My rest"; and thus we shall be reminded how that, during those forty years, Moses saw an entire generation of 600,000 men, not to speak of their womenfolk, pass away in death, because of God's wrath against their sin. This would imply an average of more than forty burials of full-grown men daily, during all that time ; which fact, coupled with the various special occasions of judgment when thousands perished at once, will add point to the saying of v. 8, "Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance". And these latter words in their turn may recall to us Moses' warning of Num. 32 : 23, "Be sure your sin will find you out".

Another suggestive expression in our psalm is the prayer of v. 17, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us", which has peculiar aptness as written by one who, according to Exod. 34 : 29-35, knew at times what it was to have, in a very literal sense, the beauty of the Lord upon him. Indeed all of the seven petitions, with which Psa. 90 ends, are specially suitable to the circumstances of Moses' closing days, as may be seen by reading them with that application in mind.

When this association of our psalm with Israel's wilderness failures is put alongside its evident relationship to Psa. 91, it gives us an interesting connection in which to read the latter. If the one was the experience of those "whose carcasses fell in the wilderness" (Heb. 3 : 17); does not the other at least suggest that of Caleb, who, trusting in his God (v. 2), passed unscathed through it all. A thousand fell at his side (v. 7) and ten thousand at his right hand, but it did not come nigh him ; although with his eyes (v. 8) he beheld and saw the reward of the wicked. The "plague" (compare Num. 14 : 36-38 ; 16 : 49) might rage round him, but his "tent" (v. 10 R.V.) was immune. Even from the simplest accidents of the way, such as dashing his foot against a stone (v. 12), the care of God preserved him until, instead of the mournful lament of Psa. 90 : 10, he could bear testimony when eighty-five years old that, "Behold the Lord hath kept me alive . . . and . . . I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me" (Jos. 14 : 10, 11). Truly in his case was even the final promise of Psa. 91 fulfilled, "With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him My salvation". We need scarcely add that such comparison with Caleb's experience in no wise detracts from the application of Psa. 91, in still further measure, to the application of which Satan showed himself aware in Matt. 4 : 6.

Other points of interest in connection with these psalms we must reserve for another paper.

The links of connection between Psalms 90 and 91, to which we drew attention last month, are by no means the only ones to be found in this part of the Psalter. Nowhere else perhaps, unless it be in the "Songs of Degrees", are the successive psalms more closely associated with one another. The 92nd, for example, which is entitled, "A Psalm or Song for the Sabbath Day", and which carries our thoughts onward to the great Millennial Sabbath yet to come ; on the one side serves as an introduction to a number of psalms without titles that follow it, all clearly millennial ; while on the other it appears to form a triad with the two we have been considering, Psalms 90 and 91.

Its fourteenth verse, "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age ; they shall be fat and flourishing", links with the final words of Psa. 91, "With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him My salvation". And its seventh verse, "The wicked spring as the grass . . . flourish . . . shall be destroyed", connects it just as closely with Psa. 90 : 5, 6, "They are like grass . . . it flourisheth . . . it is cut down and withereth".

Most of those seven petitions too, with which as we noticed, Psa. 90 ends, seem to find their fulfilment in Psa. 92. Compare, for example, Psa. 90 : 14 (R.V.), "O satisfy us in the morning with Thy mercy", with Psa. 92 : 2, "To shew forth Thy loving kindness (same word as rendered "mercy" in the other) in the morning". Compare Psa. 90 : 15, "Make us glad", with Psa. 92 : 4, "Thou, Lord, has made me glad". And compare Psa. 90 : 16,

“Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants”, with Psa. 92 : 4, “I will triumph in the works of Thy hands”.

The connections between the three psalms might be expressed in this way. In Psa. 90 we are taken back to the beginning of Israel's history ; in Psa. 92 we are carried forward to its future in millennial times ; while in Psa. 91 is depicted the security of the individual who puts his trust in God, during the long and troublous period that lies between. When looked at thus, it is interesting to observe how these songs end at the close of Psa. 92, on the very same note as that on which Moses' prophetic song of their history in Deut. 32 had begun. “Ascribe ye greatness to our God”, he had said, “He is the *Rock* : His work is perfect . . . just and right is He”. And so here, when millennial blessedness has at last been ushered in, we get, “The Lord is upright : He is my *Rock* : and there is no unrighteousness in Him”.

Another remarkable sequence, and one which might easily be missed, is that these three psalms follow up and to a large extent answer certain difficulties and questions which are raised in the later part of Psa. 89. This final psalm of Book III ends very differently from the triumphal close of Book II ; where, as we saw, all God's promises to David are so completely fulfilled that he has nothing left to pray for (Psa. 72 : 20). Here, on the other hand, the circumstances are such that the writer exclaims, “Where are Thy former lovingkindnesses, which Thou swarest unto David in Thy truth ?” (Psa. 89 : 49). His complaint, “How long, Lord, shall Thy wrath burn like fire ? Remember how short my time is”, etc., is but an echo of that earlier complaint we had before us in Psa. 90 ; and, like it, may be answered, so far as present experience is concerned, by Psa. 91, and as regard the future, by Psa. 92.

Concerning the subject matter of Psa. 90 itself, one might add much to what has already been said as to its associations, both with other psalms, and with Moses and his times ; and this doubtless would be more helpful to the understanding of it, than any verse by verse exposition could be. Its magnificent opening, “Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place (or, as someone has rendered it, “our home”), becomes still grander when we think of the circumstances of the writer. Hardly ever, from his childhood, could Moses be said to have had a real earthly home. Pharaoh's palace, the land of Midian, the wilderness tent, of all these he might have said, as on one occasion he did say, “I have been a stranger in a strange land”. To him therefore the thought of “*God our Home*” must have been exceedingly precious.

Similarly, when he adds, “in all generations”, does it not suggest to us how his thoughts would go backwards over what God had been to his father, and what He had been to each of the earlier patriarchs, of whose lives he himself had been the biographer. Compare with this God's announcement to him in Exod. 3 : 6, “I am the God of thy father (*i.e.* of Amram, the poor Hebrew slave, as well as) the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”.

In the next verse of the psalm, Moses' mind reaches out further still, beyond the “all generations”, and even beyond that very forming of the earth itself, which he had been chosen to place on record. He looks out into the eternal ages, past and to come, and proclaims that, throughout them all, the Lord is God. The phrase here used by him, a somewhat

unusual one, "from everlasting to everlasting", has a special interest of its own, and may be said to bind Book IV of the Psalms together ; because it occurs at the beginning of its opening psalm, at the end of its closing psalm, and in one of its middle psalms as well. Here is how we have it :

1. In Psa. 90 : 2, "from everlasting to everlasting" the Lord is God.
2. In Psa. 103 : 17, "from everlasting to everlasting" His mercy endures.
3. In Psa. 106 : 48, "from everlasting to everlasting" He is to be blessed, or praised.

Turning abruptly from this vision of Divine greatness, Moses looks upon man, and what a contrast is presented. Fashioned of the dust and returning to the dust, even as he had written concerning him in Gen. 3 ; his short existence appears like "yesterday when it is past", like a "watch in the night", like "a sleep", like "grass cut down", like a "tale that is told".

Nor is this all, because as has been pointed out, he is looking, not merely at short, but at shortened lives, at lives which have been shortened through God's wrath against sin ; and it is this that, in the middle verses of our psalm, he so vividly depicts.

Then follow that sevenfold prayer with which the psalm closes, and to which reference has already been made. On a primary view of them, its petitions look forward to the enjoyment of God's manifest presence and blessing in the land of promise ; but ultimately, of course, they reach onward to much greater blessings that are to be attained "*in the morning*" (v. 14, R.V.); which for all the Lord's own, whether of Old Testament or of New Testament times, is yet to come, whereas for others, their "*in the morning*" (v. 6) is already passing away.

PSALM 107

The fifth and last of the groups, or "Books", contained in the Psalter, begins at the 107th, a psalm which, like the other opening ones, is specially interesting, but, unlike them, contains nothing either by way of title or in subject matter that would enable us to ascertain who the writer was, or to identify the happenings described in it with any which are recorded in the historical Scriptures.

A few commentators have seen in it reference to the Exodus from Egypt, while a much larger number have connected it with the Return from Babylon. But although the deliverances for which God is praised in it have much in common with both these events, quite a number of expressions occur, which cannot with propriety be applied to either. One of the clearest and most prominent of these is the description in verse 3 of "the redeemed of the Lord" as having been gathered out of the lands, "from the East and from the West, from the North and from the South". At the Exodus they were gathered from the South or South-west only, and at the Return, from the East or North-east only ; but this gathering is from all quarters of the compass, and in that respect is unlike anything which has taken place in the past. So also is the description, in one section of the psalm, of sailors caught in a storm ; because no literal experience of this nature took place, either at the Exodus, or at the Return.

The psalm is therefore strictly prophetic ; and while we may find illustrations of the various trials and deliverances which it depicts, in many of the Old Testament, and even of the New Testament narratives, we must look for a final and perfect fulfilment of them all to Israel's future restoration. Then shall the Lord "set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people which shall be left, from Assyria (North), and from Egypt and from Pathros and from Cush (South), and from Elam and from Shinar (East), . . . and from the islands of the sea (West), . . . and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah, *from the four corners of the earth*" (Isa. 11 : 11, 12).

Viewed in this light, Psalm 107 is God's answer to the prayer with which Psalm 106 ends, "Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto Thy holy Name, and to triumph in Thy praise".

While all this is so, however, it must on the other hand be said that few, if any, of the psalms can more completely be made our own, or more readily be applied to the varied experiences of trial and deliverance which characterise our own lives ; and also that the group of pictures contained in it illustrate to a remarkable extent the need of the sinner, and what the Gospel does for him, when having got to the end of his resources, he seeks salvation in God's own way.

Before pointing out in more detail how it does this, it may be well to first draw attention to the structure of the psalm, which is somewhat remarkable, as even the most cursory reader cannot fail to notice. This consists of :

1. An opening exhortation to the redeemed of the Lord to praise Him for His great deliverance (vv. 1-3).

2. A group of four successive pictures, setting forth this great deliverance, each showing how God wrought for them, just at the point where they gave up every other hope and cried to Him. These are :

- (1) A picture of travellers lost in a desert, suffering from hunger and thirst, who could find "no city of habitation" (R.V.). They cried unto the Lord, and He led them forth by the right way that they might go to a city of habitation (vv. 4-9).
- (2) A picture of prisoners bound in affliction and iron, because they rebelled against the words of God ; so that they fell down and there was "none to help". They too cried to the Lord, and He brake their bands in sunder (vv. 10-16).
- (3) A picture of sick men, who in chastisement for their folly, have been brought "near unto the gates of death". Here again their cry went up to the Lord, who sent His word and healed them (vv. 17-22).
- (4) A picture of mariners caught in a mighty tempest, who are tossed up and down, to and fro, until they are "at their wits' end". Once more the cry to the Lord ascends, and He makes the storm a calm, and brings them to their desired haven (vv. 23-32).

It may be observed that each of the four pictures ends with a similar chorus of praise, at verses 8, 15, 21 and 31 respectively, and these, while they begin with the same phrase, "Oh that men would praise", etc., have each some special words added, to suit the particular circumstances.

3. Finally comes a concluding stanza or paragraph, in which is outlined some of God's principles in dealing with men, and which ends with the challenge, "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord" (vv. 33-43).

Having before our minds the above four pictures, which occupy the body of the psalm, we shall be the better able to appreciate the suggestion already made, that they illustrate what the Gospel does for the sinner. Although all genuine stories of conversion meet together at the Cross, they are not in their details all alike. To put it in another way, the Holy Spirit has not one stereotyped method of dealing with souls, to bring them to a realization of their need and helplessness.

Some there are who learn that they are "lost", that they have "gone out of the way" (Rom. 3 : 12), and that left to themselves they will never come to the "city of habitation", the "City which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God", for which Abraham set out long ago. To these, in their utter bewilderment, is revealed the One who says, "I am the Way, . . . no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14 : 6).

Others become impressed with their bondage to sin and Satan, and with their utter inability to free themselves. The gates of brass and bars of iron close them in ; so that there is "none to help", and seemingly no escape ; until upon their hopelessness breaks in the message of Him who came "to preach deliverance to the captives, . . . to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4 : 18).

Others still get to feel themselves sick with the disease of which the hymn-writer says,

*"The worst of all diseases is light compared with sin :
On every part it seizes, but rages most within.
'Tis palsy, dropsy, fever, and madness all combined ;
And none but a believer the least relief can find"*.

Yet when they have drawn "near to the gates of death", they come into contact with the Great Physician who heals by a touch or a look, and immediately made whole, they go on their way rejoicing.

A fourth class find themselves up against the storms of life. They are "tossed to and fro", neither sun nor stars have for many days appeared, and in very truth they are "at their wits' end". How gladly do such hear of Him who is the "Anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast", yea who "maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still".

All these can join together to "praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men". Their stories may vary, but there is no discord in them, for as "the redeemed of the Lord" they all "say so", whether from East or West, from North or South. And one day, gathered out "of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" (Rev. 7 : 9) they shall surround the throne, and still with absolute harmony shall sing, "Salvation to our God, which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb".

PSALM 78

With the exception of the 119th, which is composed of many short sections, the 78th is by far the longest psalm in the entire collection. Yet this psalm

is no more remarkable for its length than it is for the connected and logical manner in which, throughout its seventy-two verses, it deals with and traces onward one subject, or rather one group of closely associated subjects, until in verses 68-72 the writer reaches a climax that had been before his mind from the first.

From a historical point of view it is amongst the most important of the Psalms ; for not only has it much light thrown on it by the earlier Scriptures, but it in turn reflects light upon them, by revealing the hidden purposes and causes behind many of the events they record. It describes a great change that came about in the early part of Israel's history ; a change which involved the downfall of the great tribe of Ephraim, and the raising to honour of Judah instead ; which included the removal of the nation's religious centre from Shiloh in the one tribe to Zion in the other ; and which ultimately placed on the throne David, the man after God's own heart.

This is not the story of a day or two, nor of a year or two, but of centuries ; and it is one which bears out the truth of the oft-times cited words

“The mills of God grind slowly,
But they grind exceeding small”.

God bore long with Ephraim and his pride (Josh. 17 : 14 ; Judg. 8 : 1 ; 12 : 1 ; Isa. 28 : 1-3, etc.); and He bore long with the evil state of things existent at Shiloh (1 Sam. 2 : 12-36, etc.). He inflicted various chastisements in the days of the judges, but all without avail ; until He had in effect to say then, as He said later in the time of Hosea, “Ephraim is joined to idols ; let him alone”.

Indeed this quotation from Hosea would remind us that the subject matter of that book, although dealing with another crisis of later development in the history of Ephraim and the ten tribes, could in many passages be used as descriptive of the state of things during this earlier declension which is traced in the psalm. If one thinks of the two disgraceful episodes recorded in the closing chapters of Judges, in both of which Ephraim and Shiloh are introduced, and of the scandalous conduct of the sons of Eli, which, as we shall see, added the final drop to the filled up cup of Shiloh's iniquity ; and if, thinking of these, one reads in Hosea such a passage as chap. 6 : 8, 9, “Gilead (*i.e.* Ramoth-gilead, a city of refuge in Gad) is a city of them that work iniquity, and is polluted with blood. And as troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way toward Shechem (*i.e.* a city of refuge in Ephraim, see R.V.): yea they have committed lewdness”; it might almost be imagined that Hosea lived in the days of the sons of Eli, instead of several centuries later. Their similarity teaches a solemn lesson of the persistence of sin, and of evil character.

To trace even in outline all the various factors that had to do with this great change from Ephraim to Judah, and from Shiloh to Zion, would necessitate our considering,

- (1) Parts of Joshua, especially those where Ephraim's first grumbles were recorded.
- (2) The greater part of Judges, which book is really the external history of these same changes, of which what we might call the inner story is given in the psalm.

- (3) All of Ruth, which shows the way being prepared for the advent of David, with whose name that little book ends.
- (4) The early chapters of 1 Samuel, in which the actual change over is seen taking place. And even
- (5) The account of the bringing up of the Ark to the place prepared for it at Zion, with which we dealt some time ago in our notes on Psalms 132, 30, etc.

At present we shall, however, merely point out some things to which prominence is given in the psalm we have in hand ; and before doing so it may be better that we should say a little about its title and opening verses. It is called "Maschil of Asaph"; and we have already, when dealing with Psalm 73, recounted what is known about this chief of the Levites ; and when dealing with Psalm 42, made some observations on the use and meaning of the word "Maschil". The latter, as we suggested, implies that we first put into practical use ourselves, and then pass on to others, the lessons to be learned from our own experience of God's dealings, or from those of His people generally. In Asaph's case it is interesting to note how the personal trouble and lesson of Psalm 73 is followed by the "Maschil of Asaph" on the national troubles in Psalm 74 ; and how a second personal trouble and lesson in Psalm 77 is followed by this other "Maschil of Asaph" on the national troubles in Psalm 78.

Moreover, Asaph's trouble in Psalm 73 was settled when he "went into the Sanctuary of God" (v. 17); and in Psalm 74 we find the enemy seeking to destroy "the Sanctuary" (vv. 3, 7). In Psalm 77 his trouble is at an end when he realizes that God's "way" is in the Sanctuary (v. 13); while in Psalm 78 we have God Himself deserting the place of His Sanctuary (vv. 67-69) on account of His people's sin.

This order of things—learning for oneself in a practical way, before undertaking to teach others—is surely God's order, and worthy of our imitation. In the introduction which the translators of the Authorized Version originally prefixed to the book, and which is found in very few copies now, they say, amongst many other wise remarks, "It is a preposterous order to teach first, and to learn after". And yet, is there not still amongst us much of what some of the servants of God of the last generation called "trafficking in unfelt truth".

A point of interest in connection with verse 2 of our psalm is that we find it quoted in Matt. 13:35 in relation to our Lord's parables of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. And its citation is prefaced by the phrase, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet", though surely no one reading verse 2 here would ever suspect that he was reading a prophecy as to the character of Christ's future ministry when on earth. The fact that it is so should lead us to be on the look out for similar links with our blessed Lord elsewhere. Might we say that, while Asaph here teaches from a past history of failure, our Lord in Matt. 13 is instructing His disciples concerning failures that are yet to come ; giving them as it were the history beforehand ? In any case, this little known man, Asaph, is made a type or picture of Christ, and the thought of this may remind us how wonderful must that Bible-reading have been, when He Himself, "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself".

Since this 78th Psalm is to give instruction, there are two questions

which suggest themselves : first, who are those to be instructed, and next, what are the lessons taught them ? The answer to the latter will involve us going over the whole psalm ; so we must reserve it for another time. But to the former we get a clear reply in the opening verses, which we shall briefly consider now. In verses 4-6 we seem to have four separate generations in view: (1) "Our fathers", who received God's commands directly from Himself at the beginning ; (2) "Their children" (end of v. 5), a second generation to whom these fathers passed them on ; (3) "The generation to come, even the children which should be born" (v. 6), a third company ; and (4) "Their children" (end of v. 6), the seed of these last named. To each of them in turn the lessons are to be taught, even as are the commands of the Law themselves.

We find something similar to this list of four generations in Judges 2 : 7-11. First, of course, there was Moses and those who were men at Sinai. Then there was the generation which entered and conquered the land under Joshua. Thirdly, there was the generation ruled by the "elders that outlived Joshua", and lastly came "another generation after them, which knew not the Lord".

Coming to the early days of our own dispensation, we discover in Paul's last letter to Timothy a somewhat parallel thought of successive generations. In 1 Tim. 1 : 11 the apostle had spoken of the deposit "committed" to himself, and in verse 18 of the same chapter he speaks of "committing" the charge to his son Timothy. As the latter outlived Paul we have thus two generations so to speak. Then in 2 Tim. 2 : 2 he tells Timothy to "commit" what he had learnt to "faithful men", a third generation ; and he adds, "who shall be able to teach others also", a fourth. Here we have true "apostolic succession", a succession of faithful men who would hold fast the faithful Word as they had been taught. How different from the counterfeit thing that is talked of today !

We have seen how, according to verses 3 to 6 of our psalm, it was God's purpose that these lessons which His people needed to learn should be passed on from generation to generation of them. There follows in the next two verses a summary of the effects which the learning of them ought to produce, expressed positively in verse 7, and negatively in verse 8.

In the former verse three effects are mentioned, of which we might say that the first looks onward to the future, the second looks backward toward the past, while the third has to do with present obedience. They are :

- (1) That they would set their hope in God.
- (2) That they would remember the works of God.
- (3) That they would keep His commandments.

On the other hand, in verse 8 we have one great negative effect, namely, that they would not be as their fathers a stubborn and rebellious generation, who had

- (1) Begun badly, not getting their heart right, and
- (2) Gone on badly, their spirit being not steadfast with God.

These last mentioned points set before us what is at the root of all back-sliding, whether it be Israel's or our own. Well might Solomon pass on, as not least among those instructions which he tells us in Proverbs 4 were given him by his father David, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life" (v. 23). And well it would have been for himself

had he exercised more of this diligence personally, so that it should not have had to be said of him, "His heart was not perfect with the Lord his God as was the heart of David his father", nor that he "loved many strange women", who "turned away his heart" (1 Kings 11 : 1-4), thus falling into the very sin which, more than almost any other, he warns us against in those early chapters of the Proverbs.

The greater portion of the psalm from verse 12 onwards recounts the history of the people, of God's deliverances and of their failures, from the bondage in Egypt until the reign of David. But before this begins we are introduced at verse 9 to a battle in which it was made abundantly evident that, at the time it took place, they were away from God, and God had turned from them. "The children of Ephraim", we read, "being armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle", not because they were unwarlike, nor because their armour and their bows were not good enough, but because "they kept not the covenant of God and refused to walk in His Law". What a contrast with their ancestor Joseph, whose "bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob" (Gen. 49 : 24)!

Had there been no further reference in Psalm 78 to this battle in which the children of Ephraim turned back, than is given us at verse 9, we should be in the dark as to when and under what circumstances it took place. We are not thus left, however, for in verses 59-64 the occasion of it is made plain enough. In the intervening verses the writer had gone back, as already stated, and traced onward from their beginning those works and wonders of God which, according to verse 11, the Philistines which is described in 1 Sam. 4, during which the Ark was taken. To its capture the words of verse 61, "Delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy's hand", no doubt refer; for in Psalm 132 : 8 the Ark is called "The Ark of Thy strength", while in 1 Sam. 4 : 22 Phinehas' wife, on hearing that the Ark was taken, said "The glory is departed from Israel for the Ark of God is taken".

All this is confirmed by verse 64, in which we read, "Their priests fell by the sword, and their widows made no lamentation"; a saying that cannot fail to remind us of the end of Hophni and Phinehas, and of how the widow of Phinehas lamented for the Ark, rather than for her husband. It is therefore almost beyond question that the battle of verse 9, in which Ephraim turned back, is that described in 1 Sam. 4. That tribe had all along claimed a leading place, and when on a couple of occasions they had not been consulted as leaders (Judges 8 : 1 and 12 : 1), they were extremely indignant about it. Now, however, they had the opportunity of showing what they could do; and a very poor display they made of themselves, as our verse 9 shows.

The evil state of things to which their defeat in this battle was due was of long continuance and growth; and in the middle portion of the psalm reference is made to manifestations of it at various periods of their previous history. We cannot here dwell on these in detail, but would direct attention to a pair of words which three times over are introduced in close association, the words "tempt" and "provoke". We find them first in verses 17 and 18, then in verses 40 and 41, and lastly in verse 56; each time in connection with the people's rebellion against God, the first two occasions being in the wilderness and the third after their entrance to the land.

On comparing them it will be seen that in the first case it was by their lust for flesh that they tempted and provoked the Lord, in the second by their "limiting" Him in their unbelief, and in the third by their disobedience to His testimonies. These three things, lust, unbelief, and disobedience, may well be contrasted with the three in verse 7, already noticed, which God desired to find in His people. Had they set their hope in God, they would not have been dissatisfied with His provision for them. Had they remembered His former works, they would not have given way to unbelief. and had they kept His commandments, they of course would not have been guilty of the disobedience with which they are charged on the third occasion at verse 56.

Moreover these things in our own case as in theirs are the outward evidences, far too commonly seen, that we have "set not our heart right", and that our "spirit is not stedfast with God". They are closely associated with each other, for indeed any one of them promotes the development of the rest. If I have real confidence in God, I shall not lust after things which He has not seen fit to give me, nor shall I act otherwise than He has commanded me ; for I shall realize that I cannot, by either course, improve on His plans for my good. But if I have not this confidence, I am in danger of turning aside in any of the ways named.

These and many other lessons for ourselves contained in the psalm, one is tempted to enlarge upon ; but it is more the purpose of the present notes to suggest such applications than to follow them out ; and our hope is that readers will do this for themselves. As the points and connections which we have been considering are studied, may they suggest such questions to us as :

What kind of lessons am I teaching to the "generation to come", and what sort of example am I setting before them ?

Is my heart "set right", and my spirit "stedfast" with God ?

Am I deeply conscious that, throughout all the upheavals and overturnings of the present day, God is now, as in those bygone days described in the psalm, steadily working for the accomplishment of His great purpose that the throne of Israel, and of all the earth besides, shall be occupied by "the Man after His own heart", David's antitype - our Lord Jesus Christ ?

This last question takes us back to the greatest lesson of all that the psalm teaches ; and it is of interest to note in closing that, in the end of Psalm 77 the Israelites at their beginning are being "led forth like a flock" by the hand of one great shepherd Moses ; in the end of our Psalm 78 at the brightest period of their middle history they are "fed" and "guided" by another great shepherd, David ; while in the end of Psalm 79 and beginning of Psalm 80 they shall yet be under the rule of the greatest Shepherd of all, our blessed Lord Himself.

PSALM 84

In a former paper reference was made to the eleven psalms ; which have in their titles the words, "For the sons of Korah"; and when writing on the

first of them, Psalm 42, it was remarked that this ascription could best be considered when we came to deal with the 84th. The reason for this is that Psalm 84, as we shall see, contains more noticeable allusions to the history and service of the Korahites than do any of the others. When reading each of these eleven psalms, it is helpful to remember their Levitical character ; but when reading the 84th, we should have in mind the whole early history of Korah and his descendants.

Briefly, their story is as follows. Korah, a clever, able man, descended from Levi through Kohath, like Moses himself, and thus cousin to the great leader and to Aaron, was much dissatisfied that in the ordering of the camp no place of importance was assigned to him. While Aaron became high priest, and another cousin, Elizaphan, was made chief of the Kohathites (Num. 3 : 30), he was left just an ordinary Levite. In this discontented mood he came in contact with certain Reubenites, who had reasons of their own for dissatisfaction with God's arrangements, since, although descended from Jacob's eldest son, they too had been set aside, and Moses chosen as Israel's leader instead. All these disgruntled persons got together for mischief, just as such folks do at the present day, the Korahites jealous of Aaron, and the Reubenites jealous of Moses, with the result that they stirred up the great rebellion described in Number 16.

On that occasion Korah himself, and two hundred and fifty of his followers, who sought to offer incense before the Lord, were consumed by the fire from His presence ; while Dathan and Abiram, having refused to come up and meet Moses (v. 12), were swallowed up alive with their entire families at their own quarters in the camp (v. 27). Korah's children, being neither with himself before the Lord, nor in the tents of the Reubenites, were permitted to escape destruction, as is stated definitely afterwards in Num. 26 : 11, where it is said, "The children of Korah died not",

Amongst the descendants of these spared children of Korah in a later day were at least two of special note, Samuel the prophet, and his grandson Heman, a great leader of song. But most of them were just doorkeepers (1 Chron. 9 : 19, 27, etc.), or singers (1 Chron. 6 : 31-37, etc.); and how little they inherited of their ancestor's discontent and jealousy, let this 84th psalm tell us. In verse 4 we find, "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house ; they will be still praising Thee"; and in verse 10, "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the House of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness". In the one verse they are seen satisfied with their job as singers, and in the other with their job as doorkeepers.

In the phrase "tents of wickedness", with which this tenth verse ends, we get another link with the rebellion of Numbers 16, where at verse 26 Moses says to the people, "Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men". On the other hand, the many expressions in the psalm of longing after God's tabernacle stand in strong contrast with the state of things hinted at in Numbers 16 : 24-27 ; where a careful consideration of the use of the two words "tabernacle" (in the singular number) and "tents" (plural) would lead to the startling conclusion that the rebels had set up a "tabernacle" of their own, in secession from the tabernacle of the Lord. Notice how the passage speaks of "the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram" (vv. 24 and 27); but of "the tents" of only "Dathan and Abiram" (vv. 25, 26 and 27). Korah's tent was of course not in the Reubenite encampment at all, but in that of the Kohathite Levites ; and since, as we

have seen, his children were spared, it is unlikely that it was affected by that part of the judgment which these verses describe.

Before passing from the association between our psalm and the history of these sons of Korah, let us remind ourselves how full it is of warning lessons for today. The discontent and envy, in which the great trouble of Numbers 16 had its origin, have been the source of many a trouble and of many a division in our own times amongst the companies of God's people. And the fact, already noted, that men of evil minds, though the objects they have in view may be entirely different, will unite together to work mischief, has been proved again and again. More than that, they can often for the time being bring over to their side the majority of God's saints concerned, as Korah did in Numbers 16 : 19 with dire results. Well might Jude in the last of the epistles warn us concerning those who "perished in the gainsaying of Korah".

Paul too, in his last letter to Timothy, though he does not mention Korah and his fellows by name, seems to have had them in mind as he deals in chapter 2 with men of a similar type, Hymenæus and Philetus. Such a thought is suggested by the two sayings which in verse 19 he calls God's seal, "The Lord knoweth them that are His", and "Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity"; for both these are semi-quotations from the Septuagint version of Numbers 16 : 5 and 26. Hymenæus and Philetus, no doubt seeking leadership as Korah did, and unable to attain their desire on right lines, endeavoured to do so by teaching something new, which of course meant teaching error. Notoriety is always more easily gained in a wrong course than in a right one ; and the result was that "their word ate as doth a canker", "subverting their hearers", and "overthrowing the faith of some".

The reference to the need that those who serve the Lord should be clean vessels, which comes immediately after in 2 Tim. 2 : 20, 21, would recall to us the exhortation, doubtless addressed to Levites, in Isa. 52 : 11, "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord". The trouble, both with Korah and with these two men, was that they were more concerned about being golden vessels than about being clean vessels. They desired to be prominent, rather than to be "sanctified and meet for the Master's use"; and for that very reason were unfit to be chosen for the highest forms of service.

While the expression "tents of wickedness" in verse 10 of our psalm links it, as we saw last month, with Numbers 16 : 26, it may suggest a connection and a contrast between this psalm and the previous one. There in verses 6 to 8 we have what are indeed tents of wickedness, "The tents (not tabernacles", for the word is the same as is used in Psalm 84 : 10, and differs from that in Psalm 84 : 1) of Edom, and the Ishmaelites, of Moab, and the Hagarenes, Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek, the Philistines, with the inhabitants of Tyre ; Assur (Assyria) also is joined with them".

Here we find ten nations in all, a suggestive fact in view of what it may point to in the last days ; and amongst them we meet with the bitterest enemies that God's people ever had, who, as is so often the case, were of their own kindred. Notice how, with regard to the Assyrians, the last and most powerful nation of the ten, instead of the dreadful excesses in war of which they themselves were guilty being called to mind, it merely says, "They have holpen the children of Lot", as if to emphasise that the latter were the real originators of the coalition against Israel. Although Moab

and Ammon are frequently mentioned in the pages of the Old Testament, in only one other passage (Deut. 2 : 9, 19) are they spoken of as "the children of Lot"; and the title appears to be used here purposely to draw attention to the unbrotherly conduct of which they are guilty, so different from Israel's attitude towards them on the occasion which that other passage describes.

It is worthy of note also that the hostility of these nations to God's people is the outcome of their enmity to God Himself, as is shown in verse 2, and as has even been the case with Israel's foes until the present hour. Amalek, the "first of the nations" to attack them in days gone by (Num. 24 : 20), did so because "he feared not God" (Deut. 25 : 18); and now he and his associates of Psalm 83 are compared with the Midianites who said, "Let us take to ourselves *the houses of God* in possession" (v. 12). The word here rendered "houses" is one never used for the tabernacle or temple ; and the meaning is that these enemies, when plotting to seize the homes and property of God's people, knew quite well that God had an interest and a claim in all which belonged to them, and were deliberately setting themselves against Him.

In sharp contrast with all this, the speaker in Psalm 84 loves the Lord and His people, and prizes everything which pertains to His service. In its opening verses we see the same longing after God which we noticed in Psalm 42, the first of these Korahite psalms, and in its companion Psalm 43. And here, as there, the outward things, the house, its courts, and its altars, however dear they may be, are not enough. It is for the living God Himself that the Psalmist's heart cries out. As one of our own hymn-writers, J. Denham Smith, has well expressed it in its present-day setting,

*"All truth, and all labours, and even the Word,
How blessed soever, they are not the Lord".*

The references in verse 3 to the sparrow and the swallow has been commented upon from various points of view. Some, following the Septuagint, translate the latter word as "turtledove"; and it has been noted that, if this view be correct, both these birds which sought a home in the Temple buildings were such as were used in sacrifice there on certain occasions. But the Hebrew word "deror" suggests a bird of twisting or circling flight, and in the only other place where it occurs, Prov. 26 : 2, in which, too, it is associated with the sparrow as here (see R.V.), "the swallow" seems to be its most suitable rendering.

If then we take both birds to be those named in our A.V. and R.V. of verse 3, what have we ? In one we have a bird which ever remains by its home, the sparrow ; while in the other we have one which migrates, or comes and goes at certain seasons of the year. And it is noteworthy that the statements made about them here vary in just the manner we might, in such circumstances, expect them to do. The sparrow "has found a house", evidently intending to stay there ; while the swallow has a "nest for herself where she may lay her young", and later on depart again.

Now as we read further in the psalm, we are at once introduced to two different companies of people in verses 4 and 5, upon each of which a blessing is pronounced ; and it may occur to us that they differ in much the same fashion as the two birds. In verse 4 we have those "that dwell in Thy house", and who are represented as engaged in the praises there.

They are doubtless the Levites, Korahite and other, some of whom were always on duty in the Temple. But in verse 5 and the verses that follow we have a company which has been gathered in units from every corner of the land, and which is evidently making its way up to Zion for one of the great yearly feasts. It increases "from strength to strength" as it marches along, and every one of them "in whose heart are the highways to Zion" (v. 5, R.V.) ultimately gets there (v. 7); for the very trials of the way (*Baca*, "weeping") they make into a well of refreshment, in addition to the refreshing "rain" which has come down directly from heaven as it was needed. When the feast is over they, of course, return to their houses, but only to count expectantly the days and hours till the next occasion comes round.

In these things it is easy to find many practical lessons for ourselves, because we have something in common with each of the two groups who are here described. Like the Israelites in general, we have our special occasions of uniting together in worship and praise before our Lord; and if our hearts are right, we shall not be easily turned aside from doing so by the troubles of the way. To not a few of the Lord's dear people, the joy of being present at the Supper of remembrance is enhanced by the difficulties they have had to surmount in order to get there; while, sad to say, there are others whom the smallest excuse suffices to keep away. "The rain that filleth the pools" would serve that purpose for them, or, failing any better plea, a touch of the ailment known as "Sunday sickness" would do it.

Verses 5-7 may appeal to us in another way. God's people are on a journey to that place where they shall see their Lord to praise and worship Him eternally. Their hearts are there already, and though they meanwhile have "the Valley of Weeping" to pass through, they may still, like those ancient pilgrims, "make it a well". From time to time God's "showers of blessing" are given them, and ultimately (how gladdening the thought is) "every one of them in Zion appeareth before God".

On the other hand, like the Korahites themselves, we have escaped from judgment that we might be consecrated to serve in the presence of our Lord; and there is a sense in which it is our privilege to "dwell in His House" all the time. But have we the same ardent longing for this that the writer of our psalm had, and which David so beautifully expresses in Psalm 27 : 4, "One thing have I desired . . . that I may dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His Temple"? If we have, His service will be sweet to us, and there will be no grumbling as in the days of Korah for a more prominent position. We shall gladly be singers (v. 4), or door-keepers (v. 10), as may be required.

And may I say that "singers" always are required amongst the saints? I do not mean that with ability to lead the singing in their meetings, although that, too, has its place; but men and women who are so happy in the Lord, and so thankful for what He has done for them, that His praises are on their lips continually. Such are a real testimony for God wherever they are, and their song will please Him better "than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs" (Psa. 69 : 30, 31).

"Door-keepers" also are needed still. These are days when a "mixed multitude" (Neh. 13 : 3) essay to join themselves to the companies of the saints; and it would have been well for some of our assemblies had there been in them a few good "doorkeepers" to examine the credentials of those

seeking fellowship, to ensure that they were really "in Christ"; and proving it by soundness in doctrine and conduct. It would have saved the saints from many a heartburning afterwards. Such "doorkeepers" would also be quick to notice the absence of those beginning to drift from the meetings, and through God's mercy might be the means of their speedy restoration.

Much more might be written in the way of present and practical application of the sayings of this psalm. But we must close, and will do so, as the Psalmist himself does, by reminding ourselves that our God is a Sun to enlighten us, and a Shield to protect us; that we began in His grace, shall end in His glory, and meanwhile "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly".

PSALM 116, etc.

The longest series we have of consecutive psalms without any titles prefixed to them is that from Psalm 111 to Psalm 118; and the psalms comprised in it, though devoid of titles, are by no means devoid of interest. The first two, Psalm 111 and Psalm 112, constitute a pair; the former describing the character of God, as manifested towards those that fear Him; and the latter depicting the character of the one who does fear Him, as being a reflection of that of his Lord. It will be noticed that certain phrases and sayings are common to both psalms. For instance, it is said of the Lord in Psalm 111 : 3 that His "righteousness endureth for ever", and the same is stated twice of His servant in Psalm 112 : 3, 9. Again, in Psalm 111 : 4 the Lord is said to be "gracious and full of compassion", and so also is His servant in Psalm 112 : 4. It may be added that both these psalms are alphabetical, as the clauses composing them begin successively with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

The remaining six of the psalms above mentioned, Psa. 113-118, from what the Jews called the "Hallel" (*i.e.* Praise), and were sung by them at their great yearly feasts. They, or at least the last four of them, probably constituted the "hymn" sung by Christ and His disciples before leaving the upper room for the Mount of Olives (Mark 14 : 26); and some of the expressions and descriptions contained in them, such as Psalm 116 : 15 and Psalm 118 : 22, 26, 27, become more significant when viewed in light of this.

These psalms are themselves connected together by quite a number of interesting links, one of the most noteworthy being the references in them to death. Thus in Psalm 115 we read, "The dead praise not the Lord" (v. 17); in Psalm 116, "The sorrows of death compassed me" (v. 3); "Thou hast delivered my soul from death" (v. 8); "I will walk . . . in the land of the living" (v. 9); "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (v. 15); and in Psalm 118, "I shall not die but live . . . He hath not given me over unto death" (vv. 17, 18).

Indeed a close study of Psalm 116 and Psalm 118 may suggest that the same trouble is in view in each, and also the same deliverance. The "distress" of Psalm 118 : 5 may have been that so vividly pictured in Psalm 116 : 3, 4; and the calling upon the Lord for deliverance is introduced in both passages. It appears to have been a trouble in which not only was the Psalmist's life in danger, but his testimony as well; as may be seen by comparing Psalm

116 : 8, "Thou has delivered . . . my feet from falling", with Psalm 118: 13, "Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall, but the Lord helped me". In perhaps neither of the two psalms is there any clue sufficiently definite to enable us to determine with certainty what the occasion was which gave rise to them ; but the style, particularly in the 116th, would suggest David as the author, and if he was, there is one episode in his life which, more than any other, seems to correspond with, or at least illustrate much of what is contained in them. It is that time during which, to escape death at the hands of Saul, he fled on two separate occasions to the Philistines of Gath, only to find himself in similar danger of death at their hands ; and that in consequences which would not have been to his honour, since it was lack of confidence in God that took him there.

God had promised him that he should one day reign in the stead of Saul, and had recently manifested His protecting care by placing his enemy in his power. Yet in 1 Sam. 27 : 1 we find David saying, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul: *there is nothing better for me* than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines". Surely at this time he badly needed that his feet should be kept from falling. The 56th Psalm, which, according to its title refers to this period in his experience, ends with the words, "For Thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not Thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living"; thus showing that he himself had learned his need in this respect when he wrote it.

Now if Psalm 116 : 8, 9 be compared with these closing words of Psalm 56, it will be clear that the one passage is based on the other, and that in Psalm 116 we have a further development in the Psalmist's experience. His prayer of Psalm 56 : 13 has been answered, and he is now able not only to say, "For Thou hast delivered my soul from death", but to add, "Mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling: I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living". Then at Psalm 118: 8, 9, instead of his despairing lament, "*There is nothing better for me*", we have, "*It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man: it is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes*"; and further down the same psalm, at verse 22, the rejected stone becomes the head of the corner, an expression which, if we may think of it as having any connection with David at all, would imply his exaltation to the throne in fulfilment of the promise God had given him.

Another remarkable parallel with the language and experience of Psalm 116 is found in the words of Hezekiah on the occasion of his recovery from the illness which was expected to end in his death (Isa. 38). Compare the expression "pains of Sheol" in the psalm with "gates of Sheol" in Hezekiah's prayer ; and the reference to walking before "the Lord in the land of the living" with his use of the same words in Isa. 38 : 11. Compare also Psalm 115 : 17, "The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence", with Isa. 38 : 18, 19, "The grave cannot praise Thee . . . they that do down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth".

From these and other similarities it seems obvious that Hezekiah had this group of psalms in mind as he set down his "writing", and that he was to some extent quoting from them. But he does not appear to have learned the lesson which the Psalmist had gained in Psalm 116 : 15, that "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints"; in learning

which the latter was indeed almost unique amongst Old Testament saints. And it is interesting to notice that, whereas the writer of the psalm asks, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?", we read of Hezekiah that he "rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him" (2 Chron. 32 :25).

An even more remarkable link with our psalm than the Hezekiah one is seen in 2 Cor. 4, where the Apostle Paul places his own experience alongside that of its writer as expressed in Psalm 116 :10. In chapter 1 of that epistle he had been describing how, in connection with his gospel work at Ephesus, God had sustained and preserved him under tremendous pressure, which might have brought about his death, or a breakdown in his testimony, or both. He says, "We would not have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life. But we had the sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from *so great a death*". Compare all this with Psalm 116 :3, 4 and Psalm 118 :11, 12, and then turn to 2 Cor. 4 :8-12 where the apostle reverts in a more general way to the strain endured by him in carrying on his gospel testimony ; and in v. 13 links his experience with that of the Psalmist in the words, "We, having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, 'I believed and therefore have I spoken', we also believe and therefore speak".

This use of our psalm by Paul throws mutual light on both passages ; for it reminds us that in each case the trouble was due in part to persecution, and yet the danger was not merely death in itself, but also a breakdown of their confidence in God ; and from *so great a death*" each of them was mercifully delivered. One would like to trace out further this comparison between an Old Testament and a New Testament experience, but we have more than occupied our space and must close.

With this article we bring to an end for the present our "Notes on Some Psalms". When they were begun two years ago, there was no intention that they should be so prolonged as they have been ; but the field in which we have been gleaning is a large one, and even yet we are a very long way off from stripping it bare. If our notes have taught some to search for many interesting links between the Psalms and other Scriptures, and to realize that, without for a moment losing sight of their prophetic and dispensational character, there are to be found in them many practical lessons for today ; they will have accomplished the end we had in view.

Notes on St. Paul's 1st Epistle to Corinthians

CHAPTER I

While it is necessary that we should make ourselves acquainted with ALL the Word of God, if we would become "thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3 : 16, 17); yet there are certain portions of it which have a special claim on our attention, either as being addressed more directly to ourselves, or as dealing with matters that have particularly to do with our present testimony, individual or corporate, for God. Amongst such portions the 1st epistle to the Corinthians, for many reasons, holds a prominent place ; and yet there are those who, because it does not fit in with their views, would seek to belittle its value, telling us amongst other things that "the time of revealing clear Church truth had not arrived" when it was written. We might well ask if that time ever did arrive in apostolic days, or had we to wait for it till these new lights should be raised up in the twentieth century to discover and make it known to us. But let us look at some reasons for considering this letter to the Corinthians as deeply important for us.

We speak at times of the "Epistles to the Seven Churches", by which phrase we almost invariably mean the letters to the Churches of Asia that are found in the 2nd and 3rd chapters of Revelation. But it is well to remind ourselves that there is another set of Epistles to Seven Churches, those of the Apostle Paul to the Churches at Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thesalonica. And just as it has been said of those letters to the Churches of Asia, that in one or other of them we get the seed of every evil which has afflicted God's people throughout the centuries from the time they were written until the present day, so of Paul's Church letters it may with equal truth be said that in these we find every doctrine which has in any way to do with the development and progress of the Church of God, as well as all necessary guidance concerning its order and testimony.

This being so, the importance to us of each and all of them is a matter of course; but there is a feature in the form of address used in 1st Corinthians which gives to that epistle additional prominence. It is that while all the others in the group are directed to a particular town or district, in 1st Corinthians alone there is a clause added which widens out its address to include all Christians everywhere. For that such is the significance of the last part of 1 Cor. 1 : 2, there can be no doubt. It is "Unto the Church of God which is at Corinth . . . with all that in every place call upon the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord".

Moreover, this linking up of the Corinthian assembly with the saints in other places is emphasised, and to some extent explained, by a series of references to the doctrine and practice of churches elsewhere ; which occur throughout the epistle, and to which there is nothing similar in other epistles. For example, in ch. 4 : 17 Paul says, "I have sent unto you Timotheus . . .

who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach everywhere **IN EVERY CHURCH**". In ch. 7 : 17, after having given certain instructions he adds, "And so ordain I **IN ALL CHURCHES**". In ch. 11 : 16 he writes, "If any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, **NEITHER THE CHURCHES OF GOD**". And in ch. 14 : 33 he tells them that God is not the Author of confusion but of peace, as **IN ALL CHURCHES OF THE SAINTS**".

From these references we may learn at least two lessons. One is that the Lord intends all the assemblies of His people to move in the same beaten track, rather than that each one should have fashions and ways peculiar to itself. And this beaten track is of course the path marked out here and in other epistles ; not some human arrangement devised to produce an artificial and superficial uniformity ; nor some "hard to be understood" line of teaching, based solely on doubtful interpretations of obscure Levitical types. The second lesson is that, although assemblies are thus meant to move in harmony with one another, no authority has been given to any assembly, or to any group of assemblies, to rule over the others. Had it been so these references in 1st Corinthians to the practice of the Churches would surely have taken the form of a command in their name, instead of being, as they are, merely of the nature of an appeal to the Corinthians to not walk or act differently from the rest.

Another evidence of the value to us of 1st Corinthians is that in it we get what we might call the chief passage regarding many of the truths as to which we specially need to know the mind of the Lord in our days. It has been remarked that in the study of most doctrines taught in the Scriptures there are two passages of particular interest, the one in which they are first introduced, and the one in which they are most fully dealt with. As to the importance of the latter at least there can be no question. When we think of the sinner's condition by nature, our mind turns at once to Romans 3. If of regeneration, it turns to John 3. If of the Deity of Christ, it reverts to John 7 ; and so on.

But should you wish to know what the Word of God has to say of division and sectarianism ; or of the judgment seat of Christ ; or on the subject of marriage ; or on that of how the Lord's servants should be supported ; or on the Lord's Supper ; or on the Gifts ; or on Christian love ; or on the resurrection of the saints ; would you not in every instance turn to 1st Corinthians for the passage which deals with it most fully. As to each there are many references elsewhere, but it is in 1st Corinthians that you would expect to learn most about it.

The main reason, however, why this epistle is of special importance to us is one which those already mentioned form a part. It is that we have here the epistle of the local church, just as in Ephesians we have the epistle of the universal church. This is its real subject, and everything in it is introduced in this connection, and treated from this point of view. Other epistles, as we have seen, are written to local churches, but most of them make comparatively little reference to local church order. One epistle does indeed to some extent deal with it, but it is one that was not written to an assembly at all, but to an individual – the first to Timothy. And 1st Timothy, although amongst Paul's latest writings, does not in any wise alter or even add to those principles which had already been set forth in 1st Corinthians. They stand, complete and unrepealed.

That these principles should be kept to the front today in ministry, whether of voice or of pen, no one will question, who has taken note of the slackness and ignorance which are gradually coming to prevail concerning them, in the very circles where a generation ago such truths were well known and prized. Those who, at that time and earlier, learned and sought to carry out God's principles of Church fellowship, had usually to do so at much cost to themselves and, therefore, valued them the more. But now many older assemblies are being filled up with the children of those already members of them, young people who on their profession of conversion are baptised and brought into fellowship as a matter of course, and who often have had little or no soul exercise about these matters. The consequence is that there are to be found in our meetings a large number who, so far as assembly truth is concerned, might be said to not know their right hand from their left ; and it is surely most needful that those who do know and value what God has taught us on these lines should emphasise it in every way possible, and instruct younger ones in it to the best of their ability. That is to say, the truths taught in 1st Corinthians should be given prominence in ministry and otherwise, in view of present conditions, which require this.

CHAPTER II

In this epistle, which as we have seen is God's instruction book for the local assembly, the truth is not set forth after the style of those compendiums of doctrine which men sometimes put together, and which, even when their teaching is sound, are for the most part dry as dust. Like all the rest of the Word of God, it is living and fresh. Instead of a mere succession of hard-and-fast rules for Church life and Church meetings, we find in it the application of divine principles to various matters of difficulty and of failure which were actually existent in the Corinthian assembly at the time the epistle was written ; and as we study these we may learn what constitutes godly order, and godly discipline, and even godly doctrine, as we could never learn it in any other fashion.

That such evils as the epistle describes were to be already found in the church of Corinth is somewhat remarkable, in view of the short period it had been in existence, perhaps not more than three or four years. Their rapid development was no doubt in some measure due to the character of the place and people. Corinth in those days was a city of considerable importance, the capital of the province of Achaia, and the residence of the Roman proconsul (Acts 18 : 12). Situated on a narrow isthmus by which the Peloponnesian peninsula is joined to the northern part of Greece, it naturally became a great trading centre on the route between Rome and the east. With its two ports, Cenchreac on the Aegean Sea, and Lechaicum on the Ionian Sea, it could be said that East and West met together at Corinth, and there, as might be expected, the vices of both East and West were to be found. On the other hand, like the rest of the Greeks, its inhabitants were inordinately proud of their "wisdom" as displayed in their schools of philosophy and rhetoric.

In Paul's epistle to Titus, at chap. 1 : 12, 13, we find it suggested that the Christians of Crete stood in danger of being ensnared in the same evil

things which characterised their fellow countrymen. That such a peril was very real, we could have no better proof than the Corinthian epistles, for in them we see rising up amongst the saints the very evils which marked their city and their race. It is, however, to our gain that in consequence of this rapid and varied declension, which elsewhere might have required at least a generation for its development, we have the two inspired letters in which the apostle deals with it, with their much needed instruction for today.

As we read of the party spirit, the quarrelling, the worldliness, the irreverence, the immorality, the false doctrine, found amongst them, we might well wonder that the apostle addressed them as a "Church of God" at all, yet that is just what he does, and not a word does he say anywhere about refusing recognition or fellowship to their assembly, as some today in similar circumstances would have done. Instead of this he so commends them in his opening paragraph, that were we to read the first nine verses of our epistle and stop there, we might be left with the impression that this was a model church. In verse 2 he speaks of them as "sanctified in Christ Jesus", and "called to be saints", while in verse 9 he describes them as "called unto the fellowship of His Son". In the intervening verses he thanks God for the abundance of gifts which they possess, and says that the testimony of Christ was confirmed in them, and would be confirmed until the end, when they would be found "blameless" in the day of Christ.

Should we not learn from this to see all the good we can in the people of God, even when we have to condemn certain things that they do. A mistake which many of us make is that, once a person has committed something of which we disapprove, we can see no good in him any more, and nothing is too bad to attribute to him, or too hard to say of him. We know that Paul's letter produced a great effect upon the Corinthians; but it certainly would have had no such result had he dealt with them in the spirit in which we sometimes see erring brethren dealt with today. In 2 Cor. we read of mourning and repentance on their part, but then we also read how that the apostle had written to them with many tears and much anguish of heart. If our rebukes were thus administered, they would produce more effect than they usually do.

There is an interesting but sad contrast between the condition of things existing in Corinth at this time and the statement made as to the earliest days of Church history in Acts 2 : 42. There it is said that "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers". We do not know for how long it could be said of those saved on the day of Pentecost that they "continued steadfastly" in these four things, but we do know that the Corinthians, when Paul wrote to them, had begun to manifest failure in every one of them.

As to continuance in the apostles' doctrine (or teaching) it is clear that they had begun to follow other teachers of their own (chap. 4 : 6, 15), and that in their meetings one could not wait till the other had finished, while even their women were attempting to teach (chap. 14 : 30-34). Indeed some of them had so far removed from the apostles' teaching that they were found denying the resurrection (chap. 15 : 12).

With regard to the second item, the "fellowship", it is painful to read how these saints, who as we have seen had been "called unto the fellowship of God's Son", are found forming parties (chap. 1), and so quarrelling

amongst themselves that they had to settle their differences in the heathen law courts (chap. 6), while on the other hand they could be in fellowship with the unsaved, and even in what the apostle calls "fellowship with devils" (chap. 10 :20-27). No wonder that later he found it necessary to write to them the appeal of 2 Cor. 6 :14-18 about being "unequally yoked".

As to "the breaking of bread" we have only to turn to the latter part of chap. 11 to see how their meetings for this purpose were so disgraced by the conduct of some persons that the apostle says they came together "not for the better but for the worse" (v. 17), and that it was "not possible to eat the Lord Supper" (v. 20 R.V.) in such circumstances.

Finally, the earlier part of the same 11th chapter suggests that with regard to "the prayers", the fourth point mentioned in Acts 2:42, there was also failure, due to the behaviour of certain of their women on such occasions.

Shall we not take warning by all this failure, incurred in spite of abundance of "gift" and ability ; and seek grace that we may "continue stedfastly" in whole-hearted obedience to the truths which God has taught us.

CHAPTER III

Let us now consider the immediate circumstances which gave to us this important epistle. In most of Paul's letters we find something as to where and why they were written, but in none of them is it made clearer than in 1st Corinthians. According to chap. 16 :5-9, he was at Ephesus when he wrote, and was in the closing stages of his great three years' mission there, during which took place what was perhaps the mightiest work of grace the apostle had ever seen.

In the note appended to this sixteenth chapter (which note is, of course, no part of the inspired Word, and is omitted in the R.V.), it is stated that the epistle is written from Philippi ; but the above named verses contradict this, since in them Paul says that he hopes to remain at Ephesus until Pentecost, and will afterwards pass through Macedonia, the province in which Philippi was situated. Thus we learn from them, not only the place where the epistle was written, but also the approximate time of the year. It evidently was penned a little before Pentecost, and since the Passover took place fifty days previous to Pentecost, it may well have been indited about the period of that feast, a suggestion which is of interest in view of the references made in ch. 5 to the antitypes of both the Passover and the Unleavened Bread.

About this time there came to Paul news concerning the Corinthians, which must have pained him exceedingly and been detrimental to his gospel work. For we know that a little later, while preaching the gospel in the town and district of Troas, his work was actually brought to a stop by his anxiety concerning these same Corinthians (2 Cor. 2 :12, 13), a fact which shows what a hindrance to the gospel an assembly that is doing badly can be, not merely in its own neighbourhood, but even in places far away.

This news was conveyed to him, we are told, by members of the house of Chloe (ch. 1 :11); and about the same time, or shortly after, there arrived with him from Corinth three well-known helpers of the saints, Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (ch. 16 :17). It was likely by the hands of these

last named that a letter also reached him from the Corinthians themselves, in which questions were asked him concerning certain matters of difficulty.

Now our epistle is the outcome of these two things – the report he had heard about them, and the inquiries he had received from them. In most of it, if not all, it is fairly easy to distinguish whether he is dealing with what he had been told, or replying to what he had been asked. Probably, however, even when the latter is the case, he is guided in his answers to their questions by the information he had received.

According to ch. 1 : 11, the report stated that there were divisions amongst them, and the apostle takes up this matter first. Then in ch. 5 : 1 he says, “It is actually (R.V.) reported that there is fornication amongst you”, and he goes on to deal with that. But besides these two passages, in which the report is distinctly mentioned, it is evident that he had heard a great deal more. He knew that they were taking one another to the heathen law courts (ch. 6). He knew that they were accepting invitations to feast with the unconverted (ch. 10). He knew of their conduct at the Lord’s Supper (ch. 11). And he knew that they were tolerating and tampering with false doctrines as to the resurrection (ch. 15).

The inquiries in their letter to him are not referred to, till we come to ch. 7 : 1, so that we need not look for a reply to any of them in the previous part of the epistle. They asked him concerning the Christian’s relationship to marriage ; concerning the eating of meats that had been used in idolatrous worship ; concerning the use and value of spiritual gifts ; and concerning the manner in which the collection for the poor saints in Judea was to be handled. The four passages dealing with these subjects (from ch. 7 : 1 ; ch. 8 : 1 ; ch. 12 : 1 ; ch. 16 : 1) all start with the same Greek phrase, which the R.V. consistently translates “Now concerning” in each case, thereby exhibiting the association between them, and the fact that at the verses named the apostle is passing on to the next question.

Looked at together, their inquiries cover a wide field ; for it might be said that in the first we have a question as to home life, in the second as to public life amongst the heathen, in the third as to assembly life, and in the fourth as to our devotion to the Lord, shown in the matter of giving. And putting all the above described circumstances together, they have resulted in giving us an epistle so diversified in its details, yet all of them connected to some extent with the local assembly that from it we may glean something to guide us in every difficulty or trouble which can possibly arise in that sphere.

Before taking up some of these matters separately, let us again turn our attention to the opening paragraph of the epistle. We noticed in our last chapter how nicely he speaks of the Corinthians in those first nine verses, but as we shall see, it is not mere soothing syrup he has been administering in them. They contain references to many important truths, reaching as we saw from their conversion to their reception by Christ at His coming ; and these truths are set forth in such a form that in this introductory paragraph we may find hints with regard to almost every subject dealt with in the body of the epistle afterwards.

Take for example the address in verse 2. “Unto the Church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints”. Would not an apprehension of what this means, and of what is involved in it, have kept the Corinthians out of all the evils and errors

into which they had fallen ? And, we may add, would not consideration of these same weighty words today keep the people of God in the right path, so far as their collective testimony is concerned ?

The two Corinthian epistles are the only ones in which he addresses the saints as the "Church of God". In those to the Thessalonians we have the phrase, "To the Church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ", while in Galatians it is simply "To the Churches of Galatia", and in all the other addresses the word "Church" does not occur. As compared with the Thessalonian epistles, might we suggest that in them he wishes to encourage those young saints in their deep trials by using a phrase expressive of their high privilege and their security, while in these to the Corinthians he desires to bring home to them, right from the beginning, a sense of their solemn responsibility as members of the Church of God ?

This thought of responsibility indeed seems to underlie the use of the expression, "Church of God" wherever we find it. Usually it has reference, as here, to the responsibility of those who compose it, but sometimes, as in ch. 10 : 32, and ch. 15 : 9 it suggests the solemn responsibility of all who interfere with that which is the property of God. Because of this, the term is peculiarly suited to the local assembly, since it is in this connection that most of our responsibilities are incurred ; but to look on the phrase merely as a badge to distinguish the local from the universal Church is to miss the solemn message which the words "OF GOD" are meant to convey. In some of the passages where it occurs, the local sense, if it exists at all, is at least not prominent ; and it seems a pity to tie up the clear distinction which the New Testament everywhere draws between the local assembly and the whole Church of the dispensation, with a word or phrase ; when in by far the greater part of the references to each no such word or phrase occurs. Moreover, the use of the term "Body of Christ" in ch. 12 : 27, where it is clear that exercise of gifts in the local assembly is in view, and of "Church of God" in ch. 15 : 9, where we may be sure Saul was not too particular as to which assembly his victims were members of, should deter us from making a statement stronger than these passages warrant.

CHAPTER IV

As illustrative of the statement made in our last chapter, that in the opening paragraph of 1st Corinthians there are references and hints which bear upon most of the subjects afterwards dealt with in the epistle, it was suggested that the phrase "Church of God" in verse 2 is used there to emphasise from the outset the solemn responsibility resting upon the saints as members of such a company. This, it may be added, receives confirmation from the fact that out of eight times, which is all that the expression, in the singular number, occurs in the Scriptures, no less than half are found in our epistle (ch. 1 : 2 ; 10 : 32 ; 11 : 22 ; 15 : 9).

But there are, even in this second verse, other words besides the term "Church of God" which emphasise that responsibility, and which, like it, are frequently repeated in the epistle afterwards. The word "sanctified" (i.e. set apart as holy unto the Lord) is one of these. It occurs four times in 1st Corinthians, while in no other epistle except Hebrews is it found

more than once (see ch. 1 : 2 ; 6 : 11 ; 7 : 14). Another is the word "called", used again at v. 9 in the phrase "called unto the fellowship of His Son"; and yet again at v. 24, where it is followed by the words, "Ye see your calling, brethren", and it is shown that one great result of the manner of their call is that they will glory, not in themselves, nor in their fellow men (as at v. 12), but only in the Lord. Later, this same word "called" occurs no less than seven times in connection with the subject of chapter 7.

Still another suggestive word contained in v. 2 is "Name", as used of our relationship to the Lord. According to that verse it is a distinguishing mark of God's true people, wherever found, that they "call upon the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours". And how much is implied in this we may be helped to understand by the other references to the "Name" in our epistle. At ch. 6 : 11 the great outward and inward change which took place at the conversion of these saints is linked with it. "Ye were washed, ye were sanctified, ye were justified, in the Name of the Lord Jesus" (R.V.). At ch. 1 : 10 his first appeal to them in the epistle—to free themselves from the divisions—is made "by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ". And at ch. 5:4 the exercise of assembly discipline is to be carried out "in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ". Indeed this whole subject of the relationship of the Lord's people to His Name, and what it involves, is a most interesting one ; and the references to it are found not only in 1st Cor., or even in the New Testament, but throughout the entire Word of God from Gen. 4:23 onwards.

Before leaving v. 2, let us also notice the significance of its final clause, "their Lord and ours", as the R.V. has it. Are we not here reminded of what the apostle is about to say in v. 12 concerning the divisions, and especially of that party which made the claim "I am of Christ", as though He belonged to none but themselves? Not so, says Paul ; He is Lord to all who truly call upon His Name.

When we pass to the other verses of this introductory paragraph, we find that they also contain links with what follows in the body of the epistle. One such is the reference in vv. 5-7 to the gifts possessed by the Corinthians, which brings to mind the section dealing with that subject at chs. 12-14. "In everything ye are enriched by Him, in all utterances, and in all knowledge . . . so that ye come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming". Notice that two classes of gifts are here mentioned, "utterance" and "knowledge"; and these are the same two which we meet with later at ch. 13 ; "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels" (v. 1), and "Though I have . . . all knowledge" (v. 2). Also the "Waiting for the Coming" implies the same truth as is taught in ch. 13 : 8-12 that the "gifts" in their present form will be superseded at His Coming by something greater.

There is another connection seen at v. 8 in the expression "that ye may be blameless in the day of Christ". This suggests the passage in chs. 3 and 4 concerning the Judgment Seat, in which the phrase "the Day" is once more found (ch. 3 : 13), and stands in contrast with "man's day" (ch. 4 : 3, margin).

Still another link is the use in v. 9 of the word "fellowship", as opposed to the "divisions" and "contentions" mentioned immediately afterwards in vv. 10, 11.

To put the matter in another form, it may be seen from the comparisons shown above that there was failure in Corinth with regard to almost everything of which mention is made in the opening verses of the epistle. The believers there had not acted in keeping with their responsibilities as a "Church of God", or as "sanctified in Christ Jesus", or as "called" ones, or as associated with "the Name" and with "the fellowship of His Son". In spite of their rich supply of "gift", nay even in the very existence of it, they had missed the mark. Pride in their "utterance" had brought about the excesses rebuked in ch. 14 ; while on the other hand their "knowledge" did not suffice to keep them clear of the false teaching as to resurrection dealt with in ch. 15.

Indeed this last named point, that of their KNOWLEDGE, is more frequently touched upon in the epistle than almost any other. The limitations of knowledge, its abuses, and its dangers, are hinted at in nearly every chapter ; and the lessons taught in this connection were never more needed than they are today. It is evident that the saints at Corinth gloried much in this "knowledge" of theirs ; and the apostle therefore reverts time and again to the matter, sometimes laying down the limits of knowledge in a general way, and sometimes casting doubt upon the extent of their own knowledge in particular.

There is no virtue in ignorance, yet on the other hand it is true that knowledge has its dangers. One of these, for example, we find in ch. 8 : 1, 2, where with regard to meats offered to idols the apostle says, "We know that we all have knowledge". The form of expression suggests that he is quoting or referring to some claim made by themselves in their letter to him ; and this is borne out by the corrective words which he immediately adds, "Knowledge puffeth up, but love buildeth up". Here the danger we are up against is that of self-conceit, and the remedy or safeguard is to make sure that our love grows proportionately with our knowledge. For it is characteristic of love, not only that it "buildeth up" as here, but also that it "vaunteth not itself" (ch. 13 : 4). And to further emphasise this point, he adds here vv. 2, 3, "If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know ; but if any man love God, the same is known of Him".

Another danger, mentioned later in the same chapter, is that this conceit of knowledge can be a source of mischief to others. "If any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him that is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols ; and through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish".

Of the limitations of knowledge in general Paul speaks in ch. 13 when he says, "Though I have all knowledge . . . and have not love, I am nothing". So also when further on he adds, "Whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part . . . but then shall I know, even as also I am known".

More frequently, however, he presses upon the Corinthians how limited after all is their own knowledge, especially of the things that matter most. For example, at ch. 15 : 34 he says, "Some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame". Again, both in ch. 10 and in ch. 12 he begins his subject with the words, "Brethren, I would not have you ignorant"; his reference being in the one case to the spiritual lessons to be learned from Old Testament times, and in the other to the spiritual things of New

Testament times. An example still more remarkable is his repeated use of the question "Know ye not" to emphasise certain important and practical truths, which they and all other saints should have known. No less than ten times does he ask this in 1st Cor., although the phrase is scarcely ever found elsewhere in the New Testament.

It must have been humbling to the Corinthians, possessed as they were of the natural wisdom for which Greeks were proverbial, and endued as saints with the "gift" of knowledge, to be asked "Do ye not know" in connection with matters of which the simplest babe in Christ should not be ignorant. And although it may also prove humbling to ourselves, we should do well to face these ten questions of the apostle squarely, remembering as we do so that the test of true knowledge of such things is to be found in our actions. We may glibly reply to each and all of the questions, "Yes, I know that!" but the point is, do we know it in such a fashion that it has controlling influence on our lives and ways?

So important are these ten "Know ye nots" that one would like to dwell upon each of them separately; but just now we shall do no more than give the references to them, in hope that readers will turn them up for themselves. They are as under:

KNOW YE NOT -

1. That the unrighteous are not going to be in heaven? (ch. 6 : 9).
2. That your bodies are members of Christ? (ch. 6 : 15).
3. That he who is joined to a harlot is one body? (ch. 6 : 16).
4. That your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? (ch. 6 : 19).
5. That the Assembly is a temple of God? (ch. 3 : 16).
6. That leaven spreads in the Assembly? (ch. 5 : 6).
7. That they which minister . . . are partakers? (ch. 9 : 13).
8. That the saints shall judge the world? (ch. 6 : 2).
9. That they shall also judge angels? (ch. 6 : 3).
10. That though all run, but one receives the prize? (ch. 9 : 24).

CHAPTER V

As has been shown, most of those words which, by virtue of their frequent repetition therein are characteristic of 1st Corinthians, have their first occurrence in its opening paragraph. There is, however, one expression which, while not occurring there, is perhaps as characteristic of the epistle as any. It is "puffed up", and the word so translated is used no less than six times in 1st Cor., while it occurs only once (Col. 2 : 1-18) in all the rest of the New Testament.

Already we have had occasion to cite ch. 8 : 1, "Knowledge puffeth up", and in contrast with this, it is stated in ch. 13 : 4 that "Love . . . is not puffed up". In ch. 4 we find the word used three times (vv. 6, 18, 19) in describing how they were "puffed up for one against another", and more especially "puffed up" against Paul himself. Lastly, in ch. 5 : 2 they even were "puffed up" whilst tolerating a fornicator in their midst.

This condition of being puffed up, or as we called it in a previous chapter, self-conceit, lay in the background of all their failures as a church; for there is certain to be trouble in plenty when God's people are in such a

state. Unfortunately we do not have to go back to those early days to find evidence of the fact. It lies all around us in sad Assembly experiences, and not a little of it in our own individual experiences as well.

A very wise man once said, "Only by pride cometh contention" (Prov. 13:10), and so it proved at Corinth, for it was this self-conceit of theirs which brought about both the church "contentions" of ch. 1:10-13, and the private bickering of ch. 6:1-8. This is clearly seen in ch. 4:6 where it is said that they came to be in danger, even at that early time, of forming themselves into little sects. That this was the case, formed part of the "report" which had reached the apostle about them; and it is indeed the part with which he first deals.

His taking it first is a token of the importance he attached to it. Other matters were outwardly more glaring, such as that of the fornicator in ch. 5:1, and that of the drunkenness at the Lord's Supper in ch. 11:21. But these subjects were comparatively easy to handle; and a few verses sufficed to say all that the apostle had to say about them, whereas the matter of the divisions is referred to and hinted at again and again, and seems to give an atmosphere to the whole of the epistle.

In ch. 1:13 it is treated of as dishonouring to Christ and the Gospel. In ch. 3:3 it proves them to be childish and carnal, and it hinders the growth of their Assembly. In ch. 4:6 Paul clears himself and Apollos of all complicity in their divisions, or responsibility for them. In ch. 11:18 the trouble is seen rearing its ugly head in their very breaking of bread meetings. And in ch. 12:25 schism is shown to be inconsistent with their duties as members of Christ's body.

All these passages contain much for present serious consideration. It is still as true as it then was that the forming of parties and cliques, with the contentions and divisions consequent thereon, is dishonouring to Christ, injurious to His gospel, hurtful to the progress of an Assembly, and especially ruinous to that meeting, the most important of all, where the saints are gathered together to keep their Lord's command, "This do, in remembrance of Me".

Despite all this, and the sad havoc to which the entire history of the Church bears witness as having been wrought through the divisions and strifes of God's people, there are still many of them who treat the matter all too lightly, and who seem willing to break up an Assembly of the saints, or to cause a division between Assemblies, for but little reason, other than to preserve their own dignity, or to get their own way.

Of course in such cases we usually hear much about "standing for the truth", and so on, with a view to silencing all remonstrance. Well, it is good to stand for truth, and there are occasions when it becomes very necessary to do so, even to the extent of severing dearest ties of friendship and fellowship. But there is a snare here wherein Satan excels in his ability to deceive us. He causes us to believe that we are standing for truth and for the glory of God when we are simply standing for self.

I remember listening with interest, in a New Bradford conference many years ago, to an address of which the text was a somewhat unusual one — the words "Divide the living child" spoken by Solomon (1 Kings 3:25) on the occasion when he had to judge two women as to which was the child's mother. The speaker made the suggestion that, in the course taken, Solomon was but following the example of his father David, who tested

the loyalty of Mephibosheth by that same word "Divide". "Thou and Ziba divide the land", said he. In each case the plan proved successful. The loyalty of Mephibosheth was vindicated, as against Ziba, when he replied, "Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my Lord the king is come again in peace". And the true mother's heart was manifested in her who answered, "Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it".

So it is today, when the cry, "Divide" is raised. The true-hearted ones will soon be made manifest by their attitude. Is not this something like what is meant in 1 Cor. 11 : 19, "For there must be also heresies (R.V. divisions) among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you".

How significant it is that the abundance of "gifts" which these Corinthians possessed did not prevent the trouble of divisions from developing amongst them. On the contrary, it seems probable that it was among the gifted leaders they took their rise. When Paul in ch. 4 says, "These things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes ; that you might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written"; is it not evident that what he had in mind was, that whether or not they made use of the names of Apollos and himself, local leaders were at the head of the mischief ? And so it usually is still.

Yet the great "gift" passages in 1 Cor. 12 and Eph. 4 both emphasise that the gifts are to promote unity. See 1 Cor. 12 : 25, "That there should be no schism in the body"; and Eph. 4 : 11-13, "He gave . . . for the perfecting (i.e. perfect fitting together, as the word used signifies) of the saints . . . till we all come in the unity of the faith". Thus the very instruments meant to produce unity are, by Satan's device, turned about to thwart that purpose.

Let us not, however, pass from this subject without remarking that the best way to bring ourselves to a true realisation of the sinfulness of divisions is not, after all, by contemplating the evils they cause, but by studying, quietly and reverently, the prayer of our Lord in John 17, in which again and again He prays that His people may be one, in order that the world may believe that the Father has sent Him. Surely no one, who has love in his heart to his blessed Lord, would do anything running counter to His desire, as expressed in that wondrous prayer.

CHAPTER VI

Having considered the prominence given throughout our epistle to the divisions existing among the Corinthians, to which subject we are first introduced at ch. 1 : 10-13, let us now examine this passage from another angle. When the apostle makes the statement, "Every one of you saith, I am of Paul ; and I of Apollos ; and I of Cephas ; and I of Christ", it is evidently implied that the groups into which the Corinthians were forming themselves did actually try to associate one or another of these great names with their particular views, and thus with their mischievous activities.

Of course, as has already been mentioned, Paul in ch. 4 : 6 dissociates himself and Apollos from what they were doing when he says, "These things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes ; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that

which is written". This, however, cannot set aside the plain statement of ch. 1 : 12, but merely shows that, while he made use of the names they used, he is well aware that the real fomenters and leaders of their divisions were local men, whose names are not recorded.

Now if it be granted that the various parties tried to associate such names with themselves, the question arises, on what basis did they make their claim in each case ? In other words, what kind of views or of practices prevalent at Corinth would be most likely to get linked up with the name of Paul ; what with that of Apollos ; what with that of Cephas ; and what with that of Christ ? If we can answer this, we shall have in our hands a key which will unlock many things, not only in 1st Cor., but in 2nd Cor. as well.

What then might we expect to characterise a party who label themselves, "I am of Paul" ? In order that we may be better able to reply, let us ask another question, which is, In what way did Paul's teaching and practice stand out distinctively amongst that of other leaders of the saints in those days ? To this various replies might in our time be given ; but I think that to his contemporaries the most noticeable point would have been the clearness with which he realised and set forth the Christian's deliverance from bondage to the law of Moses. It is not that the other apostles would have disagreed with him about the matter, for we know from Acts 15 that they did not. But none expressed themselves so forcibly on this subject as he did. "Ye are become dead to the Law by the body of Christ", said he ; and again, "Now we are delivered from the Law" (Rom. 7 : 4, 6).

We can well imagine an intelligent saint who had listened to Paul saying, "I like the clear way in which he sets forth our freedom from the Law ; none of the other preachers make it so plain as he does". To speak thus would be quite natural, and not at all blameworthy. But if there were those at Corinth who sought a pretext for loose, careless living, might not they also chime in with "Yes, I too like Paul's way of putting things ; he is strong on Christian liberty. I am of Paul in this respect".

Now we find in the middle of our epistle a large section in which the latter type of person is dealt with. It runs through several chapters, and treats of various things, but one point of view permeates all that is said in it, which is this, that over and above the question as to the "lawfulness" of any course of action, there arises another question as to its "expediency" or "profitableness". The section begins at ch. 6 : 12 with the words, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient"; and just before its close at ch. 11 : 1 the same statement is repeated, word for word, in ch. 10 : 23. Throughout it we can see how lax were the views of some at Corinth as to what constituted Christian liberty ; and yet, if challenged as to their practices, they might probably have rejoined, "We are only following out what Paul taught us. We are free from the Law, and we will do what we like, and go where we like, and eat what we like".

Since we hope to deal more fully with this section in a later chapter, we shall for the present leave it, and pass on to the second of the groups of ch. 1 : 12, those who would like to claim to be followers of Apollos, a man of whom we know little, beyond what is told us concerning him at his introduction in Acts 18 : 24-28. There we learn that he was what might be called a good all-round man, one who was acquainted with the Scriptures (v. 24), one whose zeal and boldness and diligence (vv. 25, 26) well matched

his knowledge, one who had learned truth and yet was willing to be taught more, even by comparatively unknown helpers such as Aquila and Priscilla.

Together with these qualities, which were of course as characteristic of Paul as of him, we find that Apollos had another one – he was “an eloquent man”. In that respect he held perhaps a unique place amongst the early preachers, for the phrase is not used of anyone in the New Testament except himself ; and we know that the opinions expressed as to Paul’s ability in this direction were anything but flattering (2 Cor. 10 : 10).

If then we met at Corinth with some who were disposed to lay undue stress on natural ability and learning, whether in the presentation of the gospel to sinners, or in the ministering of the truth to saints, would it surprise us to find them asserting, “We are of Apollos” ? That there were such people becomes quite clear when we read through the opening chapters of 1st Cor., i.e. the latter part of ch. 1, together with chs. 2, 3 and 4. For in these the apostle warns such that “wisdom of words” cannot take the place of the preaching of “Christ crucified” in demonstration of the spirit ; and that human ability of “eye”, “ear” and “heart” is not the appointed way to learn “the deep things of God”(ch. 2 : 9, 10).

With regard to the third group in ch. 1 : 12 we need say little. They claimed to be “of Cephas” (or Peter) ; and it is generally agreed that those who are often elsewhere described as being “of the Circumcision” frequently sought to shelter themselves under the name of him who was looked upon as pre-eminently the apostle of the circumcision. They were the very antithesis of the “I am of Paul” party, for they would have had the saints still under bondage to Law. Originally their doctrine was, “Except ye be circumcised . . . ye cannot be saved” ; but after the conference of Acts 15 they had to modify this ; and they now taught any such as the Galatians whom they could ensnare to hearken to them, that although faith in Christ might be sufficient to start with, yet “perfectness” came by lawkeeping (Gal. 3 : 2, 3). In places such as Corinth, where that was unlikely to win them followers, they tried another plan, which was to belittle Paul as much as possible by denying his apostleship, etc. This is the kind of assault which we see the apostle having to meet in the opening verses of 1 Cor. 9, and again in 2 Cor. chs. 10, 11 and 12.

Last of the four in 1 Cor. 1 : 12 comes the “I am of Christ” party, which, though their slogan sounded best, was undoubtedly the worst of all. For it is evident that they claimed to be “of Christ” in some exclusive fashion which shut all others out, and which probably implied that they were above taking instruction from a mere apostle. As already remarked, there is perhaps a quiet rebuke to their error in the closing phrase of 1 Cor. 1 : 2, “Their Lord and ours” (R.V.). Elsewhere there is not much that can be definitely connected with them in 1st Cor. except perhaps such expressions as “If any man be contentious” (ch. 11 : 16) and “What! came the Word of God out from you” (ch. 14 : 36); which suggest insubjection to apostolic authority. In 2 Cor. 10, however, in a passage where the apostle speaks very sharply to “some which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh”, he addresses them in v. 7 with the words, “If any man trust to himself that he is CHRIST’S (i.e. ‘of Christ’, the very expression used in 1 Cor. 1 : 12), let him of himself think this again, that as he is Christ’s (‘of Christ’) so are we”. Here he identifies the rebellious evil-doers to whom he is speaking with those who said “I am of Christ”,

and in so doing he lets us see how destructive the tenents of such a party must have been.

Thus we find that there did actually exist at Corinth, not perhaps four clear and distinct bodies, but at least four evil tendencies in which many of the saints were ensnared. And all four of them have their counterpart among the saints today. We still to our sorrow have with us : (1) those with whom Christian liberty becomes license and looseness ; (2) those with whom eloquence and knowledge and natural ability are everything ; (3) those who would bind us up tight with rules and regulations, many of them man made ; and (4) those who are so independent that in nothing and from nobody will they bow to advice or instruction. And, willing to use any of these tendencies for the accomplishment of their own ends, there are would-be leaders who seek prominence and notoriety, be the cost to the saints in trouble and division what it may.

CHAPTER VII

When we were considering what might be expected to characterise in each case those of the Corinthians who were voicing their preferences in the four "I am's" of ch. 1 : 12 it was suggested that the claim "I am of Apollos" would come most naturally from such as were inclined to lay undue stress upon learning and eloquence. With these the apostle proceeds at once to deal, and what he has to say to them occupies most of the first four chapters of the epistle. The prominence given to this matter may indicate that it was an inclination fairly general amongst the saints at Corinth, but it surely implies also that he looked upon it as a serious error. It was a tendency natural enough amongst Greeks, who were in those days ahead of all other nations in the cultivation of "wisdom", both in words and in thoughts ; and also amongst saints, pre-eminently gifted "in all utterance and in all knowledge".

In these first four chapters Paul teaches them the folly of expecting to produce spiritual results by such means. He shows them that this "excellency of speech and of wisdom"—

1. Will not save souls (chs. 1 and 2).
2. Will not give to saints a knowledge of the things of God (ch. 2).
3. Will not build up God's assembly (ch. 3).
4. Is not a satisfactory exercise of our stewardship (ch. 4).

He thus teaches them a fourfold lesson, of which each part is as necessary and as important today as ever it was.

Let us look at it briefly, and first at what he says as to getting sinners saved. In ch. 1 : 17 he asserts that his preaching was "not with wisdom of words", and in ch. 2 : 4 that it was "not with enticing words of man's wisdom". In each case he appends a reason for abstaining from this method ; in ch. 1 : 17 that it would make the Cross of Christ of none effect ; and in ch. 2 : 4 that it would produce converts whose faith would stand in the wisdom of men rather than in the power of God. In other words, the twofold effect of trusting to human cleverness and eloquence in gospel preaching is that the Cross is robbed of its glory, and that converts are made in whom there has been no real spiritual birth at all. It is a sad fact

that much evangelistic work in our own days is of this very character, and the man made converts are at times rushed into Assemblies, to the troubling of the saints there, as well as to the eternal ruin of the poor souls themselves. If there were more of Paul's "weakness and fear and much trembling" with regard to this matter it would be well for all concerned.

The second point made by the apostle is that human wisdom is equally unavailing when it is a question of teaching the things of God to saints. Knowledge of earthly matters is gained by using the eye to see what it can, the ear to hear what it can, and the intelligence to reason correctly from what the eye has seen and the ear heard. Thus the difference between the wise man and the fool is that the former makes better use of these faculties than the latter. As the Scripture says, "The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walketh in darkness" (Eccl. 2 : 14). Yes, says Paul, but spiritual knowledge is not to be gained in that way. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit" (ch. 2 : 9, 10).

The apostle's phraseology here is reminiscent of the book of Job, in which Eliphaz harps on "I have seen" (Job 4 : 8 ; 5 : 3 ; 15 : 17), while Bildad tells what he had heard from the ancients (Job 8 : 8-13), and Zophar reasons from the fancies of his own intellect (Job 20 : 2, 3). And when all three of them failed to instruct Job, Elihu rightly gives them the reason by saying, "I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom. But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty giveth them understanding" (Job 32 : 7, 8). It is interesting to note that Paul does seem to have had the book of Job in mind, since he quotes from it at ch. 3 : 19 the opposite statement, "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness".

Even the very words in which the truth is communicated to others should be Spirit given, according to ch. 2 : 13 ; but that is not all. The teacher may be possessed of deep spiritual knowledge, and may be looking to the Spirit for guidance as to his words ; yet if the hearer is either "natural" (ch. 2 : 14, i.e. unsaved), or "carnal" (ch. 3 : 1, 3, i.e. saved but in an unspiritual condition of soul), the message will convey to him little or nothing. This lack of spiritual discernment is much in evidence today, and is the reason that clever and intellectual ministry is sought after, while spiritual ministry is but little appreciated.

Paul's third point follows naturally upon his second, and is that unspiritual ministry, however intellectual it be, will not build up God's assembly. This he deals with at the middle of ch. 3 in a passage which is usually treated in a disconnected way, as a suitable basis for an address on the subject of the judgment seat of Christ. Indeed its suitability for that purpose is unquestionable, since it is, as was noted in an earlier chapter, the chief passage in the Scriptures dealing with the subject. But no passage in God's Word ever loses anything by its context and setting being kept in our minds as we read it. Doing so will preserve us from applying it to matters with which it has no real connection, and yet will not prevent us from making application of the principles found in it as widely as they can bear. Most of all it will throw light on the passage itself, and open up beauties in it which otherwise would be unnoticed by us.

Thus when we discover that in 1 Cor. 3 the subject of the judgment seat

is introduced as connected with teachers and teaching in a local assembly, it will not hinder us from applying the principles laid down therein to every part of our service for the Lord, that is to say, to every part of our lives as saved men and women. For in what portion of them could we say that we are free from His service? On the other hand it will suggest connections with various other Scriptures in which similar subjects are treated of. For example, having first noted that in 1 Cor. 3 we have –

1. A foundation laid (v. 11) ;
2. Good and bad builders (vv. 5, 12), of which
3. The work of the one class is likened to gold, silver, and precious stones, but that of the other to wood, hay and stubble (v. 12);
4. Some who will defile or pull down instead of build (v. 17) ;

let us turn to 2 Tim 2. There too we find –

1. God's foundation firm (v. 19).
2. Good builders (vv. 2, 15), and bad (vv. 16, 17).
3. A contrast in vessels, in which gold, silver, and wood are among the metaphors used (v. 20).
4. An overthrowing of whatever can be overthrown (v. 18).

There is thus a close similarity throughout, though of course a later and worse development of things is in view in the last named passage.

Another Scripture that suggests itself for comparison is in Malachi, where again we have good teachers and teaching at the beginning (ch. 2 : 6, 7), but afterwards bad (ch. 2 : 8-12). Following on this, we have the coming Day of testing by fire (ch. 3 : 2), in which the genuine gold and silver will abide (v. 3) ; and there is even a similar idea to the "saved so as by fire" of 1 Cor. 3 : 15 in the words, "I change not, therefore ye . . . are not consumed" (v. 6). An earlier portion (ch. 1 : 7-14), in which God judges the defilers of His temple, would link with 1 Cor. 3 : 16, 17, and indeed, by its use of the expression, "The Table of the Lord", would remind us that the outcome of unspirituality in the days of Malachi was of the same character as was found in the Church of Corinth. In both we get –

1. The Lord's table polluted (compare Mal. 1 : 12 with 1 Cor. 10:21; 11 : 20-22).
2. The oppression of their brethren (compare Mal. 3 : 5 with 1 Cor. 6 : 8).
3. Violation of the marriage bond (compare Mal. 2 : 14 ; 3 : 5 ; with 1 Cor. 5 : 1 ; 6 : 15-18).
4. Association with the surrounding heathen (compare Mal. 2 : 11 with 1 Cor. 10 : 27 ; 2 Cor. 6 : 14).

The final point is made in what we have called the fourfold lesson of the apostle on the subject of trusting to earthly knowledge or eloquence for results in the work of Christ, is given us in ch. 4. It is that as God's steward the preacher's responsibility is to his Master and not to men. Therefore, instead of seeking by worldly wisdom to gain the approval of either saint or sinner, his endeavour should always be by faithfulness to merit in the coming Day the approval of the Lord, Who "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart, and **THEN SHALL EACH MAN HAVE HIS PRAISE FROM GOD**" (v. 5 R.V.).

CHAPTER VIII

We have now glanced briefly at the first four chapters of the epistle, for the purpose of pointing out that in writing them Paul had in mind those who would lay overmuch stress on human ability, amongst whom doubtless were to be found such of the Corinthians as said, "I am of Apollos". While doing so, we also drew attention to some of the connections existent between passages in those chapters and certain other Scriptures.

We purpose to examine in a similar way another large section of the apostle's letter, one that we have already referred to, in which the matters he deals with, and his method of doing so, suggests that he is thinking of such as had been overstepping in various ways the bounds of Christian liberty. Amongst these, as we have before pointed out, would probably be found those who claimed to be followers of Paul himself ; and it is therefore somewhat remarkable that in the final verse of the section, which runs from ch. 6 : 12 to ch. 11 : 1, after an interesting reference to what his own practice had been, he concludes with the words, "Be ye followers (R.V. "imitators") of me, EVEN AS I ALSO AM OF CHRIST". He had, however, already spoken in like fashion at the end of the section we have already considered. There, having reminded them in ch. 4 : 14, 15 that he is their father in the faith, he adds in v. 16, "Wherefore . . . be ye followers (R.V. "imitators") of me". Then in v. 17 he makes clear to them what he means by this, not a mere adherence to a party of "Paulites", but an imitating of his "ways which be in Christ".

But perhaps before we further examine the section we have in view, some notice should be taken of that portion which lies between it and the one already looked at, that is, from ch. 5 : 1 to 6 : 11. Here the apostle, having dealt with what we might call Item No. 1 of the report "declared unto him by them of the house of Chloe", goes on to deal with Item No. 2, the existence of a gross case of fornication among them, and then with Item No. 3, their dragging of one another before the heathen lawcourts.

A noteworthy feature in his way of doing this is the abruptness in which the two subjects are introduced at ch. 5 : 1 and 6 : 1. This is particularly noticeable in the former case, where he starts off with "it is actually (R.V.) reported that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not even among the Gentiles, . . . and ye are puffed up". The last quoted words may serve, however, to lessen the disconnectedness with what has gone before, when we remember that three times over he had mentioned in ch. 4 their "puffed up" condition (vv. 6, 18, 19). His recurring to it here in v. 2 would suggest that he had purposely introduced the charge of v. 1 in this abrupt way, as a sudden stab at the puffed up balloon of their self-conceit, one that well might deflate it utterly. "There is", says he, "this horrible thing among you, yet for all that ye remain puffed up, and have not rather mourned".

The "Dare any of you" of ch. 6 : 1 appears to have a similar implication, and indeed the connection of both with ch. 4 is perhaps even closer than this. Here were these Corinthians, unable, so far, to judge a dreadful case of immorality in their midst, and unable even to judge the petty squabbles that had arisen amongst their members, which they had to take to the heathen courts of law ; and yet from ch. 4 : 3 it is evident that they con-

sidered themselves quite competent to sit in judgment on the apostle himself. Could self-conceit go further ?

The feeling of horror implied in the abrupt exclamation with which the subject of ch. 5 is introduced, might remind us of a somewhat similar exclamation on the part of the Israelites in Judges 19 : 30, when in a ghastly manner the outrage done at Gibeah to the Levite and his concubine was brought to their notice. "There was no such deed done nor seen", said they, "from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt unto this day". Perhaps there was not, but this open outbreak was the fruit of continued backsliding on the part of the nation generally ; and before the tribes could deal with it, God had to deal with them. Even amidst the horror of their startled exclamation of ch. 10 : 30, and the immediate steps taken "as one man" (note the threefold repetition of this in ch. 20 : 1, 8, 11) to deal with the matter, we read of no mourning or confession until they had suffered defeat on the field of battle. So at Corinth the backslidden condition of the assembly as a whole was doubtless one cause for this public disgrace being allowed to come upon them, and at the same time a cause for their helplessness in dealing with it when it did arise.

This comparison with one particular incident in Judges is but one of many which may be made between the history of Israel's early experiences in the land, and that of the early church in general, and of the Church of Corinth in particular. The narrative of the covetousness of Achan, and of its terrible consequences for him, has its counterpart in the story of the covetousness of Ananias and Sapphira, and of the dreadful fate which overtook them both. The tale of the Gibeonites and the wiles by which they got into fellowship with God's people may recall to us the words of Jude, "There are certain men crept in unawares". The quarrelsomeness of some tribes about their possessions and precedence (Josh. 17 : 14-18 ; Judges 8 : 1-3 ; 12 : 1-6) may even suggest that of 1 Cor. 6 itself. And the mingling with other nations and learning their works (Psa. 106 : 34, 35), instead of keeping in God's path of separation from them, is very similar to the tendency that existed at Corinth, where they were "disposed to go" (1 Cor. 10 : 27) to the heathen feasts when invited, with the result that they badly needed the warning of 2 Cor. 6 : 14, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers".

But having so far prolonged these remarks, we shall leave for other chapters what we have to say about the great section of our epistle beginning at ch. 6 : 12, a section which, as words in that first verse of it suggest, might well be headed "THINGS NOT EXPEDIENT".

CHAPTER IX

We have said that the middle section of 1st Cor., from ch. 6 : 12 to ch. 11 : 1 might be entitled, "THINGS NOT EXPEDIENT". That phrase occurs in the statement made in its opening verse, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient", a saying which is repeated at ch. 10 : 23, just before the section closes. As has been mentioned already, there are various matters dealt with in this portion of the epistle, but always from the point of view that our conduct as to each of them should be re-

garded by asking, not merely, "Is this lawful", but also "is it expedient" (or profitable", as in ch. 6 : 12 margin).

In the two chapters immediately preceding, the apostle had spoken of things that were in their very nature definitely unlawful and wrong, while in ch. 11, which follows, he reverts to things similarly evil. But in this section he speaks of matters that have no inherent rightness or wrongness in themselves, yet at the same time they may, in certain circumstances, be inexpedient, because of their effects upon ourselves or others.

This is an important line of truth, and one which we would require to have pressed in our attention often, because it is one concerning which many Christians have views that are neither sound nor clear. They understand that, on the one hand, certain things should be done, as being right in themselves, or commanded by God ; while on the other hand, certain things ought not to be done, because they are evil, or forbidden by God. But they think that between these two groups comes in a much bigger one, of things about which, being neither right or wrong in themselves, they may act as they please. Now this last thought finds no countenance whatever in these middle chapters of 1st Cor., because there is nothing that we can do, or say, or even think, concerning which the question should not be asked, "Is it expedient – is it profitable ?"

In this section of the epistle the apostle not only points out various matters, great or small, to which the test of expediency may be applied, but also suggests a number of considerations that will materially help to a right decision, when applying it. Before, however, we examine these, let us look more closely at the two very similar verses already referred to, ch. 6 : 12 and ch. 10 : 23, which seem to form a keynote for the entire section. In each of them the expression, "All things are lawful for me", occurs twice, or four times in all, a fact which may suggest that Paul is using a saying, current amongst the Corinthians, and possibly taking it from their letter of inquiry concerning these matters. Indeed it may on their part have been a quotation of words spoken by the apostle on some earlier occasion, words which, when separated from their context, might be put to a very different use from anything he had intended by them. For by thus taking up a passage apart from its connection a man may be made to say very queer things, and so may even the Scriptures themselves. Of this no better illustration could be found than a somewhat similar saying made use of by Paul in this very epistle when at ch. 3 : 21, 22 he says twice over "All things are yours". The context of course makes it clear that his meaning is, All things are arranged by God for your benefit and blessing ; but take it apart from the context and it can be put to as bad use as could "All things are lawful". A thief might excuse his action in picking his neighbour's pocket by saying, Does not Paul in the Scriptures tell us that "All things are yours" ? I am merely taking what is my own.

In the two verses before us, the apostle sets due limits to the saying "All things are lawful for me"; first by adding "But all things are not expedient", and then, when in each case he repeats the former words over again, by naming one particular respect in which some of them may be inexpedient or unprofitable. In ch. 6 : 12 he adds, "But I will not be brought under the power of any"; while in ch. 10 : 23 he has, "But all things edify not" (i.e. others, as the context shows). In these we have the question of expediency divided into two parts, since according to the former

verse a thing may be not expedient on account of its effect on myself, while according to the latter it may be not expedient because of its effect upon others, not only our brethren but the unsaved as well, as the end of the chapter shows. There is, however, a third aspect of the matter, more important than either, which is, how does the course of action in view fit in with our responsibility and relationship to God? The writer, as we have already said, makes many suggestions in these chapters with regard to how and why certain things may be inexpedient, but all of them can be sorted into these three divisions, the effect upon ourselves, the effect upon others, and our responsibility to God.

Let us then, taking the last one first, ask how does the apostle introduce our relationship to God as settling for us whether certain things are expedient and profitable, or the reverse? He does it by reminding us twice over (ch. 6 : 20 and ch. 7 : 23) that we "are bought with a price", adding in the first case, "therefore glorify God in your body", and in the second, "therefore become not bondslaves of men". The Lord has bought us, and we are His. Our bodily energy is His. Our money is His. Our time is His. Anything therefore that would entail dealing with either strength, or money, or time, as though they were our own, is not expedient and should not be done. For instance, if my bodily and mental vigour is the Lord's I shall not willingly become enslaved to men (ch. 7 : 3). If my money is the Lord's I shall feel responsible to see to the financial needs of His work and workers (ch. 9 : 11, 14). If my time is the Lord's I shall, in view of the warning in ch. 7 : 29 that "Time is short", be careful not to waste it in trifling or self-gratification (vv. 30, 31).

Our true service to the Lord is bound up in the injunction quoted above from ch. 6 : 20, "Therefore GLORIFY GOD in your body", and it is interesting to note that, at the close of the section, the same thought is again introduced in ch. 10 : 31, "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the GLORY OF GOD". According to ch. 1 : 31 of our epistle, salvation was made ours in such a manner as yields all glory to the Lord; and now from these other passages we learn that our after behaviour should be such as will be for His Glory also.

The foregoing words from ch. 10 : 31 emphasise what has already been said about our responsibility in matters which have no rightness or wrongness in themselves. Eating and drinking are of course of that character, yet it is in connection with them that the rule is given; while the addition of "or whatsoever we do" reminds us that EVERYTHING in our lives comes within its scope. It is plain therefore that a due understanding of what our relationship to God involves will preserve us from doing many things which, though they may be in a sense "lawful", are "not expedient" for those who desire to serve Him wholeheartedly.

CHAPTER X

We shall now consider the second aspect of the matter, what the apostle has to say in these chapters as to how certain things, though "lawful", may be "not expedient" because of their effects upon others. Of these various examples are mentioned by him, such as our responsibility towards those related to us by earthly ties (ch. 7), our responsibility toward "weak"

brethren (ch. 8), our responsibility toward those giving their whole time to gospel work (ch. 9), our responsibility toward the unsaved in general (end of ch. 10). But many of the points made by him are alike applicable in all these cases ; and indeed most of them can be summed up in two injunctions, one negative, and the other positive : Do nothing which may cause others to stumble, and, Do all in your power for the spiritual welfare of those about you.

The latter aim is what the apostle has in mind in the final words of ch. 10 : 23, one of the two key verses of the section. Parallel to the "All things are not expedient" of the first clause, he places "All things edify not" in the second. And then, to make perfectly clear what he means by this, he adds, "Let no man seek his own, but each his neighbour's good" (R.V.), an exhortation which is of the very widest application. It suggests a responsibility resting on each of us, not merely on those who are preachers, or who possess some very special gift, but on everyone who names the Name of Christ, to seek the spiritual welfare of his relatives, of God's people, of the unsaved, of all in fact with whom he is brought into contact. No child of God may dare to use the words of Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper ?"

How careful Paul himself was in such matters we see by his words in the end of the 10th chapter, "Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved". And it is with regard to this that in the next verse, which is ch. 11 : 1, he adds, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ". That is to say, instead of merely repeating the parrot cry, "I am of Paul", and at the same time claiming licence to please yourselves, follow me in reality and truth in this matter, even as I follow in it my Lord and Master. He had already, in chs. 8 and 9, introduced in an even more striking way his practice and example, when he said, "I will eat no flesh while the world standeth if it make my brother to stumble", and when he pointed out that he had not claimed those things he had a right to claim—a wife, support, etc.—lest he should "hinder the gospel of Christ".

But these words, "stumble" and "hinder", remind us of the other and negative side of our responsibility to our fellow saints and fellow men, which is that we should not in any wise be a hindrance or a stumbling-block to them. Very solemn in this connection are those other words of ch. 8, "Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak . . . when ye so sin against the brethren . . . ye sin against Christ". Like the positive injunction which we have already considered, this also has no limit to its application, other than the entire circle of humanity, for in ch. 10 : 32 it is said, "Give no occasion of stumbling (R.V.), neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God".

It is noteworthy that this exhortation of ch. 10 : 32 follows a passage in which the apostle is speaking of a saint who has been invited to a feast by his unsaved friend, or neighbour, and who is "disposed to go" (v. 27). The last three words, though introduced in what seems almost a casual way, may suggest where the root of trouble in such matters often lies. Should a saint of God be "disposed to go" where he knows, if he is honest with himself, that it will be next to impossible to maintain his separation unto God and his testimony, or at least, where he is sure to come up against

difficulties and temptations which he would have escaped if he had been "disposed" to stay away, or "disposed" to go to the prayer meeting instead ?

There still remains for consideration the third aspect of our subject, the various references which are made to how these "lawful" things may affect oneself personally ; and here the question of what is, or is not "expedient" resolves itself into – Is this thing a help to my spiritual progress, or is it a hindrance , For it will usually be found that if not the one it is the other.

The first point made by the apostle with regard to this is in what we have called the opening verse of the section, ch. 6 : 12, where he says, "All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any". There is a play upon words here in the original, which cannot easily be reproduced in our language ; one of the best attempts perhaps being that in Conybeare and Howson's "Life of St. Paul", "Though all things are in my power, they shall not bring me under their power".

This is a test which will give us pause with regard to many things. Take for example the first big matter which is dealt with in our section, the question of marriage. We are distinctly told that the one who marries "sinneth not"; yet is it not a fact that many a promising young man or young woman has, after marriage, even though it was to another Christian, ceased to be of any account in the service of the Lord ? Former activities in gospel and other work are gradually dropped, and the person becomes so much "under the power" of this new relationship as to be literally "good for nothing" in "the things that belong to the Lord" (ch. 7 : 32). This should not be, and need not be. For on the other hand there are many cases of young people whose usefulness and value as saints and workers, not only did not diminish, but greatly increased when they were married "in the Lord" to a partner who was a real "help meet" for them.

This principle of refusing to allow ourselves to be "brought under the power" of anything is of course applicable to many other matters, great and small ; any, if acted upon, would restrain us from self-indulgence of every kind.

Another point, closely allied to it, is made by Paul in ch. 7 : 32 when he says, "I would have you without carefulness". For this "carefulness", or anxiety, is just one of the ways in which God's people at times permit themselves to be brought under the power of circumstances. They become fussed and worried ; and a worried saint is not a testimony for God. It may be due, as in the verses which follow v. 32, to the pre-occupations of married life, or, as is suggested in the preceding verses, to other circumstances of joy or sorrow, or even to pressure of business. But in every case it is certain to hinder usefulness for God.

A further development on the same lines is brought before us in the last paragraph of ch. 9, where it is shown that anything, however "lawful" in itself, is inexpedient if it clogs us, and hinders progress in the Christian race, thus causing us, it may be, to miss the "prize". Good speed cannot be attained by one who has weights attached, and what matters even more is that in such circumstances "patient continuance in well-doing" becomes almost impossible.

It is interesting to notice how this mention of the race in the end of ch. 9 seems to open the way for the comparison with Israel's wilderness failures in ch. 10. Theirs was surely an endurance test, under which all fell out by the way, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb. And this,

though God had given to all of them an equally good start.

The comparison is an apt one, because there is, all through, a close similarity between their failures and those of the Corinthians. In both cases there was the question of eating and drinking, in both there was tampering with idolatry and fornication, and accepting of invitations to heathen feasts (see Num. 25 : 2). Even the tempting of the Lord, mentioned in v. 9, has its counterpart in the "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy" of v. 22, which is almost a quotation of Moses' words to Israel in Deut. 32 : 16. And lastly we come to the most striking parallel of all, that as the carcasses of the sinning Israelites were strewn along (v. 5 in Newberry) the wilderness, so already it had begun to be at Corinth, as we see in ch. 11 : 30. "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep". A solemn lesson we have here for all such as begin to dabble in "things lawful but not expedient", and one which perhaps should not be passed over without further consideration by us, ere we go on to the next section of the epistle.

CHAPTER XI

These early verses of 1st Cor. 10 give us an extremely sad picture of the journey from Egypt to Canaan ; but perhaps the saddest thing about it is its use here as illustrative of what was and is to be found amongst those who profess to be the people of God in New Testament times.

The route trodden by the Israelites during the forty years was marked, as we have said, by a line of graves, in which amongst others there lay 600,000 men of war, who had left Egypt in the prime of their strength. And it was not because God had failed them that they lay there, but because they had "failed of the grace of God" (Heb. 12 : 15).

They ALL had been under the cloud which signified God's presence, guidance, and protection. ALL had passed in safety through the sea wherein their enemies were overwhelmed. ALL had been baptised unto Moses in that cloud and in that sea, being thereby separated from the Egypt of their former life. ALL had shared in the food, and ALL had been partakers of the drink, which God had provided to give them strength for the way. Yet one by one they had fallen until, out of the 600,000 which had started, only two were left.

Why this was so our passage makes very clear, and the causes are set down as a warning to us, to the intent that we should not do as they did. And just as there are FIVE BLESSINGS (vv. 1-4) in which they ALL are said to have shared, so there are FIVE CAUSES mentioned which brought about their overthrow ; and these seem to be placed in purposed contrast to the other five.

First. In v. 6 they are said to have lusted after evil things ; which no doubt refers mainly to Num. 11, where they complained of the Manna, and longed after the fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic of Egypt. Thus they were dissatisfied with GOD'S FOOD.

Second. In v. 7 they became idolaters, and made for themselves a god before whom they could "play", a contrast with the God who had appeared to them on the Mount in devouring fire, in whose presence they had trembled, and "entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any

more". Here they evidently were dissatisfied with **GOD'S WORSHIP**.

Third. In v. 8 they "committed fornication", which of course refers to the episode in Num. 25, where Balaam, having vainly tried to curse Israel, and having learned incidentally from words put in his own mouth, God's purpose that the people should "dwell alone" (Num. 23 : 9) sought to upset this by joining them with the daughters of Midian and Moab. The large number who were thus ensnared showed that they were dissatisfied with **GOD'S PLACE OF SEPARATION**.

Fourth. In v. 9 they are said to have "tempted Christ", an expression which it might have been difficult to assign to any particular act, were it not that the judgment named, that of being "destroyed of serpents", gives us the clue. It took place when "the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way" (Num. 21 : 4), or in other words when they were dissatisfied with **GOD'S PATH** for them.

Fifth. Lastly, in v. 10 they "murmured and were destroyed of the Destroyer"; which probably refers to Num. 16 : 41, where they complained "Ye have killed the people of the Lord", and the result was that 14,700 more of them were slain by a plague in the space of a few minutes. Here the trouble was that they were dissatisfied with **GOD'S CHASTISEMENT**.

Now has not the history of the Church of God corresponded very closely to that of Israel in the matter of these failures ? Have we not seen indeed, even in our own time, similar developments take place, with similar dire results ? Has not the way been strewn, as it were, with the carcasses of those who started well and went on for a while, but who have been "overthrown", so far at least as their testimony for God is concerned ?

As long as God's people were satisfied with God's **FOOD**, "the sincere milk of the Word", they grew thereby, and testimony for God was maintained. But when some of them began to lust after the food of Egypt a change soon became apparent and ultimately they came to be scarcely distinguishable from worldlings, so similar were their tastes. It should be noted, however, that many of those who lust for the leeks and the onions belong to the "**MIXT MULTITUDE**" (Num. 11 : 14), and **NEVER HAD A REAL TASTE FOR THE THINGS OF GOD AT ALL**.

Now it naturally follows that those who are not content with God's food will be unsatisfied with drawing near in **WORSHIP** to **ONE** of whom it is said in the New Testament, as well as in the Old, "Our God is a consuming fire". A god which can be played with is the god that suits the world ; and unfortunately it seems as though some who claim to be the Lord's are like-minded, for else whence comes the irreverence, carelessness, and self-will which are at times displayed even in worship meetings ? The Calf did not mind what games its worshippers engaged in ; and by their acts, such as drunkenness, etc., at the very table of the Lord, the Corinthians showed that they too expected to get doing whatever they liked. That they did not escape punishment, 1st Cor. 11 : 30 gives us to know.

Connected with this carelessness about worship, there will be corresponding carelessness about keeping in the place of **SEPARATION** to which God's people have been called. In the case of the Corinthians we see this manifesting itself in the latter part of ch. 10. The unsaved were bidding them to their feasts, and they were "disposed to go" (v. 27), with evil results to their testimony. Yet, both then and now, "the friendship of the world is enmity with God", and if we are sought after in such circles, the

sooner we get on our knees before the Lord, to discover why those who do not want His company seek ours, the better it will be for us.

Another frequent cause of disaster is, as in Israel's case, discontent with God's PATH for us, which may lead us to try one of our own choosing. It may be an easier one, or one in which more money can be gained, but sooner or later the person who leaves God's path will suffer for it. Abram left it, when staying in it meant trial, and went down to Egypt. But he brought back a legacy of trouble, from which his descendants suffer to the present day. Lot left it to better his position, with the result that he was practically burned out of Sodom, and never regained his testimony.

Finally, Christians also become at times dissatisfied with God's CHASTISEMENT or discipline. A spirit of rebelliousness takes possession of them, and they become intolerant of restraint. It is a spirit that, having once entered, may spread and spread amongst them till whole Assemblies are ruined by means of it, to the dishonour of the Lord's Name.

CHAPTER XII

We have seen how our Epistle deals with things which were in themselves wrong, and which could in no circumstances be anything else but wrong. We have also seen how, in a large section from ch. 6 : 12 to ch. 11 : 1 it deals with many things which might be described as neutral, being neither right or wrong in themselves, but being expedient or inexpedient, according to circumstances and the effects produced.

We now come to a section, immediately following the last named, and reaching from ch. 11 : 2 to the end of ch. 14, of which we might say that in it we have things dealt with which were right in themselves, but which were capable of being misused, and were in fact being misused in the Corinthian Assembly. It also differs from what has gone before in this respect, that while the preceding section is concerned chiefly with the home life and public testimony of the individual members of the church, the present one, for the most part, treats of things that took place when the saints were actually assembled together in their meetings. So much is this the case that we find the Greek word which is translated "come together" occurring no less than seven times in this part of the epistle, and these seven are the only places where it is used for the meetings of the Assembly in the New Testament. (See ch. 11 : 17 ; 18 : 20 ; 33 : 34 ; and ch. 14 : 23, 26).

On the other hand there is one interesting point of similarity between this section and the last, which is that in both the apostle applies to the matters in question the test of their profitableness. We have seen how he twice mentions that things which are lawful may at the same time not be expedient or PROFITABLE. Also in ch. 7 : 35 he uses the same word in the phrase, "I speak for your own PROFIT"; and again in ch. 10 : 33 where he says, "Not seeking my own PROFIT, but the PROFIT of many, that they may be saved".

So in the section now under consideration the word occurs once more at ch. 12 : 7, where we read, "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to PROFIT withal"; while another word of kindred meaning is found in ch. 13 : 3, and ch. 14 : 6 ; in the former to state that great

gifts and great energy PROFIT nothing apart from love, and in the latter to ask the question, "If I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I PROFIT you".

This last is indeed a very important and practical inquiry, one which we would well put to ourselves in many connections. If it be a matter of indulging ourselves in some respect, under the plea that there is "no harm" in it, let us first ask : "What shall I profit either myself or anyone else by doing this ?" If on the other hand it is a question of the exercise of our ministry amongst saints or sinners, let us apply the same test again and again. What shall this message of mine profit those who hear it ? Is it such as I can expect the Lord to use in the conversion of the one class, or in the upbuilding of the other ? Or will it merely serve to display my cleverness and ability, or, worse still, to promote argument and discord ? Many an address would be shortened, and not a few wiped out altogether, if this question of "WHAT SHALL I PROFIT" were honestly applied to them.

We can easily see, as we read ch. 14, how foolish these Corinthians were in their desire to make display of their gifts, and we do not wonder that the apostle rebuked it as childishness (v. 20). But are we ourselves after all so much better than they ? Is there not, with many of us who think ourselves fitted to take part in the Ministry of the Word, the same childish eagerness to have our little say ? If we get doing so, the meeting is of course a good one, but if we fail, the meeting in our estimation is a failure too.

The misuse of right things, which we have mentioned as characteristic of this section of our epistle, is dealt with chiefly in three connections. Reference is first made to the forward and unbecoming mode of dressing adopted by certain women in the meetings ; then to the general irreverence in connection with the breaking of bread itself ; and lastly to the unprofitable exercise of the gifts in their gatherings. Of these matters the first two are dealt with in ch. 11, while the third is taken up in ch. 14, though indeed it might be said to occupy chs. 12-14, since the teaching on spiritual gifts in ch. 12, and the teaching on love in ch. 13 are evidently designed to lead up to it.

It will be noticed that we have connected the rebuke contained in the first part of ch. 11 with the behaviour of these women in public. That it has no direct bearing on a sister's private prayers, a careful reading of the passage should surely make plain, because throughout it takes for granted that men are present, and the wearing of the head covering is enjoined, not as a matter of reverence to God directly, but of respect to the man as His representative. If it were otherwise, would not the men also be commanded to cover their head as was the case with Israel's priests in the past (Exod. 28 : 36-38) ? It is also to be noted that in verse 16 it is not "If any woman seem to be contentious", but "If any MAN". Why should the apostle expect to find the men contentious about what a woman should do privately ; and why in the same verse should he invoke the "custom" of the Churches of God with regard to such a matter ?

If the objection be raised that in ch. 14 : 34 the women are forbidden to speak at all, whether veiled or not, in the Assembly meetings ; that, we reply, is perfectly true ; but is it in any way unreasonable that Paul should first deal with the glaring breach of womanly modesty mentioned in ch. 11 : 5, 6, which was in all likelihood an imitation of the prophetesses and

priestesses connected with the heathen oracles and temples of those days ; and afterwards take up the wider matter of their public speaking in its own proper context ? Compare how in ch. 8 : 8-11 the eating of meat in an idol temple is disallowed, merely on the ground that it would stumble weak brethren ; yet when we come to ch. 10 : 20-22 it is utterly condemned as being in itself a "fellowship with devils".

CHAPTER XIII

It has been pointed out that the apostle in these chapters (11-14) deals with three different ways in which the irreverence that had begun to characterise the gatherings of the Corinthian Assembly displayed itself. And we have considered briefly the first of the three, in which he censures certain women for removing their head covering in the meetings.

The second, and perhaps most serious form of the trouble, is that described in the latter part of ch. 11, where the irreverence is seen in connection with the very ordinance of the Lord's Supper itself, and appears to be nearly general amongst those partaking. It is almost inconceivable that saints of God would turn the Supper into an orgy of feasting and drinking with their own immediate friends, ignoring while they did so, the presence of poorer brethren, and actually becoming drunken at the Table. Yet all this Paul has been informed concerning them, and it draws forth his sternest rebuke. "What, have ye not houses to eat and drink in, or despise ye the Church of God ? . . . guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord . . . eateth and drinketh judgment to himself . . . For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep".

At the first setting up of the worship of God in the Tabernacle the irreverence of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, met with a signal punishment. The same fire which came forth from before the Lord a few moments earlier to consume the burnt-offering in token of God's approval came forth again to consume them in token of His wrath (Lev. 9 : 24 ; 10 : 2). So here in Corinth God's judgment was manifesting itself in sickness and death among the irreverent ones ; and it is a further remarkable coincidence that the account of the death of Nadab and Abihu is followed immediately by a warning against drunkenness in connection with priestly duties ("lest ye die" Lev. 10 : 9); almost as though it were implied that their error was due to some such cause.

In 1 Cor. 11 there are two distinct ideas set forth as to what our partaking of the Supper means. In vv. 24, 25 it is done "in remembrance" of our Lord, while in v. 26 it is to "show (R.V. proclaim) the Lord's death till He come". The word here translated "show" or "proclaim" occurs in the New Testament seventeen times altogether, and in each of the other sixteen it refers to gospel ministry and is usually rendered "preach". We may therefore look on the Breaking of Bread as meant, not only to occupy our own hearts with thoughts of our Lord, but also to be a proclamation, not by word but by act, of the value of His work on the Cross, to all those who look on.

With regard to the Passover feast in Israel of old it was suggested that the children beholding would be led to inquire, "What mean ye by this service" (Exod. 12 : 26), and thus afford an opportunity of bringing before their young minds God's great deliverance through the sprinkled blood. In like manner today, both the children of believers and others as well, may be led to inquiry and exercise of soul when they gaze upon the ordinance duly carried out in the fear of God. On the other hand, if there be irreverence or other manifestations of fleshliness, naturally it will produce in them the opposite effect. How much mischief has been wrought by this means amongst the children of believers the Lord Himself alone knows.

In ch. 10 two other ideas are associated with the ordinance, but while the two which we have been noticing in ch. 11 should affect more particularly our conduct while engaged in the Supper itself, these others are introduced in connection with our conduct in general. In ch. 10 : 16, 17 we read, "The cup . . . is it not the communion of the Blood of Christ ? The bread . . . is it not the communion of the Body of Christ ? For we being many are one bread and one body ; for we are all partakers of that one bread". The word "communion" here is of course the same which elsewhere is usually rendered "fellowship", and behind these questions, and the statement which follows them, lies the thought that fellowship in the Body and Blood of Christ, as represented in the ordinances, implies also fellowship and oneness amongst God's people themselves. Therefore anything which mars the unity of God's people mars too the significance of our partaking of the bread and wine. This indeed the passage in ch. 11 also seems to suggest, by introducing the subject of abuses at the Supper, in vv. 17, 18, with a reference to the divisions among them, as well as by pointing out immediately after how their conduct was shaming their poorer brethren.

But ch. 10 gives to us yet another idea when in v. 21 it says, "Ye cannot drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils : ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's Table and of the table of devils". Evidently our partaking of the bread and wine necessitates separation from all that is evil ; and the Corinthians, by frequenting idolatrous feasts, and by consorting with "them that believe not" (v. 27), were denying this separation, and thus provoking the Lord to jealousy (v. 22).

When these four thoughts of ch. 11 and ch. 10 are linked in our minds with our keeping of the ordinance, what a far-reaching effect upon every part of our lives must be produced thereby. On the one hand, we shall be preserved from the very snares into which these Corinthians fell, from the (1) insubjection, (2) irreverence, (3) discord, and (4) worldliness ; while on the other hand, (1) the "remembrance" of our Lord will keep us true in heart to Him at all times, (2) the "proclaiming" of His death till He come will stir us to further interest in the salvation of our own families and others, (3) the "communion" of His Body and Blood will make our everyday fellowship with those who belong to Him a very real and practical thing, and (4) the incongruity of being "partakers of the Lord's Table and of the table of devils" will render our separation from all that is not of God unhesitating and complete.

Thus would the Supper be to us what no doubt our Lord designed it to be — a centre around which all the activities of our Christian life and service revolve, until He Himself comes again.

CHAPTER XIV

We now pass to the third form in which irreverence was being shown in the meetings of the Corinthians, which was in the misuse of the spiritual gifts they possessed. It is in ch. 14 that the actual evils existing, which evidently had been reported to the apostle, are mentioned and dealt with ; but as already stated, the subject really begins with the general discourse on spiritual gifts contained in ch. 12, and is continued in the teaching as to the importance of love in ch. 13.

The connection between the three chapters may be expressed thus. In ch. 12 the gifts are distributed in the power of the SPIRIT ; in ch. 13 their ministry is to be in the love of CHRIST ; and in ch. 14 their exercise is to be in the will of GOD. This same threefold order, as has been pointed out, is observed in 2 Tim. 1 : 6, 7, where Timothy is exhorted to use his gift in the spirit of POWER (compare ch. 12), and of LOVE (compare ch. 13), and of a SOUND MIND (compare ch. 14).

Indeed a somewhat similar arrangement is suggested here by Paul himself when introducing the subject in the opening verses of ch. 12. In vv. 4-6 (R.V.) we read, "There are diversities of gifts, but the same SPIRIT ; and there are diversities of ministrations, but the same LORD ; and there are diversities of workings, but the same GOD Who worketh all things in all". And these divisions of his might even more fittingly be used to distinguish the great gift passages of his epistles, than of our three chapters here.

As is well known, Paul's writings contain three prominent portions which deal with the spiritual gifts bestowed on the Church, one in Rom. 12, and one in Eph. 4, as well as this in 1 Cor. 12. Between them we notice some striking similarities, while at the same time there are interesting differences, caused by the differing point of view from which the subject is approached. In Rom. 12 the gifts are considered in connection with that great salvation, so fully described in the earlier part of the epistle ; and they are spoken of as GIVEN BY GOD THE FATHER (v. 3). In Eph. 4, on the other hand, they are viewed as leading on to the future glorious accomplishment of the Lord's purpose concerning us ; and they are said to be GIVEN BY THE RISEN AND EXALTED CHRIST (v. 7).

But our passage in 1 Cor. 12 which, as was remarked in a previous chapter, is the longest and fullest of the three, starts neither from the past point of view—what God has done for us, nor from that of the future—what He is yet going to do with us. It does refer to our past in v. 2, and to our future in the end of ch. 13, but the introduction of the subject is simply in connection with the abuses then present at Corinth ; and in keeping with this the gifts are set forth as GIVEN BY THE SPIRIT (vv. 3, 4, 7).

In the light of these differences might we not, as already suggested, say that in 1 Cor. 12 we have "Diversities of gifts, but the same SPIRIT"; in Eph. 4 "Diversities of ministrations, but the same LORD"; and in Rom. 12 "Diversities of workings, but the same GOD Who worketh all things in all". I think the context in each case will be found to bear out this distinction.

As for the points of likeness in the three passages, the most noteworthy are —

1. Each illustrates the teaching given by the figure of a body. See Rom. 12 : 4, 5 ; Eph. 4 : 4, 12, 16 ; 1 Cor. 12 : 12-14. And this is what might be expected, for of the three great figures of the Church in the New Testament, that of the Body is most suited to the purpose of illustrating the gifts. Neither Bride nor Building would fit so well, although in the local sense in which these, as well as the Body, are found in the Corinthian epistles, it is to some extent in connection with the exercise of gifts that they occur. Thus in ch. 3, where he says of the Assembly, "Ye are God's Building", we have various gifted men working on this building, some with good results and some with bad. And even in 2 Cor. 11 : 2, where he writes, again to the Assembly, "I have espoused you . . . as a chaste virgin to Christ", he is dealing with teachers who taught wrong things. Here, however, where in v. 27 he says, "Ye are (the) body of Christ", he is able to develop the figure very fully throughout the chapter.
2. Each passage emphasises the need for lowliness of mind in the exercise of the gifts. In Rom. 12 : 3 Paul writes, "I say . . . to every man . . . not to think of himself more highly than he ought". In Eph. 4 : 2 he begins with, "All lowliness and meekness". And here in 1 Cor. we have a whole chapter given to the love which vaunteth not itself, and is not puffed up".
3. Each passage makes clear that every believer has been given gift of some sort. In Rom. 12 : 3 we read, "GOD hath dealt to EVERY MAN"; in Eph. 4 : 7, "Unto EVERY ONE OF US . . . the gift of CHRIST"; and in 1 Cor. 12 : 7 "The manifestations of the SPIRIT is given to EVERY MAN". It is important that this should be understood and believed, for many excuse their apathy and laziness in connection with the things of the Lord by the plea that they have no gift.

The manner in which Paul introduces his subject in 1 Cor. 12 is somewhat remarkable, in view of what is said of these saints elsewhere in the epistle. In ch. 1 : 7 he writes, "Ye came behind in no gift"; and in ch. 14 : 12, "Ye are zealous of spiritual gifts"; so they not only possessed them in abundance, but were deeply interested in their exercise. Yet the apostle's first words to them here suggest that there was among them much ignorance with regard to the matter, and it is on the ground of this that he proceeds to enlighten them. It is clear therefore that saints may have both gifts and zeal in plenty, and yet be in ignorance of the very things it is most necessary to know with regard to their use.

If it be asked why the apostle assumed this lack of knowledge on the part of the Corinthians, I think the answer is, because of the abuses connected with the ministry mentioned in ch. 14. How we act is the ultimate test of what we know, and the knowledge which does not produce right actions is no true knowledge at all. Judged by this principle the Corinthians had ignorance enough ; and in the light of it we, the people of God today, have little to boast of, since in all spiritual matters we claim to know far more than we practise.

Take, for example, this very matter of the gifts. Amongst most of the so-called Christian churches the custom is to carry on as if practically all

the gifts could be exercised by a single individual whom the rest of the company pay more or less adequately for doing this. When put alongside what is taught in these Scriptures, that of course is seen to prove an extremity of ignorance, and many of us are thankful that we have been delivered therefrom. But in our recoil from such absurdity, have not some gone to an opposite extreme, and acted as though they believed that any saint may exercise any gift at will whether he possesses it or not? Anyone has a right to take the gospel meeting. Anyone can get up and minister at a conference.

Now if the passages concerning the gifts have any meaning at all, this attitude is just as absurd as the one first indicated, and shows that those who act upon it are badly in need of the apostle's "Brethren, I would not have you ignorant". For indeed it has been the means of ruining many an Assembly gospel meeting, and of spoiling many a conference.

But let there be no misunderstanding with regard to this. Apart from any question of gift, all God's children are responsible to do everything that lies in their power for the spreading of the gospel, and for the helping of their fellow believers. This, however, can be done without in any way stepping out of the place for which one is fitted, and the Lord Himself alone knows how much has been accomplished in both these respects by dear saints whose voices were never once heard in a public meeting.

But if you are gifted, even to a small extent, for public gospel preaching, or for public ministry to saints, your gift will make room for you amongst your brethren, and you will have no need to push yourself to the front by forwardness. Your help will, sooner or later, be sought for and esteemed.

Moreover, your gift, if it be real and not a "false gift" (see Prov. 25:14), will grow with exercise, and as Paul says to Timothy, your progress will be manifest to all. Where this is not the case there must surely be something amiss; and yet are there not those who, through many years of public preaching, have made no progress whatever? The same dozen or so of addresses are used in turn, over and over again, with the same illustrations set in the same places, and usually the same quaint or jocular remarks as well. They may have aroused interest or raised a smile when they were first heard, but after one has got to know them and expect them, how stale and dry they become.

CHAPTER XV

The various mistakes in the exercise of gift, to which we have drawn attention, are all clearly illustrated by the apostle's references, here in 1 Cor. 12, to the members of our bodies. Each of these has its own function, or as we may call it, gift, which another member cannot perform so well, and indeed in many cases cannot perform at all. Should a member from any cause cease to function, all the body suffers as a result.

If these points were given due consideration, it would save us from the foolish ideas already mentioned, which cause brethren, and at times sisters also, to take it upon them to exercise gifts that they do not possess. And on the other hand it would deliver us from the slothful spirit manifested by so many who say, "I am not gifted", and thus find excuse for showing no spiritual activity.

All, as Paul shows us, are not prophets or teachers, but all, as members of the Body, have their own place and use. Will it not stir me up to deep soul exercise about my responsibility before the Lord, if I realise that there is something for me to do, some function to perform, which none other can do so suitably? If I neglect it, all the members suffer loss, but myself most of all. A part of the human body which is never exercised becomes atrophied and useless. Would it be going too far to say that many of God's people have got into a condition something like this, simply through lack of spiritual exercise?

There are, we know, some learned men who would persuade us that certain organs in our bodies have no present use; but we who bow before the record given us in Genesis as to how God created man, are not likely to be convinced of this. Paul certainly did not believe it when he said, "Those members . . . which seem to be more feeble are necessary", a statement that should be a message of comfort to many, and at the same time a call to action.

In the parable of the Talents it was the man who had got least that failed to make use of what he did get, and so it usually is still. In our chapter it is the lesser gift that, envying the greater, ceases to perform its own function. The foot (v. 15) says, "Because I am not the hand I am not of the Body", forgetting that, without it, the hand will not get to the spot where it can effectively do its work. The ear says, "Because I am not the eye I am not of the Body", ignoring the fact that it has power to gather up, in the Body's service, what has been seen by a multitude of eyes the world over.

On the other side the danger with what we may call the greater gifts is that of despising the lesser ones, and thus hindering their development. The eye (v. 21) in its foolish pride says to the hand, "I have no need of thee"; and the head in like manner to the feet, "I have no need of you". It is just here that the love of ch. 13 steps in to put an end to the discord; for love on the one hand "ENVIETH NOT", and on the other "VAUNTETH NOT ITSELF" (ch. 13 : 4).

In the early part of ch. 12 there are two tests of gifts and their exercise that are of the utmost importance. The first, which is given us in v. 3, suggests that all the gifts, rightly used, will honour the Lord Jesus; while the second, found in v. 7, reminds us that they will be to the profit of His saints. To the latter of these we have already drawn attention, but the former is quite as important, and almost as easily applied.

It is in fact the very first note struck by the apostle in introducing his subject, and is brought before us in a manner at once simple and far reaching, by the use of a phrase that forms the bedrock of all Christian testimony, "JESUS IS LORD". No great gift is required for the utterance of this, which is the confession of all who are saved; while the opposite expression, "Jesus is accursed" represents the attitude toward Him of the Christ-rejecting world. Yet, while thus put in the most extreme form possible, a test is here suggested which may readily be applied to every exercise of gift, but especially to that which is commonly spoken of as "ministry". Does it glorify Christ, and bring home to me that "Jesus is Lord"? If so, there cannot be much the matter with it; while if the reverse is the case, no display of human ability or eloquence can make the evil thing right.

These two tests, the glorifying of Christ, and the profiting of saints or

sinners, set up boundaries beyond which no deviation is permissible. But within them there is ample room for diversity, diversity in the gifts themselves (v. 4), diversity in their ministry (v. 5), and diversity in their workings (v. 6 R.V.). It is somewhat interesting to note that these three verses, which show how wide is the diversity, are literally sandwiched between the two (vv. 3, 7) in which we find the tests that limit it.

In the remainder of our chapter this variety in the gifts forms the most prominent feature. Not merely is it shown to be allowable, but it is insisted upon as necessary. The apostle's reasoning is that if all were but one member, there would be no Body at all. "If", says he, "the whole were an eye, where were the hearing?" (vv. 17-20). Nor will he permit them to escape by saying, perhaps we have the "seeing", and some other assembly the "hearing". "Ye are (the) Body of Christ", he replies, "and severally members thereof" (v. 27, R.V.). It has been sometimes asserted that the term "Body" is used only of the Church universal, but we have here at least one exception to the rule; and the implication seems to be that God designs each local company of His people to be a miniature of the whole, so far as that is possible.

This line of truth was no doubt much needed at Corinth, and it is just as much needed today, for we are slow to see any value in gifts that differ appreciably from our own, or from those to which we have been accustomed. We incline to say to such, "I have no need of thee", and that all the more readily if, as is sometimes the case, at the back of the diversity of gifts there are different types of minds. This is perhaps what is suggested by the use, in the list of nine gifts which occupies vv. 8-10 of our chapter, of two separate Greek words for "another". The distinction between these is that one of them, "Eteros", as may be seen in "Trench on New Testament Synonyms", or any similar work, signifies "one of a different kind or type", while the other, "Allos", merely suggests "another of the same kind or type". The former word occurs but twice, between the 2nd and 3rd, and again between the 7th and 8th, of the nine gifts; while the latter is used in all the other cases.

The effect of this is to sort the gifts into three groups, consisting of two, five, and two, respectively, in each of which those included are somewhat similar in type to one another, but differ widely from those in another group. The first contains those pertaining to knowledge, the last those pertaining to language, while the middle one includes those that are more noticeably miraculous. These groups are easily distinguishable in the R.V., because the members of each will be found coupled by "and"; while the separate groups are not, but have a colon instead of a semicolon between them. The distinction made is not without purpose, and does seem to imply that to different types of person are allotted different types of gifts.

We must not, however, fail to notice that this diversity, of which the chapter is so full, is designed to promote real and vital unity. "There are many members", says Paul, "yet but one Body". And again, "God hath tempered the Body together . . . that there should be no schism in the Body". And in Eph. 4 it is even more forcibly emphasised that the goal in view in the use of the gifts is "Till we all attain (R.V.) unto the UNITY OF THE FAITH, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ".

Another lesson, which at first sight appears very strange, is taught us

here. It is that the lesser gifts are those which least of all can be done without. As the apostle expresses it, "Much more those members . . . which seem to be more feeble are necessary" (v. 22). And yet this is true even in Nature, for we may make shift to do without an eye or a hand, while there are parts, hidden and internal, deprived of which we could not live. So in the Church we may manage to get along in some fashion, without great teachers or great evangelists ; but the brethren, and sisters also, whose names are unknown outside their own immediate circle, and perhaps not much set by even there, form the "uniting bands" of Col. 2 : 19 and Eph. 4 : 16, binding in a quiet way the saints of God together, and pushing on His work while keeping in the background themselves. THESE are what we cannot do without. So let us see to it that we bestow the more abundant honour upon him.

CHAPTER XVI

We have seen how in vv. 15, 16 of this 12th chapter, Paul warns those possessed of what they look upon as lesser gifts, against being jealous of such as have greater ones. Yet there is another side to this matter, as we must realise when we note that the final exhortation of the chapter runs, "Covet (R.V. 'desire') earnestly the best (R.V. 'greater') gifts". Clearly there is a right kind of coveting as well as a wrong kind. The latter takes the form of envying others, while the former takes that of striving to make progress ourselves, and is illustrated by the apostle's injunction to Timothy, "Neglect not the gift that is in thee . . . that thy progress may be manifest to all". 1 Tim. 4 : 14, 15 (R.V.).

This exhortation of v. 31 teaches us that gift is not a permanent and stationary thing, of which each gets a certain quantity to begin with, that may be neither added to nor diminished afterwards. The command to "desire earnestly the greater gifts" implies that they are obtainable ; and this is emphasised by its repetition in almost the same words at ch. 14 : 1, where the subject is resumed, after the long parenthesis on the importance of love which occupies ch. 13, with the exhortation, "Desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy". The latter is followed by a passage designed to show that "prophecy" is a greater gift than is "speaking with tongues"; and then at the end of the chapter we yet again find the words, "Covet (R.V. 'desire earnestly', as in v. 1 and ch. 12 : 31) to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues". It is therefore quite evident that, by prayer and exercise, gift may be developed and increased.

We have spoken of the 13th chapter as a parenthesis, but that in no wise lessens its importance and significance. It not only supplies the lubricating oil to the machinery of ch. 12, ere it comes into action in ch. 14, but also furnishes the true antidote to all the evils wherewith the Church of Corinth was ravaged. It has already been pointed out that the phrase, "Love envieth not" (ch. 13 : 4), stands over against the jealousy of ch. 12 : 15, 16, and "Love vaunteth not itself" over against the pride of ch. 12 : 21. In like manner we may add that the love which "is not puffed up" would have left no room for the party spirit of ch. 1 : 12, etc. ; the love that "rejoiceth not in iniquity" would have prevented their complaisant tolerance of the evil thing in ch. 5 ; the love which "suffereth long and is kind" would have

hindered the lawsuits with their brethren of ch. 6 ; the love that "seeketh not her own" would never trample on the consciences of fellow-believers as in ch. 8 ; and the love which "doth not behave itself unseemly" would have put a bar on both the forwardness of certain women and the drunkenness of ch. 11. Moreover, this same many-sided love would, if we possessed it, solve most of our present-day Assembly troubles ; because true-hearted love for our Lord and for His people would find a way out of them all.

Indeed it is of interest to note that the term "a way", which we have just now used, is the very one with which love is introduced in our passage. To the exhortation, "Desire earnestly the greater gifts" (ch. 12 : 31, R.V.) is added, "And a still more excellent WAY show I unto you". Mark, it is not "a more excellent thing", but "a more excellent way". Paul does in the 13th chapter prove clearly that, both in importance and in permanence, love is a greater thing than the greatest of the gifts, but his first aim is rather to point out that love is the most excellent WAY to discover which really is the greater gift ; to attain to it when discovered ; and to exercise it when attained. If I have love, I will judge the greater gift to be that one which will help and profit God's people most. I shall, for example, at once agree that "greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues"; because my aim will be, not self-glorification, but "that the church may receive edifying". Nay more, I shall count it "greater" to be able to speak "five words" that will reach the hearts and consciences of the saints, than to have the ability to put together "ten thousand" great swelling words of vanity that will not.

Furthermore, I shall realise that the absence of this love would render useless any gift I might possess. I shall say with the apostle that, though I could speak with all the eloquence and ability of men and angels, unless I have love I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal ; that though I should excel in the gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and faith, without the love I would be nothing ; that though I should display the utmost zeal in giving away all my property, and even suffering the loss of life itself, apart from love it all would profit me nothing. That is to say, I would be of no value, either to the saints (v. 1), or in God's sight (v. 2), or to myself (v. 3). For after all, most of these things which are enumerated in vv. 1-3 are such as might lend themselves to ostentation and display, unless under the control of the love which gives to them their real value.

In the latter part of ch. 13 we have the permanence of love contrasted with the temporary character of the gifts. Love, and its sister graces, faith and hope, will ever "abide" (v. 13); but the gifts will be superseded "when that which is perfect is come", when we see "face to face" instead of "in a mirror", when "we know even as we are known". Personally, I have no doubt that all these expressions take us beyond the coming of the Lord ; though I am aware that some hold otherwise, and apply some or all of them to a time then shortly to arrive, when the New Testament Scriptures would be complete. But in the first place, any careful reading of the passage will show that only one terminus is before the writer's mind, though expressed in these three differing forms, and that therefore all three bear the same reference. Once this is granted, I can only say that any student of the verses who is able to persuade himself that we today, even with the completed Scriptures in our hands, "see face to face", and "know even as we are known", whereas our brother Paul was only able to see "in a glass darkly",

is welcome to his opinion. But let the passage be placed alongside the parallel one on the gifts in Eph. 4, and it should at once be evident that the same goal is in view in both, and that the terminus which is here described as "when that which is perfect is come", and seeing "face to face", and knowing "even as also we are known", is the very same which is there spoken of as attaining unto "the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4 : 13). And this state of things, most of us will agree, is not what we see around us today.

CHAPTER XVII

We have already to some extent been occupied with chapter 14, while we were considering its connections with the two chapters that precede it. If these connections are kept in mind they will assist towards an understanding of it ; because the three chapters taken together, form as we have seen, a distinct and definite section of the epistle.

It appears evident, from the way in which chapter 12 begins, that the subject of the gifts was one of those concerning which the Corinthians had written to Paul (ch. 7 : 11); but from chapter 14 it also seems that the reports which had reached him as to their conduct (ch. 1 : 11) included a reference to the manner in which they had been misusing some of these gifts in their meetings. That there were at least three manifestations of this evil is suggested in our chapter, and all three of them arose through exercising gift for mere display, instead of for edification. They were:—

1. Undue prominence given to speaking with tongues, as being the most showy among those gifts which they possessed. With this the greater part of the chapter is taken up.
2. Unwillingness to wait upon one another, which led to several exercising their gifts at once, and resulted in "confusion" (vv 30-33).
3. Certain women pushing themselves to the front by claiming the same right to take part in public ministry as the men (vv. 34-36).

Numerous questions have been raised as to the matters here dealt with, and many and various are the opinions which have been expressed concerning them. Instead of adding to the number of these, we shall, however, in keeping with our title, "note" some of the clues that are to be found in the chapter itself, and also elsewhere, for our assistance in rightly understanding it.

One of them, to which attention was drawn when we were considering ch. 11, is the repetition, seven times in all, in that chapter and in this, of the Greek word which is rendered "come together". These are, as was said, the only places in the New Testament where it is used with reference to meetings of the Assembly ; and they form such a bond between the two chapters as should make us slow to draw any distinction between the meetings which are in view in each case, even though ch. 11 has to do with the ordinance of remembrance, and ch. 14 with the ministry.

Another expression which points in the same direction is the phrase "in church" (without the definite article in the Greek, although it is inserted

in the A.V.). This occurs in vv. 19, 28, 35 of chapter 14, and is only found elsewhere in chapter 11 : 18. It evidently means "in the church as assembled for a meeting", and may be contrasted with the other phrase, "in the church" (with the article), which we get in ch. 6 : 4 ; ch. 12 : 28, etc.

As for the two gifts, "prophesying" and "speaking with tongues", regarding which our chapter has so much to say, it will be noticed that while the latter apparently was considered by the Corinthians to be the greatest gift they possessed, the former was in Paul's own estimation second only to apostleship (see ch. 12 : 28 and Eph. 4 : 11). They were therefore well suited to illustrate the lesson he sought to teach here—that the aim in exercising gift should be, not self-display, but the profit of the saints. Yet when this lesson has been learned, it has a much wider application than to these two only, as may be seen in v. 26, where after mentioning the exercise of various gifts the apostle adds, "Let all things be done unto edifying".

These exhortations given in this chapter to "desire spiritual gifts" (v. 1), to "pray that he may interpret" (v. 13), and to covet to prophesy" (v. 39), like that in ch. 12 : 31 to "covet earnestly the greater (R.V.) gifts", imply, as was pointed out already, that these gifts might be obtained by prayer and exercise concerning them. If not, the exhortations would be meaningless ; while if this was so, the statement one sometimes hears made, that such gifts could only be obtained by the laying on of the apostle's hands, would appear to be incorrect. That they were at certain times conferred in that manner we know from Acts 19 : 6, just as we know from 2 Tim. 1 : 6 that the evangelist Timothy received gift in the same way. Yet few would be found to contend that only by laying on of an apostle's hands can the gift of evangelist be given.

It may be said that to concede this point is giving something away to those who would uphold the present-day silly imitations of "speaking with tongues" and "prophesying"; but truth is never really helped by bringing to its aid statements which cannot be clearly proved from the Scriptures, and which only pass current because they have not been tested.

Another example of the same kind is the opinion sometimes expressed that the gift of tongues resulted in ability to preach the gospel in foreign languages previously unknown. We have neither a statement to this effect, nor an example of it, in the Word of God ; and it is inconsistent with the fact, plainly set forth in 1 Cor. 14 : 13 that a man might possess the gift, and yet be unable to interpret what he himself had said. That the "tongues" were actual foreign languages is clear enough from the exclamation of the strangers from all parts in Acts 2 : 8-11. "How hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born". But the same passage also shows that the words which they heard were not gospel addresses directed to themselves, but a speaking forth as the Spirit gave utterance of "the wonderful works of God". And no indication is given that the speakers understood their own utterances, although these strangers did. Similarly, in 1 Cor. 14 the exercise of the gift of tongues is described as praying (v. 14), as singing (v. 15), as giving of thanks (v. 16), but not as gospel preaching.

Yet on the other hand, scarcely any city could be named in which in those days more foreigners were to be found than in Corinth, a fact which may suggest a reason for the Lord dispensing this gift so much more widely there than seems to have been the case elsewhere ; not as a means of direct

gospel preaching to such, but "for a sign" (v. 22), just as had been the case at Pentecost.

As to "Prophesying", it would be no easy matter to give a definition of that word sufficiently wide to embrace all the circumstances in which it is introduced in the Word of God. In our modern speech it has become so bound up with foretelling what is future, that we can scarcely think of it in any other connection ; yet very much of what the Bible calls prophesying is not at all of this character.

At the one extreme it is used of the fully and verbally inspired writings found in the Scriptures, while at the other we have it applied even to the music and thanksgiving of the Levites in the Temple services. See I Chronicles 25 : 1-3, and note the remarkable expression in v. 2, where it is said that they "prophesied according to the order of the king". Might we say that in like manner the prophets in Corinth were to prophesy "according to the order" of the apostle as given in this 14th chapter, and emphasised in its closing verses ? At least it is clear that what is here called prophesyings cannot be on the same plane as the writings of the O.T. prophets, since Paul feels free to limit their quantity, and suggests in v. 29 that others present should judge as to their quality. If these men were speaking in the very words which God at the time was giving them to speak, would the apostle have dared to thus limit them ? And yet on the other hand, the use of the words "revelation" (v. 6) and "revealed" (v. 30) would assure us that in some sense they were delivering messages from God.

Probably the closest parallel to them in O.T. prophesying would be that of which we read in Num. 11 : 25-27 on the part of the seventy elders. There too Moses was asked to "forbid" some of them, and his reply, "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets", sounds very like Paul's words here, "I would that ye all . . . prophesied" (v. 5).

One thing more. In the middle of ch. 14 an interesting point is suggested by the mention of certain people called the "unlearned". That these were not members of the local church seems plain from the wording of v. 23, "If therefore the **WHOLE** church be come together . . . and there come in those that are unlearned". Yet on the other hand, they are carefully distinguished from the unsaved by the phrase used, both in this verse and in v. 24, "unlearned, **OR** unbelievers", and "one that believeth not, **OR** one unlearned". Who then can they be, if not such as having professed faith in Christ have not yet been received into the fellowship of the Assembly ? We may leave it to those who tell us that there is no such thing in the New Testament as reception into a local church, to find some other explanation of them consistent with what the chapter says of them. Meanwhile it is to be noticed that though either the unlearned person or the unbeliever may be led to acknowledge that "God is in you of a truth" (v. 25), it is only the unlearned, and not the unbeliever, who is thought of as saying "Amen" to the thanksgivings (v. 16).

CHAPTER XVIII

At chapter 15 we come to the last of the Assembly troubles dealt with in this epistle, unsound teaching which had got a foothold among them on the subject of the resurrection. Although it is last mentioned, it was by no

means least of the evils prevalent, for the doctrine of the resurrection is, according to Heb. 6 : 2 one of those of which go to form the very foundation of God's revealed truth. This indeed is also shown in our chapter, where it is proved to be so closely bound up with the gospel message that to deny it is equivalent to denying the gospel itself, and thereby robbing Christ of His glory as a risen Saviour.

The same effect is commonly produced by all serious doctrinal errors, and even by many errors which do not at first sight appear to be serious at all. Christ is dishonoured by them, and the gospel shorn of its power. The fact that it is so provides a means of detecting error which is available to even the simplest Christian, however unskilled in argument and logic he may be. Such a one can ask himself, does this teaching tend to the glory of Christ? Is it in keeping with the clear gospel testimony that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures"? If he can reply to these two questions in the affirmative, he has little to fear from it; but if not, the doctrine is of the devil, even though it may have come to him well bolstered up with Bible texts severed from their context.

On the subject of the resurrection of the saints 1 Cor. 15 is the fullest passage in the Scriptures, and treats the matter from the broadest point of view. Yet, as has been already mentioned, it was written in the first instance for the sake of correcting error that was being disseminated in the Corinthian assembly. As we learn from v. 12, there were actually some among them who said there was no resurrection; but here again, as in the rest of the epistle, their failures have turned to our gain; and have given to us this beautiful chapter, in which clear reasoning, sound teaching, lively description and apt illustration are so well blended together.

Its place, so near to the end of the epistle, is in some respects the most suitable it could occupy. It was fitting that the apostle, ere he closed his letter to them, should direct the thoughts of these worldly-minded saints from the present to the future, and from the things which are temporal to those which are eternal. Had they been looking for such things they would, as Peter expresses it, have been giving diligence "to be found of Him IN PEACE" (2 Pet. 3 : 14); instead of forming parties, and taking one another to the law courts. Had they been "looking for that blessed hope", they would have been "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts" (Titus 2 : 12, 13); instead of being found at the feasts of their unsaved neighbours. Had they been looking for Him "Who shall change our vile body" (Phil. 3 : 21) they would have been kept from many of the evils into which they had fallen, and especially they would not have been trying to "reign as kings" before the time, as we find them doing in ch. 4 : 8.

This 15th chapter is in one respect the ideal of what we could have wished all the chapter divisions in our Bible, so far as possible, to be. Its subject begins at its first verse, and is finished at its closing verse, so that one does not, as is sometimes the case elsewhere, incur the danger of missing the connection, owing to a chapter heading coming in between. Its matter divides naturally into two great sections, (vv. 1-34 and vv. 35-57, with v. 58 added as a practical exhortation grounded on both. In the former section the apostle deals with those who denied the FACT of resurrection, and in the latter with such as questioned the MANNER of it. The key to

the first part is found in v. 12, "How say some among you that there is NO resurrection of the dead"; while v. 35 gives the key to the second part, "Some man will say, HOW are the dead raised up, and with WHAT BODY do they come".

The little word "some" which occurs in both these verses is often one of sad import in Paul's epistles. Even in those early days of the Church's history "some" were turning aside from God's path in one direction and "some" in another. In the letters to Timothy, written almost at the close of the apostle's life, we find it in this sense, as might be expected, most frequently; but even here in 1 Cor. we get it so applied in various verses, as well as in that solemn passage of ch. 10 : 6-10, where it is used four times over of Israel in the wilderness by way of warning to ourselves.

While we cannot here deal with these occurrences in general, it is of interest to notice that in quite a few passages the word is introduced in connection with wrong views as to resurrection. Thus in Acts 17 : 32, when Paul in his address at Mars' Hill mentioned the subject, we read that "when they heard of the resurrection of the dead SOME mocked". This is of course the crudest and most unbelieving attitude possible, and it was probably in the main that of the Epicureans who were present on the occasion, and whose doctrines might very well be summed up in the words which the apostle here in 1 Cor. 15 : 32 quotes from Isa. 22 : 13, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die".

Next to these, although claiming a place among saints, we may set the SOME of 1 Cor. 15 : 12 who say that "there is no resurrection of the dead", a view little if at all different from that of the Athenian mockers. And then we come to 2 Tim. 2 : 17, 18, where the faith of SOME is overthrown by taking in the teaching of Hymanaeus and Philetus that "the resurrection is past already". These men, being unable to attain sufficient prominence while going on right lines, sought to reach it by striking out into a new line of teaching, as false as it was new, and they are not without successors today. Lastly we arrive at the SOME of our 35th verse, who instead of directly denying the resurrection, raised sceptical difficulties as to how it could take place.

The words of our Lord Jesus to the Sadducees in Mark 12 : 24 (R.V.) might well be used to all these later Sadducees of the passages we have cited, "Is it not for this cause that ye err, that ye know not the Scriptures nor the power of God?" Knowledge of the Scriptures would have prevented error as to the FACT of resurrection; and knowledge of God's power would have silenced all cavilling as to the METHOD of it.

CHAPTER XIX

We have seen how the subject of the resurrection, which occupies ch. 15 is dealt with by the writer in two parts, one proving the FACT of it (vv. 1-34), and the other describing the MANNER of it (vv. 35-57). Now the object in the first of these sections being to vindicate the fact of resurrection, the apostle sets about it thus. In the opening verses he takes the Corinthians back to the gospel message which he had preached to them at the first; a message based both on divine authority and on personal experience (v. 3); a message which they at that time had received in which

they even now had their standing as saints, and through which alone they could claim to be saved from the wrath to come (vv. 1, 2). He points out to them that this message involved resurrection, since its burden was that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He had been raised again the third day according to the Scriptures (vv. 3, 4, R.V.).

This, the Gospel of the resurrection, was then and is still what God uses to the conversion of sinners ; and yet many, even those who should know better, do not keep as closely to it in their preaching as they might. Paul in his last letter to Timothy says, "Remember that Jesus Christ . . . was raised from the dead, according to my Gospel" (2 Tim. 2 : 8). Let us therefore keep always in mind that our message is not of a dead, but of a living Saviour, even of One Who has said, "I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore".

Having shown that Christ's resurrection was a part of the gospel message, Paul in vv. 5-11 goes on to point out how well attested His resurrection is. He enumerates six of the more important appearances of our Lord to His people after it had taken place ; of which two were to all the apostles ; one (possibly on the occasion of the pre-arranged and therefore official meeting of Matt. 28 on the Galilean mountain) was to more than five hundred disciples ; while the other three were to three great leaders of the saints separately, to Peter, to James (probably the one elsewhere spoken of as "the Lord's brother") and to Paul himself. He follows this by reminding them in vv. 12-19 that, since denial of resurrection in general includes the denial of that of Christ in particular, it meant taking away the foundation from everything which as saints we claim to possess. Then in vv. 20-28 he emphasises that, just as death was involved in our relationship to Adam, so life and resurrection are necessarily involved in our relationship to Christ. And finally in vv. 29-34 he shows that the conduct and mode of living adopted by himself and by the saints generally was meaningless and profitless, if there were to be no resurrection and no glorious future. In that case the silly saying, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die", might be thought of as words of wisdom.

Passing to the second section of our chapter, the difficulties suggested by some as to the manner of resurrection are crystallised in the two questions with which it begins at v. 35, "How are the dead raised up ?" and "With what body do they come ?" The apostle first by various analogies shows how unreasonable such questionings are. How foolish it was that one accustomed to put seed in the earth to die, with the expectation that it would rise again in a crop for his use, should enquire, "How are the dead raised up ?" How foolish that one should ask, "With what body do they come ?" who had daily before his eyes the marvellous variety which at present exists in creation ; the differences in the earthly animate creation as between its parts, men, beasts, birds, and fishes, each with a nature suited to its environment ; the differences between all this earthly portion of creation and that which is celestial ; the differences between the various members of the celestial creation itself. Alongside all these contrasts he sets that between the "natural" body we now possess and the "spiritual" body we shall have at the resurrection, in a sublime passage (vv. 42-49), which has been read by gravesides times innumerable.

From this reasoning by analogies he turns to answer the sceptical

questions of v. 35 more directly, and he does so by making known to them what had been revealed to himself concerning the coming of the Lord and its results. In v. 52 he replies to "How are the dead raised up?" in the words, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump", etc. And in v. 53 he answers, "With what body do they come?" by saying, "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality", etc. Finally, with overflowing heart as he contemplates the glorious prospect, the apostle breaks forth into one of his characteristic outbursts of thanksgiving, "Thanks be unto God Who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ".

A glorious prospect indeed it is, one which, were it to occupy our own hearts as it did that of Paul, would draw and constrain us in every part of our conduct and service. If the dim, far-away glory of the "City which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God" had power to so fill the eyes and hearts of the O.T. saints of Heb. 11 : 8-16, that they had no desire to return to the country whence they came out, surely the full brightness of N.T. revelation on the coming of the Lord, which shines for us in this passage and many more, should have at least as much power over us.

But is it so? We profess to hold the sound doctrine of His coming again for His saints, of the resurrection of those who have died in Christ, and of the Judgment Seat where all faithful service shall receive its reward; but what fruit of this is seen in our lives? Is it consistent with our anxiety to copy and even outdo worldlings in so many of their ways, and with our utter lack of energy where the things of God are concerned?

But listen to the exhortation with which our chapter closes: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord". Here is a mode of living which is directly opposite to that referred to in the middle of the chapter as being the natural one for those who do not believe in resurrection. That was "Let us eat and drink, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE"; but this is "Let us be stedfast and abound, FOR TOMORROW WE SHALL FIND THAT IT HAS NOT BEEN IN VAIN". Should we not test ourselves as to which of these two diametrically opposed principles we are making the motto of our lives? Can we truly say with Paul, in his next epistle to these same Corinthians, "For which cause we faint not, . . . for our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal"?

Look again, yet more closely, at this concluding exhortation. Each word in it will be found to have an importance of its own. Thus, "Be ye stedfast" has regard to something within ourselves. It is the same Greek word which occurs in ch. 7 : 37, in the expression, "Stedfast in his heart"; and it means here, do not be slack or shaky in your grip upon the truth which God has taught you: hold it fast and let it hold you fast. Next, "unmoveable" suggests danger from without; just as does the Greek verb from which the word here is derived, in Col. 1 : 23, "Be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel". It means, do not allow others to shift you from what you have learned, however plausible they may be. Thirdly, we get "always

abounding in the work of the Lord", a feature which will ever be the practical and outward effect of being "stedfast" and "unmoveable"; unless our stedfastness is mere stubbornness, and our unmoveableness mere stiff-neckedness. Soundness in doctrine and soundness in practice go hand in hand in this exhortation, as they do everywhere else in the Scriptures; whereas, we have seen from the middle of our chapter, wrong doctrine, together with its ill effects, produces loose living.

One further point. Let us not think that we are "always abounding" if we are merely holding our ground. It implies growth and progress, being the same word as is rendered "increase" in 1 Thess. 4 : 10; and it is surely fitting that, as we get nearer our goal, we should "increase more and more" in devotedness to our Lord.

CHAPTER XX

Ere we take our leave of this great epistle, some matters in its final chapter deserve our attention. The first which strikes us as we turn to it is the introduction, immediately after the picture of our glorious future presented in ch. 15, and the exhortation based thereon to be "always abounding in the work of the Lord", of instructions with regard to the collection for poor saints at Jerusalem. It seems as though the apostle would remind them that to give according to their means was one way of abounding in the Lord's work; and as if, while he did not accept gifts from them himself (ch. 9 : 14, 15; 2 Cor. 11 : 9), he desired to provide some outlet for their liberality.

This subject, as is well known, is followed up and very fully dealt with in the 8th and 9th chapters of his second epistle; and by putting together what he says concerning it, both there and here, we learn that our giving should be done—

1. Spiritually (2 Cor. 8 : 5).
2. Willingly (2 Cor. 8 : 12).
3. Cheerfully (2 Cor. 9 : 7).
4. Bountifully (2 Cor. 9 : 6).
5. Proportionately (1 Cor. 16 : 2).
6. Honestly (2 Cor. 8 : 21).
7. Regularly (1 Cor. 16 : 2).

There follows references to his great work then going on at Ephesus, with its hindrances, and to his purposed journeyings; all of which should be studied in close connection with the first two chapters of 2 Cor., where we see the further developments that had taken place by the time he wrote to them again. Then in vv. 15-18 he speaks of the household of Stephanas, the baptism of whose members had been referred to in ch. 1. Stephanas himself appears to have been present with Paul at the time of writing according to v. 17; and the two others named in that verse, Fortunatas and Achaicus, were probably members of his family.

They were held in high esteem by the apostle, and he exhorts the saints to be subject to godly leaders such as they had proved themselves to be. These few verses, with ch. 1 : 16, contain all that we know of them; and it is interesting to place in order what facts we have. They were—

1. The first to be converted in Corinth ("Firstfruits of Achaia"), 1 Cor. 16: 15.
2. Baptised in due course, ch. 1 : 16.
3. Addicted to serving the saints, v. 15.
4. In happy fellowship with other workers ("Helpers with us"), v. 16.
5. Real plodders ("laboureth" is literally "toileth"), v. 16.
6. Willing to supply any need which arose, v. 17.
7. A source of refreshing and joy to Paul and others, v. 18.

Comment on these points is unnecessary, except to say that a "household" of this stamp would be a welcome addition to any assembly, and workers such as they would seldom have to complain of fellow preachers slighting them.

One other matter, and we have finished. Most of Paul's letters were dictated to a helper who wrote down the words from the apostle's lips, the only certain exception to this being the epistle to the Galatians (Gal. 6: 11), though there may have been others. At the close of each it was his custom to add a greeting in his own handwriting, and this greeting stands out more prominently in some than in others. Most prominent of all are those in 1 Cor., Col., and 2 Thess., which are distinctly labelled "The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand"; and among the three, that which we have here at vv. 21, 22 is pre-eminent. Its words are, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, Maranatha".

Now in the Old Testament we have curses pronounced for many things. In Deut. 27, for example, we find no less than twelve of them in succession. But in the New Testament it is otherwise, and only two fresh curses are pronounced, both of which are solemnly important. In Gal. 1 : 8-9 Paul's first message to the saints of Galatia, after his introductory salutation, is a curse (Gr. anathema), twice repeated, on anyone who sets forth a gospel other than that which gives all the glory of salvation to Christ. And here at v. 22 his closing and personally written message is a curse (anathema) upon anyone who does not love this blessed Saviour.

It is a strikingly suitable note on which to conclude this letter ; for as has already been remarked when dealing with ch. 13, love to Christ and consequent love to the brethren would have proved a preventative of every one of the evils which were found amongst the Corinthian saints. We would not, however, suggest that they were entirely without love, for it is the one inimitable mark of every soul that is really born from above that "we love Him because He first loved us"; and it is only the devil's counterfeits who have no love whatever to the Lord. Mere professors may resemble those who are real in almost everything outward, but there is no spark of affection in their hearts for Him.

The word, or rather two words, "Maran atha", with which the apostle's autographic salutation ends, is not a mere tailpiece to the rest of it, but forms a complete sentence in itself, which translated into English means "Our Lord is coming". Although the preceding word "anathema" has been left untranslated in the A.V., it is ordinary Greek similar to the forepart of the sentence in which it occurs, and had already been rendered "accursed" in ch. 12 : 3 of our epistle, as well as in Gal. 1 : 8, 9. But "Maran atha" is in Aramaic, the vernacular language of the Jews since the captivity ; so that Paul sets part of his message in a Greek, and part in a Jewish dress, as if to include all those of whom in ch. 1 he had said, "Unto them which

are called, both Jews and Greeks (He is) Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God”.

In “Maran atha” (our Lord is coming) another fitting note is struck as the epistle closes. For while the former part of the apostle’s message recalls to us what he had written concerning love in ch. 13, this latter part reminds us of what he had penned regarding Christ’s Coming in ch. 15. And as love to Him is the badge of the Lord’s own, and will cause them to walk in a way well pleasing to Him, so the hope of His Coming, burning brightly in their hearts, will constrain them to occupy their time with His service, “always abounding in the work of the Lord”. May each of us, as the days go by, learn more and more experimentally of the compelling power of these two affections, **LOVE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST** and **LOVE OF HIS APPEARING** ; that so we may be preserved from bringing reproach on the testimony, as did the Corinthians in those early days.

Notes on the Pastoral Epistles

CHAPTER I

THE MEN ADDRESSED

To some of our readers the term "Pastoral Epistles" may be unfamiliar, but it is one frequently used by commentators as an inclusive title for the letters of Paul to Timothy and Titus. Of its suitability there can be no question, since these epistles were written to them while engaged in important pastoral or shepherd work among the saints in Ephesus and Crete respectively, and contain much to instruct and guide in that service, not only them, but all who would follow in their footsteps.

This does not imply that Timothy and Titus were "pastors" in the sense in which the word is used by certain sects of the present day, as the designation of an individual appointed and paid by them to do all their preaching and praying in a particular congregation. Still less does it mean that the two brethren were "bishops" over the churches, in the places named, as is suggested by the end notes of the Authorised Version. These form no part of the inspired epistles, and are omitted on that account from the Revised Version. Indeed the statement at the close of 2nd Timothy, that Timothy was "ordained first bishop of the church of the Ephesians", is on the face of it absurd, since a body of men, who had been made by the Holy Ghost "overseers" (R.V. "bishops") over that church, were already existent at the time spoken of in Acts 20 : 28, which was before Timothy had any special relationship with it. And almost as absurd in another way is the note at the end of Titus, which states that the epistle was written from Nicopolis, whereas Paul's own word "there" at chapter 3 : 12 shows that he had not yet reached Nicopolis when he was writing. If he had, he would of course have said "here" instead of "there".

From the opening verses of both Timothy and Titus it is quite clear that these servants of Christ did not hold any permanent office in the churches of Ephesus and Crete, but that they were left temporarily behind by Paul, who himself had been visiting each place, in order that they might further some arrangements which he saw to be needful for the welfare of the saints, and also that they might restrain certain forward men from teaching things which would be hurtful to the testimony. When they had so far accomplished this, that other workers such as Artemas and Tychicus could carry on in their stead, they were to return to the apostle, as we find him arranging for in Titus 3 : 12 and 2 Tim. 4 : 9, 12.

It is also evident that Timothy and Titus had been given authority by Paul, ere he left them, to do things which in ordinary course were apostolic work, such as the appointing of elders in the assemblies ; and in this connection it is interesting to notice the different way in which that matter is mentioned in Titus 1 : 5, as compared with 1 Tim. 3 : 1. Titus is to "set in order the things wanting, and appoint elders in every city"; which suggests that there had not previously been any recognised elders in Crete. And this is just what we might expect, as we have no record of apostolic

work in that island at an earlier period. On the other hand, in 1 Tim. 3 what is said is, "If any man desire oversight . . . a bishop must be blameless", etc., which is in keeping with the fact that there were overseers or elders at Ephesus already, and it was merely a question of adding to their number.

It was no doubt a great comfort to Paul, knowing as he did that his own course was almost ended, to have two younger men such as Timothy and Titus, who had not only the ability but also the burning desire to help on the saints in the Lord's ways. When Moses in like manner knew that the time for his departure had come (Num. 27 : 12-17), and also, like Paul, knew that evil days lay ahead for God's people (Deut. 31 : 29), his cry was, "Let the Lord . . . set a man . . . which may lead them out, and which may bring them in ; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd". The apostle, we may be sure, had the same wish, and he could look upon these two as being the right type of men to meet the need.

We think of the words of commendation he had at an earlier period written about each of them. Of Titus in 2 Cor. 8 : 23 he had said, "He is my partner and fellowhelper concerning you"; and in the same epistle had spoken of his "inward affection" and his "joy" when he saw the saints eager to set things right which had been wrong. Concerning Timothy we have the strongest expression of approval ever used by Paul of a fellow-worker. In Phil. 2 : 19-23 he says, "I have no man like-minded who will naturally care for your state". Both men had been much in his company, and had proved themselves willing learners. Now all this experience which they had gained was to be of good service to them, after he was gone.

This need which Moses felt and which Paul felt is with us still – the need that younger men should be raised up to carry on "the testimony of our Lord", as one by one the older leaders, who have been much used and blessed of God to the upbuilding of His people, are being called home. But it is a matter regarding which we could feel almost in despair at times, when we think of the lack of spirituality and devotedness, so painfully evident among a large and increasing portion of the younger members of our assemblies. Of ability of a sort there is no lack ; but ability without spirituality and devotedness will accomplish Satan's ends, rather than the work of God. Korah, Dathan and Abiram were able men in their own way, "famous in the congregation and men of renown"; and they could draw over the majority of God's people to their side (Num. 16 : 1, 2, 19); but the result was disaster for all concerned. Hymenaeus and Philetus, too, were clever young men no doubt, but the net effect of their clever teachings was to "overthrow the faith of some" (2 Tim. 2 : 16-19). May the Lord deliver us from unbalanced ability such as theirs, and raise up among us Joshuas and Timothies, men who have been learners before they became teachers, and who will steadfastly carry on the testimony, instead of finding their delight in pulling down what godlier men than they had built up.

CHAPTER II

THE SUBJECT MATTER

To his two friends, Timothy and Titus, each left to face great difficulties in connection with the important though temporary service committed to

them, Paul sends these epistles for their guidance and encouragement. They are the last letters of his that have come down to us, and were all three written shortly before his death. This, so far as 2nd Timothy is concerned, is plainly stated in chapter 4 : 6-8, and when once it is seen to be true of that epistle, it follows that it must also be true of the others ; for there are many proofs of close relationship between them, as well as of their being later than the other writings of the apostle. The same aspects of truth are emphasised, as we shall see, in all three ; and certain words and phrases recur in them frequently, which are seldom or not at all found elsewhere.

For example, there are in the New Testament two Greek words usually translated "doctrine". These are from the same root, but their differing forms cause them to have a slight difference in their meaning. One more particularly signifies the act of teaching, and the other the matter of the teaching. Now the former is the word commonly used in the Gospels, Acts, and elsewhere, yet in our three epistles it occurs but twice ; while the latter is found in them no less than fifteen times, and in all the rest of the New Testament only six times. Another illustration is the word which means "healthy" or "health-giving", usually rendered "sound". Elsewhere it is used just three times in Luke and once in 3 John, always with reference to bodily health. But in the letters to Timothy and Titus it occurs eight times, and in every instance has to do, not with bodily, but with spiritual health. Still another example is the word rendered "godliness", which is found in no other of Paul's writings except these three, and in them appears nearly a dozen times. We shall take occasion later on to refer to the setting of these and other similar words ; and it will be found to emphasise yet more that the three epistles form a group by themselves.

The time when they were written was not only subsequent to the events recorded in the last chapter of Acts, which would be true of Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians as well ; but even lay beyond the termination of the imprisonment in Rome which is mentioned in that chapter, from which, as we learn in Phil. 1 : 23-26, Paul was set free to serve his Lord and the saints a little longer. After that, he was once more arrested and put in a Roman jail, this time, as we know from 2 Tim. 4, never to leave it until his course was ended, and by way of a martyr's death he departed to be with Christ.

Concerning this portion of the apostle's life we know little, except that after his release he paid visits to a number of places, some of which are mentioned in our epistles themselves. Whether he took the journey into Spain, referred to in Rom. 15 : 24 we cannot be certain, but it was the commonly received tradition amongst early saints that he did. We do, however, definitely know that he went to Crete (Tit. 1 : 5), an island at which the ship had touched when he was being brought a prisoner to Rome, and at which it had been his advice that they should shelter until the rough weather was past. Whether they remained long enough for him to do some work for his Master we do not know ; but it is unlikely, since his advice was turned down, and the ship proceeded on its journey, only to be wrecked shortly afterwards. In any case he had seen the island and felt its need ; and when at length he became a free man again, he returned to it.

He also at this time visited Ephesus (1 Tim. 1 : 3), Miletus (2 Tim. 4 : 20), and possibly some other towns in Asia, since it would appear to be at this

juncture that the sad incident, referred to in 2 Tim. 1 : 15 (see R.V.) took place. At Miletus, Trophimus, who was accompanying him, had to be left behind on account of illness, while Paul crossed over, as more than once he had done in earlier days, to Macedonia. There he doubtless could visit old friends at Philippi, Thessalonica, etc., before passing on to Corinth, at which place another companion, Erastus, whose native town it likely was, remained behind (2 Tim. 4 : 20, with Rom. 16 : 23).

It was probably while at Corinth that the apostle wrote 1st Timothy and Titus, and perhaps from there that he went north-westward along the coast to Nicopolis, at which place he purposed to spend the winter, and desired to have Titus come to him (Titus 3 : 12). Either there, or before he reached it, his final arrest seems to have taken place, for the next place we find him is in prison in Rome. And when from that prison he wrote 2nd Timothy, he had no other anticipation than that his course was finished.

There are those, it may be, to whom this tracing of Paul's movements, and of the time in his life at which these letters were written, may seem of little value. But it will help immensely to an intelligent understanding of the three epistles, and will also enhance their importance to us, as containing that line of things which the apostle, at the very close of his career, judged it needful that Timothy and Titus should impress upon the saints where they were.

When we compare them with his earlier writings, we find a considerable change, not in what he teaches, but in the comparative emphasis with which different parts of his teaching are set forth. In those former epistles doctrine is the prominent thing—the doctrine of the Gospel, the doctrine of the Church and its order, the doctrine of the Coming of the Lord, and so on. In all of them there are, of course, practical exhortations based on these doctrines, but they are more or less in the background. In the epistles to Timothy and Titus, however, the order is reversed. There is little that is new in doctrine, but there is very much about conduct, and very much warning of evil days ahead. It is stressed in them again and again that it is the manner of life produced by it, which proves the soundness of the doctrine.

Why there should be this change in the character of the apostle's written ministry is not difficult to understand. The former epistles were to converts comparatively young, and to assemblies in an early stage of experience, so that much instruction in doctrine was necessary. But by the time Paul sat down to write these three last letters many strange developments had begun to show themselves amongst the saints. Some who had made loud profession with their lips had failed to manifest the reality of it in altered lives. Many who for a time had done well, had now from various causes fallen by the way. And not a few from whom better things had been expected had turned out to be fomenters of trouble and discord in the assemblies. These things were well known to Paul as he wrote, and their effect on him is evident in every sentence he set down.

CHAPTER III

LINKS WITH OTHER SCRIPTURES

While considering, as we have been doing in our last chapter, the character of Paul's ministry in these later epistles of his, as compared with that in his

earlier ones, it may be of interest to turn also our thoughts to the letters of his fellow apostle Peter. For they in all probability were written shortly after these of Paul to Timothy and Titus ; and since Peter, like Paul, was thinking of his "decease" as being close at hand when he wrote them (2 Pet. 1 : 13-15), we may expect to find in them, too, matters with regard to which that great servant of Christ judged it needful to "stir up the saints by putting them in remembrance" (2 Pet. 3 : 1), in view of his imminent departure.

On comparing them with Paul's last writings, it will be found that they are in much the same strain ; special emphasis being laid on conduct (or "conversation", as it is somewhat unfortunately rendered in the A.V.), and solemn warning being given as to false teachers and other evils of the "last days"; just as is the case in 1st and 2nd Timothy. One notable difference there is, however, between them, in the many references Peter makes to a fierce persecution that meanwhile had arisen, a persecution of which both Paul and he ultimately became victims.

The saints to whom Peter's epistles were written included those of "Asia" (1 Pet. 1 : 1), the province of which Ephesus was at that time the capital city ; and since Timothy was at Ephesus when Paul wrote to him, we have here an additional link in connection between these writings. It is, however, but one of many such links in the New Testament, of which quite a large section has association of some kind with Ephesus and its neighbourhood ; and it will assist considerably towards an intelligent grasp of any one passage or book in that section if its connection with the others and its place in the series are kept in mind.

To begin with, we have in Acts the account of Paul's great work there, when, after having been forbidden on an earlier occasion (chap. 16 : 6) "to preach the Word in Asia", he at length paid Ephesus a brief visit (chap. 18 : 19-21), and shortly afterwards returned to commence (ch. 19) what proved to be the longest and most successful, though most difficult, piece of service in his entire career. During its course "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the Word" (ch. 19 : 10), for "a great door and effectual" (1 Cor. 16 : 9) was opened to him, in spite of the "many adversaries". The troubles that were caused by the latter are described from the outward point of view in Acts 19, and from the inward in 2 Cor. 1 : 8-10.

But we pass on to Acts 20 : 16-38, where we find the account of a meeting arranged by the apostle with the elders of Ephesus, as he went by on his journey to Jerusalem. His solemn address on that occasion is given at length, with its warning of dangers to come from without and within, and its commendation of them "to God and the Word of His grace". In both these respects his speech is a foreshadowing of the kind of ministry he was to give, years afterwards, in the pastoral epistles.

Next we think of his great letters to the saints at Ephesus and the adjacent town of Colosse, in which are reached what we might speak of as the highest heights and deepest depths of New Testament teaching ; and from those we pass on to the epistles to Timothy, which are also, as we have seen, so far as their destination is concerned, epistles to Ephesus. Following these, we have the letters of Peter, written, as has already been pointed out, to saints in "Asia"; and at last we reach the Revelation, which is addressed, as is well known, to the Assemblies in Ephesus and the district surrounding it.

It is doubtful whether even all this exhausts the list of scriptures that have connection with this part of the Roman world ; for since John evidently spent his closing years at Ephesus, it is likely that his epistles, and possibly his Gospel also, were written there.

When all these writings are studied connectedly, they will be found to stress, repeat, and develop certain lines of truth more fully than is done anywhere else. For example, most of the New Testament passages which spring to our minds, when we think of the importance of the Word of God to the believer, are to be found in one or other of them, e.g. Acts 19:20 ; 20:32 ; Eph. 5:26 ; 6:17 ; Col. 3:16 ; 1 Tim. 4:5 ; 2 Tim. 2:9, 15 ; 3:15-17 ; 4:2 ; 1 Pet. 1:23-25 ; 2:2 ; 2 Pet. 1:19-21 ; 1 John 2:14 ; Rev. 3:8 etc. Again, we meet in them frequent references to love, of which the most noteworthy are the six times repeated "in love" of Ephesians ; the various wrong loves mentioned in 1st and 2nd Timothy, such as love of self, love of money, love of pleasure, etc., the challenge to the church of Ephesus concerning "first love", in Rev. 2:4 ; and, of course, many verses in 1st John. On the other hand, they contain numerous references to the activities of Satan, and of the evil spirits, associated with him, against God's people. The narrative of the three years' work at Ephesus in Acts 19 gives prominence to his efforts at opposition. Evil spirits were much in evidence (vv. 12-16), as had been the case in Galilee during our Lord's own ministry there ; and books of Satanic arts were in such profusion that those burned by the converts were valued at 50,000 silver pieces. Again, in Paul's letter to Ephesus he is brought before us in ch. 2:2 ; 4:27 ; and 6:11, 12 ; as he also is in 1 Peter 5:8 ; and most frequently of all in the book of Revelation. But as interesting as any are the references to him in our epistles to Timothy. In 1 Tim. 1:20 certain men are "delivered unto Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme". In ch. 3:6, 7 we read of "the condemnation of the devil", and of "the snare of the devil", the latter of which is again mentioned in 2 Tim. 2:26. 1 Tim. 4:1 warns us of "seducing spirits and doctrines of devils"; while ch. 5:15 tells us that some young women had "turned aside after Satan". And finally, our adversary the devil is doubtless the "lion" spoken of in 2 Tim. 4:17.

But perhaps the most interesting series of connections between these "Ephesian" scriptures, as they might be called, are those which set forth on the one hand the value of gifted men when their gift is subject to the Lord and their hearts are true to Him ; and on the other, the danger to the saints' from such men when this is not the case. Thus in the portions of Acts above mentioned we see, first Paul's own subjection in refraining from going to Ephesus until God's time had come, then the character and teachableness of the gifted Apollos (ch. 18:24-28); and lastly the warning to the elders (ch. 20:30) of dangers to be apprehended from amongst themselves. In Eph. 4:7-16, which might well be called the foundation passage of all others with regard to the gifts and God's purpose in giving them, we learn what results are to be effected by their due exercise; while in Col. 2:4, 8, etc., are depicted the evils which may be wrought by teachers who are not in subjection to Christ. Similarly, in 1 Tim. 3:1-13 ; 4:6-16 and 5:17-22 we see men of ability and gift acting for God ; while in 2 Tim. 2:17, 18 we find such men doing the Devil's work. A like contrast is found between 1 Pet. 4:10, 11, and 5:1-4 on the one hand, and 2 Pet. 2:1-3 on the other ; while John's epistles, and the letters to Ephesus and the other

churches in Rev. 2 and 3, are filled with warnings as to teachers of evil and the mischief that may be done by them.

All these matters have their lessons for saints today, since the same dangers are still existent ; the danger of leaving first love ; the danger of not giving to the Word of God its due place ; the danger from gifted men who have got out of touch with God and acquired an abnormal sense of their own importance. They are dangers into which many of the Lord's people have already fallen, and to which all of us are exposed. But especially is the stage which had been reached when the epistles to Timothy and Titus were written in various ways similar to that which at present obtains ; and therefore we may confidently turn to these writings for both the warnings and the encouragements of which we stand in need.

At an earlier period our Assemblies, those of them which then existed, were given much doctrinal ministry, which was indeed what they most required. Truths that had been almost buried for centuries had, so to speak, been dug up again at that time, and were being set forth clearly and fearlessly, truths as to the character of the present dispensation, the heavenly calling of the Church and its unity, the coming of the Lord for His people, the future of Israel, and others of similar nature. These were what had brought the saints out from their sectarian associations and drawn them together, so that naturally they were given prominence in their meetings and much appreciated.

Such doctrinal ministry is still required, and always must be, so long as assemblies continue and grow. In comparatively few of them is there a sufficiency of it at present. But as time has passed the same developments which were seen in the churches of New Testament days have again been manifested, the profession without much outward evidence of life, the turning aside after a time of some who appeared to start well, the rising up in our midst of various kinds of troublers, and above all a growing spirit of world conformity. This being so, there is surely needed also a ministry of warning, with an increased emphasis on the practical bearings of the truth we claim to hold ; and it is in this connection that Paul's last written epistles have a special value for today.

CHAPTER IV

SOUND DOCTRINE

In our second chapter reference was made to certain words and phrases which recur with unusual frequency in the epistles to Timothy and Titus. A few of these we shall now consider more fully, and shall begin with the Greek word which in the A.V. is commonly rendered "sound". It signifies "to be healthy" or "healthful", and, as already stated, is elsewhere found in the New Testament but three times in Luke and once in 3rd John, in all four cases having reference to bodily health, whereas in the pastoral epistles it occurs no less than eight times, and in every instance has to do with spiritual and not bodily health.

In four of its occurrences, in 1 Tim. 1:10, 2 Tim. 4:3, Titus 1:9 and Titus 2:1 it is joined with the word "doctrine", to the constant use of which in the three epistles attention has been already drawn. Twice it is found

linked with "words" 1 Tim. 6: 3 (rendered "wholesome"), and 2 Tim. 1: 13; and twice with "in the faith", Titus 1: 13 and Titus 2: 2, while in Titus 2: 8 a kindred word is used in the phrase "sound speech". All these expressions are closely associated, for the healthy doctrine tends to produce saints healthy in the faith, and they in turn will give forth healthy words.

It is interesting to notice that various other semi-medical expressions, as well as the above, occur in these epistles, and, with the exceptions of 1 Tim. 5: 23 and 2 Tim. 4: 20, they too are concerned with spiritual rather than bodily conditions. One might almost feel inclined to suggest that the apostle's manner of speech at this period was affected by the presence with him of "Luke the beloved physician" (2 Tim. 4: 11).

Thus in 1 Tim. 6: 4 (see margin of A.V. or R.V.) we get the term exactly opposite to "healthy", that is, "sick"; and, since the word used occurs nowhere else, it seems to be employed in purposed contrast with the "wholesome" or "healthy" of verse 3, both words having in the Greek the same form, that of a verbal participle. In the one verse we have words that produce healthy saints, and in the other words that make sickly ones. Again, in 2 Tim. 4: 3 we meet with a disease, sadly common today, called "itching ears"; in 1 Tim. 4: 2 with a still worse one named a "seared conscience"; and in 2 Tim. 2: 17 we have "canker" (R.V. "gangrene"), the very term for which testifies to its dangerous and spreading character.

Ere pointing out the various connections in which this word "sound" occurs, let us get clearly before our minds what the phrase "sound doctrine" really implies. In our own times it has come to be used in a somewhat loose way as equivalent to "correct" doctrine, but as used by Paul it meant something more than that. A man may hold correct doctrine, and yet be in a very unhealthy state of soul; and this indeed is prominent amongst the evil features of our own days, just as it was from even the earliest times according to Rom. 1: 18, where we read of some "who held the truth in unrighteousness". In the apostle's sense of the word, "sound doctrine" is "healthgiving teaching", and produces healthy saints, for it is "the doctrine which is according to (or 'which produces') godliness" (1 Tim. 6: 3, Titus 1: 1).

This sort of teaching was never more needed than it is today, for the spiritually sick and unhealthy amongst the people of God are many; and it would be profitable exercise for any of us to make a few tests of our own condition, just as we are quick enough to do when it is a question of bodily ill health. Many of the symptoms are somewhat similar, and will be the more easily discovered on that account.

For example, the first warning of impending physical trouble is often a feeling of being too tired for work. Energy is lacking, and what was formerly a pleasure becomes a toil and a pain. Now, if judged by this test, are not many saints in a poor state of spiritual health indeed? In some cases so little energy have they that they scarcely can come out to the ordinary meetings of the assembly, and such frequently blame the weakness of their body, instead of attributing it, as they rightly should do, to a form of spiritual heart disease. Others, not quite so badly affected, may still come out regularly, but have no energy to give help in the Gospel or amongst their brethren. Unsaved friends may go on to hell, if they will, unwarned; and as for assembly activities, others may bear all the burden, for aught that these care.

Another symptom common for both physical and spiritual ill-health is lack of appetite for proper food, and of this in both cases there are several variations. Some times there is a craving for some particular food only, and sometimes there is a hankering after what is not good for them at all. This is rather like the development called "itching ears" in 2 Tim. 4:3. In even more instances the trouble is that no spiritual growth results from the food that is taken, and, indeed, there is at times a wasting instead, which possibly may be due to a "gangrene" such as that of 2 Tim. 2:17, or even to the "seared conscience" of 1 Tim. 4:2.

One more of these symptoms to which we would refer before passing on is that of a cranky quarrelsome temper. Under the strain of physical illness those whose normal disposition is kindly and considerate of others, become, in many instances, quite the opposite, and prove a sore trial to anyone attending them. If then we find it difficult to get on with our brethren, and allow ourselves to become irritated about little or nothing, should we not at once suspect that our spiritual health is far from what it should be? One bad feature, however, of this particular symptom is that others notice it much more readily than we ourselves do.

To all such spiritual invalids the apostle's health-giving doctrine comes as the very medicine which they need, and the larger the doses of it that are taken the better. It may at first seem unpleasant, but you will like it more as you go on to experience its good effects. Moreover, its composition is no secret, like that of so many advertised nostrums; nor are its ingredients hidden away in badly written Latin and hieroglyphics, like the doctor's prescriptions. From the already mentioned passages in the three epistles, which refer to it, its contents may be quite easily known; and ere closing this chapter we shall point out at least some of them.

First, then, this health-giving doctrine contains in large percentage the gospel through which we were saved at the beginning. It is "Sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God" (1 Tim. 1:10, 11). This is a well tested remedy, for has it not been proved again and again that the gospel, clearly set forth in the power of the Spirit, not only reaches sinners, but is blessed to saints also? In fact a case of spiritual disease which will not respond in some degree to this must be an extremely bad one.

Again, in 1 Tim. 6:3 the healthful words mentioned are explained to be "The words of our Lord Jesus Christ". Of course, that term might in a sense be applied to all Scripture, but the context suggests a narrower idea, namely, the actual words spoken by Christ while on earth. Compare the injunctions throughout this 6th chapter with the Lord's sayings in, for example, the Sermon on the Mount, and it can scarcely be denied that some of the latter are re-emphasised in it, and that, according to Paul's view, they form part of this marvellous medicine of his. The exhortation to servants, with which the chapter opens, is an echo of such sayings of Christ as Luke 12:42-47; and the reason appended to verse 1 is akin to that given in Matt. 5:16. In the references to being contented with the food and raiment (vv. 7, 8), and the warnings to the rich (vv. 9, 10, 17), we are reminded of the words of Jesus on these subjects (Matt. 6:19-34, etc.); while "ready to distribute, willing to communicate" (v. 18) would suggest Matt. 5:42 and other such sayings. Above all, is not "Laying up a good foundation against the time to come" (v. 19) an evident application of the two illustrations with which the Sermon on the Mount ends? All

these exhortations are ingredients of the "wholesome words" which the apostle has in mind.

Our chapter is already long enough, so we shall only very briefly mention one or two other components of the health-giving medicine. In 2 Tim. 1:13 the "sound words" are described as "which thou hast heard of me", and the preceding verse would hint that Paul has in view more particularly such truth as he had assimilated into his own experience. This when given out has weight, such as truth that has not been applied to our own experience can never have. Some of the old-time preachers used to pray to be delivered from "trafficking in unfelt truth", and many who minister in our meetings today would do well to copy their example.

Turning to 2 Tim. 4:3 we there find "sound doctrine" linked with reproof. "Reprove, rebuke . . . for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine"; and the cause given for this is the "itching ears" to which we have already made mention. Reproof is not a pleasant ingredient of the doctrine, but it is at times a most necessary one.

Other items we must leave our readers to discover for themselves by careful consideration of the passages concerned.

CHAPTER V

GODLINESS

Amongst these words and phrases, repetition of which is characteristic of our epistles, one of the most important is the words usually rendered "godliness". Out of fifteen times that it occurs in the New Testament, ten are in them, four are in 2 Peter, an epistle penned in very similar circumstances, while the remaining one is in Acts 3:12, where the apostle says to the crowd, "Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or godliness (R.V.) we had made this man to walk".

The occurrence in 2nd Peter form in themselves an interesting group. As two of them appear in the same sentence, the separate references to the subject in that epistle are three in number, and each of these has quite a different setting from the others. First, in chapter 1:3 we read that "His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness"; a statement which should remind us of the GOOD START we received in our Christian course, when God granted to us, not only all things pertaining to our life in Christ itself, but everything that was needful for godly living as well, thus leaving us without excuse for failure. Again, in verses 6 and 7 of the same chapter, godliness, amongst other things, is urged upon us, as a matter of PRESENT EXPERIENCE and growth in the words, "Add to your . . . patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness". The various graces named in this list mutually complement and correct one another ; and some measure of each of them will be manifest in any saint who is making real progress. Lastly, at chapter 3:11, in a passage occupied with THE FUTURE, we have the exhortation, "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be, in all holy conversation and godliness". Here, for the only time in the Scriptures, the word is in the plural (literally "godlinesses"), as is true also of its companion word "conversation". By this means, as well as

by the "all" that precedes them, the Holy Spirit would emphasise to us that the teachings of the chapter with regard to the future, if rightly held by us, will leave no part of our lives and ways uninfluenced.

Coming back now to the occurrences of the word in Paul's writings, we find that they are mainly in 1st Timothy. In 2nd Timothy we get it only at chapter 3:5, and there it is not the real thing, but merely an outward "form of godliness". In Titus it occurs at chapter 1:1 in the expression, "The truth which is after (R.V. 'according to') godliness", a parallel to which is found in 1 Tim. 6:3, "The doctrine which is according to godliness". Either of these might well be placed as a title or heading to our three epistles, for it is the burden of them throughout, that God's truth, if rightly taught and held, must necessarily produce godly living. It may be added that both in 2nd Timothy and in Titus we meet with the adverb formed from our word; in 2 Tim. 3:12, in the warning that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"; and in Titus 2:12, where it is said that the grace of God instructs us, in order that we may "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world".

But, as we have said, the word is especially characteristic of 1st Timothy, where it occurs eight times, in addition to a slightly different form of it, found at 1 Tim. 2:10 only, and to its verb, used at chapter 5:4 in the command, "Let them learn first to - show - piety (or 'godliness') at home". Before, however, we consider these further, it is well that we should be clear in our minds as to what godliness is. So far as the English word is concerned, there can be little difficulty, for "-ly" as a suffix usually signifies "like"; and just as "manly" is "man-like", and "womanly" is "woman-like", so "godly" means "God-like". A final "-ness" turns any of these into a noun of quality, giving us "manliness", "womanliness", "godliness", etc. Godliness is therefore likeness to God, a standard that is surely high enough for any of us.

But the Greek word which is so translated differs somewhat in its associations from the English one, although well represented thereby. It signifies giving to God His place in our hearts and thoughts, and rendering to Him the reverence that is His due. It is in fact a New Testament counterpart of the grand Old Testament phrase, "The fear of the Lord", so often met with in Proverbs and elsewhere; and if, when we read the exhortations to godliness in 1st Timothy we link them in our minds with those wonderful sayings about the fear of the Lord, it will help us to realise their importance.

Let us then consider the different connections in which the word is introduced in the epistle, although we shall do so but briefly, since some of them have been referred to already, and some we hope to deal with later. Their most striking feature is the great variety of circumstances that they suggest, a variety which must impress on us the fact that godliness is essential in every feature of our lives. A mere list of its occurrences will show this -

In chapter 2:2 and chapter 6:3 it is introduced in connection with the public testimony of the saints.

In chapter 3:16 it is at the very foundation of Assembly testimony.

In chapter 4:7, 8 it is a primary essential for "a good minister of Jesus Christ".

In chapter 5: 4 (where the verb form is used) it is to be shown in the home.

In chapter 6: 5, 6, 11 it is needed in business life, and as a safeguard against covetousness.

In each of these aspects it is to be hoped that we are willing to examine our conduct honestly and fully. Is it in all of them regulated by a consciousness of what is due to God from us? How do we stand, for example, with regard to our public lives and politics? The opening paragraph of chapter 2 presents a complete picture of what saints should be and should do in that respect; it requires no additions. Active participation of any kind in the choosing or setting aside of earth's rulers is no fitting work for a follower of the rejected Christ; but it is his to pray for them, and so to live among his fellowmen as to commend the Gospel to them.

Then further, what about our home life? What about our Assembly life? What about our business life? Do we, in all these spheres, manifest that the fear of the Lord has a controlling power over us, and that the "doctrine" we hold so tenaciously is "according to godliness"? Or is our testimony marred by selfishness in the home, quarrelling in the Assembly, meanness and even shadiness in our methods of doing business?

Doubtless the most remarkable use of our word, either in 1st Timothy or anywhere else, is that at chapter 3:16, where what the apostle calls "the mystery of godliness" is summed up in a series of statements connected with the manifestation of Christ. It is as though He would say to us, If you wish to learn what godliness is, you must study Him—study Him in His incarnation and baptism—study Him in His ministry on earth—study Him in the glory of His resurrection and ascension.

But the passage seems to take us even further than this. It follows verse 15, in which the Assembly is looked on as the dwelling-place of God; and it appears to suggest that, as the Father dwelt in and wrought through Christ when He was down here, so He dwells in and works through the Church today. The outsider who, during the exercise of the Assembly in 1 Cor. 14 comes in and looks on, is represented as confessing (when things have been going on as they should), "God is in you of a truth" (v. 25). And concerning the testimony of the saints generally, it is said in Phil. 2:13, "It is God that worketh in you, to will and to do of His good pleasure". Should we not then be justified in claiming that the best and most far-reaching definition of "godliness" is this, that it is God manifesting Himself in His people.

CHAPTER VI

WAYS AWAY FROM THE FAITH

We shall now turn to the use made in our epistles, but especially in 1st Timothy, of one of the commonest of New Testament words, the word "faith". This is found in all the books, with the exception of John's second and third epistles, and (strangely enough) his gospel. John, however, though seldom employing the noun, uses its verb form, in English usually rendered "believe", almost as often as all the other New Testament writers combined.

The word "faith", like most others, has various shades of meaning; but there are two ways in which it is employed in the New Testament that

particularly need to be distinguished. Generally it is used in a subjective sense, and means the act or attitude of believing—OUR FAITH. But sometimes it occurs objectively, and signifies that which is believed—THE FAITH. The latter use, both in the Greek and in English, mostly requires the definite article; while the former may or may not have it, according to the context. In other parts of the New Testament the latter use of the word is infrequent, but in the pastoral epistles it becomes almost the usual one. Nowhere, however, is its significance made clearer than in the exhortation of Jude 3 to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once (‘once for all’, R.V.) delivered to the saints”; because this evidently can have no reference to our personal trust in Christ, which was non-existent till our conversion.

Now since the term “The Faith”, used in this sense, means “that which is believed”, it is necessarily akin to two others employed in our epistles, “The Doctrine”, and “The Truth”. Much the same thing is signified by all three; but the expression “The Faith” views it as that which is commonly believed amongst God’s people; “The Doctrine” looks on it as that which is to be taught amongst them; while “The Truth” sets it forth as it is in itself and in relation to God.

The frequent use of the word “faith” in this way in later epistles is easily understood, when we consider that by the time they were written a certain body of teaching had come to be the common belief (“the common faith”), as it is called in Titus 1:4) of the saints everywhere. They could speak, as Luke does in the beginning of his gospel, of “those things which are most surely believed among us”, a phrase which indeed supplies a perfect definition of what is meant by “The Faith”.

Having these things in mind, we shall be the better able to consider a series of warning messages which are to be found in 1st Timothy with regard to the ways in which men get away from the Faith. For the sake of comparison let us put them together in a list.

- (1) In chap. 1:19, 20, SOME having put away a good conscience, MADE SHIPWRECK concerning the Faith.
- (2) In chap. 4:1, SOME, giving heed to seducing spirits, and teachings of demons, shall DEPART FROM the Faith.
- (3) In chap. 5:8, if ANY provide not for his own, he has DENIED the Faith.
- (4) In chap. 5:11-15, SOME women, having by lightness of behaviour turned aside after Satan, have CAST OFF their first Faith.
- (5) In chap. 6:9, 10, SOME, reaching after money, have been led astray (R.V.) from the Faith.
- (6) In chap. 6:21, SOME, professing the knowledge which is falsely so called, MISSED THE MARK (R.V. margin) concerning the Faith.

In reading these, one is immediately struck by the monotonous and sad repetition of the word “some”. It appears in all except the third, where the word “any” is merely the singular form of the same Greek term. It is also employed in the same fashion at chap. 1:3, 6, in a passage which may be considered as a kind of introduction to all these others; and in 2 Tim. 2:18, where certain of the men against whom Timothy has been warned are said to “overthrow the faith of some”. The apostle, in one of his earlier

epistles (1 Cor. 10: 6-10) had used it similarly with regard to the various failures of the Israelites during their wilderness journeyings. SOME of them were guilty of idolatry, SOME committed fornication, SOME tempted the Lord, and SOME murmured.

As used in our present passages, the word implies that the dangers against which warning is given were not imaginary but real ones ; for into most of them some had already fallen, and into the others some were going to fall sooner or later. When Paul looked around him he was confronted with the same kind of thing which had vexed the heart of Moses long ago ; for the pathway of the Church, too, was beginning to be marked by those who were "strewn along" (1 Cor. 10: 5, Newberry) its route through failure of one kind or another. And unfortunately this is even more the case today, as all who have been saved for some length of time, and have taken an interest in the welfare of God's people are well aware. Many we have known, who seemed to start well, have since fallen out by the way. Some were ensnared through the lusts of the flesh, some became entangled in this present evil world, some were turned aside by evil doctrines, and some as the result of personal quarrels with their brethren. More than ever, therefore, do we require the warning appended to the "ensamples" of 1 Cor. 10, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall".

Another striking feature about these six ways away from the Faith is that they are so different from each other, although doubtless every one of them might be traced to the same source, that of failing to go in for the "love out of a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned" of chap. 1: 5 (R.V.). Some of them are of course worse than others, though all are serious and all have far-reaching effects. In some there is deliberate turning away from the truth, while in others the trouble is that by unbecoming conduct on the part of certain who remain, at least for a time, in the ranks, the truth is reproached and belittled.

This diversity is given prominence by the fact that, as may be seen in the list above, a different word is used in each of the six passages for what takes place. We have, "made-shipwreck", "depart-from", "denied", "cast-off", "led-astray", and "missed-the-mark". It will be noticed that some of these are what might be called picture words ; especially the first and the last, which present to our minds a ship dashed on the rocks, and an archer whose aim is not true to the mark. Words of this kind appear to be characteristic of Paul's latest style as seen in our epistles, and they certainly add to their interest. Other examples, taken almost at random, are "surrounded-with-smoke" (of pride), only occurring in 1 Tim. 3: 6 ; 6: 4 and 2 Tim. 3: 4 ; "word-fight", noun and verb, only in 1 Tim. 6: 4 and 2 Tim. 2: 14 respectively ; "drown" in 1 Tim. 6: 9 ; "reach-out-after" in 1 Tim. 3: 1 and 6: 10 ; "entangle" in 2 Tim. 2: 4 ; "pierce-quite-through", only in 1 Tim. 6: 10. And there are many more.

Another, and very important difference between the passages which we have been comparing is that, like the reference to godliness dealt with in our last chapter, they have to do with various spheres of life. The mention of conscience in chap. 1: 19 would suggest that there it is mainly one's private life that is in view ; while the close connection between chap. 4: 1 and the closing verses of chap. 3 implies that in it we have church life. The passage at chap. 5: 8 has of course to do with home life ; while that at chap. 5: 11-15 could be described as concerned with social life. In

chap. 6: 9, 10 we get business life ; and finally, in chap. 6:20, 21 is what we may call intellectual life.

CHAPTER VII

SHIPWRECK

It has already been mentioned that 1 Tim. 1:5, 6 may be looked on as an introduction to the series of warnings in that epistle concerning ways in which men get away from the faith. In this passage the apostle asserts that the proper "end" or aim of the "charge" (R.V.) with which Timothy and all other saints have been in their measure entrusted, is the production and development, in themselves and others, of the love that springs from "a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned". In Rom. 13:10 he had called this love "the fulfilling of the Law"; in Col. 3:14 he had described it as "the bond of perfectness" amongst Christian graces ; in 1 Cor. 13 he had shown it to be essential to the proper exercise of the "gifts", and at the same time superior to even the greatest of them. Here he seems to think of it as the result to be aimed at and expected in all godly ministry.

Now if this is so, that love out of a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned is the true aim of ministry, then such ministry as does not tend to produce it must be at fault in some respect. Not only so, but even Bible study, if it has not this effect, must have been gone about in a wrong way. The test is one capable of very wide application, and it would have been well for God's people had it been more frequently made use of ; for thus many "questionings" (v. 4 R.V.) and "strifes of words" (chap. 6:4) and divisions would have been avoided. Even so early as when Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, some already had "swerved" from those things in *which love has its roots, and were themselves, as a consequence, becoming "roots of bitterness" among the saints.

The word rendered "swerved" in verse 6, one of those picture words that have previously been referred to, is elsewhere found only in chap. 6:21 and 2 Tim. 2:18, in both of which it is translated "erred". In all three places the R.V. gives in its margin "missed the mark", a rendering which, expressive though it is, fails to make clear what the actual trouble is. It could suggest a person who is shooting arrows or hurling missiles at a mark, but who fails to hit it, however much he tries. Such a one, since he is doing his best, would scarcely merit such censure as the apostle here gives to the men he has in mind.

But there is a reading given in our A.V. margin at 1 Tim. 1:6 which takes us further. It is "not aiming at", and this, while being quite a good rendering of the Greek word used, makes clear that the trouble with these would-be teachers was no lack of ability to reach what they were aiming at, but rather that they were not aiming at the right thing. Any true minister of the Word of God knows how possible it is, after having striven as well as he was able to be helpful to the saints and promote their love to the Lord, to find that he has failed in accomplishing to any large extent his

* The "which" of verse 6 is plural in Greek.

purpose. But the preacher has had some altogether different aim, as to display his own ability, or to gain favour with a particular party or clique, or to draw away disciples after himself, it is not to be expected that such a person will hit the right mark, while he has been aiming at a wrong one. It is plain that the object of these men of chapter 1:6, 7 was to be looked on as teachers of the Law; that those of chapter 6:21 wished to impress everyone with their possession of "science" or knowledge; and that Hymenaeus and Philetus in 2 Tim. 2:18 meant to gain a following for themselves by the new "truths" (?) they had discovered. What a contrast to all this is Paul's own attitude as he says, "We make it our aim, whether at home or absent, to be well-pleasing unto Him" (2 Cor. 5:9 R.V.). One who can truthfully speak thus is unlikely to turn his feet into any of the six ways away from the faith, which we have now to consider separately in their individual aspects.

The first of them, which we find in chap. 1:18-20, is fittingly occupied with what is the inward beginning of perhaps all failure. Timothy, in pursuance of the charge committed to him, is exhorted to hold fast that faith and that good conscience, the importance of which had already been emphasised in verse 5. For some, the apostle goes on to say, having thrust from them this good *conscience, even as a foolish sailor might cast overboard his compass, had, in consequence, made shipwreck concerning the faith.

This was a matter about which Paul himself had ever been very careful. In Acts 23:1 he says, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day". And again in Acts 24:6, "Herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men". The connection in which the latter of these sayings occurs suggests an interesting comparison. The "herein" with which it starts links it, of course, with the statement preceding it; and this is, "I . . . have hope toward God . . . that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust". It is therefore to Paul's faith in the resurrection that the "herein do I exercise myself" points back. His care to maintain a good conscience was, in part at least, the outcome of this faith of his, a fact which would remind us of the close association between unfeigned faith and a good conscience in 1 Tim. 1. On the other hand, Hymenaeus, who in our present passage had thrust away a good conscience, is found in 2 Tim. 2:17, 18 propagating error as to this very subject of resurrection. Incidentally, what is recorded of him should serve as a warning of the extent to which evil develops; since that which originated in trifling with his conscience, went on to wreck, first his own testimony, and, ultimately, that of many others whose faith was overthrown by his teaching.

Paul's carefulness, and the carefulness which he here enjoined upon Timothy with regard to keeping a good conscience, should be a reminder to us that like carefulness is required on our own part. However well we may have succeeded in maintaining a conscience void of offence in the past, we are not out of danger. Trouble in this matter usually, though not always, arises from tampering with little sins, rather than from those which appear to us great ones. If they are indulged in they develop and grow, and as they do, they render the conscience more and more dull and callous;

* The "which" of verse 19 is singular number.

with the result that further progress in evil becomes easy, until at length it ends in shipwreck.

Another point, which is suggested by the last one, is that the possibility of our conscience becoming callous, or void of sensitiveness, renders it unreliable as a sole test of our spiritual condition. If it is tender and well informed by the Scriptures, it will serve very well, but when it becomes dull it is worse than useless. Paul in 1 Cor. 4:4 (see Newberry) says, "I am conscious of nothing against myself", which, on such lips as his, meant a great deal. In the mouth of one whose conscience had become insensitive, it would mean simply nothing at all. And even the apostle has to add, "Yet am I not hereby justified".

Many saints can sit with a complacent smile under the most searching of ministry, merely because they have a deadened conscience; and such are most difficult to bring to repentance, unless, as sometimes happens, God comes down in sore chastisement upon them. This is like what Paul seems to have in mind in the case of these two men of verse 20, since he speaks of having delivered them to Satan that they might be taught by discipline not to blaspheme. May their experience serve to each of us for a warning!

CHAPTER VIII

APOSTASY

The second of these ways away from the Faith, which are given so much prominence in 1st Timothy, is set forth in chap. 4:1-3, and is probably the most dangerous, as it is certainly the most deliberate of them all. In this case we have a definite warning that some shall "depart" (R.V. "fall away") from the faith; and whereas in chap. 1:19 there was the putting away of a good conscience, we now read of "a conscience seared with a hot iron" which, being completely insensitive, will trouble its possessor no more.

This passage should begin with "But", as in the R.V., instead of "Now", a change which will at once call attention to the fact that it is linked, by way of contrast, with the final paragraph of chapter 3. In that we have God's doctrine, which is concerned with His Son; while in this we get "doctrines of demons", which have to do with man's own doings, his abstinence from meat, marriage, etc. There the saints form the "pillar and ground of the truth"; here the apostasy occurs through "the hypocrisy of men that speak lies". There God manifests Himself in His house (v. 13), even as He had manifested Himself in Christ (v. 16); here Satan manifests himself in these evil men, even as one day he will manifest himself in the man of sin.

In the one paragraph we have the working of "the mystery of godliness"; in the other the working of "the mystery of iniquity" (2 Thess. 2:7). The two testimonies stand, as it were, face to face with each other, the testimony that is of God, and the testimony that is of the devil.

The other opening words of our passage, "the Spirit speaketh expressly", are also noteworthy. Where is it that the Spirit speaks on the matter so plainly as is here stated? Chiefly, no doubt, in the various warnings con-

tained in such New Testament Scriptures as had already been written at this time ; and, perhaps, most of all in that one which had been penned by Paul himself some years earlier (2 Thess. 2). In that passage we have the noun "apostasy" ("fall away", v. 1, R.V.). In it we read of men deceived by "lying wonders" which are "after the working of Satan" (v. 9); just as here we have men "speaking lies in hypocrisy" under the control of "seducing spirits and doctrines of demons" (vv. 1, 2). The likeness between the two passages is remarkable, and might suggest that the apostle had, at least to some extent, these words of his own in mind when he used the phrase, "the Spirit speaketh expressly". It is also probable that this same warning of 2 Thess. 2 was one of the passages which Peter had in view when in the last chapter of his second epistle he referred to certain of Paul's writings, and classed them with "the other Scriptures". Thus early did the apostolic letters stand out from all other, as being the utterances of the Holy Spirit.

It seems at first sight rather strange that "forbidding to marry" and "commanding to abstain from meats" should be selected here as examples of the "doctrines of demons" against which the writer is warning us ; because he generally treats these two subjects, marriage and meats, in a fashion altogether different, as being merely a question of what is expedient in any given circumstances. Thus in 1 Cor. 8 he himself suggests abstinence from meat in a case where partaking would stumble a weak brother ; and in the preceding chapter he suggests refraining from marriage, where it might hinder one's work for the Lord. On the other hand, in chapter 5 of our present epistle, he recommends the marriage of certain young women (v. 14); and he encourages Timothy to "use a little wine" (v. 23); in each instance because of circumstances which rendered these things expedient.

But here in chapter 4:3 it is evident that something worse and deeper lies behind these forbiddings, and that it is no longer a question of stumbling a weak brother, or of having more freedom to serve the Lord ; but of something that entirely undermines the Faith, and results in apostasy from it. Many developments on such lines the after history of the professing church has recorded ; and they convey to us this warning, amongst others, that we have need to beware of new rules and new teachings which appear to be of little importance, but which Satan may be using as the thin end of a wedge that will ultimately produce departure from the Faith, or at least the scattering of the saints through division.

Passing on to chap. 5:7, 8, we there meet with an evil of a very different kind from that in chap. 4:1-3, namely the denial of the Faith which we profess to hold, by conduct inconsistent with it in our home lives. In this case, it is not so much a danger of turning from it ourselves, as of driving others from it through our bad testimony. And indeed the home is the weak spot with many. There are parents who cannot control their children because they cannot control themselves, and whose life in the home turns their families to hardness against the Gospel. There are, on the other hand, children professedly Christians, who do not honour their parents, either in the way suggested here (supporting them), or in any other way. Two outstanding marks of the last days in 2 Tim. 3 are parents "without natural affection" and children who are "disobedient to parents"; and how shameful it is that they should ever be found in homes that are called Christian !

When such people claim the name, they deny the faith, and are "worse

than an unbeliever", in more senses than one. In the first place, the honouring of one's parents has been acknowledged as a virtue by the general opinion of mankind in every age, and has been not only appreciated but practised even by those heathen whose moral code contained little else of value. Legends were current, wherever men existed, of how the gods blessed and their fellowmen respected such as were conspicuous for this form of piety. And even in our own days, although the marks above named of the last times are painfully in evidence, there are still, in thousands of unsaved homes, a correctness and affection in the relationships of parents and their children, that should put to shame those who, while professing to be saints, have a home record of a very different kind.

The second and perhaps the main reason why these are "worse than an unbeliever" is that no outsider, try whatever way he may, can do the gospel ministry so much injury as a christian with a bad testimony. And we have here a form of bad testimony that, as has already been shown, will receive universal condemnation, and for which no excuse will be accepted.

CHAPTER IX

OTHER FAILURES

At 1 Tim. 5:11-15 we reach the fourth of these evil ways, and in it is combined the bad testimony (see v. 14) which was the main feature of the third one, and the actual turning away from the Lord on the part of the person concerned (v. 12) which is characteristic of all the others.

Certain young women are described as casting off the first faith. They are not satisfied with Christ and His service, so they seek satisfaction elsewhere. They "learn to be idle" (by the way, a very easy lesson to learn); and then in their idleness they become "tattlers and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not". The beginning of their course is described as waxing wanton against Christ, and the end of it as turning aside after Satan; expressions which show how serious, in the apostle's view, the evil is. Its gravity will be further impressed on us when we notice that the word here rendered "wax wanton" is an even stronger form of that translated "lived deliciously" in Rev. 18:7, and used there of the great whore, Babylon, who like these women refuses to take the place of a "widow".

As has been already mentioned, the evil in this fourth case pertains, not so much to home life itself, as to social contacts made outside of it. Indeed the trouble with these young widows is that they have nothing to do to keep them at home, where woman's safest sphere of activity is; and thus they acquire the habit of running around other people's houses, where they work much harm with their tongues and otherwise, furnishing an example of the truth of the old saying,

"Satan finds some mischief still,
For idle hands to do".

In view of this, it is not surprising that the apostle's remedy is that mentioned in verse 14, "I will therefore that the younger women marry", etc.

What we may call the business way away from the faith next comes into view, at chapter 6:5-11; and its central evil is greed of gain, or

covetousness. "They that desire to be rich" (v. 9, R.V.) is a description which fits very many, and every saint to whom it applies is setting his feet in the wrong direction, and away from the faith. Further on in the chapter, at verses 17-19 we have an exhortation addressed to "them that are rich", that is to those already in possession of wealth ; and such are surrounded by dangers enough. But the would-be rich are in still more evil case. The apostle seems to heap word pictures on top of one another by way of warning them. They are "led astray" (v. 10, R.V.) from the faith by "reaching after" wealth. They "pierce themselves through" with sorrows, as if committing a sort of spiritual suicide. They "fall into" temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts. And finally, like those who "made shipwreck" in chapter 1, they are "drowned" in destruction and perdition. As we read all this, it may well remind us of the sad end of one of these would-be rich, Judas Iscariot, who while essaying to commit suicide by hanging, fell headlong and, bursting asunder in the midst, so went to his own place.

It is of interest to note that while in verse 9 the desire to be rich leads to sin ("foolish and hurtful lusts"), in verse 10 it leads to error ("astray from the faith"). Part, at least, of this error is suggested in verse 5, where we are told that they suppose godliness to be a way of gain (R.V.); and thus the very same passage which at verse 3 teaches that right doctrine produces right conduct, teaches also that a wrong way of living produces erroneous doctrine.

A further interesting comparison lies between verses 7 and 19 of this chapter. In the former the would-be rich are told that they can "carry nothing out" of this world when they leave it ; while in the latter the actually rich are informed that they have the privilege of "laying up in store for themselves" a good foundation against the time to come, i.e. of sending something on before. And this, paradoxically, is to be accomplished, not by hoarding or by banking, but by giving away, according to verse 18. Paul here seems, as was suggested in an earlier chapter, to have before him what he calls in verse 3 "the words of our Lord Jesus Christ"; according to which that man was laying a good foundation who "heareth My sayings and doeth them" (Luke 6:47, 48). And those "sayings", in the verses which immediately precede these, place in prominence, "Give . . . give" (vv. 30-38).

But we must pass on to the sixth and last of the ways from the faith, which might be called the scientific one. It is a very popular way today, and makes high sounding claims ; but the Holy Spirit labels it, "profane and vain babblings", and says that only falsely is it called "science" (chap. 6:20, 21). In contrast with it, Timothy is exhorted to guard the deposit of truth entrusted to him, an injunction which is practically equivalent to that of Jude 3, "Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints". This faith, the knowledge which is falsely so called would endeavour to overthrow ; but as Paul in a connection somewhat similar says, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure". Such men and such teachings may "overthrow the faith of some", but they cannot overthrow God, nor His Word, nor His work.

It may be thought that undue prominence has been given to these ways away from the faith, whether of doctrine or of conduct, but quite as much has been given to them in the epistle itself, and the warnings there found

concerning them were never more needed than they are today. May we, each of us, be quick to hear the voice behind us, which, when we turn to the right hand of wrong living, or to the left hand of erroneous teaching, says, "This is the way, walk ye in it" (Isa. 30:21).

CHAPTER X

THE ASSEMBLY'S GOSPEL TESTIMONY

The manner in which the Gospel is introduced in the early part of 1st Timothy is somewhat remarkable. The case of those who were not aiming at the right mark having been mentioned in chap. 1:6, the apostle says of them that they desired to be teachers of the Law. This leads to a statement concerning the right use of the Law, and to an enumeration of some of the evils against which the Law is directed, these being arranged in an order suggestive of that of the Ten Commandments in Exod. 20. But instead of concluding the list with a reference to the tenth command, Paul breaks off into "And if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious Gospel"; which is equivalent to saying that whatever the Law condemns, the Gospel condemns also.

This mention of "The glorious Gospel of the blessed God" calls to his mind the apostle's own responsibility with regard to it, and that again his unworthiness of such a high honour as to be entrusted with it. He had been a blasphemer of the Lord, a persecutor of His people, and injurious to His work; yet for two several reasons the Lord had mercy upon him; firstly because he acted in ignorance (v. 13), and secondly because He would show in him His compassion and long-suffering as a pattern to others (v. 16).

After a further reference at the end of chap. 1 to those who had gone astray, Paul turns in the beginning of chap. 2 to what should be the attitude of the saints to gospel testimony. They should, he says, pray for ALL MEN, because God will have ALL MEN to be saved, and to that end the Lord Jesus gave Himself a ransom for ALL. Their conduct should be such as will commend the Gospel (v. 2), and give weight in this practical commendation of it (vv. 9, 10), but not in publicly proclaiming it (vv. 11, 12).

If the point be raised that the word used in v. 12 is "teach", it is to be noticed that in v. 7 Paul, speaking of his own gospel testimony, calls himself a "teacher of the Gentiles"; and that in Acts the word "teach" is used at least a dozen times of gospel preaching.

For this prohibition of women from preaching in public he assigns two reasons: (1) that the man was first in creation, v. 13; and (2) that the woman was first in transgression, v. 14. And it is clearly to the latter of these that by its opening word "Notwithstanding" he links the remarkable statement of v. 15, "She shall be saved through the childbearing, if they continue in faith and love and sanctification with sobriety" (R.V.). Many views have been expressed as to what this means, some of them absurd, while others that are saner may not necessarily exclude each other, since the apostle may well have had more than one thought in mind as he penned the words. The context suggests that he is thinking of the sentence pronounced on the woman in Gen. 3:16, a sentence in which were two parts:

(1) that she was to have sorrow in childbearing; and (2) that she was to be subjected to the man. The latter of these is in keeping with the principle upon which Paul has just before insisted ; while as to the former, he has in this 15th verse something to add, in which warning and encouragement are combined. For just as the curse pronounced on the woman was associated with her childbearing, so also, in the words addressed to the Serpent in the preceding verse, was the provision for her salvation in the promised "Seed". Therefore the right path for her, the path in which "she shall be saved" (using that word in its present and full sense, so common in these later epistles) is the very opposite of that public and prominent one forbidden to her in vv. 11, 12. It is the path of home life and subjection, by keeping in which the very curse of Gen. 3 is turned into blessing. Compare those other words of the apostle in chap. 5:13-15, where the dangers besetting young women who have no home cares are vividly depicted, and the way to be saved therefrom is the same as here. He even uses there the verbal form of this word "childbearing", of which neither noun or verb is found anywhere else in the New Testament. Compare also, by contrast, how the young man Timothy, in chap. 4:16 is to be "saved" by going on diligently with his public ministry of the Word.

CHAPTER XI

ASSEMBLY LEADERS

We now turn to a subject rather different from those with which we have so far been occupied, and perhaps of less interest to some. But leaders and ministers of the Assembly get such prominent mention in our epistle that one cannot avoid dealing with the matter, if our "Notes" are to be at all comprehensive. As was mentioned in our opening chapter, the work which Paul left the two brethren behind him to do, in Ephesus and in Crete respectively, included on the one hand the withstanding and silencing of certain would-be leaders who wrought mischief amongst the saints, and on the other the appointing in the Assemblies of a sufficiency of leaders of the right kind.

If any leader should feel like saying, I am no bishop, and therefore this subject has nothing in it for me, let him remember that the Scriptures contain teaching, not only as to the character and responsibilities of the bishops themselves, but also as to the responsibilities which all others in the Assembly have with regard to such persons. In 1 Thess. 5, for example, we find in verses 12 and 13 an exhortation to the saints generally concerning their attitude towards those who "are over" them in the Lord ; and then in verse 14 we get an exhortation evidently directed to these persons as to their attitude towards those among whom they labour. So also here in 1 Timothy, while in chapter 3 we learn what the leaders themselves should be, in chapter 5 we are taught how others should act towards them (vv. 1, 17, etc.).

Our subject too is all the more important because most of the Lord's people have either wrong or very vague ideas with regard to it. One does not wonder that this is so in the case of such as are still associated with one or other of the various sects, because their thoughts are coloured by

the views held in the body to which they belong. But come along to the Gospel Hall, or Meeting Room, and ask that brother who has been in the Assembly from it was first formed, and who has been looking after his fellow-believers and shepherding them ever since, Are you a bishop in this Assembly? He will probably reply, No, I make no claim to that position. Ask him again, Are you in the oversight? He may likely answer, Yes. Yet if he is "in the oversight" he must be an overseer, and "overseer" as in Acts 20, 28 is the most correct rendering possible for the Greek word usually translated "bishop".

But someone will say, We have no bishops or elders today. They were appointed by apostles, or by apostolic delegates such as Timothy and Titus, and we have none such now. Well, it may be that all the elders in the early churches were so appointed, although the Scriptures nowhere say so, nor is it stated that apostolic sanction was necessary in the lists of qualifications given in 1 Tim. 3 and in Titus 1. Concerning most of the elders of whom we read, there is no information given us as to how they were appointed. There were elders among the saints at Jerusalem as early as Acts 11:30, and they appear again acting along with the apostles in Acts 15:2, 4, etc. But how they became elders we are not told. And there were elders or bishops in the Ephesian Assembly at Acts 20:17, 28, but the only information as to their origin is that they were made so by the Holy Ghost.

It is true we read in Acts 14:23 that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in certain churches; but these were the churches that they themselves had planted a few months earlier, and such action was only natural. Who could better mark out those fitted to take the lead than the servants of the Lord who had formed the meetings from the fruit of their own work? If such a passage is used as a proof that only an apostle could appoint elders, it would be equally easy to prove that none else than an apostle could found an Assembly.

But much importance is at times attached to the fact already mentioned, that it was Paul who instructed Titus to ordain elders in Crete, and that therefore he did so as an apostolic delegate. This is true, yet if undue stress is laid on it one might be tempted to inquire, Why should not Titus in turn delegate his authority to someone else, and that person to some other, thus giving us apostolic succession right away? Compare how Paul, having committed certain things in charge to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:18), then enjoined him to commit them in his turn to "faithful men who should be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). Or would it be right to say, in view of Titus 1:5 that none of "the things that are wanting" in any Assembly today can be "set in order", since we have no living apostles or apostolic delegates to do it?

It is an interesting fact in the history of Israel that they always had "elders" among them, from the time when they were Egyptian slaves (Exod. 3:16) until the days of the apostles (Acts 25:15); and yet we are never told how they were chosen. Someone may say, Did not Moses at God's command appoint seventy men to be elders in the wilderness? He did not, but from amongst those who already were "elders of the people" in Num. 11:16, 24 he chose seventy to share with him the heavier responsibilities of the camp.

Putting together all relevant passages and facts, there are two points

which can scarcely be denied : (1) That it was the mind of the Lord there should always be elders to take the lead in the Assemblies of His people ; and (2) That the manner in which they became recognised as such is comparatively of less importance than that they should be men of the right type in character and ability, and in the zealous discharge of their duty as leaders. But of course any human arrangement which shuts out or hinders the operation of the Holy Spirit in making them, as referred to in Acts 20:28 convicts itself as wrong.

Before dealing further with this subject, it may be well to remark that, in what has been written so far, it is taken for granted that the reader is aware that "bishop" and "elder", as used in the New Testament in connection with the Church, refer to the same persons. This is put beyond doubt by the interchangeability of the two words, as seen in Acts 20 and in Titus 1. Paul calls for "the elders of the church" in Acts 20:17, yet when addressing them in verse 28 he says, "over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops" (see R.V.). And to Titus he says in chapter 1:5, "I left thee in Crete that thou shouldest . . . ordain elders", yet in describing the characteristics to be looked for in such he adds, "For a bishop must be blameless", etc.

CHAPTER XII

BISHOPS AND DEACONS

If we would attain to correct views on the subject of the Bishops and Deacons mentioned in the New Testament, we must first rid our minds completely of the ecclesiastical and official associations which are gathered about these terms today ; and seek for the primary use of the words, and their relationship to other similar terms employed in the Scriptures. And when we begin to do this, one of our earliest discoveries will be that neither "bishop" nor "deacon" is, strictly speaking, a rendering into English of the Greek word used ; but that each is rather the Greek word itself, taken over bodily into our language, and clothed in an English dress. The Greek "episkopos" becomes in Latin "episcopus", which in turn develops into the Anglo-Saxon "biscop", and thence to our modern "bishop". By a similar process the Greek "diakonos" becomes in Latin "diaconus", and ultimately our "deacon".

The former word is given in the Authorised Version as "bishop" in four out of five occurrences in the New Testament, and in one only does it get a proper English equivalent, that of "overseer" in Acts 20:25, to which reference has already been made. Two verb forms of the Greek word are also found, one of which is commonly rendered "visit", a translation suggestive of at least one aspect of a true bishop's work, especially when we notice it used in such phrases as, "Sick and ye visited Me" (Matt. 25:36). "Let us go again and visit our brethren" (Acts 15:36). "To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction" (Jas. 1:27). The other form of the verb occurs but twice: in Heb. 12:13, where it is translated "looking diligently", and in 1 Pet. 5:2, where the rendering is "taking the oversight". In the latter instance the context shows that it includes all the care which an under-shepherd can exercise towards the flock in his charge, while in

the former it appears to be addressed to the saints generally, as if to suggest that all should to some degree have shepherd care for each other.

“Diakonos” is a word of much more frequent use, and that in quite a variety of connections. It is twenty times rendered “minister” and seven times “servant”, while only in Phil. 1:1 and in 1 Tim. 3:8, 12 is it given as “deacon”. It simply means “One who does service of any kind for a master”, whether it be the master of an ordinary household as in John 2:5, 9, or a king as in Matt. 22:13, or the Lord as in most occurrences. And in this last connection it is employed of His servants generally as in John 12:26, and of those who serve in the Gospel as in Col. 1:23, as well as of those serving among the saints. Not only is Paul a “deacon” (Eph. 3:7), but Timothy (1 Thess. 3:2; 1 Tim. 4:6), Tychicus (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7), and even a woman, Phoebe (Rom. 16:1) are also so called. The ruler of the land is a “deacon of God” (Rom. 13:4), and Christ Himself is a “deacon of the circumcision” (Rom. 15:8).

As has already been pointed out, the words “bishop” and “elder” refer to the same person, the former suggesting the nature of his work, and the latter one of the necessary qualifications for it. But there are other terms used for them, which are worthy of mention. In Heb. 13:7, 17, 24 they are described as “Them that have the rule over you”, or as Newberry put it, “Your leaders, or guides”; while in 1 Thess. 5:12 they are “Them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you”, a threefold expression which well sets forth what their responsibilities are.

Then we have the term “pastor” which, though frequent in Jeremiah, occurs just once in the Authorised Version of the New Testament, at Eph. 4:11. The Greek word, however, which there is so translated, is the usual one for “shepherd”, and is thus rendered in all its other occurrences. As employed in the verse mentioned, it looks, not so much at the person or his office, as at the gift which God has given him for doing shepherd work among the saints; and therefore it is not necessarily co-extensive with the term “bishop” or “elder”. No doubt a bishop or elder must have some measure of pastoral gift, else he is unsuited for the place he occupies; but one may have the gift, and yet not be in the position of a leader in an Assembly. There are those who, like Timothy in Phil. 2:20, have a genuine care for their fellow saints from their earliest Christian days; and it is a “gift” much to be coveted, though rare even in apostolic times, as that passage shows.

In 1 Tim. 3:1 we have a man who “desires” oversight.* The Greek word here used occurs in just two other places, in chapter 6:10 of “desiring” to be rich (A.V. “coveted after”) and in Heb. 11:16 of “desiring” a better country. Thus it may be used of a good desire or a bad one, but in all three occurrences it implies a desire that is translated into action, a “reaching after” as it is rendered in the Revised Version of 1 Tim. 6:10. Here in chap. 3:1 the apostle does not find fault with the desire, but he outlines, for the consideration of the man and all others, what is involved in it. Setting up God’s standard is ever a good way of causing unsuitable people to keep back; and that standard is doubtless what we have before us in the following verses, both as to bishop and deacon.

*The phrases “the office of a bishop” (v. 1) and “use the office of a deacon” (vv. 10, 13) are entirely misleading. In each case they represent but a single Greek word, in v. 1 the word “oversight”, and in vv. 10, 13 the word “serve”.

Much might be said about the various qualifications named in them, but we shall here emphasise one point only, which is that most of these have reference, not to special gifts, but to what might be called the ordinary elements of a godly life. They might well be acted upon as exhortations by saints in general, for it is not alone elders who need to be "blameless" in these matters. It is rather that he who seeks oversight should be pre-eminent in them, because he must make very straight paths for his own feet, if he is to lead God's people aright. Otherwise he cannot count on either their respect or obedience.

But we must not lose sight of the fact that in 1st Tim. there is another paragraph entirely devoted to elders or bishops, the closing one of chap. 5, from verse 17 onward. That this is so is not always understood, with the result that needless difficulty is introduced into the interpretation of some of the verses in it. "Them that sin rebuke before all" (v. 20) refers primarily to sinning elders, as the preceding verse makes plain, and is illustrated by Paul's action toward Peter in Gal. 2:11, 14. "Lay hands suddenly (R.V. hastily) on no man" (v. 22) has to do with recognising men as elders, or placing them in some leading position of service; not with the seizing of offenders in view of their punishment, which would require an entirely different Greek phrase from that here used. And the two verses which follow (vv. 23, 24), however well they may serve as a general statement of truth, are primarily an explanation as to why Timothy is not to lay on hands hastily. Some men's characters, good or bad, are easily known, and therefore widely known. But there are others which require time to manifest them, and because of that, if Timothy wished to escape responsibility for "other men's sins" (v. 22), the safe course was to push no one into prominent position hastily. It is a fuller form of the warning in chap. 3:10, "Let those also first be proved". And many a time in the after history of the Assemblies, right down to our own days, a great deal of trouble would have been avoided had these injunctions been kept in mind.

CHAPTER XIII

A PERSONAL MESSAGE

Although 1st Timothy is written to an individual, even a superficial reader cannot fail to notice that it is mainly occupied with the state of things amongst the saints in general, and especially with matters pertaining to assembly life. It is in fact a Church epistle in a deeper sense than some of those which are addressed to Churches; and in that respect differs from 2nd Timothy, the subject of which is the personal behaviour and service of a man of God such as Timothy himself in the midst of dark and difficult times. For light on your path as an individual servant of Christ, read and re-read 2nd Timothy; but when you wish to learn your responsibilities as a member of an Assembly of God's people, study the first epistle.

There is, however, in the very heart of 1st Timothy, set in the midst of the various instructions for dealing with assembly matters, a long passage which is almost entirely personal. Elsewhere there are, of course, short personal allusions of a sentence or so, but this occupies most of the fourth chapter from verse 6 onward. It may be divided into two paragraphs, of

which verses 6-10 could be described as an exhortation to exercise in godliness, and verses 11-16 an exhortation to exercise of gift.

It is only fitting that the epistle should contain such a portion, for it is not sufficient that Timothy should be reminded what is sound doctrine and what is not ; nor even that the particular parts of the sound doctrine which would suit the present need should be pointed out to him. All this, as we have seen, the epistle does contain, but something more is required. The man who would help others must keep right himself. Not only must his doctrine be sound, but his work must be done in a sound manner, and he himself must be sound in life.

This matter, which has already been dwelt on, cannot be over-emphasised. Whether our service for God is in the Gospel, or as here among the saints, our first care must be to maintain spiritual fitness for it. There has always been the danger, and it is a very great one just now, of setting knowledge and oratory before godliness.

Now there is no virtue in ignorance, and it is the duty of every one who desires in any way to serve the Lord to make himself as able for that service as he can. It is painful to find in some, that after many years of opportunity and experience, they do not seem to have made the slightest progress. But we shall come again to this point further on. Meanwhile let us remember, on the other hand, that many who have been greatly used of God have had a very slender equipment either of natural ability or of acquired knowledge. But they have made up the lack of these by having in large measure spirituality and godly zeal ; whereas the former qualifications, when possessed without the controlling influence of the latter, have at times proved a great curse instead of a great blessing.

Yet another aspect of the matter is this, that our doing of our service to God, provided we are really seeking His glory in it, will tend to make us the more careful to keep right in soul ourselves, and will also help us to make progress. It is as expressed in Prov. 11:25, "He that watereth shall be watered also himself"; and as we read in the final verse of the passage we are considering, "In doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee".

There are on the earth a number of lakes, such as the Dead Sea in Palestine and the Great Salt Lake in the United States which take in the water from various rivers but have no outflow, apart from evaporation. All such are stagnant, salty, and quite undrinkable. And, sad to relate, we find Christians like them everywhere, who take in all but gave out nothing, with the result that they are just as stagnant in their lives and testimony as the lakes with which we are comparing them. They attend meetings and appear to listen, but neither publicly nor privately does one find them giving spiritual help to others, or doing a bit in the Gospel amongst the unsaved. One would wonder how such will render their account at our Lord's judgment seat.

Let us now consider the passage (1 Tim. 4: 6-16) itself. In its opening verse we get the expression, "A good minister of Jesus Christ", which might well serve as a title for the whole of it. Or we might build up a full length portrait of this "good minister" by thinking of him as possessing the many other "good" things of which our epistle speaks. For example, he is one who, at his beginning "professed a good profession" (chap. 6:12). He holds and preaches the "good doctrine" (chap. 4: 6); and in keeping therewith

he practises "good works" (chap. 5:25, etc.); so acquiring "a good report of them which are without" (chap. 3:7). He also maintains "a good conscience" (chap. 1:5, 19), and goes in much for that "good" thing, prayer (chap. 2:3), as well as that other "good" thing, piety in the home life (chap. 5:4). Thus, warring "a good warfare" (chap. 1:18) he wins for himself "a good degree" (chap. 3:13); and finally lays up for himself "a good foundation against the time to come" (chap. 6:19).

But what does this sixth verse of chapter 4 itself set forth as a mark of the "good minister of Jesus Christ"? It says he is one who "puts the brethren in remembrance of these things". Of what things? Primarily, of course, of the evil times to come which the apostle has mentioned in the preceding verses. A good minister or servant of Christ will not hesitate to pass on the note of warning, however unpleasant it may be; since to fail in so doing would be to incur the guilt of the unfaithful watchman of Ezek. 3:18.

But one's mind naturally goes back further, to the truths of chapter 3, and especially to the previous "These things" of chap. 3:14. Our ministry must not be one-sided, for a "good minister" will give out the positive as well as the negative sides of the truth of God. Not only so, but the term "These things" suggests yet more, because of its repeated use in our epistle. It appears there seven times in all; and though each occurrence has its own special connection with what immediately precedes it, the frequent repetition weaves them all together, till we find that ultimately "These things" include the whole contents of the little book. All this Timothy, as a good minister of Jesus Christ, is to teach and to continue teaching, despite the demand that may arise for "something different", and despite the darkening times of which Paul has just warned us.

As already remarked, the passage contains two sections—verses 6-10, in which exercise in godliness is enjoined; and verses 11-16, in which the exhortation is to exercise of gift. In the former three words stand out, which, like others in these epistles referred to in an earlier chapter, contain word-pictures. As given in the A.V. they are "nourished" (v. 6), "exercise" (v. 7), and "suffer reproach" (v. 10); but this last is given as "strive" in the R.V., which follows an alternative and better attested Greek reading; while the middle one might more fittingly be rendered as by Newberry, "train". Putting the three together, we have in very complete form the illustration so often made use of by Paul, of a contestant in the running and wrestling games which were popular in those days in Greece and elsewhere. It was essential that such a person should be "nourished" with suitable and strengthening food; that he should "train" vigorously, with a view to "strip off" (which is the root idea in the word rendered "exercise" or "train") unnecessary weight of fat, etc.; and that only in this fit condition he should "strive" or "contend in the games".

All these things have their counterpart in the case of the Christian athlete. He, too, must be fed with suitable food, "the words of the faith and of the good doctrine" (v. 6, R.V.). If he has been nibbling at the food we are warned of in the early verses of the chapter, he will have little strength for the conflict. And he must also by self-discipline and training rid himself of all superfluous weight, if he is to have any prospect of winning the prize.

In the beginning of the second section we have an exhortation which

must be carefully read in connection with the verses that follow it, if we wish to rightly understand what the apostle has in mind when he says, "Let no man despise thy youth". Wrenched from its context, it could be made use of by forward young people as an excuse for rebelling against godly rule on the part of older ones ; though it is only a chapter back that we have the warning words, "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil".

Let us ask then, how the apostle means Timothy to act so that no man may despise his youth ? If we do, we shall find, not merely one, but many answers in the succeeding verses of the passage. It will be noticed that the exhortation is followed in the same sentence by "but be thou an example of the believers", etc. That is to say, "but be of such behaviour that they will have no reason for despising it". And this is followed by –

Verse 13 – "Be so diligent in your service that you cannot be despised".

Verse 14 – "Remember that it was God who led you into this work, and that older men, as wise as any of these, gave their approval by laying their hands on you".

Verse 15 – "Let them see that you are profiting (i.e. making progress, as R.V.)".

Verse 18 – "Think, too, of the truths which your work produce, both in others and in yourself".

When due weight has been given to all these considerations, there will be little difficulty in obeying the injunction, "Let no man despise thy youth".

CHAPTER XIV

THE LETTER TO TITUS

For the greater part of our "Notes" thus far, we have been occupied mainly with 1st Timothy; and, while we have by no means exhausted that portion of our subject, it may be well now to pass to the other two epistles of the group, 2nd Timothy and Titus.

One would naturally incline to consider these in the order named, because it is thus they are found in our Authorised Version. But since 1st Timothy and Titus, as pointed out in an earlier chapter, were written at nearly the same time, and before Paul's last imprisonment had begun, whereas 2nd Timothy was written shortly before that imprisonment ended in his death, and is the latest writing of the apostle that has come down to us, it is perhaps better to take them in the order in which he penned them.

Another reason for doing this is that the letter to Titus, like the first to Timothy, is chiefly concerned with the condition and needs of the saints among whom the recipient was serving the Lord at the time; while the second to Timothy, as has been already remarked, is of a more personal and less official character. This being so, the Titus epistle need not detain us long; since much that could be said about it has already been said in connection with 1st Timothy, or in the general notes with which we began.

As Timothy had been asked to remain behind at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3), so Titus had been left at Crete (Tit. 1:5), and for work of a similar kind. There, too, the development, concerning which the apostle had warned the Ephesian overseers at an earlier period, was beginning to manifest itself;

and both from without and within the circle of the Assemblies men had arisen, "speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them". There was, therefore, the same need, that men conspicuous for godliness and ability should be raised up to leadership amongst the saints, with a view to "stop the mouths" (Tit. 1:11) of such. So in the first chapter Paul sets before Titus the characteristics, both of these "gainsayers", and of those fitted to deal with them.

The variation of expression (previously commented on) between the "If any man desire overseership" of 1 Tim. 3:1, and the "Set in order the things wanting, and appoint elders" of Tit. 1:5, would suggest that the churches of Crete differed from that at Ephesus in this respect, that they had not previously had acknowledged "elders" amongst them, whereas the Ephesians, of course, had. This might be taken to imply further that these churches had only recently been formed. But this view would scarcely be consistent with the extensive development of evil described in the latter part of the first chapter.

The only reference made to the Cretians in Acts, apart from the fact that Paul's ship sailed by their island during the voyage of chap. 27, is the statement made in chap. 2:11 that Cretan Jews were present on the Day of Pentecost. It is quite probable that some of these were amongst the 3,000 converted on that occasion, and that they themselves carried the Gospel to their fellow-countrymen. If so, it may be that the reason for there being "things wanting" among them, was the absence previously of apostolic guidance in their Assemblies concerning such matters.

In view of the fact that the worst of the troublers in Crete were "they of the circumcision" (vv. 10, 14), it is interesting that the man Paul left behind to deal with the situation should be the same Gentile Titus, whom, many years previously, he had brought with him to Jerusalem, when he faced these people in their stronghold (Gal. 2:1-5). At that time they sought to "compel" the circumcision of Titus; but, says the apostle, "To whom we gave place by subjection, NO, NOT FOR AN HOUR, that the truth of the Gospel might continue with you".

One outstanding feature in this little epistle is the manner in which it sets forth the Gospel as a "threefold cord", including within itself a past, present and future aspect, in all three chapters. Thus in chap. 1:1-4 Paul tells us that his apostleship is

- (1) "according to the faith of God's elect,
- (2) "and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness,
- (3) "in hope of eternal life".

In chapter 2: 11-14 he says

- (1) "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared,
- (2) "that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world,
- (3) "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ".

And finally in chapter 3: 1-7 we have

- (1) "The kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,
- (2) "being justified by His grace" (as well as the practical exhortations with which the passage opens),
- (3) "according to the hope of eternal life".

These three passages form, as it were, a backbone for the entire epistle; and they stand out all the more prominently when we notice that it is in association with them we get the repeated "God our Saviour . . . Christ our Saviour" which is another characteristic of this letter (chap. 1:3, 4 ; 2:10, 13 ; 3:4, 6).

CHAPTER XV

GOOD WORKS

Another noticeable feature in Titus is the emphasis laid upon sobriety as an essential part of the character of a saint. Out of thirteen times that the adjective "sophron" (sober-minded) and its derivatives are encountered in the epistles, ten are in these last three of Paul's; and of those no less than six occur in Titus. Young and old alike are exhorted to sobermindedness; and when we come to chapter 2:12 it is coupled with righteousness and godliness, as the great threefold outcome of having been instructed by the grace of God.

We shall not wonder at the stress laid upon it, if we consider in the light of chap. 3:3 how opposite to all that sobriety means had been the character of the saints generally in their unconverted days; and, more especially, how opposite to it was the character of the Cretan race, as set forth by their own countryman Epimenides, and endorsed by Paul in chapter 1:12, 13. But what some perhaps may not so readily see is that such exhortations to sobermindedness were never more needed by God's people, young and old, than they are today. Yet so it is; and if they were acted upon, much weight would be added to our testimony amongst the unsaved, who oftentimes are more affected, for better or worse, by what they see in us than by what they hear from us.

This practical line of things is yet further emphasised in our epistle by the repeated references it contains to "good works". As the word "godliness" was seen to be characteristic of 1 Timothy, so the term "good works"—the outward manifestations of godliness—is given prominence in Titus. It occurs six times therein, and is found in connection with :

- (1) The conduct of unsaved professors (ch. 1:16).
- (2) The conduct of Titus personally (ch. 2:7).
- (3) The conduct of saints generally (ch. 2:14 ; 3:8).
- (4) The conduct of the Cretan saints in particular (ch. 3:1, 14).

With regard to the first of these, we may say in passing, that to tell the unsaved that their "good works" cannot save them, is not putting the matter in the Bible way. To say that salvation is "not of works", and "not by works of righteousness which we have done", is scriptural; but no unconverted person is ever represented in the New Testament as doing "good works". The term is reserved for acts done by the saints; and as to these sinners of Titus 1:16, the statement is that they are "to every good work reprobate".

On the other hand, "good works" are not to be the monopoly of a few

super-saints, but should be the mark of all Christians ; every one of whom has been "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). The first mention of them in the New Testament is in the general exhortation of Matt. 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven", and the last is in the similar one of 1st Peter 2:12, "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that . . . they may, by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation".

What then are these "good works"? Getting baptised? Keeping the remembrance feast? Preaching the Gospel? Such, doubtless, are good works, but it is not in connection with them that the expression is found in the Scriptures. The first definite act to which it is applied is the anointing of Christ by Mary of Bethany in Matt. 26:10, concerning which He said, "She hath wrought a good work upon Me", and also, as in Mark's account, "She hath done what she could". The next is in Acts 9:36-39, where it is employed of the kindness of Dorcas to the poor. Putting these together, it is evident that acts springing from love to Christ and love to our fellow-men are what God calls "good works". They may cause us to be praised, as in the case of Dorcas, or to be blamed, as in that of Mary, but they have our Lord's own approval.

Another interesting hint as to what may be "good works" underlies the marginal rendering, "profess honest occupations, or trades", which is given in both A.V. and R.V. at the last occurrence of the term in Titus in chap. 3:14. We do not say this rendering should find a place in the text, but it certainly is suggestive of what the apostle is here getting at. One's ordinary occupation may be a "good work", if it is done as "unto the Lord", and with His interests in view.

Paul in Acts 20:34, 35 reminds the Ephesian elders that by the work of his hands he had ministered, not only to his own necessities, but to those of his fellow-labourers ; and he then adds the injunction, "that so labouring ye ought to support the weak". Again, in Eph. 4:28 he says of the converted thief, "let him labour, working with his hands (not merely to supply his own wants, but) that he may have to give to him that needeth".

Similarly here in Titus 3:14, if the close connection with v. 13 is kept in mind, the line of thought in both verses may be paraphrased thus. "Bring thou (the command being in the singular number, and addressed to Titus personally) those servants of the Lord, Zenas and Apollos, in their journey diligently (by providing for their needs), in order that nothing may be wanting to them. Not only act thus thyself, Titus, but also (Gr. *de kai*) let our people (i.e. the rank and file of the saints) learn to be forward in good works with a view to meeting the (Gr. *eis tas*) necessary wants (which from time to time arise in connection with the Lord's service); in order that they (the saints) may not be without fruit".

From these and other passages it is clear that the apostle looked upon earthly toil as honourable, not only for the ordinary Christians, but when practicable, for those engaged in spiritual labours also. Moreover, he saw in it what could be turned to account as a "good work", in supplying the needs of the poor and the weak, as well as of the Lord's service generally; and this was the point of view that he himself strove, and that he desired Titus to impress upon the saints.

CHAPTER XVI

LAST WORDS FOR THE LAST DAYS

From 1st Timothy and Titus we now pass to 2nd Timothy, the latest written and, to some of us at least, the most interesting of Paul's pastoral letters. In a number of instances we find in the Scriptures what may be spoken of as the last words of certain saints, who had become aware that their course was finished ; and all such passages are worthy of careful study. In the case of David in 2 Samuel 23 : 1-7, the very term is employed, for we read, "Now these be the last words of David"; and what follows, concerning the nature of Inspiration (v. 2), concerning the coming King Messiah (vv. 3, 4, R.V.), concerning David's own experience and longings (v. 5), and concerning the doom of the wicked (vv. 6, 7), forms one of the finest and most remarkable messages that ever fell from the Psalmist's lips.

Then we think of Jacob's words in Gen. 49 to his sons gathered round his deathbed ; of Joseph's in Gen. 50:24-26, with their note of strong confidence in God's fulfilment of His promise ; of those of Moses in Deut. 33, culminating in the inimitable peroration of verses 26-29 ; and of Peter's in the second epistle which, in many respects, resembles this closing message of Paul that we are about to consider. Indeed, in all these "last words" there is a striking similarity, emphasis being laid on God's Word, on the evil times ahead, on the coming of God's anointed King, and on the personal experience of the speaker himself.

When the Lord saved the writer as a young lad just entering his teens, one of the first pieces of advice tendered him was to study 2nd Timothy. He did so, and has much reason to be thankful for the counsel, and to pass it on with confidence to every young believer. In contrast with 1st Timothy and Titus which, as has already been shown, are mainly occupied with church matters, 2nd Timothy is personal and individual in character. Throughout it the apostle seems to have before him Timothy's own testimony and service, while the Assembly is scarcely referred to ; and we might insert as a sub-title to the little book, "Helps and Hindrances to the Man of God in difficult times". Studied from that point of view, the epistle will prove a tower of strength to us, all through our Christian course, from the stage of the young convert just entering upon his path of service, to that of the aged saint expecting soon to be taken home.

The relationship between Paul and Timothy, as was suggested in our first chapter, had much in common with that between Moses and Joshua. Paul was the great leader in early church development, as Moses was in that of the nation of Israel. Each of them took unto him a young man to be a close companion and associate in service. Moses during the forty years appears to have had Joshua with him continually. He gave him command of the army in the early struggle with Amalek (Exod. 7 : 9-14), and he took him up with him to the Mount of Sinai (Exod. 24 : 13). In like manner Paul took Timothy about with him, and entrusted him with many a service, so that he could say to the Philippians, "Ye know the proof of him, that as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel". And both of these young men gladly profited by the training which they thus received.

A feature of the epistles to Timothy is the repeated reference to a

“charge” which the apostle is committing to him, and which he desires him to pass on to others. This is even more noticeable in the R.V., where the rendering of the Greek words is more uniform ; and it is interesting to compare with it Deut. 31 : 14, 23, in which Moses is said to have similarly given Joshua a “charge” before his death. Moreover, the charge, as there given, and as repeated by God Himself to Joshua afterwards (Josh. 1 : 6, 7), consists mainly of two injunctions, one, “Be strong and of a good courage”, and the other, “Study the Book of the Law”, both of which have their counterparts in 2nd Timothy, where in each chapter Paul exhorts his young fellow-labourer to courage and to the study of the Scriptures. “Stir up the gift”, he says to him, and again, “Be not ashamed of the testimony”; and again, “Endure hardness”. Even the very words “Be strong”, used several times to Joshua, are found in chap. 2 : 1. As to his attitude to the Word of God, we have in chapter 1, “Hold fast the form of sound words”, in chapter 2, “Rightly dividing the word of truth”, in chapter 3, “All Scripture . . . is profitable . . . that the man of God may be perfect”, and in chap. 4, “Preach the Word”.

Indeed one might carry the comparison between Joshua and Timothy still further. For as Moses was succeeded by the former, so he in turn was followed by those who are described as “the elders that outlived Joshua” (Judges 2 : 7). And, similarly, as Paul was succeeded by Timothy, so Timothy was succeeded by “faithful men who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2 : 2). In each case, while these men lived, God’s people were kept to some extent in the right path, but when they were gone declension set in, a course of events which has more than once been repeated in the later history of God’s people.

CHAPTER XVII

A MAN OF GOD

In our last chapter we described 2nd Timothy as dealing with the things that help or hinder the man of God in his testimony. What these are we shall now endeavour to point out ; but before doing so, it may be well to consider the expression “man of God” itself. It occurs only twice in the New Testament, both times in relation to Timothy ; but it is found in the Old Testament frequently, and is there applied to at least a dozen individuals.

The connections in which we get its New Testament occurrences may suggest to us certain characteristics by which the “man of God” can be known; and it would be a study both interesting and profitable to place alongside these the various persons to whom in the Old Testament the title is given, that it might be seen to what extent they were marked by them. Thus, in 1 Tim. 6 : 11, 12, the man of God is one who flees and follows and fights. He flees from the love of money and its attendant evils ; he follows after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness ; he fights the good fight of the faith. Then in 2 Tim. 3 : 16, 17 he is one who, by learning the Word of God, becomes thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Putting both passages together, he is evidently a man who walks within the lines of that twofold “charge” which, as we saw, was given to

Joshua and Timothy when about to be bereft of their great leaders; exhorting them, on the one hand, to be courageous and, on the other, to study the Scriptures.

Those in the Old Testament who are honoured with the title "man of God" had indeed much need both of courage and of acquaintance with the Word of God, because they were for the most part placed in situations of difficulty or danger in which they had to stand alone for God, having neither human help nor human counsel. The first to whom it is given is Moses, who is called "Moses the man of God" some six times. Most of the others who get it are prophets, and of these a few are unknown to us by any other name than this (e.g. 1 Sam. 2:27 ; 1 Kings 20:28 ; 2 Chron. 25:7, 9). As might be expected from their circumstances, it is often used of Elijah and Elisha ; and, strangely enough, it is employed no less than seventeen times for the prophet from Judah who prophesied against Jeroboam's altar, and who afterwards failed himself to keep the commandment God had given him. The last man in the Old Testament to get it is one called Hanan, the son of Igdaliah (Jer. 35:4), concerning whom we know little else than that he was "a man of God". A short record, yet one we might well covet to have as our own.

But let us return to consider what the apostle has to say to Timothy of the dangers and difficulties which he, as a man of God, would find himself up against. These were –

1. Weakness of the flesh in himself (ch. 1: 6-8).
2. Defection of the saints in Asia (ch. 1: 15).
3. Introduction of false teachings (ch. 2: 17, 18).
4. Evils of the last days (ch. 3: 1-9).
5. Persecutions (ch. 3: 11, 12).
6. Failure of fellow-preachers (ch. 4: 10, 16).
7. Loss of Paul by death (ch. 4: 6, 7).

Such a list might well be sufficient to daunt Timothy, or anyone else in similar circumstances ; and the apostle does not seek to minimise them, but would have his young friend to face them manfully, which is ever the best way.

Starting from what we might call the outer fringe of them, we first meet with the "perilous times" described in chapter 3. These are of course more fully manifested in our own day than at that early period, yet verses 5 and 6 show that Timothy had to face them to some extent, and the danger from them was twofold. On the other hand the difficulty of testifying for God amongst such people as are here spoken of might dishearten him ; on the other hand he might become in some measure like them. And if he did keep faithful to his charge he would, in all probability, meet with the persecution of which Paul warns him in verses 11 and 12.

But perhaps the most serious hindrances of all were those to be found among the saints themselves. Teachers such as Hymenaeus and Philetus were spreading false doctrines, and many were allowing their faith to be overthrown thereby. Men of Asia, probably converted through the apostle himself, had deliberately and disloyally turned their backs on him at some critical juncture.* Through love of the world, or from fear of exposing

*The Greek tense used in ch. 1:15 for "turned away" suggests a definite act at some particular time.

themselves to danger, certain preachers who had been prominent in the work of the Lord were proving themselves unreliable by deserting their post. Worst of all, Paul, who had been Timothy's guide and helper through all the past years, was now about to be taken from him.

That in such circumstances he himself should have shown weakness is not surprising, and the exhortation of chap. 1:6 to "rekindle" (see Newberry, Weymouth, etc.) the gift that was in him, implies as much.

CHAPTER XVIII

ENCOURAGEMENTS

But over against these hindrances, with which Timothy was surrounded, we must place the helps and encouragements that were his, as set forth in our epistle (2 Tim.).

In chapter 1 Paul takes him back to his conversion, reminding him of God's purpose and grace to which it was due (v. 9), of the work of Christ that made it possible (v. 10), and of the certainty of its final outcome (v. 12).

In chapter 2 he exhorts him to remember that even now he has a risen living Christ in glory to count upon (v. 8, R.V.).

In chapter 3 he describes at some length the value of the Word of God to him for present guidance and instruction in his service (vv. 14-17).

In chapter 4 he reminds him of that which lies ahead, the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the rewards for those who have earned them (vv. 1, 8, 18).

He also, throughout the epistle, sets before him the example of others who had proved themselves faithful; e.g. in chap. 1:5 the life of his mother and grandmother, in chap. 1:16-18 the courage and zeal of Onesiphorus, in chap. 3:10, 11 and 4:6, 7 his own manner of life since Timothy had first known him.

Of such encouragements as these all who have to stand for God in times of difficulty may still avail themselves. Surrounded by men of the type described in chap. 3:2-5, their hearts will be strengthened by the thought that when they themselves were "even as others" God saved them and called them "with an holy calling" (chap. 1:9); and as they consider how securely the Lord guards their deposit "against that day" (chap. 1:12), they will be the more determined to be faithful with that which He has entrusted to them (chap. 1:13, 14). Deserted by some, upon whose help they might well have thought that they could in all circumstances rely (chap. 1:15 and 4:10, 16); and bereft by death of others whose guidance they formerly leaned upon (chap. 4:6); they will the more be cast upon their risen Lord (chap. 2:8), Who has promised, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee"; and will be able to say with Paul, "Notwithstanding, the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, . . . and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion" (chap. 4:17). Faced with evil teachings (chap. 2:17, 18), the Word of God with which they have been "furnished" will not only keep them right personally, but will enable them to "in meekness instruct those that oppose themselves" (chap. 2:25) to it. And in all their weakness (chap. 1:6-8) they will be "made strong" by looking forward to

that time when their Lord will come back again, and His reward with Him, "to give every man according as his work shall be" (chap. 4:1, 8).

The encouragement which the apostle himself derived from these sources is manifested in a number of bold and confident assertions contained in the epistle.

As to his salvation, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day" (chap. 1:12).

As to the work of God, "The foundation of God standeth sure (chap. 2:19).

As to the Word of God, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable" (chap. 3:16).

As to the future prospect, "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom" (chap. 4:18).

Here we have no sad wailings of a disillusioned and disappointed man, who feels that the work to which his life has been given is rapidly coming to nought ; but the steady confidence of one who has well learned the lesson taught by his old master Gamaliel, "If this counsel or this work . . . be of God ye cannot overthrow it" (Acts 5:38, 39). May we, in the midst of the difficulties and troubles of today never cease to have like confidence.

CHAPTER XIX

FIGURES OF THE MAN OF GOD

Having noticed the difficulties with which the "man of God" is surrounded in our epistle, and also his helps and encouragements as set forth in each chapter of it, let us now consider a group of illustrations of himself and his responsibilities, which we find in chapter 2. In all there are seven figures used, but the first and the last are titles belonging to him, rather than mere illustrations of him. They are contained in the word "son", addressed to Timothy in verse 1 ; and in the expression "servant of the Lord", which occurs in verse 24.

These two terms are, it may be noted, in their proper order ; for we are sons before we are servants, and the only service which God will accept from us is the service of sons. Although the word rendered "servant" here and in many other places means "bondservant", this does not imply that our service is hard and irksome slavery, but rather that we have been purchased by our Lord (1 Cor. 6:20), and are, therefore, His property. Such as try to be servants without having become sons will doubtless find it irksome enough, and will be unable to please Him however hard they may slave (Rom. 8:8); while, on the other hand, if any would be sons without becoming servants also, they have as painful a lesson to learn as had the prodigal of old (Luke 15:18, 19).

Set in between these two figures, we get five others, which picture from various points of view the position and work of this son-servant. In verses 3 and 4 he is a soldier, in verse 5 an athlete, in verse 6 a farmer, in verse 15 a workman, and in verse 21 a vessel. Some of these are again introduced in chap. 4:6, 7, where the apostle presents his own completed service in five pictures, a drink-offering, a traveller, a fighter, a runner, and a steward.

Those not found there are used of him elsewhere, for Paul never exhorted others to be what he was not prepared to be himself.

Of the five illustrations in chapter 2 above mentioned, the first three are found closely linked together, as though to form one full length picture between them; while the fourth and the fifth stand out, each by itself. And when we thus consider them, it will be noticed that a similar aim is attributed to the servant of God in the three passages, though couched in different language in each case. In verse 4 that aim is that he may "please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier"; in verse 15, that he may "show himself approved unto God"; and in verse 21, that he may be "meet for the Master's use". All these mean much the same thing; and they may be compared with what the apostle elsewhere declares to be his own aim, "Wherefore also we make it our aim . . . to be wellpleasing unto Him" (2 Cor. 5:9, R.V.); or they may be contrasted with those men described by him in 1 Tim. 1:6 (see A.V. margin) as not aiming at the proper mark, men of whom Hymenaeus and Philetus mentioned in our chapter are examples (v. 18, R.V. margin), as well as various others named in the epistle.

But let us consider more fully the threefold picture drawn in verses 3-6, which takes its form from the exhortation of verse 3, "Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ". In each of the three verses which follow there is suggested something that this enduring of hardness will imply; in verse 4, that it will necessitate abstinence from undue occupation with other matters; in verse 5, that it will involve careful obedience to certain laws; and in verse 6, that it will mean strenuous and unremitting toil. The soldier on service must not be entangled with the affairs of this life, the athlete must conform to the rules that govern the contest, and the husbandman must labour with all possible energy. One who would keep his service right in each of these respects must surely be prepared to "endure hardness"; for he will find himself in conflict with his three ancient foes: the World, which will seek to entangle him in its snares; the Devil, who will entice him, as he did Eve long ago, to break through God's rules; and the Flesh that would constrain him to take things easy and not overstrain himself.

It is of interest that while the word used for a soldier in verse 3 is the usual one, occurring frequently in the New Testament, another term is employed in verse 4. There he is a "man that warreth", or as it is rendered in the R.V., a "soldier on service". That is to say, the reference is not to the man in barracks with nothing to worry him but the daily drills, etc., but to the man at the front where war is actually raging. The distinction is important, for many things would be allowable to a soldier in his home quarters that could not be tolerated in the battle line; and men in the field have been turned over to a firing squad and shot for actions that in times of peace would have been dealt with very lightly. And our position is just this, that we are actually engaged in war, not merely exercising in view of one. Many of God's people appear not to realise this, and merit the rebuke of James, "Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world maketh himself an enemy of God" (Jas. 4:4, R.V.). In present-day speech they are "fifth columnists".

Another interesting thought is suggested by the expression "enrolled him as a soldier" (v. 4, R.V.). He is not commander-in-chief, nor even a general,

but just an enlisted soldier, possibly in a very subordinate position. Some of us think ourselves fitted for far greater things than we are allowed to do ; and if we had the arranging of the Lord's host we would have it very differently. But let us not forget that it is a great honour to be in His army at all. Only for His mercy we might still be in the devil's army and fighting against Him, so we may well be contented to do our best in the position to which He has assigned us.

CHAPTER XX

THE WORKMAN

Yet another suggestive word in 2nd Tim. 2:4 is that rendered "entangleth himself in" (literally, "is-woven-up-in"). Most of the Lord's people have to be occupied, during a large part of their time, with "the affairs of this life", in order to earn their daily living; and the apostle exhorts them elsewhere to do so diligently. But no saint should allow himself to become "entangled" in such things, or in other words to have his heart taken up with them. If our hearts are true to the One whom we serve, we shall not be found unduly engrossed in anything else ; nor indeed shall we be found treating lightly any of His rules (v. 5), or wasting the time that should be given to His service (v. 6).

It is pitiful to hear, as one sometimes does, saints speak of their devotedness to the Lord, and attributing it to having received what they call "the second blessing"; while at the same time they are walking in disobedience to some of His plain commands. Let all such be assured that there will be no crown for the one who has not striven "lawfully". Sad, too, will be the awakening of those "gentlemen farmers" whose only work has been to stand by and criticise, while others were overburdened by having to take on their neglected labour in addition to their own.

One last point as to this threefold picture in verses 4-6 of unentangled, obedient, and unremitting service to our Lord, is that it offers a threefold award. In verse 4 we get the high honour of His personal approval ; and to "please Him" should be in itself reward sufficient, even though we were to get none other. In verse 5 we look forward, as the apostle himself did in chap. 4:8 to the "crown" which will be given for faithful service after the course has been finished. And in verse 6 we are privileged to partake, even while we still toil on, of the "fruits" of our own labour.

But we pass on to the figure used in verse 15, that of a workman. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth". Here, although what is aimed at is much the same as in verse 4, that is, to please the Lord, yet the point for His approval is different. There, as has been remarked, it was a question of the heart being right; but here it is rather of ability in service, or, might we say, of the head being right, so that the Word of truth may be rightly divided.

The expression which Paul uses in this verse, and which is rendered in the A.V. "rightly dividing", but in the R.V. "handling aright", has given rise to much speculation as to its exact meaning. It is one of those picture-words to which reference has been made in an earlier chapter, and literally

it signifies "cutting straight"; but what the picture before the writer's mind was has been answered in various ways. It has been thought to represent a father, or a steward, cutting up bread for the household, a priest cutting up the parts of the sacrifice, a ploughman cutting a straight furrow in the soil, or (as in the R.V. margin) a sailor steering his course through the sea.

Some of these pictures are suggestive, but the passage itself gives little support to most of them. It is not a father, nor a priest, nor a sailor, that is in view, but just a "workman". And this workman has, through study and practice, acquired such skill at his job that he is able to present himself before his Master as one who has done, and can do, work of which he is not ashamed.

Of the service of Christ in itself none need ever be "ashamed" (see chap. 1:8, 12, 16); but of our own efforts in that service we have cause to be ashamed often enough. We have not done our best; or if we have, our best was not as good as it should have been, because we have not been making the progress we might have made, and to which the apostle urged Timothy in the previous epistle when he said, "Be diligent in these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy progress may be manifest to all" (1 Tim. 4:15, R.V.). Many, who claim to have started for heaven a long time ago, seem to have made no advance since then; and even amongst such as have for years been ministering to saints and sinners, there are those who appear to be not a whit clearer or more intelligent in the things of God than when they began.

The importance of being able to "rightly divide" the Word of truth is emphasised by the setting in which the exhortation is here given. Timothy had around him those who were striving about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers (verse 14). Some of them, as Hymenaeus and Philetus, were disseminating erroneous doctrines about the resurrection (v. 18); and, of course, the servant of the Lord had to contend for the truth against such. They, doubtless, were clever men; and though one could not say it would take a cleverer man to meet them, for that is not God's way, yet it certainly would require a man who had studied the Word of God, and who, as it is expressed in Heb. 5:14, had, by reason of use, his senses exercised to discern good and evil. Thus equipped, and guided by the Holy Spirit, he could be able to carry out the injunction with which our chapter closes, and to meekly instruct those who were opposing themselves to the truth.

CHAPTER XXI

THE VESSEL

Still another of these instructive pictures remains to be considered, that in verses 20 and 21, of a vessel, one amongst the many to be found in a great house.

There has been at times much questioning as to what this "great house" represents, and some doubtful explanations of it have been forthcoming; but there is really no need that it should have any particular significance, since it is only the background of the illustration; the man of God being

compared, not to the house, but to a vessel in it. The great house is mentioned simply because in a poor cottage, or even in an ordinary dwelling, this profusion of vessels, formed from such a variety of materials, would not exist. Earthen and wooden vessels it might have, but scarcely those of gold and silver.

Our passage is, of course, not the only one in which the saint is likened to a vessel, for it is a figure occurring frequently in the Scriptures. Paul himself, at his conversion, was called by the Lord "A chosen vessel unto Me". And he afterwards said of himself and others, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4:7). But it is noteworthy that in the latter passage all the vessels are spoken of as "earthen", in order, as it says, "that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us"; whereas in 2 Tim. 2:20 they are made from various materials, each to suit its own particular purpose.

There is, however, another distinction drawn between the vessels in verse 20, besides that of their substance. Some of them, we are told, are to honour, and some to dishonour. In comments on the passage it is usually taken for granted that this difference runs parallel to the former one—that the vessels of gold and silver are vessels to honour, and that the wooden and earthen vessels are the vessels to dishonour. It may be so, but the form of the statement does not necessarily imply this. Indeed the middle "and" suggests otherwise, and the exhortation of the following verse is evidently based on the second distinction only. For, while purging or cleaning may render a vessel of whatever material, more fit for honourable use, no amount of it would turn a wooden vessel into a golden one, or one of earth into one of silver. And, on the other hand, a golden or silver vessel may become defiled and so unfit for use, as well as one of wood or earth.

The Master of the great house is the owner of all the vessels alike, and each, as we have said, has its own special use. Most of us may never in this life be anything but earthen vessels, yet it is our privilege as well as our duty to purge ourselves from all that is evil, in order that we may be clean vessels. And a clean earthen vessel is more "meet for the Master's use" than a dirty golden one.

Now since cleansing is the point here emphasised, the illustration of verses 20 and 21 adds something more to what we had before us in verses 4-6 and in verse 15 respectively. As already stated, in the former it was the question of freedom from entanglement, or of keeping the heart right; and in the latter it was that of ability, or of having the head right. But in our present verses the question is as to our conduct and company, or might we say of keeping our feet right.

When we bring together in our minds these three, the heart, the head, and the feet, they may suggest to us words spoken in Exod. 12 in connection with the paschal lamb; of which, according to verse 9 (R.V.), the Israelites were to eat "its head with its legs and with the inwards thereof". Its great Antitype was perfect in all these respects, and our own development in them will doubtless be in proportion to our feeding upon Him.

In 2nd Timothy we have examples of those who failed in each respect. The heart of Demas was wrong when he "loved this present world" (chap. 4:10). The heads of Hymenaeus and Philetus were surely wrong when they taught that "the resurrection is past already" (v. 18). And the feet

of Phygellus and Hermogenes turned in a wrong direction that day when they and others "turned away from" Paul (chap. 1:15).

The case of the two, Hymenaeus and Philetus, who are named in our chapter, is of special interest ; for the passage we are considering follows closely on what is said regarding them. Evidently they desired to be prominent, and so, aiming at the wrong thing, they turned aside from both the truth and the path, and drew others with them ; thus exemplifying the need for the warning Paul had given at this very place some years earlier, when he said, "Of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them". For it is ever easier to gain prominence and notoriety by taking a wrong path, than by keeping in the right one.

The connection between verse 19 here and Numbers 16, the inscription on one side of the "scal" being quoted from the Greek of verse 5 in that chapter, and that on the other side being probably based on its 26th verse, might suggest a comparison between what happened there in the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and what took place here in the case of Hymenaeus and Philetus. Like the latter, these men of the old time united to accomplish their ends, and to draw away many after them ; but they were like them, too, in this, that they were unable to overthrow "the foundation of God". They were, so to speak, jealous of those two "vessels of gold", Moses and Aaron (see Num. 16:3, 10, 13), and were dissatisfied with their own position ; as was probably the case with Hymenaeus and Philetus also.

Note, too, that it was to the Levites, of whom Korah was one, that at a later time the words were spoken, "Depart ye . . . be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord" (Isa. 52:11), words which also may well have been in the apostle's mind, as he penned, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity, . . . if a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use".

CHAPTER XXII

EVILS OF THE LAST DAYS

Following upon the composite picture of the man of God, his character, and his activities, which, as we have seen, is set before us in 2 Tim. 2, we come, at chap. 3:1 to a description of the times and surroundings in which he may have to take and maintain his stand for God. And it is surely fitting that the solemn message of warning with which this chapter opens should be impressed upon our minds, for never before have the characteristics of the "last days", as here enumerated, been so fully manifested as they are just now.

In this chapter we have a prophecy, and that in clearer and simpler language than most prophecies, of times which were yet future when the apostle wrote, indeed more distantly future than he himself realised. Paul, generally speaking, does not, in his epistle, address us as a prophet, but rather as a teacher ; yet here and there he does give us some remarkable prophecies. For example, in 1 Tim. 4 he describes what will take place

"in later times" (R.V.), that is, in times later than his own. Then, in the passage with which we are now concerned he deals with "the last days", that is, with the days just before Christ's second coming. In 1 Thess. 4 he speaks of the manner in which the rapture of the saints will take place, and in 1 Cor. 15 of the manner of the resurrection of such of them as have died. Following upon this we have 2 Thess. 1 and 2 on the rise of the man of sin, and on the Lord's destruction of him at His appearing. And lastly, there is in Rom. 11 the prophecy of Israel's future restoration as a nation. Putting all these together, we have in them a fairly complete outline of prophetic events, drawn from Paul's writings only.

But, clear though it may be to us that there has never been a time to which the apostle's description of the last days was more applicable than to our own, it is evident that he himself thought of them as just about to begin. See how at verses 5 and 6 he changes over from the prophetic future tense to the present, urging Timothy to turn away from such persons as he had described, and pointing to the mischief which they were already working in a hidden way. In common with the other apostles, he viewed the Lord's coming again as close at hand, and it was therefore but natural that he should think similarly of the last days.

There are those who look upon this expectation of the near return of their Lord on the part of the New Testament writers as a blunder which somehow detracts from the full inspiration of the Scriptures written by them ; but, in truth, it was no blunder at all. It was according to the purpose of God that His people should ever be living in expectation of Christ's coming again, just as in Old Testament times they had been waiting and looking for His first coming. He had not revealed to them anything which necessarily implied that the intervening period would be as long as has actually been the case ; and in all ages the best and most spiritual amongst the saints have been those who were most under the influence of this expectation.

The section of 2nd Timothy which begins at chap. 3 : 1 may be looked on as continuing to chap. 4 : 8, at which point the concluding notices and salutations of the epistle are introduced. It may be divided into three almost equal paragraphs ; of which the first, chap. 3 : 1-9 describes the evils existent in the last days ; the second, chap. 3 : 10-17, sets forth some safeguards for the man of God who is faced with these evils ; and the third, chap. 4 : 1-8 deals with his testimony maintained in spite of them, and with its reward. We shall briefly consider each of the three.

In chap. 3 : 2-5 no less than nineteen characteristics of the men of the last days are enumerated, and a most remarkable feature is the close correspondence between them and the list given in Rom. 1 : 29-31. The latter shows to us the depths of wickedness into which Heathendom sank when men turned their backs on the knowledge of God (v. 21); while in 2 Tim. 3 we get the depths into which what we commonly speak of as Christendom has sunk. If the two descriptions were set down in parallel columns it would be seen that practically the same things are said and the same expressions used in each case. Some words indeed are found in both lists, which occur nowhere else in the New Testament ; and where the actual word is not the same, the same evil is suggested by another word. The only notable distinction between them is that the list in 2 Tim. 3 closes with the words, "Having the form of godliness, but denying the

power thereof". It is that "form" alone which distinguishes the evils of Christendom today from the past and present evils of Heathendom.

That these evils of 2 Tim. 3 are prevalent today admits of no doubt. Consider them, clause by clause, and not one of them will be found missing. In the spheres of private life, home life, social life, business life, and very specially of late in political life, they are everywhere being manifested. And in such surroundings the saint is in "peril" in two ways. He may (1) become contaminated in some degree with the evil himself, and the love of money, the love of pleasure, the love of self, as well as others of the characteristics named may supplant in his heart that devotion to the Lord and to His interests which marked the man of God in chap. 2:4, 15, 21; until it has to be said of him, as of Demas, he "hath forsaken me, having loved this present world". Or, on the other hand, he may (2) lose heart and courage, and fear to maintain a testimony for God amidst these hard, proud, fierce people, who scorn all that he holds dear.

In the two succeeding paragraphs of the section, as already suggested, we shall find (1) what will help to preserve him from the first peril (chap. 3:10-12), and (2) what will encourage him to carry on with his testimony until the Lord comes, or he is taken home (chap. 4:1-8).

CHAPTER XXIII

SAFEGUARDS IN THE LAST DAYS

The list in 2 Tim. 3:2-5 of the evils characteristic of the last days has not been strung together at random. Love of self (R.V.) is rightly first, since from it springs the others. It leads to love of money, and the money in turn, when acquired, causes boasting and pride. Then the claims of God come to be ignored, as well as those of parents, and, indeed, of everyone except that well loved self. Many of the evils named are subjects of admonishment in other parts of both 1st and 2nd Timothy, and several of them are amongst the things from which the man in 1 Tim. 3 who seeks oversight is warned that he must be free.

The mention in verse 6 of "creeping" and of "silly women" links the promoters of these evils with the old serpent who thus beguiled Eve. Compare the references to her in 1 Tim. 2:14 and note how the expressions "led away with divers lusts" and "ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" corresponds with "the woman saw that the tree was . . . to be desired to make one wise" in Gen. 3:6.

Then in verse 8 we find them linked with Jannes and Jambres, who resisted Moses by imitating his miracles; and it is of interest that Ephesus, where Timothy at this time was, had been the scene of a similar attempt to imitate Paul's miracles on the part of "certain of the vagabond Jews" (Acts 19:13-17). There, too, as in the Old Testament instance, "their folly became manifest to all". The sons of Sceva were defeated by the demon-possessed man, while Jannes and Jambres were unable to produce life (Exod. 8:18), even in one of its lowest forms. In imitation of the work of God, they reached the point where they could "proceed no further" (v. 9); although in wickedness they might still "wax worse and worse" (v. 13).

But we must pass on to the second part of our subject, the safeguards

which Timothy, as a "man of God" had for his help amid such difficult surroundings. These were—

1. The example set by a great and godly leader, Paul himself (vv. 10-14).
2. The background of a godly home, and the lessons learnt there (vv. 14, 15).
3. The holy Scriptures which are able to make him wise unto salvation in all circumstances (vv. 15-17).

As to the first of them, the characteristics named in verse 10 as marking the course of the apostle stand in sharp contrast with those mentioned in verses 2-5. His "doctrine" and "manner of life" may be set over against the "form of godliness" which was all these men had ; his "purpose" against their "incontinency"; his "faith" against their "boasting"; his "longsuffering" against their "fierceness"; his "charity" or love against their "love of self", "love of money" and "love of pleasure"; and his "patience" against their "pride". These characteristics, ever since Timothy had first known him when preaching near his home at Lystra, he had displayed in the face of bitter persecutions ; yet he is able to remind his young friend for his encouragement that "out of them all the Lord delivered me" (v. 11). Not only so, but even now, with the headman's block in view, he can add, as he does in chap. 4:18, "and the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom". Death to Paul's mind was no such evil as a breakdown in his testimony would have been.

At verse 14 the apostle turns to others besides himself whose influence for good Timothy had experience of. The word "whom", in the clause "knowing of whom thou hast learned them", is plural (see R.V. margin); and the expression "from a child" which follows, shows that the reference is to Timothy's mother and grandmother, already mentioned at chap. 1:5. This is confirmed by the word that is used for the Scriptures in verse 15. Instead of the usual word "graphe" (plural, graphai") which we get in the next verse, and which is found in that sense only throughout the New Testament, it is "grammata", which literally signifies the alphabetic letters (as in Luke 23:38), and which is never elsewhere used for the Scriptures, except in the phrase "his (Moses) writings" at John 5:47. Its occurrence here may well suggest that Timothy's mother taught her boy to read from "the sacred letters" of the Word of God, and in so doing left impressions on his youthful mind that were never to be erased.

What a contrast do these two godly women present to the "silly women" of vv. 6, 7, who sought their "learning" at the wrong source! And what a contrast must Timothy's home life have been to the state of things depicted in vv. 2, 3, where there is lack of natural or parental affection on the one hand, and disobedience to parents on the other! Thoughts of it and of them would be a restraining and constraining force to him all the days of his life.

Moreover, the references to what Timothy had learned from Paul himself, and to what he had learned at a still earlier time from his mother and grandmother, lead on to further consideration in the closing verses of the chapter of what is the greatest safeguard of all, the Scriptures. Not only are these "able to make wise unto salvation" from all that is evil, but they

“furnish” the man of God with everything that he needs for carrying on his testimony and maintaining “good works”.

May we, amid the perils and difficulties of these “last times” seek in them the guidance and encouragement that we so greatly require.

CHAPTER XXIV

SERVICE IN THE LAST DAYS

Having noticed first, the evils of the “last days”, and the difficulties with which the man of God is faced because of them, and secondly, some things that are as safeguards to him under the circumstances, we now turn to chap. 4:1-8, the third paragraph of this section of our epistle, in which we have before us his activities and testimony as carried on despite his unpropitious surroundings.

His business is to “Preach the Word”, and Paul sets this before Timothy in a solemn charge, the last of three in these epistles, which are couched in very similar language. By quoting them successively as given in the R.V. the likeness of their form becomes more evident, while at the same time we shall find interesting differences among them.

In 1 Tim. 5:21 we have, “I charge thee in the sight of God, and Christ Jesus, and the elect angels, that thou **OBSERVE THESE THINGS**”.

In 1 Tim. 6:13, 14 it is, “I charge thee in the sight of God, . . . and of Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed the good confession, that thou **KEEP THE COMMANDMENT**”.

In 2 Tim. 4:1, 2 we get “I charge thee in the sight of God, and of Christ Jesus, who shall judge the quick and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom ; **PREACH THE WORD**”.

It will be seen that each begins with the “charge”, followed by the phrase “in the sight of God and of Christ Jesus”; but that in all three there is joined with this an additional plea, differing in each case. In 1 Tim. 6:13 Timothy’s thoughts are drawn back to the scene prior to the Cross, when Christ witnessed a good confession before Pilate. In 2 Tim. 4:1 they are led forward to His coming again, when service will be judged and rewarded. In 1 Tim. 5:21 they are turned to the elect angels, probably in view of the present interest of these in the testimony of God’s people, and in all that pertains to their welfare (cf. 1 Cor. 11:10 ; Heb. 1:14 ; 1 Pet. 1:12). Each of the three forms a weighty plea and ground for the exhortation that follows, one which should have a strong appeal to Timothy and to ourselves ; and each is particularly suitable to the passage in which it occurs.

The exhortations also are different, not only in their wording, but in their reference. The “**KEEP THE COMMANDMENT**” of 1 Tim. 6:14 is closely linked with verses 11, 12, which have to do with Timothy’s personal conduct. The “**OBSERVE THESE THINGS**” of 1 Tim. 5:21 is set in a passage dealing with Assembly matters. And the “**PREACH THE WORD**” of 2 Tim. 4:2 is in one which speaks of his public testimony in general. Thus when the three passages with their solemn charges are put together, they cover practically the entire life of the servant of God.

“Preach the Word” is a fitting climax to the earlier references made to God’s Word in the epistle. In chap. 1:13 he was to hold it fast ; in chap. 2:15 he was to rightly divide it ; in chap. 3:15-17 it was to be his guide and instructor under all circumstances ; and now he is to preach it to others. All these exhortations are much needed today ; and the connection of this final one with the “last days” and with “the time . . . when they will not endure sound doctrine” should especially be noted ; because it is taken for granted by many preachers that, in modern conditions, God’s Word must be made palatable to the hearers by the help of clever and witty sayings and stories, or by the accompaniment of solos and other sentimental ditties miscalled hymns. Yet here it is to be sounded out in its own naked and inherent grandeur as suited to all times and conditions.

Following upon the command to preach the Word, we get another important one, “Be instant in season, out of season”. The word rendered “Be instant” is the same as translated “is at hand” in verse 6 ; and its meaning here is “Be ready for action”. The previous exhortation suggested what his work was to be ; this one what is to be his attitude towards that work. He is to be ready to seize every opportunity given him, and to make opportunities where there seem to be none. This charge to preach, and to urgent zeal in doing so, is then pressed upon Timothy by two considerations ; one being that the times may be expected to get still worse, and the opportunities fewer (vv. 3, 4) ; and the other that Paul’s own course being finished the burden of carrying on the testimony will more than ever devolve upon him (vv. 5-8).

As has been already shown, when dealing with the pictures of the man of God in chapter 2, the five figures used here by the apostle in verses 6, 7 to describe his impending end, prove that he had not been exhorting others to do what he did not do himself. When he urged upon the saints that in obedience, energy, and singlemindedness they were to be like (1) a sacrifice, (2) a pilgrim traveller, (3) a contestant in war or the games, (4) a runner, (5) a steward, he had, as these statements imply, been practising what he preached. And now at length the earnest desire that he had expressed in Acts 20:23 (see R.V.) that he might finish the course without a breakdown is about to be fulfilled.

What a contrast this, the end of Saul the Benjamite of the New Testament presents to that of Saul the Benjamite of the Old ! Of the latter it was said, “The Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy” (1 Sam. 28:16) ; but here, “The Lord stood by me, and strengthened me” (v. 17). Concerning the king we read, “God . . . removed him” (Acts 13:22) ; but here, “I have finished the course”. The end of Saul was death by suicide (1 Sam. 31:4, 5) ; that of Paul, death by martyrdom.

Notes On The Epistle To The Hebrews

Chapters 1 and 2

JESUS AS SON OF GOD AND SON OF MAN

This epistle, which was probably penned by Paul, stands out from all the other works of that writer in the following ways :

1. It contains no reference to the name of its human author and introduces us to the great subject to be considered without any formal opening. In this respect it resembles the 1st Epistle of John.
2. It makes no mention of the particular company of saints for whom it was, in the first instance, intended. Yet it is quite clear from its ending (chap. 13 : 22, 25) that it was sent to some definite company, and that its first readers were well aware who its author was.
3. With the exception of its closing verses, it is not of the nature of a letter at all, but rather of a treatise.
4. Both in language and style it is different and, perhaps, in structure, could be said to be superior.

All these points of difference are in keeping with the grand subject of the epistle, which is to make known, more fully than any other, the personal glories of Christ and His perfect fitness to meet the varied needs of His people. In it HE is compared or contrasted with –

Prophets
Angels
Adam
Moses
Joshua
Aaron
Melchizedek

while His work is compared with the sacrificial and priestly work of the old economy. From first to last, these comparisons and contrasts exhibit the superiority of the Lord Jesus. In every case He is seen to be the “more excellent” One (chap. 1:4; 8:6). Under such circumstances, to give prominence to the human writer, or even to the particular Assembly addressed, would be unfitting, just as the high purpose which the author had in view called for the very grandest of human language and required no preliminary introduction.

The epistle sets Christ before us as the perfect Revealer of the Father and of the Father’s mind on the one hand and, on the other, the perfect Accomplisher of that provision for man wherein all others failed. In His offices and work He gloriously transcends all that went before Him, and He leaves nothing undone for any coming after Him to do.

SON OF GOD – SON OF MAN

In chapter 1 He is seen to be unique as Son of God. In chapter 2 He is perfected as Son of Man. The link with the Father in the former passage could be no closer than it is. The link with those whom He calls His “brethren” in the latter passage could be no closer than it is. And these two qualifications are what fit the Lord Jesus for the office which is the central thought of the epistle, namely, that of our Great High Priest.

In chapter 1, as Son of God, He is, and always has been, infinitely above the angels. In chapter 2, “for a little while”, as Son of Man, He takes a place “lower than the angels”; then is exalted above them and “crowned with glory and honour” (v. 9 R.V. margin); and the outcome is that He “brings many sons unto glory”, v. 10. In these two chapters the promise of AUTHORITY upon which Adam failed to lay hold, is taken up by Christ, just as in chapters 3 and 4 the promise of REST into which Israel failed to enter and enjoy, is entered upon by Christ – in both cases His own are associated with Him.

THE CONTRASTS

The first of all contrasts in the epistle is that between the manner in which God revealed Himself by the PROPHETS and that in which He has revealed Himself by His SON. The one side of the contrast is fairly well represented by the R.V. of verse 1: “God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets BY DIVERS PORTIONS AND IN DIVERS MANNERS”. The other side consists of the words, “Hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son . . . Who being the EFFULGENCE of His glory, and the VERY IMAGE of His substance” (vv. 2, 3, R.V.).

The expression, “BY DIVERS PORTIONS” suggests that the prophetic revelations of the Old Testament were fragmentary and partial. They were given in piecemeal fashion, “here a little and there a little”, cp. Isa. 28:9, 12 etc. The term used of the Son, however, “THE EFFULGENCE of His glory” implies that in Christ we have a full-orbed revelation, like the sun shining down out of a cloudless sky. The day of dim light and scattered rays has passed, and we are now in the presence of the fullest revelation possible. The clause “IN DIVERS MANNERS” suggests a variety of forms, such as types, prophecies, etc., and therefore implies varying measures of vagueness or clearness. But the “VERY IMAGE OF HIS SUBSTANCE” is expressive of an EXACT revelation, one that is, so to speak, identical with its substance. It is thus that God has been made known “in His Son” (v. 2, R.V.), for “no man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him” (John 1:18). So perfectly did Christ reveal Him that He, Himself, said, “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father” (see John 14:9).

*In Thee, most perfectly expressed,
The Father's glories shine ;
Of the full Deity possessed,
Eternally Divine !
True Image of the Infinite,
Whose essence is concealed ;
Brightness of uncreated Light,
The heart of God revealed.*

With this outshining of the glory of God in chapter 1, we may compare the use of the words "enlightened" and "illuminated" (both translations of the same Greek word) in chapter 6:4; 10:32. Having this full-orbed revelation, it was no wonder that the Hebrews in the latter passage were ready to endure "a great fight of affliction". Nor was it surprising that those in chapter 6, who in face of its fulness and exactness turned away, should be represented as utterly doomed. For what further LIGHT was there to give them? Absolutely none!

RELATION TO CREATION

To this fulness and exactness which the two expressions of the Son's relationship to His Father imply, the writer adds three others which stress the Son's relationship to CREATION.

First we have "Whom He hath appointed Heir of all things" and, linked with this, "By Whom also He made the worlds"—one carrying us forward to the future, the other taking us back to the beginning. Then in v. 3 He fills up the time between by adding, "upholding all things by the Word of His power". To these the writer further adds two clauses, "When He had by Himself purged our sins" and "sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high", two clauses which refer to the Son's past and present work for His people. Thus we have in verses 2 and 3 a SEVENFOLD DESCRIPTION OF THE SON in which He is presented in His relationship to THE FATHER, to CREATION and to HIS PEOPLE.

THE SEVENFOLD DESCRIPTION OF THE SON in verses 2 and 3 of chapter one, to which attention was drawn last month, is illustrated in the remainder of chapter one by SEVEN QUOTATIONS from the Old Testament, as follows:

HEIR OF ALL THINGS (v. 2)

Compare with this vv. 11 and 12, which are a quotation from Ps. 102:26, 27—"They shall perish; but Thou continest: And they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a mantle shalt Thou roll them up, as a garment, and they shall be changed: but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail" (R.V.).

BY WHOM ALSO HE MADE THE WORLDS (v. 2)

We would compare this with v. 10, which is a quotation from Ps. 102:25—"Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Thine hands".

WHO BEING THE EFFULGENCE OF HIS GLORY (v. 3, R.V.)

Here compare vv. 8 and 9, quoted from Ps. 45:6, 7—"Thy throne O God, is for ever and ever a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity: Therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows".

THE VERY IMAGE OF HIS SUBSTANCE (v. 3, R.V.)

This should be compared with the double quotation of v. 5, taken from Ps. 2:7—"Thou art My Son, This day have I begotten Thee", and 2 Sam. 7:14—"I will be to him a Father, And he shall be to me a Son".

UPHOLDING ALL THINGS BY THE WORD OF HIS POWER (v. 3)

Comparing this with v. 7 we have a quotation from Ps. 104:4 –“Who maketh His angels spirits, And His ministers a flame of fire”.

PURGED OUR SINS (v. 3)

This our Lord did the first time He came to this world and with this we would compare v. 6 in which we have a quotation from the Greek translation (Septuagint) of Deut. 32:43 which shall be fulfilled “When He (God) AGAIN shall have brought in the first born into the world” (R.V. margin).

SAT DOWN ON THE RIGHT HAND OF THE MAJESTY ON HIGH (v. 3)

With this compare the quotation from Ps. 110:1, found in v. 13 –“Sit on My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool”.

The above seven quotations from the Old Testament, which, as we have seen, illustrate the seven clauses of verses 2 and 3, prove that the Lord Jesus is superior to angels. This is the **SECOND GREAT CONTRAST** in Hebrews.

CHRIST INFINITELY ABOVE ANGELS

There are thirteen mentions of the word “angels” in this epistle, of which eleven are found in chapters one and two (in chapter one, verses 4, 5, 6, twice in v. 7, then v. 13 and in chapter two, verses 2, 5, 7, 9 and 16). The remaining two mentions are found in chapters 12:22 and 13:2. The angels are servants –“ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation” (v. 13). They did so in the case of Jacob, to which service this is most probably an allusion (cp. Gen. 28:12; 32:2). It is interesting to compare with this ch. 13:5, which is doubtless a reference to Gen. 28:15 and speaks of the Lord’s **PERSONAL** care of the patriarch. But Christ is here seen to be infinitely above angels. Though sinless and exalted, they are merely servants. He is, however,

THE ETERNAL SON	verses 5, 6
THE RIGHTEOUS KING	verses 7, 9
THE IMMUTABLE CREATOR	verses 10, 12
THE VICTORIOUS MAN	verses 13, 14

Therefore the Lord said, “Let all the angels of God worship Him”, v. 6.

REASON FOR COMPARISON

The reason for the comparison of the Son with angels is seen in ch. 2:1. This verse connects with the first clause of ch. 1:2. All that intervenes is parenthetical and reveals the excelling glory of the Son, through Whom God now speaks, over the angels through whom the Law was spoken. God’s final word of grace has been “spoken unto us in His Son” (R.V.) . . . “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word **SPOKEN BY ANGELS** was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if

we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be **SPOKEN BY THE LORD**, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him?"

PRACTICAL OBSERVATION

This is the first practical exhortation of the epistle, and it shows the seriousness of neglecting salvation. The **GREATNESS** of this salvation is seen in the three clauses which follow in verses 3 and 4. First, it was "**SPOKEN BY THE LORD**" and secondly, it was "confirmed unto us by them that heard Him". And again, "God also bore them witness". If they did not escape Divine judgment who sinned against the light of the law, what escape can there be for any who sin against the light of the Gospel? If the salvation is **GREAT**, then **GREAT** is the crime of neglecting it, and the punishment of all who thus treat it shall be proportionately **GREAT**.

REST AND RULE in Chapters 1 to 4

The key to the Hebrew epistle is found in its opening statement: "God . . . hath in these last days spoken to us by His Son". We have already seen that Christ is here presented to us as the Instrument of God's full and perfect revelation of Himself in contrast with all the partial and imperfect revelations that went before. All that preceded was in "divers portions" and in "divers manners"—a few rays shining here, and a few more there; some clearer than others, but all dim in comparison with what was to come later. Christ is the outshining of God's glory, and the "very image of His substance"—the sun shining, as it were, in a cloudless sky.

REVEALING OF GOD'S LAW

Now, the most important part of God's revelation of Himself prior to Christ's advent was in the giving of His law at Sinai; and the instrumentality of that revelation was two-fold; Angels on the one hand, and Moses on the other. As we are told in Gal. 3, the law "was ordained of angels in the hand of a mediator". Heb. 2:2 confirms this, and so does Stephen's speech in Acts 7. In order, therefore, fully to bring out the contrast which he has in mind, the writer to the Hebrews first sets Christ over against the angels in chapters 1 and 2; then over against Moses in chapters 3 and 4. There is much similarity in the way these two comparisons are developed. In chapter 1, angels are but servants in God's world, while Christ is Son and holds authority over it. In chapter 3 Moses is but a servant in God's house, while Christ is Son and holds authority over the house. In these passages this position of Christ is shown to be all the more fitting by its being pointed out that He is the Originator in each case. In chapter 1, He made the worlds and the angels themselves; and in chapter 3 He builded the house and Moses as part of it.

AUTHORITY OVER CREATION

Then in chapter 2 we have a quotation of a promise from Psalm 8, which was given to man with reference to authority over creation. But man himself became disobedient and so lost the obedience which was due to him. Similarly, at the end of chapter 3 we have a quotation from Psalm 95 which has reference to **GOD'S** promise of rest for His people. But man disbelieved and lost the **REST**, just as he had disobeyed and lost

the RULE. Both these arrangements of God seemed to have failed through man's default, but our writer shows that both are made good in Christ. Lastly, both chapters 2 and 4 end with references to Christ's priestly work. In the former passage He provides the reconciliation which we, being under sin and Satan, needed. In the latter passage He provides a throne of grace which we required because of our infirmities.

RULE AND REST

These two great things – RULE and REST – were the very two as to which God brought Adam into fellowship with Himself in Gen. 1:28-2:3. But both were to a large extent lost when Eve disbelieved and disobeyed God. Very soon afterwards we see men trying to retain, or regain them, As to REST, Cain's descendants sought to make themselves comfortable and at home in a cursed world. As to RULE, see Nimrod's hunting and the building of BABEL.

Both RULE and REST are again prominent in the promises made to Abraham and Israel. But both are seen to be lost by Israel in the book of Judges, where there was to be found but little of either. To some extent, RULE and REST were regained by David and were, in measure, enjoyed in the early days of Solomon, for in 1 Kings 4:24, 25 we read of the wide extent of Solomon's authority, and of the fact that all Israel "dwelt safely (or in rest), every man under his vine and under his fig tree".

Solomon himself, in his prayer of 1 Kings 8:56 blesses the Lord for having "given REST unto His people" and many of the expressions used concerning this time recall those which are used elsewhere of Millennial days. It is, of course, in this period that Psalm 8 and Psalm 95 were written by David, and by linking them with it special interest is given to the exhortation of Psalm 95: "TODAY IF YE WILL HEAR HIS VOICE, HARDEN NOT YOUR HEART", etc. For man at this time failed again, and soon, as in earlier days, there was neither RULE nor REST in Israel. Both of these points are emphasised for us in the book of Ecclesiastes, which, we know, was penned by Solomon. From that we can pass on to the first four chapters of Hebrews, where we learn that IN CHRIST all these purposes of God are going to be gloriously fulfilled.

Evidently the appeal of Psalm 95 had little effect at the time, and since the Captivity and Dispersion of Israel two great threats of Deuteronomy 28 have been carried out. Israel has become "the tail" of the nations instead of the "head" – she has lost her place of RULE and amongst those nations she finds no REST. But, anyhow, the people of David's and Solomon's period had their "TODAY" of opportunity, just as their ancestors of the book of Numbers, and their descendants to whom the Hebrew epistle was sent had theirs. I may add, that we, also, have our "TODAY" of opportunity now. And Israel of the future will have theirs prior to the RULE and REST of Millennial glory.

GOD'S REST

Our present subject is chapter 4. I have not any special light upon it. The truth is, I want light. I want it specially with regard to what is meant here by "entering into His rest". When and how do we enter God's rest? All the commentators seem unanimous in putting it off to the future and

referring it to the Rest of Heaven. I have also heard the view set forth that it is a present attainment which saints may, or may not, possess ; while others claim to see in the passage three “rests”—one past, one present and one future—all separate from each other. Personally, I have always felt inclined to look at it as something already possessed by all who are truly saved. But whichever view is taken, it appears to me there are difficulties.

However, as I do not wish to occupy space over a few knotty points, we shall commence our study by considering further the connection and setting in which this fourth chapter is found. Its close relationship with chapter 3 and also with chapters 1 and 2, was touched upon in last month’s article. Let us now turn back to chapter 3:1. The expression “holy brethren” here is linked with chapter 2:11, where the Sanctifier calls the sanctified (or “made holy” ones) brethren. Next we get “heavenly calling” and in passing I should like to suggest some questions as to this.

Is the phrase used to describe our present position (as the same word “heavenly” is employed in Ephesians), or does it merely mean that we are called to be in heaven in the future? And whichever view we take, does the answer to this question help us with regard to whether the “rest” of chap. 4 describes our present position, or our future prospect? We have always been taught that in Ephesians saints are seen, typically speaking, in Canaan. I suppose, therefore, that in “heavenly places” there must be that which is analogous to Canaan. If so, does this suggest that both the “heavenly calling” and the “rest” in Hebrews have reference to what is ours presently? Or is the proper view that they look forward to something shortly to come? This would be more in line with the tone that runs through this epistle. Compare such phrases as “world to come”, “powers of the age to come”, “things hoped for”, “a little while” etc.

Again, we have in this first verse (chapter 3) Christ as “Apostle and High Priest”. That is to say, He is the antitype of both Moses, the sent one to Israel, and Aaron, Israel’s priest ; just as in chap. 7 He is seen as the antitype of David and Solomon, “King of righteousness” and “King of peace”.

Following upon this call to consider Him as Apostle, comes the comparison with Moses, which runs upon the line mentioned in our last article—Christ as Son and Builder, greater than Moses, who was only a servant and part of the house himself. Here, let me remind you, the writer is quoting from Num. 12:7, “My servant, Moses, is not so, who is faithful in all mine house”. In Numbers this commendation is followed by the people’s refusal of the Rest, in chapters 13 and 14. This, again is followed by the story of the man who broke the Sabbath Rest, in chap. 15 and which should be compared with the expression “Sabbath-keeping” used in Heb. 4:9 (marginal reading). Then in Numbers 16 we have the account of Korah’s seeking the priesthood, which illustrates Heb. 5:4—“And no man taketh this honour upon himself”. The story of Numbers 17—the budding of Aaron’s rod—is referred to in Heb. 9:4. The tithing for the Levites of Numbers 18 is brought up in Heb. 7:5, and the ordinance of the Red Heifer of Numbers 19 is the type alluded to in Heb. 9:13. Finally, the wilful sin of Heb. 10:26 takes us back to what is said about presumptuous sin in Num. 15:30, 31. Thus Hebrews is seen to be more an exposition of the types of Numbers than it is even of those of Leviticus.

Here in chapter 3 the application of the matter to ourselves begins at verse 6 (“Whose house are we, if . . .”), which is repeated in another form at verse 14 (“For we are made partakers of Christ, if . . .”). These are two of those warnings about the necessity of continuance, and of the danger of failing in that respect, which are so common in this epistle. Chapter 4 opens with another of them—“Let us therefore fear, lest . . .”. In all of these there is a peculiar form of expression which seems to hint that the failure, where it manifests itself, has been present from the very first. Chapter 3:6 does not read, “Whose house we shall be, if we hold fast”, but rather, “Whose house we ARE (i.e. now) if we hold fast”. In other words, if we do not hold fast to the end, WE ARE NOT HIS HOUSE EVEN NOW. Verse 14 is still stronger, for its literal reading is, “We have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast to the end”. Thus, if we do not, it is because we have not become partakers of Him at all. This, surely, is unspeakably solemn. Again, in chapter 4:1 the literal rendering is, as in the R.V. “lest . . . any of you should seem to HAVE COME short of it”. The danger is that we may already have come short of the REST, that is, no doubt, at the time of professing conversion.

REJECTION OF THE GOSPEL

With this in mind, notice that it is the rejection of “the Gospel” which, in chap. 4:2 is said to bar us out of the Rest ; and not the rejection of some later exhortations regarding our conduct as Christians. In verse 3 the literal rendering is: “For we as having believed, enter into rest”. The fourth verse links the rest with that spoken of in Gen. 2, and verse 10 links God’s resting from His works on that occasion with some kind of a resting on the part of One Who hath “ceased from His own works”. Is this the resting of the sinner who comes to Christ ? Or is it the resting of the saint who has reached heaven ? Or is it rather the resting from His work, of Christ when He entered in? This is the view of Alfred and others. With it compare Isaiah 11:10, “His rest shall be glorious”. The verb is in the aorist tense, and the words should read: “For He that entered into His rest, rested from His works, as God did from His own”.

Again, what does the exhortation of verse 11 (chapter 4) mean ? In the R.V. it reads: “Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, that no man fall after (or “in”, margin) the same example of disobedience”. Is this an exhortation to saints to go to heaven ? Or to strive after some kind of higher life ? Is it not more in keeping with what has preceded to regard it as an exhortation to make sure we are saints at all ?

SUMMARY OF VIEWS OF CHAPTER 4:10

The following meanings have been suggested by commentators for this verse :

(1) An explanation of the word rendered “keeping of sabbath” (margin) by a reference to literal Sabbath-keeping. (One writer absurdly applies even that word itself to literal Sabbath-keeping, thus making verse 9 to mean that God’s people should still keep a weekly Sabbath). Against this view is a lack of connection with the remainder of the passage, and especially as it leaves the phrase, “that rest” in the next verse meaningless. Against it, also, is the expression, “He having entered into His rest”, which is not at all one which would be used of beginning a weekly Sabbath.

(2) A sinner resting from his own works in order to be saved by grace thus entering into rest, as in Matt. 11:28. But, in that case, the "resting from his own works" would NOT BE "as God did from His" but rather the exact opposite. God rested when He had completed all and found all good. The sinner rests in Christ's work when he finds his own NO GOOD.

(3) A saint who has reached rest in heaven. In favour of this is Rev. 14:13 "they rest from their labours". But against it is the fact that if "rest" in this verse means heaven it would apparently require to mean heaven throughout the chapter. Most commentators think it does so, but verse 3 says that we "enter it upon believing" and the phrase, "seem to have come short of it" suggests that we should have it already. But the greatest objection to these three views is the difficulty of explaining why the tenses used should be the Aorist Indicative and Participle, which point to a definite act of someone in the PAST. It is literally, "For the one who entered into his rest, rested from his works".

(4) Christ entering into His rest after finishing His works upon earth, including the Cross. So Alford, Weymouth, etc. In favour of this are the tenses, also the words of Isaiah 11:10—"His rest shall be glorious". Compare John 9:4. Against it is the awkward way in which Christ would be introduced in the opening clause without any previous mention of Him since chapter 3:14. But it would contrast with Joshua's failure of v. 8, and would lead on to the statement of v. 14: "Seeing then that we have a Great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession".

THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST

We saw in an earlier paper that as Son of God, Jesus is greater than the angels, chap. 1; and that as Son of Man also He has been exalted above them, and has, moreover become the Captain of the "many sons" whom He is "bringing unto glory"—chap. 2. It is just at the end of this twofold presentation that we are given, in chap. 2:17, 18 the first direct reference to the subject which occupies the central part of the epistle, namely, THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST.

DEITY AND HUMANITY

The writer, no doubt, had this in mind from the beginning; for the perfect Priest which he conceives the Lord Jesus to be requires that He should be both Son of God and Son of Man in order to exercise the duties of His office. Being the former, He has power to help His people; and being the latter, He can sympathize with them in their trials.

Throughout the Scriptures the idea of Priesthood seems to have been that of one standing between God and man, to bring them and to keep them together. The perfect priest should have been able to "lay his hand upon us both" as Job expressed it. In the Old Testament, however, the priests came far short of this. But now we have One, Who, because of His Deity and Humanity, can do it perfectly, and we should notice that in the passages concerning His priesthood, the writer is careful to lay emphasis upon this twofold fitness, i.e. being Son of God on the one hand, chap. 4:14 - 5:5. 6 - 7:28 and His being "made like unto His brethren" on the other, chap. 2:17, 18 - 4:15 - 5:8.

DAVID'S SONS

In this connection, I always like to point out that in the lists of David's officials in 2 Sam. 8 and in 1 Chron. 18, it is said in the one case that "David's sons were priests" 2 Sam. 8:18, R.V., and in the other that they were "chief about the king" 1 Chron. 18:17. That is to say, they had an official position between the king and his subjects. They had access to the king's person and authority to come before him on behalf of the people, for both lists are introduced by the statement that "David executed judgment and justice unto all his people". As we know, of course, David's sons failed in their priestly service, but thanks be to God, this is not so in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It has often been said that seven OFFICIAL TITLES are given to Christ in Hebrews :

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------|
| 1. Captain, or Chief Leader | 5. Mediator |
| 2. Apostle | 6. Surety |
| 3. High Priest | 7. Shepherd |
| 4. Forerunner | |

It will however be found, that He is called PRIEST oftener than all the other titles put together ; and further, that most of the other six are more or less identified with some aspect of His Priesthood. The word for "Priest" is used of Christ seven times in Hebrews; and the word for "High Priest" ten times. Neither word is found at all in any other epistle, so it is quite correct to state that the Priesthood of the Lord Jesus is the central subject of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

ANTITYPE OF AARON AND MELCHIZEDEK

As I have already said, the first direct reference to this subject is in chap. 2:17, 18, and there the work mentioned as the beginning of His priestly office is that He made "propitiation for the sins of the people" R.V. With this we may compare chap. 7:27 where, in contrast to the Old Testament priests who offered sacrifices repeatedly, it is said of our Lord that He "ONCE . . . offered up Himself". In this He is the antitype of the Levitical priest who was concerned mainly with sacrificing. But in chap. 2:18, He is also the antitype of Melchizedek who "succoured" the "tempted" one (see Gen. 14:17, 24).

The next reference to Christ's Priesthood is in chap. 4:14, 16, at the close of the long parenthesis (chap. 3:1 to 4:13), the main subject of which, as we considered last month, is GOD'S REST. Throughout that parenthesis we are warned against the sin of unbelief. Then almost at its conclusion we have the exhortation to "give diligence . . . for the Word of God is quick and powerful . . . a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart". In other words, if we are careless and permit the least unbelief to pass unjudged, the Word will detect it at its very source, i.e. in our hearts, even before it manifests itself in our conduct. But the writer does not leave us there. It is just at this point that he resumes his main subject, which had been dropped in the close of chapter 2, by directing us to GOD'S GRACIOUS PROVISION for us.

If the Word of God, v. 12, exposes our sin, the Son of God is upon the Throne that we may "obtain mercy" for it. Our Great High Priest has "passed through the heavens" (R.V.) into God's immediate presence, cp.

chapter 9:11, 12, and we are invited to "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need". Thus once more we have the Aaronic and Melchizedek features of our Lord's Priesthood brought together.

OUR LORD'S PRIESTHOOD

The passages in chapters 2 and 4 which we considered last month take for granted our Lord's priesthood. It is only when we come to chapter 5 that His right to it is formally proved. This is done, first by a comparison with the Aaronic priesthood (vv. 1-5), and then with that of Melchizedek (vv. 6-10). Thus as the "Son" is compared with angels in the matter of Authority in chap. 1, with Moses in the matter of Apostleship in chap. 3, He is here compared with Aaron and Melchizedek in the matter of Priesthood.

DIVINE QUALIFICATIONS

In connection with Aaron, two qualifications for his priesthood are to be noticed. One is the closeness of his link with the people whom he represented, for he was "taken from among men" (vv. 1-3); the other, the closeness of his link with God, for it was God who appointed him—"And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God" (v. 4). In Old Testament history we read how Korah and, later, Uzziah (Num. 16 ; 2 Chron. 26) tried to make themselves priests, but against both of them the Lord publicly expressed His anger. But Aaron was Divinely appointed, in token of which his rod budded, as we learn from Num. 17, to which our writer makes reference in chap. 9:4. Now, both of these qualifications our chapter proves Christ to possess, in the first case, by making reference to "the days of his flesh" (v. 7); and in the second by quoting Ps. 110:4, where God, who in Ps. 2:7 had said, "Thou art my Son", addressed to Him also the words, "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (v. 6).

The mention of the fact that our Lord's priesthood was "after the order of Melchizedek" at once reminds the writer that many of his intended readers are in no spiritual state to receive the wonderful thoughts he has to bring forth upon the subject, and as a result we have a long parenthetical passage dealing with their condition. This parenthesis commences immediately after the reference to Melchizedek in chap. 5:10 and returns to the same point in the last verse of chapter 6.

GENESIS 14

Before dealing with chapter 7, we perhaps should make a parenthesis of a different kind, in order to look at the two Old Testament passages on which the truth contained in it is chiefly based. These, of course, are Gen. 14, where we get all that is known of Melchizedek's personal history, and Ps. 110, where His priesthood is linked with that of our Lord.

In Gen. 14:17-24 we have the story of how Melchizedek met Abraham and strengthened him to resist the temptation about to be set before him by the king of Sodom. It is interesting to notice that while the going forth of the king of Sodom to meet Abraham is what is mentioned first, it was Melchizedek who reached the Patriarch first, and through his gracious

ministry Abraham obtained "grace to help in time of need". He received not only bread and wine for his physical weakness, but words from God, and about God, which filled him with spiritual strength. He was reminded that his God was "the most high God, possessor of heaven, and earth". With these words ringing in his heart, how paltry indeed must the offer of the king of Sodom have appeared in his estimation! What were the few spoils which Abraham had captured in comparison with the blessing of the One who was Possessor of heaven and earth! All this reminds us of the priestly work attributed to the Servant of Jehovah in Isaiah 50:4 (R.V.)—"that I should know how to sustain with words him that is weary".

We must now consider the points about Melchizedek in Gen. 14 which are enlarged upon in Heb. 7. The first is that he is introduced without any reference to his parentage, birth, age, or death. This is very remarkable, since Genesis is a book in which such details of its prominent personages are always given. The second is that this unknown stranger is of such a dignified standing that he blesses Abraham, the friend of God, for "without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better" (Heb. 7:7). And the third point is that Abraham acknowledges Melchizedek's superiority by presenting to him the tithes. These are the three main heads made use of in Hebrews 7.

Besides them, Melchizedek is seen to combine kingship and priesthood, a combination which we never find in the Scriptural conception of the Levitical priesthood. Then, of course, in point of time he is long before Aaron, and there is also the fact that his name and his city's name had symbolic meanings ("King of Righteousness", and "King of Peace"), but no hint of this occurs in Genesis itself.

PSALM 110

We pass now to Ps. 110. Here we begin with the fact that Christ is Jehovah's chosen King—"Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (v. 1). This is given much prominence in Hebrews, where besides being quoted it is referred to four other times in connection with Christ's present session upon His Father's throne, thus demonstrating the inseparability of Christ's Kingdom and Priesthood. He has "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" as :

1. The Sin-Purger, ch. 1:3.
2. The Great High Priest, ch. 8:1.
3. The Victorious One, ch. 10:12.
4. The Perfect Example, ch. 12:2.

The old time priests had no provision for sitting. Their work kept them ever standing (see ch. 10:11). But our Great High Priest sits. He rests in the satisfaction that His atoning work is finished. Indeed, it may be said that this word "sat" (or "sit") is the first introduction in Hebrews to the thought of Rest—a thought which is afterwards so fully developed in chap. 4. By the way, we may suggest that verse 1 of Ps. 110 shows a close connection with Ps. 2, from which the writer to the Hebrews twice quotes the words "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee" (chap. 1:5; 5:5).

In verse 4 of the Psalm we get words of which much use is made in Hebrews—"The Lord hath sworn and will not repent, Thou art a priest

for ever after the order of Melchizedek". You may notice that this statement has three separate parts :

1. "The Lord hath sworn and will not repent"—How and by Whom the Priest is made.
2. "Thou art a priest for ever"—For how long the Priest is made.
3. "After the order of Melchizedek"—Of what sort the Priest is made.

One other Old Testament passage, though it does not name Melchizedek, should not be lost sight of—Isaiah 50:4-6)—a passage already referred to in connection with Genesis 14. I cannot but think that the author of Hebrews had in his mind. The similarity between "able to succour them that art tempted" and "grace to help in time of need" on the one hand, and "know how to sustain with words him that is weary" on the other ; as well as the reference in both cases to learning obedience through suffering; form links too close to be merely accidental.

In this seventh chapter of Hebrews, which is, after all, the main portion which deals with the subject, of our Lord's priesthood in the epistle, the writer bases what he has to say upon the two Old Testament passages which refer to Melchizedek, i.e. Genesis 14 and Psalm 110.

GENESIS 14

Here he stresses :

1. What is there said about the man's name, title, etc., and what is left unsaid as to his ancestry, birth, death, etc. Had all been pre-arranged by the Holy Spirit, with a view to presenting in great fulness a priesthood, unlike the Levitical, but similar to that of our Lord . . . Cp. vv. 1-3.
2. The giving of the tithes to Melchizedek by Abraham gives him typical superiority over the latter, and so over his descendants of the tribe of Levi . . . Cp. vv. 4, 5, 8, 9, 10.
3. Melchizedek's blessing Abraham implies the same typical superiority . . . Cp. vv. 6 and 7.

PSALM 110

Taking up this Psalm, he stresses :

1. The significance of the final clause of v. 4—"after the order of Melchizedek" as implying the failure of the Levitical order then existing . . . Cp. vv. 11, 19.
2. The first clause, "The Lord sware", as showing the superiority of this priesthood which was made with an oath . . . Cp. vv. 20, 22.
3. Finally, the middle clause—"a priest for ever", in contrast with those whose priesthood death cut short . . . Cp. vv. 23, 25.

Then, from all he has said, the writer in vv. 26, 27 (Hebrews 7) concludes that this is the very Priest, and the only Priest, that suits us. "For such an High Priest became us, Who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens".

Lastly, in chapter 8:1 he says that the SUM of all we have been considering is that this is the very One that we actually have as our "High Priest" and that He is now "on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens".

*“Enthroned in Majesty
The High Priest sits within ;
His precious blood, once shed,
Has made and keeps us clean ;
With boldness let us now draw near ;
That blood has banished every fear”.*

THE WRITER'S DIFFICULTY

As has been pointed out already, the section which begins at chap. 5:11 and ends at the close of chap. 6 is a parenthesis – the second great parenthesis in Hebrews. In chapter 5:10 the writer, in developing the doctrine of the priesthood of our Lord, had come to the point where he wished to show that that priesthood was “after the order of Melchizedek”, and to enumerate the consequences which flowed from its being so. As he thought of these things he paused when faced with the difficulty of setting them forth to such sluggish saints as these Hebrews had come to be. They, owing to their low spiritual state, could not appreciate these glorious truths. Hence the writer here turns aside to give expression to the difficulty he felt, and to the cause of it, and also to emphasize the danger of the position of the Hebrews and the remedy for it. It is only at the end of chap. 6 that he gets back to the point he was about to make, and there he repeats the words he had already uttered in chap. 5:10 that Christ is “an high priest after the order of Melchizedek”.

THE SLUGGISH

This passage, from chap. 5:11 to 6:20, can therefore be dealt with as being to a great extent one subject. It is, however, a very big subject, as we shall see, and I do not propose to go into it exhaustively. First of all, I want to draw your attention to a word which appears twice in this parenthesis, and which is not found anywhere else in the New Testament. Unfortunately, it is translated by two different English words in our Authorized Version, and so it is not as noticeable as it might be. It is the word which is rendered “dull” in chap. 5:11 (“ye are dull of hearing”), and “slothful” in chap. 6:12 (“be not slothful”). It comes from a Greek verb which means “to push, to shove, to thrust”, and it has a prefix which signifies “not”. So its most literal meaning would be “not slothful”, or “without push”.

If you look at these passages you will see that in chap. 5:11 the word is used with reference to our having no push in the matter of hearing what God has to teach us. The glorious truths about our Lord's High Priestly office and work are hard to utter when saints have no push in them to receive them. In chap. 6:12 the word is used with regard to our continuance in the service of God. In this matter, says the writer, “Be not without any push, but be imitators of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises”.

There is a very close association between these two things, for it may be taken for granted that if I have no push in me to hear what God has to teach me, there will also be no push in me in the matter of continuing steadfastly in His work. Conversely, if I am sluggish in the Lord's service, it means that I am sluggish in hearing His voice also. Because of this,

slothful people are not easily cured. If you exhort them by the Word of the Lord to stir themselves up in His service, you have the difficulty that they are so sluggish also in the matter of hearing, that your exhortation is lost on them.

HAD NOT ALWAYS BEEN SLUGGISH

We must remember, though, that the Hebrews had not always been sluggish, either in hearing or doing. The writer says, "Ye are BECOME such as have need of milk". The same word is used in the phrase, "ye are dull of hearing", which would be rendered more correctly by the words, "ye are BECOME dull (or sluggish) of hearing". This implies a better condition in earlier days. There was a time in the past when they were not dull of hearing. Similarly, in chap. 6 he looks back to their "work and labour of love" (v. 10), reminding them, as he does also in chap. 10, of their "former days" when first they were "illuminated". This is the experience, unfortunately, of far too many of the saints. Their best days were their earliest, before they lost the bloom of their first love, and love of the world came in its place. This love of the world may not in some cases take any gross form. It may be just a desire to be respectable and to see their children getting on well, but it is love of the world all the same.

On the their hand, there are many cases of slothfulness amongst those who profess to be Christians in which there is no better past to look to. They have always been the same, and the only member of their bodies which tells they are saved is the tongue, and it does so only when it has to, because of someone asking the question. The real fact about such is that they are not born again at all.

Turning again to those who have gone backward on what they once were, you will notice that the opposite is what should have been the case. They should have "gone on unto perfection" (chap. 6:1), for those who do not "go on" go back. Notice, too, how strongly the writer put it in chap. 5:12—"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers". He does not say that a few of the more gifted ones should be teachers, but that all of them had had sufficient time to be thus far advanced. Notice also the reference to "milk" and "strong meat" in v. 12. Had they profited by the former, they would by this time have been able to enjoy the latter; but because they did not do so, they would now need to go back to the milk. The mark of their poverty is that their "senses" are not "exercised to discern good and evil". They think ministry is good if it pleases them, whether or not there is anything in it. The men who humour them and lick them over are popular, though they may not be men of God at all.

The verse in chap. 6 expresses the writer's desire for the Hebrews—"That ye be not sluggish, but imitators of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (v. 12, R.V.). We have many examples in chap. 11 of Old Testament saints who did this. They not only began well but ended well. They had no desire to return to the country from whence they came out. Their faith was not merely a kind of starting line to set off from, but a powerful incentive to continuance all the way, working itself out in patient endurance. Then we have the further example of the New Testament guides in chap. 13, whose faith we are also asked to "imitate" (v. 7, R.V.), because it, like that of the Old Testament saints of chap. 11, impelled them onward through a whole life of service to the

Lord. Greatest of all, we have the example in the opening verses of chap. 12 of our Lord Jesus Himself, "the author and finisher of faith: Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God".

THE FALLING 'AWAY DOCTRINE

Those who hold what is called "the Falling Away Doctrine", in seeking to support it by Scripture, often get themselves badly entangled in this sixth chapter of Hebrews. They see in verse 6 what they think are the very words they want, and they quote them as a proof that a real believer in Christ is still in danger of falling away and being lost for ever.

It does at first glance seem very much like a proof, for a doubt is plainly expressed in the words, and when we read in the preceding verses that the persons concerned have been enlightened, have tasted the heavenly gift, and even have partaken of the Holy Ghost, it certainly does seem to teach what these people believe. When, however, they read the whole sentence, of which, "if they shall fall away" forms a part, and discover that for the persons who thus fall away there is no more hope, for "it is impossible to renew them again to repentance" they are quite entangled. They are entangled, because all those who hold this doctrine also hold very strongly that persons who fall away CAN be renewed to repentance and CAN be saved over again. Thus the verse to which they turn for proof proves too much for them.

I sometimes think that Satan robs us of the solemn weight of warning which this passage contains, by thus making it serve as a bone of contention between differing schools of thought. Those who believe in what is called "falling away" try to fit it to their views, which it will not do, while those of us who reject that doctrine are inclined to water down the expressions used of the persons here described, so as to give them as little appearance of reality as possible. The truth is, that these expressions are chosen, not for their weakness but for their strength, not to show us how little these people have, but how much they have, and how very, very far they went in Christian profession before they apostatized. In this connection we must not forget the actual persons whom the apostle has in mind. They were no light tattlers, in whose profession scarcely anyone had confidence. They were some of the Hebrews to whom this epistle was sent — persons who had gone on so long that he had said of them in chapter 5, "ye ought to be teachers". They had not only professed faith in Christ, but had been baptized, were in the assembly, and had broken the bread many a time, and had joined in the hymns of worship and in the service of the Lord. If you want an example of a person who arose so high and then fell so low as all this, perhaps the most outstanding is Judas. He went all the way, outwardly at least, which the other disciples went, and he so thoroughly deceived them that when our Lord identified him at the last Passover, they could not even believe that he was a traitor. An Old Testament example of much the same kind is given us in Hebrews itself — that of Esau, concerning whom it is definitely said that he "found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears" (ch. 12:17). What a warning all this is to those today who turn their backs upon Christ, after having professed His Name, and having had, perhaps for years, the reputation of being truly His! As Israel's path through the wilderness was marked by

a line of graves, so in a spiritual sense has been the experience of those of us who have been at all long on the way.

ANOTHER ENTANGLEMENT

I have pointed out one entanglement into which the holders of the "falling away" theory themselves fall in this chapter. It is by no means the only one. In verse 9 there is another. The writer says, "But beloved, I am persuaded better things of you, and things that ACCOMPANY SALVATION, though we thus speak". If the second clause of this verse were absent, we might understand the writer to mean, "I am persuaded that you are going to hold on and not fall away after all". It is plain, however that this is not his meaning. What then is the significance of his reference to "THINGS THAT ACCOMPANY SALVATION"? Do these words not plainly imply that one who gets salvation in reality, receives with it what prevents one from falling away in the sense which the preceding verses describe? I believe that in the earlier verses of this chapter we have things that are PREPARATORY TO SALVATION, but which will not do instead of it, while here it is suggested that there are "THINGS THAT ACCOMPANY SALVATION". These are the things which make the position of one who is born again perfectly and eternally secure.

OUR ETERNAL SECURITY

Even here we have, not the end, but only the beginning of the difficulties which await our "falling away" friends in this chapter, for one could scarcely find a stronger passage in proof of the security of the true believer than its closing verses. The early verses teach us HOW VERY MUCH one may possess and yet be lost after all. The closing verses teach us HOW VERY LITTLE is required on the part of a sinner to put him into a position as safe as that of Christ Himself. He has but to "flee for refuge" to the Saviour (v. 18), and all will be well for Eternity. The one who does so has on his side: (1) The Immutability of God's Counsel; (2) God's Oath; (3) The impossibility that God could lie; all of which put together afford one "Strong Consolation" (vv. 16-18). Then on the other side, the believer has: (1) A Refuge; (2) An Anchor; (3) A Forerunner; (4) "An High Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (vv. 19, 20); in view of which seven blessings how confidently we may sing:

*"My name from the palms of His hands
Eternity will not erase;
Impressed on His heart it remains
In marks of indelible grace.
Yes, I to the end shall endure
As sure as the earnest is given —
More happy, but not more secure,
The glorified spirits in heaven".*

The new covenant, chapter 8 . . . In the summing-up of chap. 8:1, 2, we have our Great High Priest as the centre of everything. We have also in v. 2 the first reference in Hebrews to the Tabernacle. Later in the epistle it is referred to frequently, sometimes the earthly one, and sometimes, as here, its heavenly archetype. The Hebrew epistle does not anywhere mention the Temple. The writer draws all his types and shadows from the

portable structure which was associated with Israel's wilderness experience.

We are reminded in chap. 8:3 that, as a priest, our Lord must have some sacrifice to offer. Verses 4 and 5 show that His priesthood is not connected with the earthly sanctuary, and verse 6 shows that at the back of all, there must be a new covenant. From here to the close of the chapter the New Covenant is the subject dwelt upon, and its terms, as found in Jeremiah 31 are quoted. This subject is in three main sections, each containing several clauses.

The first of these sections refers to the LAW, which is now to be written upon the hearts and minds of God's people, instead of upon tables of stone, and runs thus—"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord ; I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts ; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people", v. 10. The second section has to do with our KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. Formerly this was received through the priests' teaching, but now it is inherent in all the Lord's children. "And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord : for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest", v. 11. The third section deals with the question of our SINS and shows that sacrifices of the old type are no longer necessary—"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more", v. 12. Thus it will be seen that v. 10 has to do with our relationship to GOD—verse 11 with the teaching of the SPIRIT ; and verse 12 with the perfect work of the SON, by which our guilt was removed.

THE SACRIFICE

Now, as chapter 7 deals with the Priesthood ; chapter 8 with the Covenant ; so chapter 9, for the most part, is occupied with the Sacrifices, which subject is continued in the early part of chapter 10. Then in chap. 10:11, 18 we have a summary (just as we have had in chapter 8:1, 2), which introduces all three—the PRIEST, the SACRIFICE, the COVENANT. All this leads up to the highest point of exhortation at chap. 10:19, 25, and to the sharpest warning at chap. 10:26, 31 in all this epistle.

In dealing with the Sacrifices in chapter 9, the writer first describes the Tabernacle, laying special emphasis on its two parts. What is said in connection with the second part suggests the Day of Atonement, when alone that apartment of the Tabernacle came into prominence, chap. 9:3. The development of this thought leads to the truth of Christ's entering "the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption", v. 12, and to the setting forth of the perfectness of what He has accomplished, v. 14. Here the writer's mind reverts to what he had said in chapter 8 about the Covenant. He reminds his readers that the first Covenant was dedicated with blood, vv. 18, 20, and that "almost all things are by the law purged with blood", v. 22, and then points out that through the sacrifice of Christ "the heavenly things themselves", of which "the tabernacle, and vessels of the ministry", v. 21, were but "patterns", are "purified", v. 23. Such is the infinite value of the blood of our Lord Jesus.

In the closing verses of chapter 9 we are taught that our Great High Priest, having entered the Holiest, is now occupied "in the presence of

God for us", v. 24, and that one day, like the high priest on the Day of Atonement, He will "appear the second time without sin unto salvation", v. 28. Blessed hope of the child of God !

*"And though awhile He be
Hid from the eyes of men,
His people look to see
Their Great High Priest again :
In brightest glory He will come,
And take His waiting people home".*

The last great section of the epistle commences at chap. 10:19. It opens with a practical application of all the teaching which has preceded. This application is twofold. We have first an exceedingly beautiful invitation to enjoy our spiritual blessings, chap. 10:19, 25, and next, a most solemn warning to those who deliberately turn away from them, chap. 10:26, 31.

FAITH

The very first exhortation of this section introduces FAITH—"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith", v. 22. If we seek grace to keep right in this respect, we shall have but little difficulty in keeping right with regard to the two other exhortations which immediately follow: "Let us hold fast the confession of our HOPE", v. 23 R.V. — and "Let us consider one another to provoke unto LOVE", v. 24.

The "DRAWING NEAR" of v. 22 need not be limited to any particular kind of approach to God, such as prayer or even worship. That we draw near to Him is the very character of our lives as saints. The Greek word for "draw near" occurs seven times in this epistle. It is frequent in the Gospels and Acts, but elsewhere in the New Testament it occurs only in 1 Tim. 6:3 where it is "consent" and 1 Peter 2:4—"coming". In Hebrews it is somewhat hidden in our English Bible by its various translations, being rendered :

"let - come - unto"	ch. 4:16
"that come unto"	ch. 7:25
"comers - unto"	ch. 10:1
"draw near"	ch. 10:22
"that cometh to"	ch. 11:6
"are - come unto"	ch. 12:18
"are come unto"	ch. 12:22

The connections in which this word are used are interesting, such as :

Of our getting saved	ch. 7:25
To describe saved ones	ch. 11:6
Of the citizenship of saved ones	ch. 12:12
Of the prayer life of saved ones	ch. 4:16
Of the worship of saved ones	ch. 10:22
Not of Sinai (contrast ch. 12:22)	ch. 12:18
Not by animal sacrifices (contrast 10:22)	ch. 10:1
The contrasting word "Draw back" occurs in ch. 10:38, 39.	

FAITH is mentioned not only in the first exhortation of this section, but again and again to the end of the epistle. In fact, it is one of the key words of Hebrews. The trouble with the Israelites in the wilderness, to

which attention is drawn in ch. 3, was that they had no faith, and the warning to us there and in chap. 4 is based upon that fact. Twice at the end of chap. 3 we have the negative word which is formed from faith and which in our English Bible is translated "unbelief". In that chapter we have a whole generation of men who lacked faith, over against which is placed the picture gallery of men who had faith in chapter 11.

After the invitation and warning with which this final section opens, the writer takes his readers back to the beginning of their Christian course—back to the time when FAITH and HOPE and LOVE were strong, and when they were willing to endure any hardship for the Lord's sake, chap. 10: 32, 34. This is followed by an exhortation to show the same confidence to the end, since it has "great recompense of reward", vv. 35, 36.

HABAKKUK'S TRIAL OF FAITH

At this point we have once more a quotation, or rather a semi-quotation, from the Old Testament. It is made from the too little known prophecy of Habakkuk, vv. 37, 38. Habakkuk, like these Hebrew Christians, was surrounded by things which were hostile to Faith. His own people were full of evil which God had to punish, while the instruments of punishment, the Chaldeans, were still worse. In these circumstances he turned to God to hear what He would say. This was His message: "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie, though it tarry wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith", Hab. 2:3, 4. The writer of Hebrews takes this quotation from the Greek Version of the Old Testament, just as he so often does elsewhere. How well Habakkuk came out of this trial we learn from the closing words of his book: "Although the fig tree shall not blossom . . . Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation", Hab. 3:17, 18. The author of this epistle expected that he and the majority of his readers would come out of their trial similarly, for he says: "We are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul" v. 39. Those who "believe", i.e. those who have FAITH, never "draw back to perdition", for they possess not only that which starts them in the Christian life, but which carries them right through it, until at last it can be said of them, "These all died in faith", chap. 11:13. All the variety of persons and variety of circumstances in chapter 11 are heaped to prove this.

From all of these the writer, at the beginning of chap. 12, turns to Christ, presenting Him as the Leader and Perfecter of FAITH. He is our great Example. We may remind ourselves too, that in imitating those who before us have trodden the path of Faith, we have not only the Old Testament worthies of chap. 11, and our blessed Lord here in chap. 12, but also the New Testament guides of chap. 13:7—"Remember them that had the rule over you . . . and . . . IMITATE THEIR FAITH".

In ch. 12:3 the writer returns to the subject of the hindrances and difficulties, to which he had referred in the closing verses of chap. 10, and looks at them from a new angle. In chap. 10 he had encouraged the saints to be patient, since their trials would soon be at an end. Here, however, the trials are viewed as part of our Father's training. If we had no chastisement, we would not be sons of God at all, v. 8. Moreover, as part of our

training, it produces the fruits of righteousness and holiness in those who are "exercised thereby", v. 11, in view of which we may sing :

*Bless I then the Hand that smiteth
Gently, and to heal delighteth,
'Tis against my sins He fighteth,
Peace, peace is mine.*

CHAPTER 13

I wish to consider this chapter in its relationship to the earlier part of the epistle. In it many things are touched upon, and most of them have a link of some kind with the great truths of the preceding chapters, and suggest practical lessons in connection with the teaching that has been given. Of course, they are not the only practical lessons which the epistle contains, for in that respect Hebrews differs entirely from such epistles as Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians, in which the doctrinal parts are to a great extent kept separate. Here we get a little bit of teaching and a little bit of practical exhortation alternately, the latter usually commencing with, "Let us", or some similar phrase. Thus in the chapter immediately before this one, we have doctrine in verses 18-27, and then we have an exhortation based on it in verses 28 and 29—"Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear ; for our God is a consuming fire". To some extent our 13th chapter may be looked upon as growing out of that exhortation, for if we serve God acceptably we shall be doing all the various things to which we are urged in it, and on the other hand, without the consciousness of our responsibility to a holy God, we shall show no zeal in obeying any of them.

HOW DIVIDED

Hebrews 13, as is shown in the R.V., divides naturally into three main paragraphs, of which the first, vv. 1-6 contains exhortations, mainly of an **INDIVIDUAL** character ; the second, vv. 7-17, exhortations that have more to do with our **COLLECTIVE** gatherings ; while the third, vv. 18-25, is the concluding message of the epistle.

The first paragraph commences with a general exhortation of brotherly love. That is followed in vv. 2 and 3 by two special manifestations of this love—hospitality and sympathy. Then in vv. 4-6 we are warned against two things which would conflict with brotherly love—lustful desire in v. 4 and covetous desire in vv. 5 and 6. The form of the principle exhortation is noteworthy. It is not, "Let brotherly love be acquired by you", but "Let brotherly love continue". This implies that they already had this love, as do the words, "Forget not", and, "Remember" in vv. 2 and 3. That this was true in fact, we learn from chap. 6, where, after describing some that had gone a long way and then turned out to be apostates, the writer refers in vv. 9-11 to their labour of love in ministering to the needs of saints, as being proof of their reality. He also emphasises that their love was continuing, when he says, "Ye have ministered . . . and still do minister" (R.V.). This is surely something like the hospitality to which he encourages them yet more here in chapter 13. Then in chapter 10, in connection with another similar warning about those who turn back, he reminds them of the days when they were first enlightened and of how

they not only endured affliction themselves, but showed sympathy with others in affliction (vv. 32-35). So that there again the very thing to which he exhorts them in chap. 13:3 is seen to have been already in evidence amongst them. Both in chapters 6 and 10 they are exhorted to continue to the end showing these graces, so that the opening verses of chapter 13 are merely a final reminder of that which he had earlier in the epistle been pressing upon them. When this continuance to the end is placed with the good beginning referred to in chap. 10 ("when ye were illuminated"), and the present carrying on "do still minister") of chap. 6, we have their entire lives, as saints, covered by the three.

In connection with verse 2, I like to think that the Lord has here found a niche for a man who was scarcely worthy for a place in chap. 11. I refer to Lot, who seems to be hinted at in the phrase, "thereby some have entertained angels unawares"; and just as in chapters 6 and 10, kindness and sympathy are viewed as being a surer token of reality than other great things that are named, so in Lot's case, his attitude to the strangers who came that evening to Sodom, is one proof that in spite of his failure he had the root of the matter in him.

In verse 3 there are suggested two different links between ourselves and those suffering trial. The words, "as with them", suggest a spiritual link – they with us are members of Christ. The other words, "being yourselves also in body" (there is no "the" in the Greek), refers to the natural link – we, like them, are still in the physical body and therefore liable at any moment to similar trial.

With these two links compare the two between Christ and us which are mentioned in chapter 2 of Hebrews. It further illustrates the point with which I began, namely, that the exhortations of chapter 13 are based upon what has been taught earlier in the epistle.

MARRIAGE AND MEATS

In Hebrews 13, verses 4-6 two things are suggested, either of which, as we have already seen, may hinder our manifesting the brotherly love enjoined in verse 1. The two evils – unclean desires and covetous desires – are linked together in many of the warnings of the epistles (see Eph. 5:3, 5; Col. 3:5; 1 Cor. 5:10, 11; 6:9-11). The mention of "marriage" in v. 4 should also perhaps be associated in our minds with that of "meats" in v. 9, for they, too, are several times linked together in the epistles. False views as to the sanctity gained by abstinence from both had even in those early days been taught amongst the saints, and these had to be set right. In 1 Cor. 7 Paul speaks of his abstaining from marriage and in the next chapter of his abstaining from meats (see also chap. 9:4, 5); but he makes it clear that he did so, not of obligation, but to assist his gospel testimony. When it came to be set forth as a state of super-holiness it had to be resisted, and he does so in 1 Tim. 4, where he says that those who "forbade to marry and commanded to abstain from meats" were going to cause men to "depart from the faith".

LOVE OF MONEY

Just as the references to marriage and meats remind us of 1 Tim. 4, so the one that follows here in verses 5 and 6 – the love of money – suggests a closely parallel passage in 1 Tim. 6. There, as in Heb. 13, contentment

with such things as we have, is enjoined upon us. Indeed, so similar are the two portions that one might well think that 1 Tim. 6 was present to the mind of the writer here.

“I WILL NEVER LEAVE THEE”

The words at the end of verse 5 –“I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”– are not an exact quotation of any one Old Testament passage. They are taken from a promise made on three separate occasions – to Jacob in Gen. 28:15; to Joshua in Josh. 1:5; and to Solomon in 1 Chron. 28:20. Each of these saints was a comparatively young man at the time he received this promise. Each had an untrodden and difficult path of service before him; and each had lost, or was about to lose, the fellowship and guidance of an older man upon whom he had relied. Compare verse 7 here which shows that the Hebrews had also at this time lost by death good and godly leaders. Note, too, that many of them, like Jacob, were outcasts from their homes and friends, and that like Joshua they were, so to speak, severed from Moses (the Law and its ritual). How very precious to their souls these words –“HIMSELF (R.V.) hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee”– must have been !

The response to this promise, given in verse 6, is taken from Ps. 118:6, “The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?” This and many other statements in that Psalm would be of special encouragement to the Hebrew Christians in their trials. See especially verses 5, 18 and 22.

With verse 7, as I already said, the second paragraph of the chapter commences. It opens with a reference to the good leaders these Hebrews had lost by death (see R.V.), and it ends at v. 17 by referring to leaders they still had with them and whom they were to obey. By placing together the two verses we get with some measure of fulness what the responsibilities of these leaders, or guides, were : (a) They spoke the Word of God to the saints ; (b) They had conversation (or conduct) “worthy of consideration ; (c) They had faith worthy of imitation (cp. the elders of chap. 11); (d) They watched on behalf of the souls of the saints ; (e) They grieved when the saints did not go on well ; (f) They will have to render an account to the Lord.

We are also given, on the other hand, something of the responsibilities of the saints toward these leaders. They were to : (a) Obey them ; (b) Submit to them ; (c) Imitate them ; (d) Remember them after they are gone. Failure to do these things will prove not only a grief to the leaders, but unprofitable to the saints.

There were, however, other would-be leaders against whom the writer has to warn the people of God in v. 9. They would wish to teach “divers and strange doctrines”. Notice the contrast between these and the teaching which had been given by the first leaders “who spake unto you the WORD OF GOD” (v. 7). The word, “divers”, suggests variety in these doctrines. They differed one from another, and doubtless even contradicted one the other. “Strange”, means that they differed from the truth which the saints had learned and that they clashed with it. Thus the word, “divers”, contrasts these doctrines with “Jesus Christ the same” (v. 8); while “strange” contrasts them with “the Word of God” (v. 7).

The position of verse 8 and its connections with its context are interesting.

Looking back to verse 7, the sentence, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea, and forever" (R.V.), contrasts with the statement there about the guides who have been taken from us by death. They are gone, but He, in keeping with His promise of verse 5, is with us still, with which verse 8 also connects back. Then, as already hinted, "Jesus Christ is the same", also contrasts with the "diverse and strange doctrines" of verse 9. In addition, this 8th verse is linked with chap. 1: 11, 12: "Thou remainest . . . Thou art the same, And thy years shall not fail". Thus in the closing chapter as in the opening one of our epistle we are reminded of the unchangeableness of our blessed Lord. What a comfort it is to God's people, in days of trial and bereavement, such as these Hebrew saints were experiencing, to be able to sing:

*"I change – He changes not ;
My Christ can never die ;
His love – not mine – the resting place ;
His love – not mine – the tie".*

CHAPTER 13

The reference in v. 9 to "meats" and to Levitical occupation with such ordinances, recalls to the writer's mind the truths he had so clearly and so fully set forth in chapters 8 - 10. Verses 10, 11 and 12, which are based on these truths, show that even in the arrangement for certain of the O.T. sacrifices there was an underlying hint of a great something beyond them – a kind of type of the superiority of the sacrifice of Christ which was yet to come. Those sacrifices of which the blood was BROUGHT IN (as was the blood of Christ in chap. 9:12), especially the sacrifice which, on the Day of Atonement, was brought into the Holiest, were not eaten by the priests, but were burned OUTSIDE THE CAMP just as Christ suffered "WITHOUT THE GATE" (cp. Lev. 6:30 - 16:27). We should note that the expression, "that He might sanctify the people", links our Lord's sacrifice with the Levitical offering for Israel, the term "THE PEOPLE" (which occurs some thirteen times in Hebrews), being taken from the Old Testament.

OUR ALTAR – CHRIST

"They . . . which serve the tabernacle". Observe it is not "They which serve God in the tabernacle", . . . have no right to eat from our altar, which of course, is Christ, cp. Gal. 5:2. Such have never learned the truth of their sinfulness, nor do they appreciate the value of our Lord's atoning work. What they thought of Him they showed by crucifying Him, and by doing this "WITHOUT THE GATE" of their religious city. So there can be NO COMPROMISE. It cannot be Christ AND JUDAISM. It must be CHRIST OR Judaism. We must be INSIDE the camp of the religious world, or OUTSIDE it with HIM. Cp. the call of Moses in Ex. 32:26 – "Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me". See also Ex. 33:7. So our place is WITHOUT THE CAMP, there to bear the reproach of a rejected Christ. In obeying this call, let us not be upset or disappointed at the loss of an earthly city. We "seek after the city which is to come" v. 14, R.V. This is the city in chap. 11:10, 16 as sought by the Patriarchs, and of chap. 12:22 as already possessed in faith by ourselves.

Though we require "no more offering for sin", we can still come with our peace offering of thanksgiving, that is, "the fruit of our lips". Yea, more, the Lord views these acts of well-doing, sympathy, and fellowship, to which we have been exhorted in verses 1 to 3, as sacrifices. He is well pleased with them too, which He was not with the sacrifices of the O. T., cp. chap. 10:8. What great encouragement all of this was to these Hebrew Christians when fellow Jews sneered at them as having NO CITY, NO ARTAR and NO SACRIFICE !.

AUTHORSHIP

Verses 18 - 25 form the closing paragraph of the epistle. It is more like Paul's writing than any other part of Hebrews. Cp. for example, the expression—"pray for us" v. 18 with very similar ones in his epistles. Cp. also the remainder of this 18th verse with Acts 23:1 and 24:16. Then in verses 20 and 21 we have the writer's prayer for them, which reminds us of 1 Thess. 5:23 and 2 Cor. 13:14, etc. In it he thinks of the "great Shepherd" Who does not pass away like the "guides" of v. 7, and Who loves and watches the sheep with greater care than the "guides" of v. 17. In it, too, he mentions Christ's resurrection for the first and only time in Hebrews. The prayer is addressed to "the God of peace", a term used five times elsewhere in the N.T. and always, as here, at the end of an epistle. The word "covenant" in v. 20, occurs seventeen times in Hebrews, against only nine occurrences in all the other epistles. Cp. especially chap. 9:20 and 10:29, in each of which, as here, we have the expression "the blood of the covenant". Another interesting word in v. 21 is "well-pleasing"—it also is found a number of times in our epistle. It is used of . . .

Our walking with God by faith. Heb. 11:5, 6.

Our serving God with reverence. Heb. 12:28.

Our doing good and communicating. Heb. 13:16.

The desire being wrought in by God Himself. Heb. 13:21.

The references to doing God's will in v. 21 links with chap. 10:36 and is in line with what Christ did in chap. 10:7, 9, 10. MAY IT BE OUR AMBITION TO DO HIS BLESSED WILL till pilgrim days are ended. "Grace be with you all. Amen".

Notes on Peter's Epistles

In the titles which, in our English Bible, are prefixed to the epistles of James, Peter, and Jude, and also in that of John's first epistle, there occurs a word not found in the heading of any of the writings of Paul, the word "general". There is nothing of inspiration associated with its use, for the earliest manuscripts of these epistles are without it; but it may serve to draw our attention to the fact that, whereas Paul's letters are written to certain local churches, or individuals, named in their opening paragraphs, those are addressed in a much wider and more vague manner, either to saints in various places, or to the saints in general.

This, however, does not imply that there is anything less for the Lord's people collectively in the one group of epistles than in the other. In 1 Corinthians, which is the most characteristically local of all Paul's writings, we find that the words, "To the church of God which is at Corinth", are followed by "with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord". And Peter himself, in 2 Pet. 3:15, speaks of Paul's epistles as "written UNTO YOU", although according to his own phrase he is addressing "Them that have obtained like precious faith with us", without reference to any particular locality.

Of all these so called general epistles, 1 Peter is the only one that designates territorially those who were to be its first recipients, and very extensive the designation is. The apostle writes (ch. 1:1, R.V.) "To the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia", five large provinces which cover the greater part of the country now known as Asia Minor. Three of them, Pontus, Cappadocia, and Asia, had been named together in Acts 2:9 amongst the places where the Jews of the Dispersion, that were gathered at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, had their homes; and doubtless some from those parts were included in the three thousand who received the gospel through Peter's preaching on that occasion, and carried it afterwards to the districts where they resided.

But from our epistle itself it is evident that Peter regards these to whom he writes, not as converts of his own, but as

THE FRUIT OF THE LABOURS OF OTHERS ;

mainly, as we may learn from Acts, of those of Paul and his fellow-workers. In ch. 1:12 he writes in the third person of "THEM that have preached the gospel unto you"; in 2 Pet. 3:2 R.V., he speaks of them as "YOUR APOSTLES"; and in verse 15 of the same chapter he alludes to epistles that had been written to his readers by Paul. Moreover, the manner in which he gives his commendation to Silvanus or Silas at ch. 5:12 and makes him the bearer to them of the epistle, is in keeping with the fact that this brother had been Paul's partner in the work in some of the districts to which Peter was sending him.

Not only does 1 Peter name the localities to which it was in the first instance to be sent, but it is also the only one of this group of epistles to

indicate where the author was at the time of writing it. The salutation in ch. 5:13 from "the church that is at Babylon" implies that Peter was himself there ; and though some would have it that he uses this name as a symbolic for Rome, it is far more probable that he was in the literal city of Babylon. As has been pointed out by others, and as may be verified on a map, the order in which the provinces are mentioned in ch. 1:1 is that in which they would present themselves to the mind of one resident in Babylon, and not that which would occur to one writing from Rome in the west.

The use of the phrase "sojourners of the Dispersion" in ch. 1:1, R.V., might suggest that only Jewish believers were in Peter's thoughts, since the term "Dispersion" was a usual one for Jews residing in foreign lands. In the New Testament it occurs, besides here, only in John 7:35 and James 1:1. But that

GENTILES ALSO WERE ADDRESSED

is evident from such passages as ch. 1:14 ; 2:10, etc., and especially from the R.V. rendering of ch. 3:6, "Sarah, whose children ye NOW are", and of ch. 4:2, 3, "That ye . . . wrought the desire of the Gentiles". It would appear, therefore, (and the words quoted from ch. 3:6 would confirm this), that Peter looks upon the saved Gentiles as having become part of what Paul calls "The Israel of God", and that so viewing them, he includes them also among "the elect, who are sojourners of the Dispersion".

As to the time when this epistle was written by Peter, there are one or two features in it which throw some light on that question. The persecutions of which we read in the period covered by Acts were, with at the most, two exceptions, instigated by the Jews ; and the exceptions, at Philippi and at Ephesus, were stirred up by men whose trade was affected by the work of the gospel preachers. The Roman authorities of that period had no animus against Christians as such ; and some charge of conduct that was disorderly had always to be trumped up, in order to induce them to take action. But there came at length a time when the authorities themselves began to dread what the outcome would be of the spreading of this new religion ; and this brought on

A SERIES OF OFFICIAL PERSECUTIONS

which, starting in the latter part of the reign of Nero, continued at intervals during the first three centuries of the church's history. Now, it is clear from many expressions used in our epistle that it was written just as this state of things was beginning. The apostle forewarns the saints of "the fiery trial" just about to come upon them, in which they would be called on to suffer for the very "name" of Christian (see ch. 4:12, 16, R.V.). Paul had possibly already been put to death ; Peter himself was looking forward to the fulfilment of the Lord's prophecy concerning him, recorded in John 21:18, 19, and one main purpose of his writing, though not as we shall see the only one, was to cheer and encourage the saints in view of the fierce form of persecution soon to burst upon them.

In this connection it is of interest that the Greek word "pascho" (suffer) occurs no less than twelve times in 1 Peter, which is twice as often as in any other book of the New Testament ; while its noun form "pathema"

(suffering) occurs four times, also oftener than in any other. Even more interesting is the fact that the sufferings of Christ are mentioned seven times in varied connections, but always with an underlying thought of encouragement for other sufferers. The references are :

Ch. 1:11. "Testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ".

Ch. 2:21. "Suffered for us, leaving us an example".

Ch. 2:23. "When He suffered, He threatened not".

Ch. 3:18. "Suffered . . . that He might bring us to God".

Ch. 4:1. "Suffered . . . arm yourselves with the same mind".

Ch. 4:13. "Ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings".

Ch. 5:1. "I . . . a witness of the sufferings of Christ".

We have said that one object which Peter had in mind, when writing his first epistle, was to encourage and cheer the saints in view of the fiery trial of persecution that was just beginning at that time. Let us now see what forms this encouragement takes in the successive references to the subject in each chapter.

In ch. 1:6, 7 he directs their thoughts onward to the future, and tells them that the trial of their faith (more precious than that of gold) will be to their "praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ". In ch. 2:20-23 he teaches them that a right attitude on their part of patience under sufferings is even now "acceptable with God", since it proves that they are following the example of Christ Himself. In ch. 3:14-17 he suggests that persecution gives them an opportunity to testify the "reason of the hope that is in them", and to make their very adversaries ashamed. In ch. 4:5, 16-19 he asks them to look upon it as God's chastisement beginning at His "House", and points out that their persecutors will in due time have to give "account" for what they have done. Lastly, in ch. 5:10 he reminds them that their trial will be only for "a while", and will issue in their being made perfect, stablished, strengthened, and settled.

Throughout all this we can see that Peter, who had himself failed under trial, is carrying out the injunction of his Lord in Luke 22:32, "When thou art turned again, strengthen thy brethren", and these passages in which he does so are written, not alone for the benefit of the saints to whom the epistle first came, but for God's tried and suffering people in all succeeding generations.

But there was one aspect of the sufferings which would particularly

AFFECT THE JEWISH BELIEVERS

whom the apostle doubtless had specially in mind when writing – the scorn and evil-speaking to which they would be subjected by their unbelieving fellow-countrymen ; as being renegades from their religion, and as having lost all share in Jewish election and inheritance, in the Temple, priesthood, and promises. To such he ministers encouragement suited to their need. He points out to them that it is they who have the true election (ch. 1:2), and the inheritance "that fadeth not away" (v. 4); that they possess what their prophets had been searching diligently after (vv. 10, 11), and what even angels desired to look into (v. 13). He assures them that they themselves are builded together as living stones into a real Temple (ch. 2:5), and have become a real priesthood capable of offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. He gathers together expressions which had a primary

application to the nation, and which the nation failed to live up to ; and uses them of the Christians. "Ye are", says he (v. 9), "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people ; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light". (Compare Exod. 19:5, 6 ; Deut. 10:15 ; Isa. 43:21). These and other comparisons with Israel's experiences, as well as quotations of what God said of them, we should take special note of when reading this epistle ; not only on account of the use that is made of them, but because they show how fully stored the apostle's mind was with the Old Testament writings.

But there are other groups of references besides these to be watched for in Peter's letters. One that is of special interest is to

THE ACTS AND SAYINGS OF OUR LORD

as recorded in the four gospels. When He restored Peter after his fall, He gave him a threefold commission (John 21:15-17) to feed His lambs and sheep ; and the apostle in seeking to do this seems to lay much stress on what he had seen and heard during Christ's earthly ministry. "Whom having not seen, ye love", he says of his readers in ch. 1:8 ; and he who had seen Jesus endeavours so to set Him before them that they will love Him yet more.

His mention of the prophets in ch. 1:10 as deeply interested in the times of the Messiah, and in the great salvation He was to bring, is doubtless based on the Lord's own words about them in Matt. 13:17 ; his exhortation in v. 13, "Gird up the loins of your mind", is almost a repetition of Luke 12:35 ; while the somewhat similar injunction of ch. 5:5, R.V., "Gird yourselves with humility to serve one another", is an evident allusion to the act of Jesus in John 13:4, 5, to which he himself had taken exception at the time. Similarly, his references to being born again, ch. 1:23 (cf. John 3:5) ; to their being built as living stones upon Christ (cf. Christ's words on him in Matt. 16:18) ; to the stone which the builders disallowed, ch. 2:7 (cf. Matt. 21:42-44 and his own speech at Acts 4:11) ; to men beholding the good works of the saints and glorifying God therefor, ch. 2:12 (practically a quotation of Matt. 5:16) ; to feeding the flock of God, ch. 5:2 (cf. John 21:15-17) ; to Satan's desire to injure them, ch. 5:8 (cf. Luke 22:31, 32) ; to the manner of his own death, 2 Pet. 1:14 (cf. John 21:18, 19) ; to the transfiguration, 2 Pet. 1:17, 18 (cf. Matt. 17:1-9) ; to dogs and swine, 2 Pet. 2:22 (cf. Matt. 7:6) ; these, and others too numerous to mention here, are founded on well known passages and incidents in the gospels. And when he exhorts them to "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason" ; and to "be sober and watch unto prayer" ; 1 Pet. 3:15 and 4:7 ; can there be any doubt that the apostle's mind was going back to his own failures in these very matters in the garden and in the high priest's palace ? and his earnest desire is that others may not fall into the same snares as he had fallen.

We have shown how Peter, when endeavouring to carry out in these epistles the Lord's injunctions to feed His lambs and sheep, makes frequent references to what he had "seen and heard" during Christ's earthly ministry ; and how, because of this, his writings contain many links with the four Gospels. We have also noticed that, in pursuance of his further object of comforting the saints under fiery trial and suffering, he shows that the

promises and privileges formerly given to Israel are but a shadow of higher and greater ones now possessed by themselves; and that, in doing so, he supplies another series of links, this time with the Old Testament scriptures.

But the fact, already pointed out, that he is writing, not to converts of his own, but to saints the greater part of whom had been brought to Christ through the agency of Paul and his fellow-workers, would suggest that Peter has yet another purpose in mind; and the more carefully his epistles are studied the more clearly will this purpose come into view. He is writing to confirm these saints in the truths which they had already learned, and to assure them that his own teaching was on the very same lines as that of his great fellow-apostle. What need there may have been for this we can judge from the many references made by Paul himself to the mischief wrought by Judaizers, who evidently sought to associate the names of Peter, James, and others, with their activities, and to belittle Paul and his teaching by contrast with them and theirs. See 1 Cor. 9:1-6; 2 Cor. 11:3-5; 12:11-13; Gal. 2:6-9; 6:12-14; etc.

Looked at from this angle, one can see deeper significance in such passages as 1 Peter 1:12 (R.V.), where

"THEM THAT PREACHED THE GOSPEL UNTO YOU"

are described as announcing the very things which prophets of old not only had foretold, but had searched into with intense interest, as had also the angels; and verse 25 of the same chapter, where the statement that "the Word of the Lord endureth for ever" is followed by "and this is the word of good tidings WHICH IS PREACHED UNTO YOU". Light is thrown also on the reference at 2 Pet. 3:16 to Paul's epistles as being on the same plane with "THE OTHER SCRIPTURES"; and on 1 Peter 5:12, where the mention of Paul's fellow-worker Silvanus, the bearer of the epistle to them, as being "a faithful brother UNTO YOU" is followed by the words, "I have written unto you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD: STAND YE FAST THEREIN" (R.V.).

Now in this connection also we meet with a series of links, even more numerous than those in the two groups already spoken of, between 1st Peter and the epistles of Paul; and as might be expected, the closest parallels are with Ephesians, which like 1 Peter itself was written to saints in Asia, of which province Ephesus was the captial city. So great indeed is the

SIMILARITY BEWEEN THE TWO EPISTLES

that one might think of Peter as having just turned from the reading of Paul's letter to sit down and write his own. To display this likeness adequately would require the quoting of many entire passages from each of them, but the mention of a few points of resemblance must suffice.

Each epistle begins with a majestic description of our salvation, in which it is attributed to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; is traced from our election right through to our inheritance, and is shown to be secured by the precious blood that has been shed for us. In both of these the expression, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" appears word for word the same. In the second chapter of each, the Church is pictured as a great temple in process of erection, of which Christ in both is described as "the Chief Corner Stone"; and in the same chapters reference is made to what the saints were "in time past" (see Eph. 2:2, 11

and 1 Peter 2:10). In each epistle we get instructions on the reciprocal duties of husbands and wives, servants' and masters; in each we find a paragraph on spiritual gifts and their exercise (see Eph. 4:7-16 and 1 Peter 4:10, 11); and each in its concluding chapter dwells upon our conflict with the Devil (see Eph. 6:11-17 and 1 Peter 5:8, 9).

Compare, too, the references in each letter to our calling (Eph. 1:18; 4:1-4; etc.; with 1 Peter 1:15; 2:9; 5:10, etc.); to the veiling from saints of a past dispensation of truths which are now made known (Eph. 3:5 with 1 Peter 1:10, 11); to the interest taken by angels in these matters (Eph. 3:10 with 1 Peter 1:12); and to the subjection of these heavenly beings to Christ in His resurrection (Eph. 1:20, 21; with 1 Peter 3:22). Perhaps also attention should at this point be drawn to the likeness between

PETER'S MESSAGE TO THE ELDERS

in chapter 5:1-4 and Paul's address to the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20:17-35 ("Feed the flock of God . . . taking the oversight . . . not for filthy lucre's sake", as compared with "Take heed to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God . . . coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel").

Another epistle with which one might expect to find associations is that to the Galatians, since the province of Galatia is also one of the five to which 1 Peter is directed in its opening verse. From a number of these we shall here point out but two. The words of 1 Peter 2:16, "As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God", seem to be a semi-quotation from Gal. 5:13, "Ye have been called unto liberty, only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another". And the expression in 1 Peter 3:6 (R.V.), "Sarah . . . whose children ye NOW are", appears to be based on the "allegory" of Gal. 4:22-31, which ends with "So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free".

But it is not alone with Paul's letters to Asiatic churches that these connections exist. There are quite a number of them with Romans, the epistle in which Paul's doctrine of the gospel is unfolded more completely than anywhere else; and here, too, the similarity is at times so close as to suggest Peter's previous acquaintance with the other apostle's letter. Compare, for example,

THE TEACHING ON BAPTISM

in Romans 6:3-7 with that in 1 Peter 3:21 to 4:3, noting especially the two statements, "He that is dead is freed from sin", and "He that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin". See how a couple of passages from Isaiah, ch. 8:14 and ch. 28:16, which have been joined together as if one in Romans 9:33, are separated and explained in 1 Peter 2:6-8. Compare Romans 13:1-7, on subjection to "the powers that be", with 1 Peter 2:13-17, and note particularly the repetition of the unusual idea of "praise" from the authorities for well-doing. Finally, compare the passage on spiritual gifts in 1 Peter 4:10, 11 with the one in Rom. 12:6-8, to which it is more closely allied than to the Eph. 4:7-16 passage already mentioned.

Two other groups of links between Peter's epistles and the other Scriptures remain for consideration, those between 1 Peter and James, and

those between 2 Peter and Jude. In both cases the connection is very intimate, and quite as remarkable as any that we have yet examined. Of the latter we may have occasion to speak when dealing with the apostle's second letter ; and as for the former, we shall at present merely point out a few of the more striking parallelisms.

Compare the references to "joy" in "temptations" or trials, and to the outcome of these trials, in James 1:2, 3, 12 and in 1 Peter 1:6, 7. Note how both writers make use of the illustration of the fading flower of the grass, in James 1:10, 11 and 1 Peter 1:24. Compare the mention of the new birth in James 1:18 and 1 Peter 1:23. In each instance it is attributed to the Word of God, and in each it is followed by an exhortation to lay aside certain evil things, and to receive more of that Word. See how, in James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5, both quote the Septuagint Greek rendering of Proverbs 3:34, "God resisteth the proud but giveth grace to the humble"; yet in James 5:20 and 1 Peter 4:8, Peter follows James in making use of the expression "cover a multitude of sins", which is a partial quotation, not of the Greek, but of the Hebrew of Proverbs 10:12.

The many and close parallelisms which we have pointed out between these epistles and other Scriptures might suggest that, so far at least as the writings of Paul, James, and Jude are concerned, our apostle is a mere copyist. But more careful comparison of the passages which are similar will show that this is far from being the case ; and that while Peter's mind is well stored, not only with the Old Testament writings, but also with as much as had then been penned of the New Testament, he has made the truths contained in them his own, and presents them in his own way. This may be seen, not only in the relative degree of prominence he accords to some matters as compared with others, but also in his use of favourite words and phrases seldom occurring elsewhere.

Nowhere, for example, is more emphasis laid upon

CONDUCT BECOMING TO OUR CHRISTIAN PROFESSION

than in these epistles, and nowhere are the exhortations on this subject more frequently linked with references to our glorious future. Yet not once in them have we a clear allusion to the Lord's coming to the air for His people, as distinct from His coming to earth to reign. Again, although on the surface 1 Peter follows closely, as has been shown, the lines of the Epistle to the Ephesians, yet the saints are not in it looked on as already in Canaan, or in "the Heavens" of that epistle, but as still journeying thither through the wilderness. Contrast, in this connection, Paul's "Ye are no more strangers and foreigners" of Eph. 2:19, with Peter's "I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims" of 1 Peter 2:11.

These, and other such differences, do not, however, necessarily imply that the one apostle had a more limited knowledge of truth than the other, but only that the writing of each was in keeping with the purpose he had in view, and with the readers he had specially in mind. For although each wrote to all the saints in the localities named by them, there can be no doubt that converted Jews were more prominent in Peter's thoughts, and converted Gentiles in those of Paul.

With regard to our apostle's choice of

WORDS AND PHRASES,

quite a large number might be mentioned, which are characteristic of his writings, and are employed by him with more than usual frequency. A connected study of their occurrences will in most cases well repay the trouble of searching for them. One notable example, which has been referred to in an earlier paper, is his use of the words "suffer" and "suffering". It will be noticed that he constantly employs the former word where another writer would have said "die". Thus, concerning Christ, Paul again and again tells us that He "died" for us, or for our sins; but Peter invariably that He "suffered" for them. So, of ourselves, Paul writes, "He that hath died is justified from sin" (Rom. 6:7, R.V.); but Peter says, "He that hath suffered . . . hath ceased from sin" (1 Peter 4:1).

Another characteristic, almost peculiar to Peter, is his use of the phrases, "your souls", "their souls", etc., where a simple pronoun would have served instead. He writes –

"The salvation of your souls", 1 Peter 1:9.

"Ye have purified your souls" 1 Peter 1:22.

"Lusts which war against the soul", 1 Peter 2:11.

"Shepherd and Bishop of your souls", 1 Peter 2:25.

"The keeping of their souls", 1 Peter 4:19.

"Vexed his righteous soul", 2 Peter 2:8.

"Beguiling unstable souls", 2 Peter 2:14.

Yet another example is his employment of the terms "obey" and "disobey" with their derivatives, almost always in a gospel connection or at least with what might be called a gospel background. Thus the phrase, "Unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood", in his opening paragraph (1 Peter 1:2), must refer to their "obedience" to the gospel at the time of their birth into God's family, of which the next verse speaks. The expression, "Children of obedience", in verse 14 (R.V.) carries a suggestion that the likeness in holiness to their heavenly Father, which he here enjoins upon them, is involved in, and should be the outcome of that birth into His family, while the clause, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth . . . see that ye love one another", in verse 22 (R.V.) in like manner suggests that this further exhortation, to love those who are their brethren in His family, rests on the same basis, their "having been begotten again" as he expresses it in his next words.

That the "disobedient" ones of chapter 2:7 and 8 are

DISOBEDIENT TO THE GOSPEL CALL

is clear, especially as they are set over against the "You which believe" of verse 7, and that the expression, "If any obey not the Word" in ch. 3:1 refers to husbands remaining unsaved, is just as clear. The phrase, "Them that obey not the gospel of God", at ch. 4:17, bears its meaning on its face; and even the reference in ch. 3:20 to those of Noah's days, "which sometime were disobedient", points, not to the "great" wickedness of Gen. 6:5, that was the original cause of the Flood being sent, but to something of which they were guilty "WHILE THE ARK WAS A PREPARING", and which therefore must have been their rejection of Noah's testimony and preaching.

Attention has already been drawn, when comparing Peter's first epistle with that to the Ephesians, to his many references to the calling of the saints by God. His use of the word "called" in it, as applied to this, results in a remarkable series of expressions. He speaks of them as "called"—

To be holy, as God is, ch. 1:15.

To show forth His praises, ch. 2:9.

To suffer for Christ's sake, ch. 2:21.

To inherit blessing, ch. 3:9.

To God's eternal glory, ch. 5:10.

We have the word once more in 2 Peter 1:3, where God is spoken of as having "called us by His own glory and virtue" (R.V.). And is it not fitting that, after all these suggestions as to what His calling implies, we should come to the exhortation of 2 Peter 1:10, "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure" ?

Another matter often dwelt on in 1 Peter is the importance of

LIVING IN THE FEAR OF GOD ;

and the apostle's hints as to this are of interest, not only because of the variety of connections in which they are found, but because of the care taken in some of them to differentiate between the fear of God and that of man. In ch. 1:17-19 godly fear is introduced as being a desirable feature of the entire Christian course, "the time of your sojourning", as the apostle calls it, in keeping with his presentation of it as a wilderness journey to the promised land. He urges it upon the saints in view of the fact that the One whom they call on as Father "judgeth according to every man's work", and also on the ground of their knowledge of the great price which has been paid for their redemption.

He follows up this general exhortation to the fear of God by introducing it in various particular relationships. In ch. 2:17 it is associated with the Christian's

ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE POLITICAL WORLD

as described in the preceding verses ; while in ch. 2:18 it is brought in again, in relation to what we might speak of as his attitude to business affairs. In ch. 3:2 it is mentioned as a becoming thing in home life ; and in verse 15 of the same chapter we are reminded that it should characterise the saint who is called on to bear testimony before persecutors.

That the fear which he commends to them is not the fear of man, whether of a master, or of an unsaved husband, or of persecutors, is made clear in each case in which the point might be raised. The servants are exhorted to serve with all fear, not only the good and gentle master, but also to the froward one. Had he meant fear of the master the order would of course be the opposite, "not only the froward (who would compel in any case), but the good and gentle (who might not)". The unsaved husbands are to behold the chaste conversation coupled with fear, of their Christian wives ; yet the latter are NOT to be "put in fear by any terror" (v. 6, R.V.). Those who suffer persecution are encouraged to "FEAR NOT their fear" (ch. 3:14, R.V.); while at the same time they are told to give their "reason . . . with meekness and fear" (v. 15). It is therefore clear that the "fear" which Peter wishes the Lord's people to have is fear of grieving Him, or

of marring their testimony for Him, and this fear not only is very different from the fear of man, but actually removes it. No one knew better than he did that "the fear of man bringeth a snare" (Prov. 29:25), since he had proved it so in his own experience more than once. It had led to his three-fold denial of his Lord in the High Priest's palace; and, at least on one later occasion (Gal. 2:12), it had caused him to "build again the things which he destroyed".

Amongst these words and phrases, to which attention has been drawn as characteristic of the writings of Peter, few perhaps are of more interest than two words that in the A.V. are usually translated "GRACE" and "CONVERSATION". The former, of course, occurs frequently in other epistles also, but the manner and wideness of its use in 1st Peter are none the less remarkable. It is found there ten times, though in two cases, at ch. 2:19 and 20, it is disguised under the renderings "thankworthy" and "acceptable". Yet even in these instances the R.V. margin points out that it is the word "grace".

In three occurrences which we get in ch. 1 it might be said that we have past, present and future

ASPECTS OF THE GRACE OF GOD.

In verse 10 the prophets are said to have prophesied of the grace that should come upon us; in verse 2 the apostle desires present grace for those to whom he writes; and in verse 13 we read of grace that is yet to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. The setting of verse 10 would suggest that the reference there is to the whole great work by which we have been saved, and which is spoken of in Titus 2:11 as "The grace of God that bringeth salvation". This is a big subject, and well worthy of being searched into, since it was thought so by the prophets who foretold it, and by angels who "desire to look into" it. The salutation "Grace unto you" of verse 2 would bring to mind many Scriptures in which present grace to meet our present need is promised or spoken of; especially Heb. 4:16, "Grace to help in time of need", and 2 Cor. 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for thee". But the mention in verse 13 of yet further grace, that is to be brought unto us when Christ comes again, involves a use of the word "grace" not found anywhere else. The nearest approach to it is in Eph. 2:7, but the thought there is somewhat different.

A due appreciation of the fulness of God's grace towards us, as set forth in these three references to it in ch. 1 will form the best possible preparation for the study of certain

RESPONSIBILITIES ON OUR OWN PART

that are associated with the use of the word in the chapters that follow. But one needs to have some understanding of the various shades of meaning which the word itself may bear. Although "GRACE" in the New Testament is generally employed of the Lord's unmerited favour towards us, or the blessings which this causes Him to bestow on us, it is also used in several ways, one of which is to denote the attitude of mind and conduct produced in those who have not received His grace in vain. This may be expressed in "thanks", which is the rendering of the same Greek word in the several times repeated phrase, "Thanks be unto God". Or it may be better expressed in the gracious behaviour that seeks to act towards others as God

has acted towards us. See, for example, how giving is called a "grace" in 2 Cor. 8:6, 7, etc., and note particularly the phrase in 2 Cor. 9:14, "The exceeding grace of God in you".

Now it is doubtless this attitude of mind that Peter has in view when he makes use of the word in ch. 2:19, 20, and we might not be far from the true thought in the passage; if we introduced the usual rendering, as in the R.V. margin, in both verses, and said of patient endurance while suffering wrongfully, "THIS IS GRACE"; or even enlarged upon it in the words of ch. 5:12, R.V., "This is the true grace of God; stand ye fast therein". It would be in keeping with the fact that Christ is set before us in the next verse as the supreme "example" of it (just as He is at 2 Cor. 8:9, in connection with the "grace" of giving); and that patience under wrong is never characteristic of the natural man.

These two occurrences of the word in ch. 2:19, 20 are in what we might speak of as A BUSINESS CONNECTION, since the passage deals with the relationship of servants and masters. The next, in ch. 3:7, is in one dealing with the relationship of wives and husbands, that is, in a home connection. And then, at ch. 4:10 we get it in connection with ministry, that is to say, with assembly life. In all these spheres, those who have themselves become recipients of the grace of God are expected to manifest it in their attitude towards others with whom they are brought into contact.

As in the first chapter, so in the last the word is found three times; and these three forms, each of them in its own way, a suitable ending to the subject of GRACE in this epistle. In verse 5 we are told what sort of people they are to whom God gives His grace. They are the humble ones; for "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble". In verse 10 we have the word employed as a title for God. He is "THE GOD OF ALL GRACE". And finally, it is used at verse 12 in the closing exhortation of our epistle, an exhortation which carries us back, not only to the previous allusions to grace in it, but to its exhortations as a whole, and not only to them, but to what these saints had been taught from their beginning by Paul and his fellow-labourers. "THIS", says Peter, "which they have taught you and which I have written to you IS THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD: STAND YE FAST THEREIN" (R.V.).

As for the other word, "CONVERSATION", it is more peculiarly Peter's own; for out of thirteen times that the Greek word which is so rendered in his epistles occurs in the New Testament, no less than eight are in them; and as we have seen to be the case with other favourite words of his, HE EMPLOYS IT IN VARIED CONNECTIONS. Before looking at these, it is well to remind ourselves of what most Bible readers already know, that the word "conversation" has never there its modern meaning of "talk" or "intercourse", but signifies "behaviour" or "conduct".

Putting together its eight occurrences we have :-

TWO AS TO UNSAVED LIFE,

"Filthy conversation", 2 Pet 2:7. Suggests the worst side of it: and is spoken of those by whom a saint was surrounded.

"Vain conversation", 1 Pet. 1:18. Suggests the better and religious side of it; and is spoken of the saint's own past.

TWO AS TO OUR LIFE BEFORE GOD,

"Holy conversation", 1 Pet. 1:15. In view of what God Himself is.

"Holy conversation", 2 Pet. 3:11. In view of the prospect before us.

TWO AS TO OUR LIFE BEFORE THE WORLD,

“Honest conversation”, 1 Pet. 2:12. By means of which others may be won to God.

“Good conversation”, 1 Pet. 3:16. By which even persecutors may be put to shame.

TWO AS TO OUR LIFE IN THE HOME,

“Winning conversation”, 1 Pet. 3:1; and

“Chaste conversation”, 1 Pet. 3:2. Which may bring about the conversion of unsaved relatives.

Much might be said about each of these, and of the context in which they occur, which in every case is helpful towards the understanding of them. But for the present we shall do no more than call attention to the remarkable form of expression in 2 Pet. 3:11; where we have not only the last mention in the scriptures of the words rendered “godliness” and “conversation”, but also the only instance in which either of these is used in the plural. To render the apostle’s question literally, “What manner of persons ought ye to be **IN ALL HOLY CONVERSATIONS AND GODLINESES**”, would not give us good English, but by these plurals he suggests in a most impressive way the far-reaching effect which the truth dwelt on in this last message of his should have on every part and aspect of our conduct.

The half-dozen or so, which we have thus far considered, of words and phrases that occur in these writings, with more than usual frequency or prominence, by no means exhaust the list. But we cannot dwell at length upon them all; and it is the less necessary to do so, since many of them to a considerable extent overlap one another with regard to the connections in which they are found. We shall, however, mention with references a few more, most of which will have been already noticed by every careful reader of God’s word.

Four things are described by Peter as incorruptible :—

1. The “blood” by which we are redeemed, 1 Pet. 1:18, 19.
2. The “seed” by which we are born again, 1 Pet. 1:23.
3. The “apparel” of a meek and quiet spirit, 1 Pet. 3:4.
4. The “inheritance” reserved in heaven for us, 1 Pet. 1:4.

Three things are contrasted by him with gold :—

1. The blood, 1 Pet. 1:18, 19.
2. The apparel, 1 Pet. 3:3, 4.
3. Our faith, 1 Pet. 1:7.

Four things he speaks of as “precious” :—

1. The blood, 1 Pet. 1:19.
2. The Living Stone, 1 Pet. 2:4, 6, 7.
3. Our faith, 1 Pet. 1:4.
4. The promises, 2 Pet. 1:4.

Four times he adds to his exhortations a clause introduced by the word “Knowing” (Gr. *oidotes*), in which he reminds them of matters already familiar to them :—

1. As to their redemption by the blood, 1 Pet. 1:18 (see R.V.).
2. As to their inheritance of blessing, 1 Pet. 3:9.
3. As to suffering being the lot of all saints, 1 Pet. 5:9.
4. As to progress in godly living, 2 Pet. 1:12.

Four times in his first epistle he urges his readers to "be in subjection", using in every instance the same Greek verb :—

1. All the saints, to rulers, ch. 2:13.
2. Servants, to masters, ch. 2:18.
3. Wives, to husbands, ch. 3:1, 5.
4. Younger ones, to the elder, ch. 5:5.

See also ch. 3:22, where angels are subjected to the risen Christ.

Three times in the first epistle he exhorts them to "Be sober", employing in each case a word (nepho) that occurs only three more times in the N.T.; and connecting it with :—

1. A girded up mind, ch. 1:13.
2. Prayer, ch. 4:7.
3. Conflict with the devil, ch. 5:8.

Other groups such as these, readers may discover for themselves ; but there is one feature still in Peter's letters which deserves more than casual mention,— his repeated references in them to the Word of God. The only other epistle that can be compared with them in this respect is Paul's second to Timothy, a fact which suggests that both apostles, as they neared the end of their course, were desirous of emphasising to the saints the importance of the Scriptures as their permanent guide in the days to come, when apostolic ministry would no longer be with them. Let us then place these references together, that we may see how much Peter thought of God's Word, and how many uses he found for it.

The first one is at 1 Pet. 1:10-12, where he speaks of the

OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS

as foretelling the very "salvation that had been preached to his readers by those who brought them the gospel. By "The Spirit of Christ which was in them" did the prophets foretell it, and with the same "Holy Spirit sent down from heaven" did the preachers proclaim it. The central theme of both was "The sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow", and it is worthy of notice that the prophets, far from being left to give the message in their own way, had actually "to inquire and search diligently", just as any other Bible reader might, to what persons and to what times did the Spirit who spoke to them refer ; and ultimately to have this "revealed" to them by the Spirit Himself.

A remarkable instance of such inquiry, and one which may have been in Peter's mind as he wrote, is mentioned in Daniel 9, where the prophet tells how he had been learning from the "BOOKS" something as to when "the desolations of Jerusalem" would be accomplished (verse 2); and how, in response to his prayer, the Lord revealed to him a period far longer than the "seventy years" of which he had been reading, and the end of which was now in sight had been "DETERMINED . . . to make reconciliation for iniquity and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to SEAL UP THE VISION AND PROPHECY" (verse 24).

Before passing to the other references to the Word in 1st Peter, let us set alongside this one the first mention of the earlier Scriptures in 2nd Peter, which occurs at ch. 1:19-21. It will be noticed that the statements made in it are very similar to those we have been considering ; so much

so that one passage helps us to understand the other. We find the same emphasis upon

THEIR DIVINE ORIGIN

“Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”, and a similar effect of this Divine origin is mentioned—“that no prophecy of the Scriptures is of any private interpretation”. But in addition to this, we get an interesting representation of them as “A light that shineth in a dark place”, to which the saints would do well to take heed in their hearts, until the day dawn and the day-star arise. It is an illustration which should doubly appeal to us at the present time; on the one hand, because we have learned by experience, as never before, and the value of a light however small shining on our pathway; and on the other, because we have been discovering that this present world is a darker place than some of us ever thought it to be, and are all the more longing for the appearance of the Day-star.

The other references in the first epistle are :—

Ch. 1:23-25, where it is said that we have been born again by the Word. Here its permanence is stressed, and the apostle’s statement as to this is fortified by a quotation from Isa. 40:6-8, at the end of which he links it with his readers’ experience by saying, “And this is the word of good tidings (R.V.) which was preached unto you”.

Ch. 2:2 where, having been thus born again, he wishes them “as new-born babes” to grow by constant use of the “sincere milk”.

Ch. 2:8, according to which God has “appointed” that those who disobey His gospel shall stumble at the very word through which they might have been born again, and over the very Christ Who would have saved them.

Ch. 3:1, where we find that there is still a gleam of hope that one who is disobedient to the gospel word, may be “won” by beholding the godly conduct of a Christian relative.

Ch. 4:11, in which one exercises the “gift” of speaking is to do so in the closest possible association with the “Oracles of God”.

In the second epistle, in addition to the passage already noted, we have:—

Expressions such as “Exceeding great and precious promises” though from a different point of view, suggests to us the word of God.

Ch. 3:2 where “The words which were spoken before by the holy prophets” are joined with “The commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles” (R.V.); thus linking the Old Testament with the New, as a fitting introduction to a warning against “scoffers” (v. 3) who would arise to deny the authority of both.

Ch. 3:3, 5, 7, in which “the word of God” is represented as having held back in its allotted place the water by which in due time the “world that then was” perished; and “the same word” as now penning up the fire by which in time to come “the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up”.

Ch. 3:15, 16, in which Paul’s epistles are linked with “the other Scriptures”, as being of the same class, and suffering the same treatment at the hands of the “unlearned and unstable”. Also from this final reference we learn that Peter had been already studying Paul’s epistles,

and that, like the prophets of old time mentioned in his first reference at 1 Pct. 10-12, he found "things hard to be understood", apart from the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

In most of Paul's writings the doctrinal and the practical portions are largely kept separate, and it is easy to mark the point at which the one ends and the other begins. This is especially the case in those of them with which we have shown 1st Peter to have close connections, Ephesians, Romans, and Galatians ; yet it is a feature in which that epistle entirely differs from them, for in it doctrine and exhortation are mingled, sometimes in alternate paragraphs, and sometimes in the same paragraph, or even in the same sentence. This difference is due, not alone to a dissimilar style on the part of the writers, but to the fact that in the letters of Paul above-mentioned the teaching is the prominent thing, much of it being new to those to whom they were written ; whereas in 1st Peter little that is new is introduced, and doctrines are mentioned chiefly as leading to the exhortations which accompany them.

One consequence of this is that Paul's epistles are more readily separated into what we may call their main divisions, and another that the sequence and the development of thought in them are more easily traced, than in those of his fellow-apostle. In 1st Peter the difficulty is increased because of the writer reverting again and again in all parts of it to certain subjects which are much upon his mind, such as the Christian's suffering, and the Christian's conduct. But, as has been said when considering some of these subjects in former papers, each time he brings them up again he looks at them from a different point of view ; and by discovering what this in each case is, we shall be able to find order and connection in the epistle beyond what we may have expected.

THREE MAIN DIVISIONS

One well-known commentator suggests that 1st Peter may be divided into three main sections at the points (ch. 2:11 and ch. 4:12) where we get the twice occurring expression, "Beloved"; and that in the first (ch. 1:3 to ch. 2:10) the writer exhorts the saints as "BORN AGAIN" ones ; in the second (ch. 2:11 to ch. 4:11) as "PILGRIMS AND STRANGERS"; and in the third (ch. 4:12 to ch. 5:11) as "PARTAKERS" of the coming glory. And it is at least so far true that in the first of these sections prominence is given to the Christian's beginning (see, for example, ch. 1:3, 12, 18, 21-23 ; and ch. 2:2, 4, 6, 9, 10); in the second to his present position in the world (see ch. 2:11, 12, 16, 24 ; ch. 3:10, 15-17 ; and ch. 4:2, 4); and in the third to his future prospect (see ch. 4:13, and ch. 5:1, 4, 10).

It might also be added that in the first of the sections our relationship with the Lord is stressed (see ch. 1:3, 8, 15, 17, 21 ; and ch. 2:12-14 in the second our relationships with the unsaved about us (ch. 2:12-14, 17, 18 ; ch. 3:1, 15, 16 ; and ch. 4:4); and in the third, which on this view should perhaps rather begin at ch. 4:7, our relationships with other saints (see ch. 4:8-11, 17, and ch. 5:1-5).

OUR GREAT SALVATION

That Peter does turn back, to consider the same subject from other points of view, is very simply illustrated in the first chapter by his reference

to our great salvation. He describes it in three separate statements, each of which is followed by an exhortation based on it, with the result that the chapter may be divided into six portions, in which doctrine and exhortation alternate.

In his first statement at verses 2-5 salvation is set forth from GOD'S STANDPOINT, commencing with His "FOREKNOWLEDGE" and choice of His people, and tracing it right through to its full development and revelation when the Lord comes. Then in verses 6-9 he uses this ground for encouraging the saints to endure the fiery trial of persecution now about to burst upon them, since even that will prove to be in furtherance of God's purpose, and will be found to their praise and honour and glory at Christ's appearing.

In his second reference at verses 10-12 the salvation is set forth from the STANDPOINT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, in which it was "TESTIFIED BEFOREHAND" in words that the Holy Spirit caused the prophets to utter, and unto the meaning of which, not only they, but angels desired to look. This is followed in verses 13-17 by an exhortation to holiness of life in keeping with so great a salvation, and with the near relationship to God into which it had brought them.

The third statement about it comes at verses 18-21, where we may speak of it as viewed from OUR OWN STANDPOINT, since it starts from our unconverted life, and passes on to our redemption through the blood of the "FOREORDAINED" Lamb, and our new birth by means of the Word of God. On this he bases the third exhortation in verses 22, 23, which is to love with a pure heart our brethren who have had a similar introduction into God's family.

FOREORDINATION

It will be noticed from the words quoted and emphasised above, in connection with each statement, that Peter speaks of (1) God's beforehand knowledge, (2) the prophets' beforehand testimony, and (3) Christ's beforehand ordination for the procuring of this salvation. This line of thought seems to have been a favourite one with our apostle, as may be seen by comparing his words in Acts 2:23 and 4:28 concerning "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God", as well as his references at Acts 2:31; 3:18, 24, etc., to what the prophets foretold.

On the other hand, he introduces into each of the three parts of the chapter a reference to our "HOPE". It is a living hope, to which we have been begotten (v. 3); we are to hope to the end, or perfectly (v. 13); and this hope is in God Himself (v. 21).

Yet another thought, more important than any of the above, is that at verses 3-5 God the Father is shown as the Ordainer of our salvation, at verses 18-21 the Son of God as the Procurer of it. Thus it will be seen that the chapter enlarges upon and opens up the ascription in verse 2, "Elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ". In this respect it resembles Ephesians, where a similar reference to Father, Spirit, and Son, as responsible for our "spiritual blessings", at ch. 1:3, is followed by an opening up of the activities of each severally in connection with them.

The intimate connection between the closing verses of the chapter which

we have been considering (1 Peter 1) and the beginning of ch. 2 is obvious. In the former the apostle speaks of his readers as having been born again, and of the Word of God as the means by which this new birth has been brought about. In the latter they have become new born babes, and as such are exhorted to desire the sincere milk of the Word that they may grow thereby. The R.V., it is true, replaces the phrase "of the Word" in v. 2 by the adjective "spiritual"; but it is clear in any case from the context that the Word of God is the spiritual milk that the writer has in mind. As an additional link between the two passages, we may notice that the reference to being born again in ch. 1:23 occurs by the way of giving emphasis to the exhortation in v. 22 to love their brethren – that is the other members of the same heavenly family; and that ch. 2 begins with a companion exhortation to lay aside malice, guile, hypocrisy, envy, and evil speaking, things that would mar and destroy this brotherly love, and at the same time things as remote as possible from what would be expected in "babes".

We saw in our last chapter that in ch. 1 there are successive and differing descriptions of our great salvation. In v. 2 it might be said that we have in it

VARIED AND PROGRESSIVE PICTURES

of those who have received this salvation. In v. 2, as we have seen, they are "new born babes" in God's family; in v. 5 they are "lively stones" in a great spiritual building; in vv. 5, 9 they are a "priesthood" and engaged in priestly work; while in v. 11 they are "strangers and pilgrims" in the world. Lessons that are much needed by God's people today are suggested by each of these figures; but the one with which Peter himself deals most fully is that of the priest; and as has been often remarked, he considers this from two complementary points of view. In v. 5 the saints are "a holy priesthood", whose occupation is to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God; but in v. 9 they are "a royal priesthood" to show forth His praises (R.V., excellencies) amongst their fellow-men.

It is well that we should be exercised about both these aspects of our priesthood; for some who talk much about priestly worship, and draw fine distinctions as to what is and what is not worship, have little or nothing to say about priestly testimony. Yet from the beginning there were always two sides to the work of the priest, on the lines clearly set forth in the blessing on Levi at Deut. 33:10. On the one hand it is said, "They shall teach Jacob Thy judgments and Israel Thy Law"; and on the other, "They shall put incense before Thee and whole burnt sacrifice upon Thine altar". Moreover, the order in which these duties are mentioned is as here given, and is perhaps the opposite of what might have been expected, since the teaching is placed first.

At the other end of the Old Testament, Malachi stresses

THIS SIDE OF PRIESTLY WORK

when he says, "The priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the Law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts" (Mal. 2:7). Also in his twofold denunciation of the wrongdoing of the priests, while the first part in ch. 1:6-14 dwells upon failures in their worship; the second in ch. 2:1-9 deals with failures in their testimony;

his words in each case being in sharp and perhaps purposed contrast with Deut. 33:10. Instead of "They shall put . . . whole burnt sacrifice upon Thine altar", we have "Ye offer polluted bread upon Mine altar", and instead of "They shall teach . . . Israel Thy Law", we get "Ye have caused many to stumble at the Law".

But in addition to these two aspects of priesthood in 1st Peter and elsewhere to which attention has been drawn, there are two other ideas associated with it in our epistle, which are not necessarily nor usually involved in it; the idea of sonship, and

THE IDEA OF ROYALTY.

With the exception of Melchizedek, and of the One foretold in Zech. 6:13 who is Melchizedek's great Antitype, the priests of the Old Testament were not royal priests. Uzziah, the only royal person in Israel who aspired to combine priesthood with his kingly rights, paid the penalty by being smitten with leprosy. Nor had the Old Testament priests sonship in any sense other than that in which all Israelites possessed it as seen in Exod. 4:22, 23 and Deut. 14:1. Yet in the case of the Lord we have His Sonship and His Priesthood closely bound together in Heb. 6:6; while here in 1st Peter our own priesthood appears to be based on our birth into God's family which had been mentioned in the preceding paragraph. We are not only priests but son-priests.

Now, as I have pointed out in the little volume "BACK FROM BABYLON", there is in the Old Testament an interesting illustration of what it is to be ROYAL-SON-PRIESTS. In a list given at 2 Sam. 8:15-18 of the officials of David's court, who had been appointed, as v. 15 suggests, because of his desire to "execute judgment and justice unto all his people", mention is made of the Levitical priests, Zadok and Abimelech. But in addition to this, we find at the end of the list the words (see R.V.), "And David's sons were priests". The Hebrew term employed is the same as had been used of those others in v. 17, and is the usual word for priests throughout the O.T.; yet the fact that Zadok and Abimelech had already been named separately, proves that no intrusion upon their duties as priests of the Lord is implied. What then does the statement mean?

The question has some light thrown on it by another list in 2 Sam. 20:23-26, which contains the name of those in office during the latter part of David's reign, after the Absalom rebellion had been put down. As might be expected, several changes had taken place, perhaps the most interesting of them being that the king's sons are omitted, and in their stead there is one called Ira the Jarite, a stranger from the district in which he had sojourned during the rebellion, of whom it is said (R.V.), "Ira the Jarite was priest UNTO DAVID". This form of expression may assist us to understand what the office really was. As Aaron's descendants were priests UNTO THE LORD, acting before Him on the people's behalf, and acting amongst the people on His behalf; so these "priests UNTO DAVID" were doubtless intermediaries between him and his subjects; and their work being of a similar though secular nature, the same word serves to designate them. Who could have such access to the king in a subject's cause than his own sons, and who could so fittingly represent the king amongst his own people as they could?

Yet, that they failed to fulfil their duties is evident from the fact of

their supersession. by Ira, and is still more evident from the record we have of that son who was doubtless the most prominent of them all, Absalom, while in exile for three years at Geshur as the result of his evil-doing, certainly could not act as "priest unto David"; nor was he any better able to do so during the period that followed this, of which it is said that he "dwelt two full years in Jerusalem and SAW NOT THE KING'S FACE" (2 Sam. 14:28). This privilege having been restored to him through Joab's intervention (verses 32, 33), we are, immediately after in ch. 15:1-6, given a sample of his priestly service (?) to his father. He puts himself in the way of a man who desires to bring his cause before the king for judgment; and instead of facilitating the suppliant, he tells him that there is no one deputed by David to do this – the very work for which he and his brothers had been given official standing. Not only so, but he seeks to turn the hearts of the people from his father to himself, with what result the story of his rebellion lets us know.

The lessons on failure in both sides of priestly activities which may be learnt from this remarkable record we leave our readers to glean for themselves. They are many and important.

The expression "A royal priesthood", which we have been considering, is but one of several occurring in the same verse, 1 Peter 2:9, and each of these has its own special significance as descriptive of God's people. The verse itself appears to be built up of two Old Testament passages, Exod. 19:5, 6 and Isa. 43:20, 21, its first and final clauses being taken from the latter, and the three intervening ones from the former. All five of them had been used to set forth what God's purpose was, and still is, for the nation of Israel; but Peter employs them to describe what His purpose is for saints today.

It is interesting to notice how these five clauses, in the order in which Peter gives them, link themselves with the relationship to Israel borne by

THE FIRST FIVE BOOKS OF THE SCRIPTURES

"A chosen generation", or, as the R.V. has it, "An elect race", might well be used as a sub-title for Genesis, the book in which we are led on from an elect individual, Abraham, to an elect family, and thence to an elect people (see ch. 12:1-3, etc.). "A royal priesthood" suggests to us Exodus; not only because we have this dignity offered there to the nation, and the title itself employed at ch. 19:6; but because in ch. 32 we have the occasion which resulted in the setting apart of the tribe of Levi for the priesthood, and in the chapters that follow the building of the place where they were to minister, and the making of the garments they were to wear. As for Leviticus, it is certainly the book of "an holy nation", since it is largely occupied with precepts and laws on the subject of holiness (see ch. 11:44, 45; 19:2, etc.); and Numbers just as clearly deals with Israel as "God's own possession" (see ch. 3:13, etc., and R.V. of 1 Peter 2:9). Lastly, in Deuteronomy it is emphasised again and again that God intended the nation to "show forth His excellencies" by being a testimony for Him amongst the other peoples of the earth (see ch. 4:6; 28:10, etc.).

These clauses of 1 Peter 2:9 also suggest the various truths which were occupying the apostle's mind as he wrote the epistle, and which he emphasises in it; truths that are of the utmost importance to all who desire their life and walk to be in keeping with

GOD'S PURPOSE CONCERNING THEM.

They have been chosen by Him and brought into nearness to Him as priests, therefore they should be characterised by holiness. They have been purchased to be His own, and therefore should in all their ways manifest that they belong to Him. Israel the nation had failed in these matters, and so many a time have we ; but this is still the standard that is set up for our attainment—that we should show forth the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light.

Indeed our verse may well be taken as a text whereon are based all the practical exhortations that follow in the middle section of the epistle ; exhortations which as has been already pointed out, cover every possible relationship with those about us, whether in the State, in the business, in the family, or in the Church. Four times, in the course of them we are reminded that welldoing, even under suffering, is “the will of God” for us (see ch. 2:13, 17 ; 4:2, 19); a thought which seems to look back ; on the one hand to this 6th verse, in which we have been “called . . . to SHOW FORTH EXCELLENCIES” of the great God who has made us His own ; and on the other to verse 21, in which we have been “called to . . . FOLLOW THE STEPS” of the rejected and suffering One, who bore our sins on the tree. For, of course, that to which we are “called” is but another way of describing that which is “the will of God” concerning us.

The term “welldoing”, above mentioned, is the rendering of a word that, as noun, verb, and adjective, is almost peculiar to 1st Peter, so far as its use in the epistles is concerned. It occurs there six times, and always in connection with

THE BEHAVIOUR OF SAINTS

under the various circumstances to which the apostle successively makes reference. Another word, found nowhere in the New Testament except in 1 Peter 2:12 and 3:2, and in both cases rendered “behold”, is also of interest as suggesting the influence that their welldoing will have on those who are spectators of it (which is what the word implies). Both in the public surroundings which are depicted in the one instance, and in the home life which is described in the other, it will bring about in the unsaved beholder a favourable attitude of mind towards the gospel message. It will not of itself save them, but it will “win” (ch. 3:1) them, so that they will “glorify God in the day of visitation” (ch. 2:12). And even where this influence is still resisted, it will at least “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (ch. 2:15), and cause them to be “ashamed that falsely accuse your good manner of life in Christ” (ch. 3:16, R.V.).

Reference has already been made in these papers to Peter's great knowledge of the Old Testament. He does not, however, parade this knowledge before us by formal citing of passages ; for out of thirteen quotations and semi-quotations that may be traced in his first epistle, only two have any reference to their origin prefixed to them ; ch. 1:16, where he has “It is written”; and ch. 2:6, where he begins with “It is contained in the Scripture”. Elsewhere he drops without warning into the words of Old Testament passages, and does so with more or less exactness, as may best suit his immediate purpose. Chapter 2 contains many examples of this, and its closing verses afford perhaps the best of these, being almost

entirely built up from statements of Isaiah 53. This feature, in a paragraph addressed to servants many of whom were suffering wrongfully, will seem all the more suitable when we remember that Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12 calls on us to behold God's true SERVANT, scorned and suffering, but ultimately triumphant and glorious. This is the One whose "STEPS" the servants were to follow, instead of being "as sheep going astray", which in their unsaved days they were. And in this path He would be to them, not only their "EXAMPLE" but the "SHEPHERD and BISHOP of their souls".

Another illustration of how Peter, without formal acknowledgment, quotes from the Old Testament, may be seen at ch. 3:10-12, where he makes use of four or five verses of Psalm 34, weaving them into his message as though they were his own, and to such good purpose that no one unacquainted with the psalm would think of them otherwise than as his own.

The passage in which he does this is at the end of a series of exhortations as to conduct, which he addresses to saints in certain specified relationships, such as subjects, servants, wives, etc., and it all adds to them some further injunctions, which are applicable to all. That is why the paragraph begins (v. 8) with the word "Finally", which is a link with what has gone before; and not, as is at times the case with a word similarly rendered in Paul's epistles, a hint that the writer is about to draw his letter to a close.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SAINTS.

No less than five things by which all saints should be characterised are brought before us in this 8th verse, each of them in the Greek composed into a single and unusual adjective. Of these, four are found nowhere else in the New Testament but here, while the remaining one is in but one other place. Translated as literally as possible (see R.V. and R.V. margin), Peter's readers are exhorted to be (1) likeminded, (2) sympathetic, (3) loving-as-brethren, (4) tenderhearted, and (5) humbleminded; in other words, to be everything that would keep them right in relation to others, in any circumstances in which they might find themselves.

In the next verse two negative injunctions are added to the five positive ones; "NOT (6) rendering evil for evil, or (7) railing for railing"; and in these the writer also passes from the inward region of mind and thought, which is suggested in all the previous five, to that which is outward, in action, and in speech. Moreover, all this he urges upon them on the ground that, having been called to inherit blessing themselves, they should, like Abraham, "be a blessing" to all with whom they are brought into contact.

THREEFOLD EXHORTATION

It is at this point that the apostle drops into the language of the psalm; and it may be noted that in the threefold exhortation quoted by him, the order which has been mentioned above is reversed. A reference to SPEECH comes first, in the clause, "Let him refrain his tongue from evil and his lips that they SPEAK no guile", which may be compared with "Not . . . railing for railing" of the preceding verse. Next, DEEDS are mentioned, when it is said, "Let him eschew evil and DO good", and this links up with "Not rendering evil for evil". Lastly, an attitude of MIND is suggested by the third clause, "Let him SEEK peace and ensue it", an attitude which will be easy of attainment to those who are described by the five words of verse 8; and all the easier when they remember that "The eyes of the Lord

are over the righteous and His ears are open unto their prayers", as the psalmist had learned by experience and here teaches others. or even by personal failure, is a feature of not a few psalms ; but perhaps in none is it more marked than in the 34th. Having given testimony in the opening verses to the Lord's dealings with himself on the occasion of the incident mentioned in the heading of the psalm, David at verse 11 says, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me ; I WILL TEACH YOU the fear of the Lord". And he proceeds to do so in the words of the very passage which Peter repeats : its threefold exhortation being evidently viewed by the psalmist as pointing out the path in which "the fear of the Lord" will be realised and developed.

THE FEAR OF THE LORD

In Psalm 34, and also, as has already been noted, in our epistle, this subject of THE FEAR OF THE LORD is prominent ; and in both it is set in contrast with the fear of man. The latter point is particularly noticeable in the section of 1st Peter to which we have been drawing attention as containing special injunctions to suit special circumstances (see ch. 2:17, 18 and ch. 3:2, 6). And just after the quotation from the psalm of David's lesson to the "children", the same contrast is once more emphasised in the words of verses 14, 15, "Be NOT AFRAID of their terror . . . but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts . . . with meekness and FEAR", words which, by the way, are yet another example of how Peter employs an Old Testament message as his own ; since they are taken by him from Isaiah 8:12, 13.

As for the psalm, the fear of the Lord is named in it four times (vv. 7, 9, 9, 11); and these references to it are preceded by one to the fear of man, in connection with which it is worthy to note that David tells of deliverance from his "fears" (v. 4), before he speaks of being saved from his "troubles" (v. 6). This is as it should be, for David's fears were at the very root of his troubles on the occasion which is the subject of the psalm. It was through fear of Saul that he went down to Gath (1 Sam. 21:10), to stay amongst the enemies of God's people ; and it was through fear of Achish, or Abimelech, the king of Gath, that he "changed his behaviour" and acted like a madman (1 Sam. 21:12, 13). Neither act was becoming in one who had God's definite promise that he would be king after Saul, and whose life was therefore secure from all attempts on it until that promise was fulfilled. Both showed an absence of that trust in God concerning which he speaks so strongly in verses 8, 19, 20 of the psalm ; while on the other hand his pretence of being insane was an example of the very "guile" against which he warns others in verse 13 of his "teaching". From the psalm as a whole it is clear that it was not his guile which saved him, but the Lord's intervention on his behalf. This point, as well as the greatness of the peril in which he had placed himself, is even more clearly brought out in Psalm 56. See the title and verses 5, 6 of that psalm.

PETER'S EXPERIENCE

We have gone somewhat fully into these matters pertaining to David's experience, and to the psalm in which he writes of it ; because Peter, who quotes from the latter, had himself an experience comparable with it. He,

too, had gone into a place of danger by entering the high priest's palace, and he too, had become filled with fears when challenged by the servants. So, like David, he "changed his behaviour", and pretended to be a cursing, swearing outsider who knew nothing of Jesus, thus stooping to the "guile" which he condemns here and elsewhere in his epistle. Moreover, it was given to him, as to David, out of his very failure to be the better able to help and teach others. Christ, when foretelling his fall in Luke 22:31-34, added the words, "And do thou, when once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren" (R.V.); and this is just what Peter is seeking to do in our epistle, and particularly in the part of it with which we are now occupied. Could he possibly have written ch. 3:14, 15. "Be not afraid of their terror . . . be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you . . . with meekness and fear", without his mind going back as he did so to the time when he himself was "afraid", and not "ready to give an answer", with the result that he denied his Lord? And if he thought of this is it too much to suggest that he who knew the Scriptures so well may have also thought of David's fear which led him into guile? In any case, it is interesting to note how all these Scriptures, in the Old Testament and in the New, combine together to teach the same lesson; and how the failures of these great servants of the Lord may be of profit to us, if we learn that lesson.

In our earlier "Notes" it was suggested that Peter's object in writing his first epistle was threefold: that he desired (1) to encourage the saints in view of a fiery trial of persecution which had arisen at that time; (2) to confirm them in the truths which had been already taught them by Paul and his fellow-workers, through whom most of them had been led to Christ; and (3) to exhort them to manifest by their conduct the power which these truths exercised upon them. It does not seem to have been any part of his purpose to teach them new things, nor what he himself, when referring to Paul's writings calls "things hard to be understood"; and indeed to do so might have hindered the accomplishment of the second aim above mentioned by giving them an impression that there were truths which their early teachers had kept back from them, or else did not know.

DIFFICULT PASSAGES

Yet for all this 1st Peter contains at least a few statements and expressions that have stirred up more diversity of opinions as to what they mean than almost anything in Paul's epistles has; and some of these opinions view him as setting forth what is not only novel, but even contrary to the plain teaching of the Scriptures elsewhere. This is particularly so in the case of two passages, ch. 3:18-20 and ch. 4:6; which by a certain class of commentators are held to mean that the Lord, between His death and resurrection preached the gospel, and gave a fresh opportunity of receiving it, to sinners who long before had died in their sins. That such an idea stands contradicted by Luke 16:26, Jude 7, Job 36:18, and many other passages, may matter little to the writers in question, but will bar it from the acceptance of all those who believe that the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures is a reality.

Others there are who, while they take a similar view of that above with regard to the time and circumstances under which Christ is said to have "preached" to these disobedient ones, do not agree that a second chance

was offered them. They speak of it as merely a proclamation of His triumph; though why such a proclamation should be made at that juncture, or why the sinners of Noah's days should be chosen to hear it rather than others, is by no means clear. If it was not designed to bring about their salvation, it could only be to their further discomfort; and thus fails to give any explanation of ch. 4:6, where the word rendered "preached" is not equivalent to "heralded" as in ch. 3:19, but to "evangelised", or "announced as good news".

WERE THEY DISOBEDIENT ANGELS ?

An alternative view to this last explains the connection with antediluvian days by asserting that the disobedient ones were not men at all, but a particular class of angels who, it is said, are referred to as "sons of God" in Gen. 6:2; and whose disobedience consisted in marrying the "daughters of men", and having children by them. But here again it is a thing "hard to be understood" how angels who are "spirits" (Heb. 1:7, 14) and who "neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Matt. 22:30), should be able, as part of their disobedience, to provide, or should we say "create", for themselves bodies sufficiently human in character to be capable of reproduction of the human species. Nor is it easy to apprehend what connection there can be between a proclamation made to such spirits and the subject with which Peter is dealing in the preceding and following verses.

Doubtless ch. 3:18-22 is, in some degree parenthetical as may be seen by the easy and natural way in which ch. 4:1 can be read after verse 18; but this does not imply that the apostle has wandered from his subject. Rather is it that he turns back from the point to which he has attained at the end of verse 18, for the sake of using an Old Testament illustration, and of this illustration he then makes a stepping stone to carry him forward again to that same point. For the word "quickened" of verse 18 just as certainly refers to Christ's resurrection as does the word "resurrection" itself in verse 21. Compare the use of the same Greek term in 1 Cor. 15:22 where it is rendered "made alive".

THE DAYS OF NOAH

This being so, a turning back in our thought between verses 18 and 19 is equally necessary, whether we refer the latter verse to an act done between the death and resurrection, or to something which took place centuries before; and since our minds can travel the one journey as easily as the other, it seems much simpler to go back at once to the time of Noah, and to look on it as describing from a particular point of view what then took place. We are the more encouraged to do this because certain guideposts which appear to direct us that way. In ch. 1:11 of this same epistle it is stated of the O.T. prophets that "the Spirit of Christ which was in them . . . testified". If in others, why not in Noah? In Gen. 6:3 the Lord (Jehovah) said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man", which implies that His Spirit was then doing so. Mark, too, that it is "with MAN", not with some other order of beings. In 2 Peter 2:5 Noah is called a "preacher" and the word used is the noun corresponding to the verb rendered "preached" in 1 Peter 3:19. Going further afield, we find in Eph. 2:17 an expression similar in form to the "He went and preached" of our passage. It is "He came and preached", and the context there shows that it was through the

agency of the apostles and others He did so ; so that there need be no difficulty, grammatical or other, about attributing the statement in verse 19 to the agency of Noah.

Any one of these points, had it stood alone, might perhaps be brushed aside as unimportant ; but together they make a very strong case for what may fairly be called the orthodox view of 1 Peter 3 : 19, 20. And when the view is accepted, the phrase "spirits in prison" will most naturally mean the spirits NOW in prison ; and the idea suggested will be in vivid contrast with another one which underlies ch. 4 : 6 and some other verses, namely that death is to the believer's spirit a gaining of freedom. These men of ch. 3 : 19 were "in the flesh" when preached to ; now, because they disobeyed the message, they are "spirits in prison". On the other hand, when the "dead" of ch. 4 : 6 had the gospel preached to them, they too were "in the flesh", but now, though dead, they "live in the spirit", because when they heard the good news they believed it ; bearing, in consequence, the evil speaking of their fellowmen (v. 4), and their adverse judgment (v. 6), and possibly death itself at their hands.

SPIRITS IN PRISON

If it be maintained that those of ch. 3 : 19 must have been "spirits in prison" at the very time of the preaching to them, it will follow that those of ch. 4 : 6 must have been "dead" when the gospel came to them, and "dead", too, in the same literal sense in which that word is used in the preceding verse. But in this case the final clause of the verse implies that they were saved through the preaching, and would thus be made to contradict the teaching of the Word of God elsewhere.

For a clear understanding of either ch. 3 : 19, 20, or ch. 4 : 6 it is necessary to give more attention than is generally given to the real connection between their various clauses and phrases. In the case of the latter, the words "men-in-the-flesh" are read by most people as though they formed a single closely connected expression, and this, if it stood, alone might have an intelligible meaning. But here we would have to set over against it "God-in-the-spirit", which has no intelligible meaning whatever. We, therefore, in reading should pause slightly after the words "men" and "God", thus making it plain that the phrases "in-the-flesh" and "in-the-spirit" which follow do not qualify them, but carry us back to successive stages in the experience of those who in the beginning of the verse as spoken of as "dead". Some versions insert a comma at the two points so as to prevent misunderstanding ; Darby's rendering of the entire verse being particularly clear. It ends with "that they might be judged, as regards men, after the flesh, but live, as regards God, after the spirit". Helpful also to a right understanding of the entire passage is his translation of the parenthetic verse 2, "For he that has suffered in the flesh has done with sin". Throughout the whole of it, from ch. 3 : 14 onward, Peter seems to have before his mind the persecutors ; the persecuted, some of which had already suffered unto death ; and a God who in the background stands "ready" (ch. 4 : 5) to call to account the one and to vindicate the other.

Similar attention to the connecting words between the clauses of ch. 3 : 20 will completely disprove the more erroneous of the views held regarding it and the previous verse. The persons concerned were disobedient, WHEN the long-suffering of God was waiting (Gr. imperfect tense), and WHILE

the ark was a preparing. Therefore the disobedience referred to was not the "great wickedness" which originally caused the sending of the Flood, but disobedience (through unbelief, as the word used implies) to God's message through Noah during the period while the Ark was being built, and during which God's long-suffering was awaiting their repentance. That being so, no reason can be suggested why these sinners should get a further offer, who during a hundred and twenty years of opportunity remained disobedient ; and no reference to fallen angels is possible since in the light of Heb. 2:16 it cannot be assumed that the long-suffering of God ever waited on the repentance of such.

As was suggested in an earlier chapter, three main divisions may be traced in the subject matter of 1st Peter. In the first one, the saints are pointed back, again and again, to the beginning of their Christian course ; in the second, their present testimony for God is emphasised ; and in the third, special prominence is given to their future prospects. In addition, the first section deals more particularly with their relationship with, and responsibilities towards the Lord Himself ; the second with those towards the world of unsaved ones around them ; and the third with those towards their fellow saints.

The last of these divisions may be viewed as beginning at chapter 4:7, with the statement, "The end of all things is at hand"; and it will be found that the thought thus expressed runs like a sort of undercurrent beneath most of the exhortations which come after. That this is so is implied in the "therefore" by which it is followed in verse 7 ; and is seen in the promise which ends v. 13, in the view of things that is taken in vv. 17, 18, and in the future prospects at ch. 5:1, 4, 6, 10.

THE APPROACHING END

The closeness of the connection between these opening words of v. 7 and the group of seven exhortations coming immediately after them, is shown very clearly in the R.V., in which they are all united in a single paragraph ; and indeed in a single sentence, since the Revisers insert no full stop between the beginning of v. 7 and the end of v. 11. Thus all the seven are linked ; on the one hand with the motive suggested in the warning which precedes them, of the end being at hand ; and on the other with the higher motive contained in the words which follow them, "that God in all things may be glorified". It will be noticed that the group begins with exhortations of a general character, to sobriety of mind and to diligence in prayer, matters with regard to which the apostle himself had failed ; and it goes on to include others addressed to such as were possessed of particular spiritual gifts ; but in the one case or the other, these activities were to be controlled by consciousness of the approaching end, and by a desire to glorify God in them.

As so often in this epistle, Peter at v. 12 reverts once more to the fiery trial of suffering upon which his readers were entering ; and on this occasion he introduces a new and beautiful thought – that in the midst of their trial "the Spirit of glory and of God" would be resting upon them. The form of expression here seems to be taken from Isaiah 11:2, where it is said of Christ, "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him"; an interesting point, in view of the fact that in the preceding verse Peter had spoken of them as "partakers of Christ's sufferings". The thought

itself is well illustrated by the case of Stephen, of whom it is said in Acts 6:15 that his persecutors "saw his face as it had been the face of an angel".

SUFFERING AND GLORY

It is rather remarkable that soon after this reference to "the Spirit of Glory" as resting on persecuted New Testament saints, the apostle's thoughts go back to the time when "the Glory" was seen to be leaving God's House of Old Testament times. For there can be little doubt that when in verse 17 he says, "Judgment must begin at the House of God", he has in mind the words of Ezekiel 9:6, "Begin at My Sanctuary"; words which form a part of the Vision of the Departing Glory, seen by the prophet in chapters 9-11 of this book.

Even while Peter wrote, the "cloud out of the West" was about to overwhelm with a new destruction Israel's Temple and City, just as the "whirlwind out of the North" had done on that earlier occasion; but it is not of this the apostle is thinking. The House of God to which he refers is the same that he had been setting before the saints in chapter 2:4, 5, of which they themselves formed the living stones; as is made clear by the clause that follows in verse 17, "if it first begin at US". For this "us" is the equivalent of "House of God" in the former clause, and of course means the apostle and the saints to whom he is writing.

Moreover, the "judgment" of which he speaks is evidently the persecution mentioned in the previous verses, as is shown by the use of the connecting word "for" at the beginning of verse 19. His suggestion is that they should look upon their suffering as chastisement from the hand of God; and by the contrast drawn between it and the fearful doom of those who do not obey the gospel, one is reminded of the saying of Paul, "When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world". In the present instance, however, it must not be thought of as a punishment for some sin they had been guilty of, but as part of the training to which all God's children are subjected.

SAVED THROUGH SUFFERING

When once the connection of this 17th verse with verses 12-16 is apprehended, the meaning of the "scarcely saved" of the next verse will also become clear. In that verse Peter repeats in words which are quoted from the Septuagint Version of Prov. 11:31, practically the same question that he had asked in verse 17, concerning the fate of the wicked as compared with the present afflictions of the saints. The "righteous" in the one verse is the counterpart, expressed individually, of the collective term "House of God" in the other; and the phrase "scarcely (or, with difficulty) be saved", like the previous one "judgment must begin", points back to the difficult path of suffering through which God's people were passing at this time and by means of which their salvation, in its present or progressive aspect, would be furthered. Compare Paul's thought about his afflictions in Phil. 1:19-20, where in words taken from a still earlier sufferer (see Job 13:16, R.V.) he says of them, "This shall turn to my salvation". And note also that here in verse 18 the word rendered "be (R.V., is) saved" is in the present tense, and might well be translated "is being saved".

From all this it should be clear that no failure, either on the part of

God, or on that of the saint, is implied in being "scarcely saved"; nor is the expression to be set in contrast with the "entrance abundantly" of 2 Peter 1:11, as though it suggested a bad finish to one's course instead of the good finish pictured in that other verse. Indeed it may be found that most of those who shall have the abundant entrance are the same who have been "scarcely saved" through difficult and painful experiences while on their way home. They have suffered "according to the will of God" (verse 19) and they shall not be unrewarded.

Peter's frequent allusions to acts and sayings of Jesus, to which attention has already been drawn in these "Notes", are nowhere more in evidence than in the closing chapter of his first epistle; and recognition of them will add much to its interest for the careful reader. Indeed the apostle turns our thoughts in that direction in its very first verse, when he speaks of himself as having been a witness of the sufferings of Christ; a reminder which gives weight to what he has previously written on the subject of suffering; and which helps to account for the "therefore" that the R.V., following the oldest MSS., inserts in the verse.

Most of the allusions occurring afterwards in the chapter are to deeds and words associated with what took place immediately before and after Christ's death—with the upper room of Luke 22, and with the lake side of John 21. They are used by Peter here to put in shape what he wishes to say regarding service (vv. 1-4); humility (vv. 5-7); and watchfulness (vv. 8, 9).

UNDER SHEPHERDS

In his exhortation of verse 2, "Feed (R.V., Tend) the flock of God", he is passing on to other under-shepherds in turn the commission, "Feed (R.V., Tend) My sheep", which the Lord had given to himself in John 21:16. This service they are to do, "not by constraint (LIKE A SLAVE) but willingly", "not for filthy lucre (LIKE A HIRLING) but of a ready mind", not as lording it (LIKE A MASTER) . . . but as ensamples to the flock".

In the warning against "lording it", as well as in the exhortation to humility which follows in verse 5, and the reference to the Devil's activities in verse 8, Peter has evidently in mind what the Lord Jesus said and did on the occasion of the Supper. At that time there had been a strife amongst the disciples about which of them should be accounted greatest (Luke 22:24-27), as there had been at least twice previously (Mark 9:33-35 and 10:41-45); and Jesus rebuked them for it, by words in which "lording it" over one another is contrasted with taking the lowly place. He had already even more pointedly rebuked them by His action, described in John 13:4-12, of girding Himself with a towel to wash the feet of these quarrelsome disciples of His. Then there followed the announcement that one of their number was about to betray Him; and this, while it caused self-questioning among them, stirred up in Peter a vein of self-confidence (John 13:37), which brought on him the Lord's solemn warning of Luke 22:31, 32 (R.V., "Simon, Simon behold Satan hath asked to have you (plural) that he might sift you as wheat; but I made supplication for thee (singular) that thy faith fail not; and do thou when once thou has turned again, stablish thy brethren").

THE GIRDLE OF HUMILITY

If with these things in mind, we turn back to 1st Peter 5, we shall have little doubt the apostle derived his phrase, "not as lording it over" (v. 3, R.V.); and still less as to what occupied his thoughts when he said in verse 5, "All of you gird yourselves with humility to serve one another". The very word that he uses, rendered in the A.V. "be-clothed-with", but in the R.V. "gird-yourselves-with-to-serve", would itself suggest a reference to the feet-washing of John 13. It is a word which occurs nowhere else in the Scriptures, and its basic meaning is "gird-yourselves-with-the-overall-which-marks-the-slave-at-work". Even so did Christ gird Himself with the towel in John 13:4, 5, giving to His disciples an "example" (v. 15) of what He expressed shortly afterwards in the words of Luke 22:27, "I am among you as he that serveth".

The apostle's exhortation in verses 8 and 9 of our epistle, to watchfulness and resistance against the assaults of the Devil, falls into line with what has gone before, if we link it in our thoughts with the Lord's warning to Peter himself on the same subject in Luke 22:31, 32; a warning given immediately after His words on that occasion, concerning humility and its reward. Having experienced the attack of Satan, against which he had then been forewarned, he is the better able to carry out the injunction which was at the same time given him to "strengthen" (R.V. "stablish") his brethren; and that is what in these verses he is endeavouring to do. Indeed he makes use of this same word "stablish" when in verse 10 he encourages the saints by telling them that "the God of all grace . . . shall Himself . . . stablish . . . you". And it may also be noticed that Christ's prayer for Peter, that his FAITH should not fail, corresponds with the latter's desire for the saints, that in resisting the Devil they should be steadfast in their FAITH.

RESIST THE DEVIL

The emphasis thus laid in both cases on their faith, should remind us that one of Satan's chief aims in his assaults on the people of God, is to shake their confidence in Him, whether by their sufferings, or by dread of having to suffer, or by some other means. This aim is perhaps most clearly seen in his dealings with Job; but that he failed to accomplish it is just as evident, from such sayings on Job's part as "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15). He will fail in our case, too, if we heed the exhortation of Peter, "Whom resist steadfast in your faith", and that of Paul in a passage that in an earlier paper was mentioned as a parallel one with this, "Withal taking up the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one" (Eph. 6:11, R.V.).

There is scarcely any New Testament book, of which the authorship and inspiration have been more frequently assailed by critics and would-be critics, than the second epistle of Peter; and yet there is scarcely any that will more readily satisfy spiritual men, as to its genuineness in both respects. They cannot read it without feeling that it is Peter and none other who is addressing them; nor can they read it without feeling that it is God Himself who is speaking to them through His servant.

Attention has at times been drawn in how greatly it differs from 1st Peter; but similar differences exist between 1st and 2nd Corinthians, 1st

and 2nd Thessalonians, and 1st and 2nd Timothy, these being due in each case to development and in some degree change of subject. It has also been suggested that its second chapter is too much an imitation of Jude's epistle to be the work of a greater than he ; but we have already pointed out that this close similarity in certain passages to other writers is even more prominently a feature of Peter's first epistle.

SECOND PETER

1st Peter had been written to "the elect, sojourners of the Dispersion", in some provinces of Asia Minor, a designation which, as was remarked, would hint that the writer had more especially in view the Jewish saints in those places. 2nd Peter is addressed more widely, "to them that have obtained like precious faith with us". No territorial limits are mentioned ; and the form of expression employed might suggest Gentile converts, the "us" referring to the Jewish ones. But, it is evident from the words he uses in chapter 3:1 that the apostle has the same readers before his mind in both letters ; and this is confirmed by the same mention in the following verse of "YOUR apostles" (see R.V.); a hint that here, as in the first epistle, he is writing to those who had been brought to Christ through the agency of Paul and his companions. It is therefore more probable that the expression in chapter 1:1 refers, not to Gentile converts as compared with Jewish, but to the general body of the saints who had obtained like precious faith with the original apostles and "eye-witnesses" (ch. 1:16) of whom Peter himself was one.

When comparing the two epistles together, one is struck by the fact that, while 1st Peter is full of references to suffering for Christ's sake, the words "suffer" and "suffering" do not occur once in 2nd Peter. This is not because the "fiery trial" of 1st Peter 1:6, 7 ; 4:12 had come to an end ; for indeed the apostle himself was about to fall a victim to it, as he hints in 2nd Peter 1:14. But he had already said all that was necessary upon that subject ; and he has now another message to give the saints before he is taken from them. It is a message of warning as to dangers ahead of a very different kind from the persecution they were now suffering ; dangers arising from the false teachers of chapter 2, and from the scoffers of chapter 3, dangers that, if not withstood, will influence for evil their conduct, and put an end to their progress as saints.

TWO APOSTLES IN ACCORD

This line of things is similar to that taken up by Paul in his last written epistle, the second to Timothy ; and because it is, 2nd Timothy and 2nd Peter much resemble each other ; as may be seen by comparing the references in each to the "last days"; to the evil teachers that the last days will bring forth ; to the Word of God as a safeguard in the last days and to the conduct which should characterize God's people in the last days. Thus it might be said that, as in his first epistle Peter shows that his general teaching is in full accord with that of Paul, so in his second he lets us see that the latest thoughts of these two great leaders, as to what they should emphasise to the saints just before being removed from them by martyrdom were also in full accord.

When pointing out in a former paper the large number of words and phrases that by their repetition are characteristic of 1st Peter, it was shown

that some of them stand out prominently in 2nd Peter also. One such is "Conversation" (behaviour) found in ch. 2:7 ("filthy conversation") and in ch. 3:11 ("holy conversation"), while its Greek verbal form occurs in ch. 2:18 ("live"). Another is "Grace", the last occurrences of which in the exhortation "Grow in grace" of ch. 3:18 put a fitting topstone on the many references previously made to it by the apostle. And there are various others.

SECOND PETER'S SPECIAL WORDS

But 2nd Peter has noteworthy repetitions of its own; one interesting example being its exhortations to diligence. In ch. 1:10 the saints are urged to make sure that they have started right, in the words, "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure". In ch. 3:14 they are exhorted, on the ground of their future prospects, to "Give diligence (R.V.) that they may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless". And in ch. 1:5 they are encouraged to fill up the intervening time of testimony by growth in Christian graces; "Giving all diligence" they are to add to their faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and so on. The same word is also used by Peter in ch. 1:15 of his own exercise as to providing permanent help for the saints. It is hidden in the A.V. by a different rendering, but is brought out clearly in the R.V., "I will give diligence that at every time ye may be able after my decease to call these things to remembrance".

Perhaps of even more interest are the occurrences of the word "godliness", a term that 2nd Peter shares with the Timothy epistles, and which is found nowhere else save in Peter's own gospel address at Acts 3:12. This too is hidden by the A.V. in its rendering "holiness", but is shown in the R.V.

In our epistle it has, like the above-mentioned exhortations to diligence, links with the past, present, and future of Christian experience. In ch. 1:3 we read that God in saving us has made provision for it, by granting unto us "all things that pertain to life and godliness". In ch. 1:7 we are called upon to add it to other graces in which we should be making progress. And in ch. 3:11 we are to be found manifesting it by the Lord when He comes. The last occurrence is the only place in the N.T. where the word is in the plural (Greek); the suggestion being that it is to be manifested in all possible ways and in fullest measure.

Although 2nd Peter ends, as it begins, with exhortations to spiritual progress, the epistle as a whole sets before us, as characteristic of the present period, a progress, or rather sequence, that is downgrade. In ch. 1 we at first have saints who are going on in the ways of God, adding to their faith virtue, and so on. But this is succeeded by a reference to backsliding saints who have ceased to move in the right direction, who see only what is near, and who have forgotten the cleansing from the old sins. There follows in ch. 2 a lengthy description of men who profess to be saints, but are not really so; who, although they are found "among you" (v. 1) yet have still the unclean character of the "dog" and "sow" (v. 22). Finally, in ch. 3 we come in contact with open scoffers, who "walk after their own lusts", and flatly contradict the Word of God.

It is noticeable that each of these types can easily drift into, or produce the one which comes after it. Saints who have been going on well are ever in danger of slacking off, and so becoming to some extent like those who

go down to the pit ; and when this occurs it becomes easy for unsaved professors to creep in amongst them. Then is brought about a state of things which in turn tends to encourage the development of scoffers and infidels, who sneer at God's promises and warnings. We have, therefore, in our epistle what we might speak of as evolution downwards ; which is indeed the only kind of evolution there can be, apart from God's intervention. It is what the Scriptures lead us to expect, as marking the age in which we live ; and yet we ourselves are not free from blame in the matter. If it were not for failure on the part of God's people to go on for Him, professors and "false teachers" would, as in Acts 5:13, find no place amongst them ; and if there were no unreal professors to cause a blot upon Christian testimony, scepticism would be deprived of its chief excuse and its keenest weapon.

GOD'S WISE PROVISION

To encourage the saints in this going on for God, Peter turns their thoughts in two opposite directions. In ch. 1 he reminds them of the wonderful start God had given them and of the provision He had made for their continuance in His ways. In ch. 3, on the other hand, he would have them look forward to the bright prospect that lies ahead, and to the "new heavens and the new earth" wherein dwelleth righteousness. The former consideration should assure them of God-given ability to continue in their steadfastness and growth ; the latter should secure their willingness to do so.

Let us then first look more closely into his exhortation of ch. 1, and the basis upon which it rests. This chapter is composed of two almost equal paragraphs, and it is with the earlier one, which ends with verse 11, that we have at present to do. In this we are taken all the way through the Christian course, from its beginning when we obtained "like precious faith" with the apostles and early saints (v. 1), to its close when we shall have ministered unto us our "entrance into the everlasting kingdom" (v. 11); and in it we learn that, so richly has God provided us with all things necessary for the journey when He started us on it that no excuse is left us for falling out by the way, or of finishing with any other than an "abundant entrance".

The paragraph may be looked on as comprising four sections ; (1) Verses 1, 2, which contain the opening salutation ; (2) Verses 3, 4 in which God's great provision for us is described ; (3) Verses 5-9, which set forth the responsibility entailed on us in consequence of this provision ; and (4) Verses 10, 11 in which we have an earnest exhortation, founded on all that has gone before.

FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

The interest which the salutation has for us, as connected with the other sections that follow it, and indeed with the rest of the epistle, centres in its introduction of two great matters ; (1) our precious faith – the means by which salvation became ours ; and (2) our knowledge of God and Christ – the element in which not only grace and peace are multiplied unto us, but all true progress in Christian experience takes place. The importance of these two becomes evident in verses 5-8, where the "adding" to which the saints are there exhorted, has for its starting point "your faith" (v. 5),

and for its goal "the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 8).

The next section of the paragraph, verses 3, 4 develops and explains the expressions used in the salutation, and in doing so introduces two other important words, "life" and "godliness". These at first sight suggest to us the beginning and the after development of our career as saints, reminding us that we have been granted all things that pertain, not only to getting eternal life when we believed, but also to godly living ever afterwards. But, indeed, the connection between the terms is closer than this way of expressing it might imply; for the "life" which we received at the beginning abides in us still, and the "godliness" is the manifestation of it. Moreover, the phrase, "through the knowledge of Him that hath called us", in the latter part of verse 3, applies to the "life" as well as to the "godliness", recalling to us our Lord's own words in John 17:3, "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent".

INWARD AND OUTWARD

It may be pointed out in passing that the word "given" (R.V., "granted") in verses 3 and 4 answers to the "obtained" of verse 1. We have "obtained", or were allotted what God has "granted" to us, from whichever angle we look at it, whether our "faith", or the "things pertaining to life and godliness", of "His precious and exceeding great promises". Note also that the two sides of our deliverance mentioned in end of verse 4, "become partakers of the divine nature", and "escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust", correspond respectively to the "life" and the "godliness" of verse 3.

These two aspects, the inward as well as the outward, the positive as well as the negative of what the "promises" accomplish for us, should be carefully borne in mind because when we come to ch. 2:20 we read of certain of whom the outward thing was in some degree true but not the inward. They had "escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ", and yet they were "again entangled therein and overcome", the reason being, as the context shows, that they had not "become partakers of the divine nature", but still, as has already been pointed out, had the unclean character of the "dog" and the "sow" (v. 22). In consequence of this, they were found willing to listen to "promises" of a very different kind (v. 19); and the final outcome was, in words quoted by Peter from our Lord's own saying of Matt. 12:45, "their last state became worse than the first" (v. 20, R.V.).

We now pass on to the third of the four sections which together form the opening paragraph of 2nd Peter 1. As the second of these (vv. 3, 4) brought before us God's great provision for our heavenward journey, so the third (vv. 5-9) sets forth the responsibility resting on ourselves to make full use of that provision.

The connection between the two sections is made clear in the R.V. rendering of the words which begin the third one at verse 5, "Yea, and for this very cause adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply . . ." Here the expression "on your part", suggests that Peter has already been dealing with God's side of the matter; and another phrase, "for this very cause", implies that the exhortation about to be given as to our side of it is based on what he has previously been saying as to His. Moreover,

the fact that the exhortation starts with "In your faith supply . . .", reminds us that this precious faith, which forms the starting-point of our growth, is what we have already "obtained" in verse 1 ; and the further fact that the fruition of our growth is described as "unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 8) turns our thoughts back to verses 2, 3, where this knowledge is spoken of as the element in which thrive all things that pertain unto life and godliness.

KNOWLEDGE INCREASED

With regard to this last named link of connection, it is interesting to notice that while verses 2, 3 teach that the knowledge of the Lord produces godly living ; verses 5-8 on the other hand teach that progress in godly living brings about further knowledge of the Lord. In other words the inner and outer aspects of the Christian's life mutually produce each other. The better I know my Lord the better I shall live for Him, and the better I live for Him the more fully I shall get to know Him.

As may be seen, there are seven graces named in verses 5-7 which should follow upon faith, and as might be expected, the last and highest of the seven is "love". Each of these should be developed out of, and should form the complement of the preceding one ; for this, and not merely the "adding" of each as a separate item, is what is implied in the expression used. The rendering in the R.V. gives the idea fairly well, "In your faith supply virtue, and in your virtue knowledge", etc.

The contrast between the positive side of the matter as given in verse 8 and the negative side as given in verse 9 is striking. In the former, not only are the various graces which have been named present, but they "abound" or "increase". In the latter, where they are lacking, not only is there no increase in knowledge of the Lord, but there is forgetfulness even of the things which once were known and experienced.

ESTABLISHED CHRISTIANS

Another connection which is of interest is formed by the occurrence in verse 9, and again in verse 12, of a word which may be literally rendered "to be present". In the beginning of verse 9 it would be, "he with whom these things are not present"; and in verse 12, "the truth which is present with you". Its repetition might suggest that when Peter speaks of them being "established in the present truth", his thoughts are going back to the practical teaching he has already been giving them in the earlier verses of the chapter. It may be also remarked that in using the word "established" in verse 12, his mind is probably travelling still further back ; since the term thus rendered is the same which his Lord used to him, when in Luke 22:23, after warning Peter of his impending denial He added, "When thou art converted, strengthen (R.V., "stablish") thy brethren". That is the very thing which our apostle is here seeking to do.

Another word in verse 9 deserving of mention is that which in the A.V. is translated by the phrase, "cannot-see-afar-off", and in the R.V. by "seeing-only-what-is-near". It occurs nowhere else in the Scriptures, and the simplest English equivalent would perhaps be "short sighted". The persons here described are at the opposite pole from Abraham and the others referred to in Hebrews 11:13, who saw the promises afar off and embraced them. These are too short-sighted to see the value of the "ex-

ceeding great and precious promises" of ch. 1:4 and ch. 3:13 ; and they show that they have forgotten the cleansing from their old sins by turning back to them.

MAKING SURE

In the fourth and last section of the paragraph (vv. 10, 11) the apostle presses home his exhortation of the previous section, by pointing to three great results that will accrue from doing "these things" to which he has been urging them. In the first place they will be making their calling and election sure, or in other words, proving to themselves and others that they have truly been born again, and are therefore amongst the number of the "elect" and "called" ones to whom Peter's letters are written (see 1 Peter 1:2 ; 1:5 ; 2:9, R.V., 2 Peter 1:5, etc.)

Secondly, they will be preserved from falling by the way, and even from stumbling (as in R.V.), which is what the word here used literally means. In the spiritual realm it is not the one who keeps going on and making progress who stumbles, but the one who has ceased to do so. Nor is it the one whose eyes are lifted up to the things that are "afar off", but the one who sees only what is near.

Finally, those who obey the exhortation of the preceding verses will have "ministered" unto them abundantly an entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The word "ministered" here is the same as is translated "add" in the A.V. of verse 5 ; and this the R.V. shows by rendering "supply" in the one case, and "supplied" in the other. Its repetition seems to bind the entire passage together, by the thought that when the "faith" obtained by us in verse 1 is made the means of supplying one after the other the various graces mentioned in verses 5-7, the Lord Himself will supply an abundant entrance at the end of the course. As is stated in Phil. 1:6 (R.V.), "He which began a good work in you will perfect it".

The second paragraph of the two that make up our chapter (i.e. 2 Peter 1:12-21) has as its main features of interest, the reference to the Transfiguration, and that to the character and use of the written Word of God. The latter subject, as was pointed out in an earlier paper, is given prominence throughout Peter's epistles, but nowhere does he deal with it so fully as here.

In verses 12-15, the apostle speaks of his desire that the saints may be kept in remembrance of the truths which he has already been bringing before them ; and that, not only during the short time he may be yet with them, but also after he shall have been taken from them. And his statement concerning this in verse 15, "I will endeavour that ye may be able, after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance", evidently implies an expectation on his part that his writings will find a place in those Scriptures to which, in days to come, the saints will turn for guidance. In chapter 3:15, 16 we see him giving to the epistles of Paul a similar place amongst the "Scriptures".

THE VOICE AND THE WORD

In verses 16-18 he reminds them of what was to himself an unforgettable confirmation of the truth of the earlier Scriptures, as well as of the reality of "the Power and Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"—the scene on the

mount of Transfiguration. There he had been an eye-witness of the "majesty" of his Lord, and had seen in His company the two great representatives of "the Law and the prophets". He had heard them conversing with Him about "His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem", and, more wonderful still, had heard the "Voice" which Moses and Elijah, alone amongst the prophets, had been privileged to hear in former days (see Num. 12:6-8; Exod. 19:19; 1 Kings 19:12-13); and which now proclaimed, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased".

The apostle's readers had not personally the privilege that was his on this occasion, but they possessed the prophetic Word, of which it is an illustration and confirmation, and which was itself just as really "from heaven" as was the Voice heard on the mount. Peter directs our attention to this comparison between the two by using, twice with regard to each, a word meaning "brought" or "borne" (see margin of R.V., or Newberry). The Voice "was BORNE to Him from (rather "by") the excellent glory" (v. 17), and it "was BORNE not by will of man" (v. 21), but "men spake from God, being BORNE by the Holy Ghost" (v. 21).

A LAMP IN A DARK PLACE

This being so, it follows that saints should give careful heed to the Word, "as unto a lamp shining in a dark place"; but it also follows that in doing so they need to remember that "no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation". Only the Holy Spirit, who dictated it can explain it, either of the writer (1st Peter 1:10-12), or to the reader (1 Cor. 2:10-12).

The words in verse 19, "Until the day dawn and the daystar arise", must necessarily refer to the Lord's Coming; for the dawn of day is here viewed as bringing to an end the need for the lamp, and since the lamp is the Word, it is unthinkable that any event or attainment, short of the Coming, could be looked upon as ending the saint's dependence on it for guidance. But taking this view of the verse, its last three words seem to present a difficulty, and the question might be asked, Why, if it be the Coming that is referred to, should the daystar be said to "arise in your hearts"? To this it may be replied that if our Lord's Coming does not dwell in our hearts as something to which we longingly look forward, we have little right to reckon ourselves amongst His people; and if it does so dwell, there is nothing farfetched in describing its actual occurrence, from a subjective point of view, as the rising up in our hearts in daylight splendour of that which has been treasured in them and has been a light to us all the way along. It is not a matter of having a clear apprehension of the order and manner of the Coming, but of being true in heart to our Lord during His absence, and longing for Him to appear.

But perhaps the explanation, first suggested by Tregelles, and since then adopted by various commentators, is the true one. He treats the illustrative portion of the verse, from "as" to "arise" as parenthetical, and links the final "in your hearts" with the previous "take heed". Thus the exhortation would read, "To which ye do well that ye take heed (as unto a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawn and the daystar arise) in your hearts"; or simply, "To which ye do well that ye take heed in your hearts, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawn and the daystar arise". In support of this view, he refers to 1 Peter 3:21 as a similar example of parenthesis in Peter's style of writing.

A HOLY CALLING

The apostle's use, here and elsewhere, of the word "holy" is worthy of notice, for it is one of many links which show the two epistles to be the work of the same author. It is found eight times in the first letter and six times in the second, one occurrence in each case being of the Holy Spirit; but what is most remarkable is the variety in the nouns to which it is prefixed. In 1st Peter 1:15, 16 he repeats it four times in the command, "As He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy . . . ; because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy". In ch. 2:5 he writes of "an holy priesthood" in ch. 2:9 of "an holy nation", and in ch. 3:5 of "the holy women" of olden time. In 2nd Peter 1:18 he uses it of "the holy mount", in ch. 1:21 of "holy man of God", in ch. 2:21 of "the holy commandment", in ch. 3:2 of "the holy prophets", and finally in ch. 3:11 he urges upon his readers "all holy conversation and godliness".

The above references in ch. 1:21 and ch. 3:2 to the holy character of those whom God used in giving us His Word stand out the more prominently by contrast with the uncleanness attributed to the "teachers of falsehood" of chapter 2, and to the "mockers" of truth of chapter 3. Turning from the first chapter to the second is like coming down from the scene on the "holy mount" to the sordid and corrupting scenes below. While Peter at ch. 1:16 speaks of "the Power and Coming" of our Lord, we meet at ch. 2:1 (see R.V.) with those who deny His Power, and at ch. 3:3, 4 with those who deny His Coming. And as one great object before the apostle, when writing this letter, was to stir up the minds of the saints in remembrance of the truths they had learned in the past; so another was to warn them of the errors with which they would be called upon to contend in the future.

The middle chapter of 2nd Peter is in many ways a remarkable one. Its impassioned denunciation of the false teachers, whose coming is foretold in its opening verse, sounds like a passage from one of those prophetic writings to which the apostle has just called attention, rather than the production of a New Testament writer. In the course of it he makes use of at least twenty Greek words not found elsewhere in the Scriptures, while certain others, such as the words for "destruction", "corruption", "covetousness", etc., which do occur though rarely elsewhere, he repeats in it with unusual frequency.

On the other hand, the chapter possesses such a similarity to the little epistle of Jude as would suggest that one of the two writers was already acquainted with the work of the other when he wrote; and much difference of opinion has resulted amongst commentators as to which of them wrote first. A comparison of the portions in which this similarity is most marked will show, I think, that if one has a priority of that kind it is Jude; and since we have already seen that Peter in his first epistle goes over much of the same ground which Paul had already traversed in Ephesians, etc., and that in certain passages he follows also the very wording of James, it is not surprising to find him in his second letter taking up, in similar fashion, a line of things closely related to one already dealt with by Jude. There is, however, a possibility that the similarity is not due to either writer having had access to the product of the other, but to the fact that each is giving out in his own way a message of warning to the saints, which

at this juncture the Holy Spirit was impressing on both their minds, and possibly on the minds of other leaders amongst them as well.

THE OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

Of special interest are the apostle's references in our chapter to three men of the Old Testament times ; because in each case we learn something about these which otherwise we should scarcely have known. Concerning Noah we are told that not only was he a "just", or righteous man as he had been declared to be in Gen. 6:9, and 7:1, but he was also "a preacher of righteousness", one who, besides preparing against the coming judgment, himself sought to warn his contemporaries.

The other two, Lot and Balaam, are dealt with more fully, the one in verses 6-9 and the other in verses 14-18. Had we not Peter's description of Lot, in which three times over he speaks of him as "righteous", and tells us that he never became so accustomed to "the filthy conversation of the wicked" as to cease to be vexed in his soul by it, we should have been left wondering whether this convert of Abraham was a really saved man after all. And had we not the apostle's reference here, and that in Rev. 2:14-16 to Balaam's activities, we should scarcely have realised from the Old Testament account of him what an utterly wicked man he was, despite his beautiful speeches. The introduction of the two men in the same passage here may, however, suggest to us a comparison, as well as a contrast; for while it is made very clear that Balaam was a slave to his own covetousness, it may be asked, What was it but a touch of the same vice that led Lot into Sodom? When Abraham in Gen. 13:9-13 permitted him to choose in which part of the country he would settle, he "lifted up his eyes" to covet the well watered and fruitful district which bordered on Sodom and the other cities of the plain. If he, like Abraham, had lifted his eyes a bit further, and "looked for the city which hath the foundation whose Builder and Maker is God", it is unlikely that he would have taken the course which he did. He seems to have been an early example of those mentioned in 2 Peter 1:9, who "cannot see afar off". Balaam might in this respect be thought as having got farther than Lot, for he could say, "I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not nigh" (Num. 24:17, R.V.); yet greed of gain and of popularity kept him from having any real desire to participate in the blessings of that far off future, with the result that he, who had cried "Let me die the death of the righteous", died in his sins and in battle against God's people.

WARNINGS AND EXHORTATIONS

Both these illustrations have a warning for us, especially when thought of in connection with the great events foretold in the third chapter; on the one hand the destruction, more complete than even that of Sodom, of the present earth and "the works that are therein", and on the other the emergence of "new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness". Lot saw all that to which he had devoted his energy and toil go up in flames. Balaam, as he peered into the events of the distant future, instead of rejoicing at the prospect, broke out in the sad wail, "Alas, who shall live when God doeth this?" Contrast with both the attitude which Peter enjoins upon his readers in the threefold exhortation of his closing chapter. In verse 11 we read, "Seeing then that all these (present) things shall be

dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness", in verse 14, "Seeing that ye look for such things (as the new heavens and new earth of the preceding verse), be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless", and in verse 17, "Seeing ye know these things before (both those of verse 10 and those of verse 13) beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked (that of verses 3-4), fall from your own steadfastness".

SLACKNESS OR SALVATION

The wicked say, "Where is the promise of His coming" (v. 4) ; but you are to "look for" it (v. 14). They account the Lord's long-suffering to be SLACKNESS ; you are to account it SALVATION (vv. 9-15). His desire "that all should come to repentance" holds back the Day of the Lord (v. 9); your "holy conversation and godliness", especially perhaps through its favourable influence upon those to whom salvation is being offered, "hastens" its coming (vv. 11-12, A.V. and R.V. margin).

You have, to keep you right in these matters, both "the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets", and "the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles" (v. 2, R.V.), that is to say, you have the Old Testament and the New more closely joined together as forming THE SCRIPTURES, here and in verse 16, than perhaps anywhere else. And not least amongst them, you and I have these two letters of Peter in both which he stirs up our pure minds by way of remembrance of the truths already made known through the others. Let us, therefore, as in his concluding words, "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen".

THE PROMISE AND CERTAINTY OF HIS COMING

"WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS (the Lord's) COMING ?" is the question attributed to the last day scoffers of 2 Peter 3. From the context it seems clear that what they mean is, What signs are there that this promise will ever be fulfilled ? But let us take their question literally, and endeavour to reply to it, not by looking for external tokens, the real significance of which might be doubted, but by turning to the Word of Truth itself, and searching for the Promise there.

In doing so we will for the moment ignore passages concerning which doubt might also be entertained as to whether they refer to the Coming or to something else, even though to the Spirit-taught mind they might be plain enough. We shall endeavour to bring forward only those in connection with which any questioning as to their application is altogether unreasonable; and of such the chief are perhaps John 14: 1-3 ; 1 Thess. 4: 13-18 ; Heb. 10: 35-37 ; and Rev. 22: 7, 12, 20. In all of these the Promise is given clearly and distinctly, in the first and last of them by our Lord Himself, and in the intervening two by His inspired apostle.

BIBLE METHODS

As we read them we may notice that there is in each case a contextual reason for the introduction of the Promise. In that respect the Word of

God is very different from books of "Systematic Theology", or "Confessions of Faith"; or "Articles of Religion". All these have their doctrines set out in what their authors conceive to be a regular order, one after the other like plates on a kitchen sideboard. If they bring in the Coming of the Lord at all, which is seldom the case, it is neatly placed at or near the end of the row. But in the Scriptures even the grandest and most important of truths are introduced without any formality in the midst of exhortation, or of messages of comfort or warning. Seldom, too, is it that they are dealt with exhaustively in any one passage, but we must glean a little here and a little there as we search our Bibles, that by putting all together we may obtain, with a measure of fulness, the mind of God with regard to the doctrine in question. This is just as it should be, for God's Book is not a college text book, nor are its doctrines given to fill our heads with knowledge, but to reach and to establish our hearts.

PROMISE AND INDUCEMENT

In John 14 the Promise is brought in to encourage the disciples in view of the fact that Jesus was going away from them. In 1 Thess. 4 it is similarly introduced to comfort those whose Christian friends had been taken from them by death. In Heb. 10 it is set forth as an inducement to patient continuance in their testimony for God. And in Rev. 22 it forms our Lord's thrice repeated closing message to His own.

In keeping with these differences of connection, and in consequence of them, varying aspects of the Promise are emphasised in each passage. In John 14 it is pointed out that His coming is to receive them UNTO HIMSELF, that where He is there they may be also. In 1 Thess. 4 the fact is stressed that they will then be reunited to their "dead in Christ". Heb. 10 brings into prominence that it is only for "A LITTLE WHILE" they have to wait, and that He "will not tarry". Lastly, Rev. 22 introduces in turn the Blessing at His coming (v. 7), the Reward at His coming (v. 12), and finally HIMSELF (v. 20).

All these aspects of His "exceeding great and precious" Promise are most important, yet after all they are but a few of the many ways in which it is presented to us in the Scriptures, with the object of stirring our hearts in expectation and exercising our consciences in view of it.

THE CERTAINTY

As to the CERTAINTY of His coming there can of course be no doubt in the minds of those who bow to and believe His Word, but it is a remarkable fact that more emphasis is thrown into the statements made in connection with this truth than is the case with almost any other contained in God's Book. It is as though He has provided beforehand against all doubts and cavils regarding it.

Let us, for example, notice how true this is of the four great passages upon which we have been dwelling.

In John 14 the Lord begins with "If I go away I will come", thus asserting that the one fact was as certain as the other. Has He gone away? He surely has. Then He will just as certainly come again. Notice, too, how it is in the same connection that we have the twice repeated "Believe . . . believe" of v. 1, as well as the "If it were not so I would have told you" of v. 2.

PROMISE AND FAITH

In 1 Thess. 4 the apostle starts off somewhat similarly with an "if" and a "believe". He says, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again", thus making the Coming and the reunions with our saved dead as sure as the very Gospel testimony upon which all our redemption is based.

Turning to Heb. 10, what could be more emphatic than the manner in which the Promise is here stated, "He that shall come WILL come, and will not tarry". And here, too, the oft-quoted and important statement "The just shall live by faith" is immediately appended as if to say that the Promise is a part of the very faith by which we live.

Lastly, in the end of the Revelation, where we have the threefold "I come quickly", we have also in connection with these and other prophecies of the future therein contained, a threefold affirmation of their truth:—

Ch. 19 : 9. "These are the true sayings of God".

Ch. 21 : 5. "These words are true and faithful".

Ch. 22 : 6. "These sayings are faithful and true".

And as though to crown all, and leave no shadow of doubt, the final repetition of the Promise is "SURELY, I come quickly".

Faced with all this, we may well, with our brother Peter, tell the scoffers that "The Lord is not slack concerning His Promise", and pray with our brother John, "AMEN: EVEN SO COME LORD JESUS".

*"I am looking for the Coming
Of the Lord who died for me.
Oh, His words have thrilled my spirit,
'I will come again for thee'.
I can almost hear His footfall
On the threshold of the door ;
And my heart, my heart is longing
To be with Him evermore".*

"SCARCELY SAVED"

(1 Peter 4:18)

In 1 Peter 4:17, 18 two companies of people are placed in contrast. In verse 17 one of them is called "the House of God", and is further identified as "US", i.e. the Apostle and his readers ; while in verse 18 it is described as "the righteous". The other company is spoken of in verse 17 as "them that obey not the gospel", and in verse 18 as "the ungodly and the sinner".

When the two verses are read together, it becomes evident that the terms used in verse 18 suggest the outward manifestation of those mentioned in verse 17. All who form "the House of God" give proof of it by their "righteous" conduct ; while those "that obey not the gospel" are such as love their ungodliness and wickedness too much to turn from them to God. It also becomes clear that the opening clauses of the two verses are mutually explanatory. The "scarcely saved" (or better rendered, "with difficulty saved") of verse 18 has reference to the difficult path of suffering and chastisement through which God's people have to pass to future glory, a subject that has been in view throughout the chapter, and is gathered up in the statement of verse 17, that "judgment must begin at the House of God".

A SOLID SALVATION

The whole passage makes it plain that Peter's idea of salvation was not that of the many today who look upon getting saved as a comparatively trifling affair, a state of excitement wrought up under stirring appeals in a gospel address, or in a private conversation, which enables the subject of it to say he is saved, yet leaves him free to go in for worldly things as before. Such a "conversion" might rather remind Peter of "the sow that was washed" (2 Peter 2:22); for to him salvation meant a deliberate choice, like that of Moses (Heb. 11:24-27), of a path which abounded with sufferings and "manifold temptations" (1 Peter 1:6), in which nevertheless the saint would be "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (verse 5). He could well remember the many sayings of his Lord when on earth about this matter, such as "Strive to enter in at the strait gate"; "Count the cost"; "Take My yoke upon you"; and especially that one, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23); and his statement here in verse 18 is based upon these, as well as upon his own experience.

AN ANCIENT EXAMPLE

The story of Lot being brought out of Sodom is perhaps the simplest illustration in the Scriptures of a righteous man being "with difficulty saved". It is Peter himself who calls Lot a "righteous" man (2 Peter 2:8), yet we know from Gen. 19:16 with what difficulty he was dragged out of the city by the angels. "While he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand . . . and they brought him forth and set him without the city". All his possessions were in it, and it was not easy to leave them. It was, in fact, too difficult, both for his sons-in-law who stayed behind, and for his wife who looked behind, and all of these were lost. In his own case the difficulty is further emphasised by the sharp words addressed to him in verse 17: "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee; neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed". Evidently, all this urging was necessary to keep him on the move.

THREE DIFFICULTIES

Looking at the matter in a wide way, we might think of three great difficulties connected with salvation. But the first and greatest of them—the necessity that the salvation should rest upon a righteous basis—has been solved by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; when, as Peter tells us in chapter 3:18, He "suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God". Apart from that work of His, salvation would have been not merely difficult but impossible.

The second difficulty is that which has already been hinted at, the difficulty of getting sinners into such a state of earnestness about their salvation as will cause them to overcome every obstacle which might turn them aside, and every earthly desire which might claim precedence to it. The obstacle, or the desire, may be any one of a hundred things, riches as in the case of the young ruler of Luke 18:23, religion as in that of the Pharisee in ver. 12 of the same chapter, or anything else. But so long as the sinner's heart clings to it he will not receive salvation.

The third difficulty is that connected with bringing all the way home to glory those who have come to Christ, and this is doubtless the one which Peter has here specially in mind, when he speaks of being "scarcely saved". It does not mean that God has difficulty in bringing to a finish the good work which He has begun in them (see Phil. 1:6); but that He finds it necessary, for their own good, and for their progress in holiness, to bring them by the roundabout way of suffering and trial. His dealings with Israel from Egypt to Canaan illustrate this point very well. We read that "God led them not through the way of the land of the Phillistines, although that was near; . . . but God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness" (Ex. 13: 17, 18). This, in their case also, was for their training, as we learn from Deut. 32: 10-13, etc.

USING THE OLD TESTAMENT

Ere closing, reference should perhaps be made to the two O.T. passages which seem to have been present in Peter's thoughts, as he penned the verses we have been considering. He does not formally quote either of them; and indeed either, viewed in its own context, runs exactly parallel with the truth he was seeking to enforce. But in verse 17 the words "Judgment must begin at the House of God" remind us of the message in Ezek. 9: 6, "Begin at My Sanctuary"; although there the persons on whom the judgment was to fall were but nominally God's people, as the gross idolatries in which they indulged in ch. 8 makes certain. While the sufferings into which the saints were being plunged when Peter wrote, would doubtless manifest unreal ones, this does not appear to have been the main idea in what he writes.

Again, verse 18 follows almost word for word the Septuagint rendering of Prov. 11: 31, the Hebrew of which is as given in our A.V., "The righteous shall be recompensed in the earth; much more the wicked and the sinner". But there both parts of the verse are limited by the phrase, "in the earth"; and the reference throughout is to God's present governmental dealings with men, rather than to anything beyond this earthly scene.

These allusions, though they may not shed much light on the meaning of 1 Peter 3: 17, 18, do at least, with many other similar ones in his epistles, reveal to us how well stored Peter's memory was with the words and phrases of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Notes on Things Written Aforetime

CHAPTER I

FINDING THE BOOK

Let us in imagination take a journey backward through the centuries until we arrive at the year B.C. 624. It is the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah, the last king worthy of the name to rule in Judah. Having succeeded to the throne when a mere child of eight years old (2 Chron. 34:1), and having been converted at the age of sixteen (v. 3), he began, as soon as he had taken over the full authority some four years later (v. 3) to purge out the various brands of idolatry then existing, not only from the cities of Judah, but from those which had belonged to the northern tribes also (v. 6).

This work of destroying things evil has already occupied him no less than six years, and it is but lately, in his eighteenth year as king (v. 8) that he has been able to get a start made with the pleasanter side of what he had set his heart on accomplishing, the repair of the House of God, and the full restoration of the Temple services. For a short time the work of renovation has been proceeding, but just at the moment a remarkable event has taken place.

Hilkiah, the high priest who, of course, is in charge of what is being done, has made a startling discovery. He has found **THE BOOK**; not an old musty church register, of value only to the antiquarian or historian, but the Book of all books, the most important book in the whole world. You ask, "What can it be?" The answer is, "**THE BOOK OF THE LAW OF THE LORD BY THE HAND OF MOSES**" (2 Chron. 34:14, R.V. and margin).

More than eight centuries have rolled their course since it was written, and at the command of Moses was placed by the side of the Ark (Deut. 31:24-26). What vicissitudes it had passed through in the meantime we do not know; but God has seen to its preservation, and now its solemn words of warning are being read in the ears of the young king by Shaphan, the scribe. What will the effect of them be?

Ah, the old Book has still its old power. See, Josiah has rent his clothes, and is sending messengers to inquire of the Lord what is to be done, in view of the flagrant disobedience there has been to His holy Law, and of the dire judgments with which it threatens the nation because of this.

Was there ever a more remarkable case of "**BACK TO THE BIBLE**" than the one we have pictured? Josiah went on to have the Book read in the presence of all the people, with the result that a great revival took place, with further purging out of what was evil, even of that which was associated with the name of his great ancestor Solomon (2 Kings 23:13). It is true that, like most revivals, it was with many merely outward and formal (see

Jer. 3:6, 10), and produced conceit instead of contrition, as is clear from Jer. 8:8, where they boast that "the Law of the land is with us", and at the same time are using "the false pen of the scribes" (R.V.) to tone it down. Yet in the king's own case and that of at least a few others the impression made was both deep and lasting.

One of the latter was the prophet Jeremiah himself; and some time afterwards he wrote down for us his own testimony concerning its effects upon him. He says in Jer. 15:16, "THY WORDS WERE FOUND, AND I DID EAT THEM; and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart". He then goes on to tell us one particular morsel which he "ate", and that too from the very chapter, Deut. 28, which had impressed Josiah by its threatenings of judgment. In its 10th verse we find the words, "All people of the earth shall see that thou art CALLED BY THE NAME OF THE LORD, and they shall be afraid of thee"; and this no doubt is what Jeremiah has before his mind as he writes, "For I am called by Thy Name, O Lord God of Hosts". He then gives us to know the result that eating this portion of God's Word produced in him. He says, "I sat not in the assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced". How could he, after having realized that he was called by the Lord's Name, have fellowship with those who mocked His Word? How could he mingle the "precious" with the "vile" (v. 19)? Thus we see that in Jeremiah's case, as in Josiah's, the old Book which had been "found" had a mighty constraining power.

Nor was this all, for the prophet could not keep to himself the words which had affected him so much. One interesting use to which he put them is by way of a plea in his prayer to God at chap. 14:7, 9, 21. "We are called by Thy Name", he cries, "leave us not". Later he wrote concerning them in chap. 20:9, "HIS WORD WAS A BURNING FIRE SHUT UP IN MY BONES", so that he had to speak it forth to others. Yet when he did speak in the Lord's Name, he discovered that the Book had enemies, just as it still has; and he has to say, "The Word of the Lord was made a reproach to me, and a derision daily" (v. 8).

Amongst its foes were to be found most of the great ones of the land, including the sons of Josiah who reigned after him. Worst perhaps of all was Jehoiachim, who as well as being a hater of God's Word, was an oppressor of His people (Jer. 22:13, 19). One day this king was having read to him some prophecies of coming judgment, which God had given through Jeremiah himself; but instead of rending his clothes as his father Josiah had done, he took his penknife (Jer. 36:23) and CUT UP THE BOOK. Not content with that, he put the remains of it IN THE FIRE in the presence of his princes. Three of these, oldtime "modernists" no doubt, though they raised no objection to the cutting up process, thought it was going just a little too far to burn the Book, and said so (v. 25); but as might be expected, without avail. Jeremiah's terse comment on the affair is, "Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments".

Twenty-five centuries have elapsed since these scenes were enacted, but THE OLD BOOK IS TODAY AS MUCH ALIVE AS EVER. Generation after generation, both of its opponents and of its friends, have passed on for weal or woe to the place where its truth is never doubted, but the Word of God abides with us still. Again and again it has been burned since Jehoiachim set the fashion; again and again it has been cut up even

by those who professed to preach it. But the persecutors have gone, and the critics have gone, and have left it victorious behind them. Today it is as true as ever it was that "THE WORD OF GOD IS QUICK AND POWERFUL, and sharper than any two-edged sword, . . . a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart".

We ourselves in our turn are passing on to the place whence there is no return, the place where no one doubts or denies the Bible. What is our attitude towards it? Have we submitted to its "discerning"? Have we bowed before its condemnation of our sins, and given heed to its warnings of judgment to come? Have we been led by it to accept God's provision for us as guilty sinners in the death of His Son on the Cross? Do we, further, yield ourselves to its guidance, and obey its injunctions in everything, as we journey by the way we have never trodden before, and never shall again? Let there be no self-deception with regard to these matters. **THE ISSUES ARE ETERNAL.**

CHAPTER II

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO GENESIS III

In that very chapter in which the entrance of sin into the world is described, God sets before us in **TWO WAYS** His provision to meet the need which had arisen. In verse 15 He reveals it in a statement He makes when pronouncing judgment on the Serpent; and in verse 21 He represents it by a picture or type, the coats of skin which He provided for Adam and Eve by the slaying of an animal. In these two references to it there is not only a difference of form, but also two distinct views of what was to be accomplished by the coming Deliverer. In verse 15 He is seen triumphing over the Devil; while in verse 21 He is pictured as meeting God's claims on account of sin by His death.

To understand the need of both these, we must remember that amongst the changes which took place when man fell were, on the one hand, the loss of that relationship to God and that standing before Him which he had previously enjoyed, and on the other, an entering into a relationship with Satan which had not before existed. In order then that the latter connection should be abrogated, the Devil must be defeated; while in order that man should once more have a standing before God, the claims of His righteousness must be met. That there was One to come by Whom both these requirements would be fulfilled verse 15 in the one case, and verse 21 in the other, make known to us.

Man as a sinner became the "seed" of the Devil. In John 8:44 the Lord Jesus said to the most religious people of that day, "Ye are of your father the Devil", and in 1 John 3:8 we read, "He that committeth sin is of the Devil". The latter passage gives a concrete example, when in verse 12 it mentions Cain, "who was of that Wicked One and slew his brother". Thus, in that very epistle which teaches how like the children of God are to their Father, Cain, contrariwise, is seen to resemble his father. John 8:44, from which we have already quoted, describes Satan as a murderer and a liar: and in both these characteristics Cain was like him; for he first murdered his brother, and then told the Lord that he did not know where Abel was. In so doing he also proved the existence of the

enmity of which Gen. 3:15 speaks, an enmity which has been manifest ever since, on the part of the children of the Devil against the children of God.

Let it then be clearly understood that everyone on earth belongs to one or other of the two families. There can be nothing between. Outside the circle of the children of God there are only the children of Satan, and therefore the question, To which family do I belong? is an exceedingly important one. From many Scriptures it is clear that those only are God's children who have been "born again" into His family, and so the question resolves itself into, How does this new birth take place, and has it taken place with me? To the first part of this the Scriptures reply very plainly, and in so doing make it possible for everyone to answer the second part honestly before God for himself or herself. In John 1:12, 13 we read, "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God". And in Gal. 3:26 it is stated, "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus". Thus neither baptism, nor any other outward ordinance, can bring about the New Birth, but only the reception of Christ by faith.

But the Devil is not only a father: he is a master and a king as well. His kingdom is "The Power of Darkness" (Col. 1:13); and since the fall, all men in their natural condition are his subjects and slaves. Only those who have been "translated into the Kingdom of God's dear Son" are free, for in this matter there are no neutrals.

Like "a strong man armed" Satan guarded his palace and his goods (Luke 11:20-22). But "a stronger than he" came upon him, even the One Who is the woman's "Seed" of Gen. 3:15, and took from him his armour wherein he trusted, and divided his spoils. Christ bruised his head, when through death He destroyed him that had the power of death (Heb. 2:14). The mighty king who "opened not the house of his prisoners" (Isa. 14:17) has been defeated; and the Lord now proclaims "the opening of the prison to them that are bound" (Isa. 61:1 and Luke 4:18). If the latter, like those in that Nazareth synagogue, refuse to accept their liberty; if like the slave in Exod. 21:5, 6, they say, "I love my master, I will not go out free"; they will have but themselves to blame, when "the acceptable year" shall have passed away, and they find themselves in Satan's company in the Lake of Fire for ever.

Such then is the aspect of the Gospel that is presented in Gen. 3:15. It is a message which says to the captive, "GO FORTH" (Isa. 49:9), and further says to the freed one, "God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Romans 16:20).

A very different side of the truth illustrated by God's action in Gen. 3:21, where He provides Adam and his wife with coats made, not from fig leaves, but from the skin of an animal. This of course implies the killing of the animal, and so takes place the first death recorded in the Scriptures, a death doubtless designed as a type of the death of the Victim of Calvary, by means of which God clothes the sinner in a robe of righteousness, meet for His own eye to rest on.

For, as has been mentioned, not only was it requisite that Satan's power over man should be broken, but still more was it necessary that the judgment of a righteous God on sin should be exacted. Prior to the Fall man stood

before God in innocence. He needed no "shedding of blood" in his approach to Him. But having sinned, this was no longer the case ; and Adam's fear and hiding, when God came down to the Garden, proved that he was conscious of the fact. He was no longer innocent but guilty, and such is now the natural condition of his descendants, as is clear from Rom. 3:19, where all the world is seen "guilty before God". It has ever been the Devil's aim to get men to ignore this fact, and from Cain downwards he has been remarkably successful in doing so. Abel believed what God had made known, both as to his own need, and to the remedy required. By faith he approached God on the ground of "shedding of blood", doubtless copying from God's own act of chapter 3:21. Cain, on the other hand, realised no necessity for this but sought to come before God in his own way, with the result that he was rejected. He has had a multitude of followers down through the ages ; and those who "go in the way of Cain" (Jude 11) are to be found on every hand today. Their end shall be as his, unless they humble themselves to take their true place as guilty, and while yet there is time, avail themselves of the Sacrifice of Calvary, where the Innocent One died in the stead of the guilty.

Thus the view of the Gospel which is seen in Genesis 3:21 is that of 2 Cor. 5:21, "He hath made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him". Its message to the sinner who stands without, guilty and condemned, is "COME IN", and that not merely to the outer court as it were of God's favour, but into the very Holiest, by the blood of Jesus, the old way which is still the "New and Living Way" (Heb. 10:19, 20).

Reader, have you ever discovered yourself to be the slave of sin and the Devil, and gratefully responding to the emancipating message of the Gospel Trumpet, GONE FORTH into the liberty wherewith Christ makes men free ? Have you ever seen yourself to be a guilty person, shut out from a holy God, and gladly embracing the provision made to meet your need at the Cross, COME IN to a new standing before Him, "accepted in the Beloved" ?

CHAPTER III

ENOCH AND HIS TIMES

Although his story occupies but a few verses of the Word of God, Enoch is an outstanding figure in it, eminent among the men of God whose records it contains. The narrative of his life, brief as it is, is full of lessons for those who seek to witness for God in difficult times. In considering it, there are FIVE POINTS which claim our attention:—

1. The character of the days in which he lived.
2. His conversion.
3. His manner of life afterwards.
4. His preaching.
5. His translation.

As to the first, we have in Genesis 6 a very full account of the men who lived in the days of the Flood ; and what was true of them in general, was doubtless characteristic of Enoch's immediate contemporaries. They were

men who sought to blot God out of their thoughts, and to magnify themselves. They were GIANTS, MIGHTY MEN, MEN OF RENOWN (literally, "men of the name"). This last expression stands in marked contrast to Gen. 4:26, where those who felt their need of Him began to call upon THE NAME OF THE LORD, but is similar to chap. 11:4, where after the Flood men again said, "Let us make us A NAME". A further contrast is found in chap. 12:2, where God Himself promised to make Abram A NAME ; and in chap. 12:8, where Abram called upon THE NAME OF THE LORD. Moreover, Gen. 6 shows that there was taking place at this time the mingling of the godly seed with the daughters of the ungodly, by means of which practically all the race was being dragged down to one common level of corruption.

Again, in Enoch's own prophecy of Jude 14:15 we have the word "UNGODLY" used no less than four times in one sentence, and it perhaps describes these sinners better than any other single word could do. God in Genesis 1 had made Adam "after His likeness"; but men had now become UNGOD-LIKE in their nature, in their "deeds", and in their "speeches". And a point of special interest is that the use of this prophecy in an epistle for the last days, links the character of these early sinners with that of the sinners who will be found on earth when the Lord comes ; and in that way shows us how the lessons we may draw from Enoch's days will suit our own.

But perhaps the most striking picture of the times in which he lived lies concealed in what is said of Enoch in Heb. 11:6. The statement, "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him", is evidently introduced there as showing of what sort Enoch's testimony for God was. His creed is summed up in the two articles, GOD IS, and IT PAYS TO SEEK HIM ; and to these he bore witness before his contemporaries. But the very fact of its introduction in Heb. 11 implies that they on their part held opposite opinions ; for the beliefs and actions which are there ascribed to the men of faith are in every case diametrically opposed to those of the world in which they moved ; a truth which in our own days we should do well to take note of. Thus the popular doctrine in the days of Enoch must have been "God is not ; or if He does exist, He can neither reward nor punish us". It may be difficult at first sight to take in that men who lived so near to the beginning of things, and who had even Adam himself as an old man in their midst, could persuade themselves that God did not exist ; but man's heart is the same all down the line, and the fool of that time, as of any other, would say in his heart, "NO GOD". Indeed the 14th Psalm, which opens with these words, contains a number of expressions that seem to suit the times of Enoch and Noah exceedingly well. Compare "The Lord looked down to see" in the Psalm, with "God saw", and "God looked upon" in Gen. 6:5, 12. Compare "In his heart" with Gen. 6:5, "They are corrupt" with Gen. 6:12 ; and "Generation of the righteous (just)" with Gen. 6:9. Also contrast "Call not upon God" with Gen. 4:26 ; and "No God . . . none that seek God" with the twofold testimony of Enoch in Heb. 11:6, to which reference has been made. And since the last verse of the psalm connects it with the period just before the appearing of the Lord, we have in it, as in the prophecy in Jude, a link between the days of Enoch and our own.

How these men did manage to blot out God from their thoughts will be more easily understood when one considers that, so far as is recorded, God did not reveal Himself to them by what might be called miraculous acts from the time that He dealt with Cain and Abel until the arrival of the Flood itself. During those fifteen hundred years or so, the silence of Heaven was probably unbroken, so far as men in general were concerned, with the single exception of Enoch's own translation. This being so, it was easy for them, even in Enoch's time, which was five to eight hundred years after the events of Gen. 4:1-15, to persuade themselves that God's existence was a myth; and one can imagine with what scorn they would refer to Adam's account of his beginning, and of the Fall, as an old man's fancies.

To confirm this, we have another passage, Job 22:15-17, in which two expressions, ascribed to the wicked who were "cut down before their time" (R.V.) by the Flood form an almost exact antithesis to the two that constituted Enoch's testimony. Eliphaz tells us that they said to God, "Depart from us", and that they asked, "What can the Almighty do for us?". Doubtless these were some of the "hard speeches" mentioned in Jude 15, and they simply mean, "We don't want God; it is not profitable to serve Him".

It should be abundantly plain that, in all the characteristics above mentioned, the sinners of Enoch's time were like those of our own. The "men of renown" are with us today; the two propositions, that God is not, or if He is, that it does not pay to seek Him, are subscribed to by multitudes on every hand; and the mixing of the "seeds" goes on to a greater extent than perhaps ever since those days. Let us see to it that our testimony in the midst of this is as clear and as clean as was Enoch's.

CHAPTER IV

ENOCH AND HIS TIMES (continued)

Turning now to the man himself, we notice first the definite change which, it is implied, took place at a certain point in his life. We read of him, as we read of others in the genealogy of Genesis 5, that he lived so many years and begat a son. But here, in his case, the expression is changed; and while of the rest we read that they lived so many more years, of him it is said "AND ENOCH WALKED WITH GOD AFTER HE BEGAT METHUSELAH, three hundred years". That is to say – at sixty-five years of age, and at the time his son was born, there took place in Enoch's life such a transformation that from then onwards it could be said of him, "He walked with God". This change was beyond doubt his conversion. Then for the first time, to use the words of Heb. 11:6, he came to God, believing that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. As it is expressed a few verses earlier in the same epistle, he had "faith to the saving of the soul".

How the change came about we are not informed; but the fact that it was at the time of Methuselah's birth is worthy of note, in the light of one or two other facts known to us. In the first place, if one may judge from the significance of the name given to his son, Enoch's mind had at that time been occupied with the approaching judgment of God against sinners. As is generally understood, METHUSELAH means "His death will bring

it", or "When he is dead it will be sent"; in keeping with which the Flood came in the very year in which Methuselah died. While the name thus proved to be a very definite prophecy, it doubtless at the same time reflected the thoughts which had been passing through Enoch's mind – thoughts of sin and judgment to come. And it may be asked incidentally, Was not the extremely prolonged life-time of Methuselah suggestive of the long-suffering of God ?

Then again, it is of interest that the only recorded promise of deliverance, upon which men before the Flood could rest was that of Gen. 3:15, which connects it with the birth of the "Seed". Thoughts of this were evidently in the mind of Eve, as she exclaimed when Cain was born, "I have gotten a man from the Lord"; and again at the birth of Seth when she said, "God hath appointed me another seed". Such thoughts, too, seem to have occupied Noah's father Lamech, when at his son's birth he uttered the words, "This same shall comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed". He bowed before the word of God which pronounced the curse and accepted the other word of God which promised deliverance through the "Seed". There was nothing blameable in those early saints expecting the Seed promised to appear in their own time, any more than there was in the Thessalonians waiting for the Son from heaven (1 Thess. 1:10), although since their day centuries have elapsed, and He has not yet come.

The introduction of those words of Lamech into the genealogy of Gen. 5 marks them as significant, and no explanation but that which links them with thoughts of the coming Saviour would give them their due weight. They are doubtless also set in by way of contrast with those of another Lamech, a descendant of Cain, who occupies about the same position in the genealogy of chapter 4. While Noah's father bowed to the word of judgment and rested on the word of promise, this other Lamech quoted another word of God to his ancestor Cain for the very purpose of scorning it. He had slain a man who had injured him ; and he said, "If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold (i.e. as God had promised in verse 15), truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold". That is to say, I do not depend on God to avenge me ; I do it myself.

Since then the promise of the Seed in Gen. 3:15 was, so far as we know, the only gospel promise which men of those times had, and if not that, was certainly by far the most important one ; and since we have seen that Eve and Lamech, Enoch's grandson, were led to think of it at the time of their children's birth, is it not probable that Enoch himself may have had his mind exercised on similar lines about the time of Methuselah's birth, and may thus have been brought to rest upon the promise of God ? One can do no more than suggest it, where so little is stated in the record ; but we may at least say that we have some indications as to Enoch's conversion being of the kind which the Word of God leads us to expect that all conversions must be – a conviction with respect to sin and judgment, and a resting by faith on the Deliverer, with a clear-cut change of life as the outcome. Has the reader such a conversion as that ?

CHAPTER V

ENOCH AND HIS TIMES (continued)

The next point for our consideration is Enoch's manner of life after the great change had taken place. Of this too, we have little told us in the Scriptures, but what little we have is most illuminating. In Gen. 5 it is simply said that he walked with God, while Heb. 11, adopting the rendering of this expression which is given in the Septuagint version, says that he was well-pleasing to God. It also tells us, as has been already noted, that this pleasing of God was founded on his faith that God is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. From this it is clear that Enoch at his conversion weighed matters, and having come to the definite conclusion that it pays to seek God, he set himself to go in for that, making it the main business of his life. Not only so, but having made this choice, he acted on it consistently, day in and day out, for three hundred years.

As we think of this, let us examine ourselves. Can we who claim to be the Lord's look back to a time when we faced things squarely as Enoch did, and decided that to seek God and to please God, were not only the most important things, but also the most profitable things that we could be occupied with? And if we can, how is it with us now? Do we still maintain and act on that conclusion? Do the unsaved around us see, by our lives before them, that such is our estimate of the true value of things? Or are we as keen to make money, as eager for worldly honour, as any of themselves? And possibly no more scrupulous as to how we gain our ends?

From the whole context it is plain that Enoch, in the stand he took, was alone. He had no one to walk with but God, since the rest of the world were walking in the opposite direction. But he knew no loneliness, and he had no desire to change his company. It has ever been men like him, who were satisfied to walk alone with God, that have been a real testimony for God. Abraham was called "alone" (Isa. 51:2), and it was always when he was alone with God that he was at his best. Elijah spoke of "the Lord . . . Before Whom I stand", and he stood there alone; for although there were seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal, they were of little use in testimony, since Elijah seems to have scarcely known of their existence. The Lord Jesus Himself also, in the language attributed to Him in Psalm 102 said, "I am as a sparrow ALONE on the housetop". We sometimes sing, but is it truthfully,

*Alone with Thee, O Master, where
The light of earthly glory dies ;
Misunderstood by all, I dare
To do what Thine own heart would prize.*

But we pass on to our fourth point, that Enoch not only walked with God, but preached for God. His preaching, we may be sure, was all the weightier because of his walking. It would be a great gain in our own days if no one took it on him to preach for God except those who know something by experience of what it is to walk with God. The man who, like Asher in Deut. 33:24, has "his foot dipped in oil", will when he preaches be "blessed with children", and "acceptable to his brethren". But those who preach truth of which they know not the power in their

own lives, will always be producers of discord and weakness among the people of God.

Doubtless Enoch's preaching would have as its keynote the two points we have called his creed – that God is, and that it pays to seek Him ; but the only example of it which has been given us in the Scriptures is that contained in Jude 14:15 concerning judgment to come. This certainly is not of such a character as to have rendered him a popular preacher ; for telling people that they are ungodly, and that their speeches are ungodly, is not what the religious world would call attractive, nor is the distinct and terrible warning of soon coming judgment. But it was the truth, and Enoch was not afraid to tell it to them.

Men of his type are much needed still, men who will tell the ungodly sinners of the present day, in plain honest words, of their guilt before God, and of the judgment that is soon to burst upon them. Only by so doing can the preacher clear his soul of their blood ; and if they on their part refuse to hearken, it is but a repetition of what took place in Enoch's time. It is a remarkable fact that, although God had warned them through Enoch some eight or nine hundred years before the judgment fell, and though Noah had preached to them for the last hundred years previous to it, and built the Ark before their eyes, we have to read, "THEY KNEW NOT till the Flood came and took them all away". Need we wonder that our own message is so often unheeded, when we find added, "So shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed" ?

But the most interesting thing about Enoch is, of course, his Translation. It has already been pointed out that, so far as is recorded, this was the only miraculous display, in a public way, of God's power, between the time of His dealings with Cain and Abel, and the coming of the Flood itself. In that respect it corresponds exactly with the Translation of those who will be alive at the Coming of the Lord for His own. There were miracles which the world could see in the apostles' days, but since then there have been none in that sense of the word, nor will there be until the time when the Lord begins to pour out His judgments upon the earth ; with this one great exception that some day the living saints will be missed from their accustomed places, and like Enoch WILL NOT BE FOUND because the Lord has taken them.

Note that the statement, "BY FAITH Enoch was translated", implies that the Lord had made known to him beforehand what was going to take place. How otherwise could his faith be exercised with regard to the subject ? In this he was like Elijah, who also had previous knowledge of what was about to happen ; and to a certain extent like ourselves, who have the Word of God to assure us that "We which are alive and remain shall be caught up". In Elijah's case the knowledge was communicated to others, for both Elisha and the sons of the prophets knew of it ; and it is probable that Enoch would make it known also. If so he was not believed, for the expression "Was not found" in Heb. 11:6 implies that he was looked for in vain. For Elijah too they sought, fifty strong men of them for three days, without result. And so the day is coming when they will seek for God's people, their relatives and friends who had warned them of the Coming of the Lord, but they will not find them, for the Lord will have taken them. What a dire awakening for them, but how blessed for those who have gone !

*Oh joy, oh delight, we shall go without dying ;
No sickness, no sorrow, no dread, and no crying ;
Caught up through the clouds with our Lord into glory,
When Jesus receives His own.*

CHAPTER VI

ABRAHAM'S CALL

That the early part of Abraham's life, before God called him out of Ur of the Chaldees, was spent in idolatry is made at least very probable by the statement of Joshua in Josh. 24:2. If we keep this in mind as we read his later history in Genesis his record will shine the brighter, for never was a man freer from that particular sin than Abraham came to be. He failed in his testimony more than once, but never in this respect. Joshua had gathered the Israelites to Shechem (or Sichem), the very spot where Abraham had halted on his arrival in Canaan (Gen. 12:5, 6), and where his first public act was to build an altar to Jehovah while the "Canaanite" was looking on. There, Joshua had to say to the people, even as Jacob, when at the same place, had to say to his household, "Put away the strange gods that are among you" (Josh. 24:23 and Gen. 35:2). But in Abraham's case there had been no need for this, and it is interesting to compare the latter's strength in that respect with Jacob's weakness, in view of the fact that the one had been brought up an idolater, and the other in a godly home.

It is an old story, yet one which is being re-enacted under our eyes today. A generation or two ago Assemblies of God's people were composed almost entirely of men and women who had had a very real deliverance from the religious systems around them, and from the world itself to which these systems belong. Today many, and in some cases most of those who come into them are children of Christians already in fellowship ; and speaking generally, they have had nothing like the same exercise of soul as their fathers had, with regard to separation from the world and its religions. The outcome is only too painfully manifest in looseness and lack of stability.

The case of Paul in the New Testament is parallel with that of Abraham in the Old. Above all the apostles and other saints, he had been steeped in Judaism and its ceremonies. Little wonder would it have been had the traces of it remained with him so long as he lived. The ignorant, and perhaps irreligious fishermen of Galilee might drop it completely, but surely not Saul the Pharisee, the member of the Sanhedrin, the blameless law-keeper. Yet the fact is that no one can be found in the Acts or the Epistles who became so thoroughly delivered from the bondage as he did. The link between Abraham and him in this matter is also more complete than at first sight appears. If Paul had been asked what had wrought such a change in him, he could have told, as he told the Corinthians, of "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ", which had been revealed to him that day on the way to Damascus. That "heavenly vision" left him free from Judaism till the end of his days. And had Abraham been asked the same question, he might in like manner have recounted, as Stephen in Acts 7 did for him, how "the God of glory" appeared to him in Mesopotamia and his idolatry was swept away for ever. Not only so, but in his

case as in Paul's, this revelation of God's glory, by which He first made Himself known to him, closed his eyes from that day forth to the charms of earth, and kept him, for a hundred long years, as he walked up and down through the land of Canaan, a pilgrim and stranger who looked for "the City which hath the foundations", the City of Revelation 21 and 22, which will be lighted by that same wondrous GLORY OF GOD. So with Paul, when in the very passage in which he tells the Corinthians of "The Light of the knowledge of the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ", he adds, "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen ; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal".

We may thank the Lord that there are still some today who, like these men of God can look back, not merely to a conversion, but to a time when God was pleased to reveal His Son in them with a glory that has had power over their souls ever since ; and which even yet makes the most glorious things of earth pale and dim to them by comparison ; so that they require no fences to keep them in the pilgrim path. Like those of Psalm 84:5 (R.V.) "in whose heart are the highways to Zion", and of whom it is said in verse 7 that "every one of them" gets there ; their hearts are always turned towards "The City", and they can truthfully sing :—

*"This Earth has lost its power to drag me downward ;
Its spell has gone.
My course is now right upward and right onward,
To yonder Throne".*

Others there are who know nothing of this, though perchance they can tell of a conversion that will pass muster, and so have got into the circle of God's people. They are of those who "cannot see afar off" (2 Pet. 1:9); and it is with difficulty they restrain themselves, or are restrained by others, from being "entangled again in the pollutions of the world" (2 Pet. 2:20), from which they have for a time escaped. They cause trouble in the Assemblies of God's people all the while that they are among them, and frequently in the end bring open reproach upon the testimony.

May we be enabled to search ourselves as to where our hearts really are, and as to whether we have ever seen that LIGHT THAT IS ABOVE THE BRIGHTNESS OF THE SUN !

CHAPTER VII

"BY-PATH MEADOW"

Such is the name given by Bunyan to a temptation to which his pilgrims for a time succumbed, in order that they might escape the hardships of the Way ; but which almost brought about their ruin ; and of which, when safely back in the path again, they sang :—

*"Out of the Way we went, and then we found
What 'twas to tread upon forbidden ground".*

Something like this experience took place in the story of several of the saints, as recorded in the Scriptures, including that of Abraham. In Genesis 12 we have his good testimony when he first entered Canaan ; but before the chapter ends we get also his failure in testimony when the

famine caused him to go down to Egypt, a failure in which he was followed by others afterwards, with the same result as in his case, that they had to stoop to **GUILE**.

Abraham himself acted in the same way again on a later occasion, when he went amongst the Philistines (Gen. 20), and earned from Abimelech their king the reproach, "Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done". Then his son Isaac followed the evil example set him by his father, and was rebuked by the Abimelech of his day (Gen. 26) for pretending that Rebekah was his sister. When we come to the story of David we find that twice during his persecution by Saul he went down to the Philistines, and that on both occasions he resorted to **GUILE**. In 1 Sam. 21 he pretended to be a madman ; and when one pictures him scrabbling on the doors, and letting his spittle fall down upon his beard, it becomes clear that there must have been something very far wrong to bring about a testimony so dishonouring to God. How he was delivered on that occasion we are told in Psalm 34, and it is plain from a careful study of this, together with Psalm 36, that it was not his guile which saved him after all, but God's intervention. Like Abraham, however, he repeated his mistake, for in 1 Sam. 27 we find him saying in his heart, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul. **THERE IS NOTHING BETTER FOR ME** than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines". So he again went there, and a few verses farther on we find him scheming to deceive Achish about the battles he fought.

An interesting point with regard to Psalm 34 is that it does not give Achish as the name of the Philistine king, but Abimelech. The usual explanation of this is that the latter was a title borne by the rulers of Egypt. This is probably true, but it does not explain why the Holy Spirit introduces it into the Psalm, in preference to the personal name which occurs in the historical account of 1st Samuel. May it not be that it is used in the stories of Abraham and Isaac. All begin with the same failure in faith ; in all there is the same fear of death (Gen. 12:12 ; 20:11 ; 26:7 ; 1 Samuel 21:10, 12 ; 27:1 ; Psalm 34:4); and in each case this fear leads to **GUILE**.

Another point in the Psalm is that, in contrast to the fear of man (v. 4), it introduces the fear of the Lord (vv. 9, 11), and it shows that the effect of the latter is to keep one's lips from **SPEAKING GUILE**, whereas the fear of man produces it. The passage is quoted by Peter in his first epistle, and is there followed by the injunction, "**FEAR NOT THEIR FEAR . . .** being ready always to give answer to every man with **MEEKNESS AND FEAR**" (1 Pet. 3:10, 15, R.V.). Here, as in the Psalm, it will be seen that the two "**FEARS**" are contrasted. On reading it one recalls that Peter himself turned aside into "**BY-PATH MEADOW**" when he warmed himself at the High Priest's fire ; and while there, instead of being "ready always to give answer to every man", as he tells us we should be, he because of the fear of man used guile, pretending to not understand what was said to him, and then lying (Mark 14:68). Thus he added yet another incident to the series we have been considering.

It will be seen that one very important lesson we may learn from these examples is that, when we turn aside from God's path we come face to face with temptations with which otherwise we would never have been troubled ; and we are much more likely to be ensnared in them than if we

had remained in the position where we could with confidence count on help from God. Our Lord taught the disciples to pray, "Lead us not into temptation"; yet sometimes saints do not wait to be led, for they put themselves in the way of temptation unnecessarily. The man in 1 Cor. 10 who, when invited to an unsaved neighbour's feast was "DISPOSED TO GO" (v. 27), soon found himself up against a difficulty (v. 28) which he would have escaped had he kept clear of the whole affair.

Another solemn lesson, already pointed out, is the effect which the fear of man can produce, even on those who are mighty men of faith. We can well believe that "The fear of man bringeth a snare", when such as Abraham, David and Peter were ensnared through it.

Yet another lesson is that the evil fruits of departure from God's path are manifold. In Abraham's case, not only did his going down to Egypt produce immediate failure in his own testimony, but it put some things into Lot's mind that had been better out of it (see Gen. 13:10), and it probably introduced Hagar the Egyptian into the household to be a trouble to Sarah in after years. "Here is the easiest going", said the pilgrims when they climbed over the stile into By-path Meadow, but they soon reaped bitter fruit from what at first had seemed a very pleasant thing.

Again, we are taught by these occurrences that, not only is **GUILE** unbecoming in a saint, and an evil testimony to others, but **IT DOES NOT PAY** in any sense of the word ; and the person who uses it ultimately gets shown up and discredited. The path in which the Fear of the Lord leads us is in every way the wise path for a Christian to take ; for "The Fear of the Lord that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding". The characteristics of that path are very simply described in Psalm 34 :-

1. Keep thy tongue from evil, and guile.
2. Depart from evil, and do good.
3. Seek peace, and pursue it.

And the reward for walking in it, as promised in Psalm 34:12, and again in 1 Peter 3:10, is not merely a future and heavenly one, but the enjoyment of **GOOD DAYS** while we are down here.

Peter, after his own fall and restoration, was to strengthen his brethren (Luke 22:32); and in this linking up of his experience with that of others should serve to strengthen some of God's children in these difficult times, and to keep them in the path of faith, preferring the trials which meet them in the Way to the temptations that meet those who leave it, it will not have been written in vain.

CHAPTER VIII

ABRAHAM'S TWO FIGHTS

Genesis 14 tells the story of the earliest war concerning which we have any authentic record, and a careful study of it would help us more as God's people than would the perusal of all the war news which the papers and other publications of recent years have given us. This war was, as every war since then has to some extent been, a chastisement inflicted by God upon the nations for their sins. In the previous chapter we read that "the men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly".

and this was doubtless true of the neighbouring cities as well. So God brought upon them one of His "FOUR SORE JUDGMENTS" of Ezek. 14:21 ; but how little effect it had may be known from the fact that, in less than twenty years after, the cry of their wickedness was coming up before God again (Gen. 19:13), and He was moved to destroy them utterly by fire.

It is worthy of note that the invasion of South Canaan, here recorded, was by kings from the north-east, the country in which Nimrod, first prominent type of the Antichrist, had built Babel (or Babylon) some time previously, to be the centre of his world kingdom. Thence also came in a later day the kings whom the Lord used as His rod for the chastisement of Israel. But what is more remarkable is that from the same quarter Abraham himself had set out, a few years before this, to go to Canaan. In fighting these invaders he was fighting those who had formerly been his fellow-countrymen. A glance at the names, Elam, Shinar, etc., on the map, as compared with Ur, will prove this, and will show how thorough was Abraham's obedience to the command, "Get thee out of thy country".

Another matter deserving of attention is the association of three brothers who were Amorites with Abraham in the battle. It almost certainly implies that these men had come to a knowledge of Abraham's God, for had it not been so his confederacy with them would have been quite out of keeping with what we know of the mind of God, and of the character of Abraham himself. Doubtless they were part of the fruit of his testimony for God in Canaan.

But the most interesting part of our chapter is that dealing with another fight, in which Abraham was again victorious. When he was returning from the slaughter of the kings, Satan deemed it a fitting moment to tempt him, and he used the king of Sodom as his instrument in doing so. But God had not forgotten His servant's need, and had provided "GRACE TO HELP". In verse 17 we are told that the king of Sodom went out to meet him ; but verse 18 shows that Melchizedek, king of Salem, got to him first, and gave him something for both body and soul. He "brought forth bread and wine", and he also gave him words which were the very message of God to him for his need at the time. How Abraham made use of these is seen in his encounter with the king of Sodom immediately afterwards, for they became as the Sword of the Spirit in his hand to smite the adversary. The king made his offer, "Give me the persons and take the goods to thyself". It seemed on the surface an innocent one, for the Devil is an adept at concealing his snares ; and to some of us at least the bait would have been tempting. But to agree would have brought Abraham down from his "excellency" as one who waited on God only, and whose "expectation" was from Him (Psa. 62:4, 5). The words God had given him through Melchizedek were ringing in his heart, and the thought of "GOD MOST HIGH, POSSESSOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH" made the wealth of Sodom shrink very small in his estimation. So, clear and decided came the answer, "I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord, the Most High God, THE POSSESSOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet, and that I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abraham rich". Such a sword-thrust required no repetition. The king of Sodom seems to have

departed without answering ; and Abraham had won his second and more dangerous fight.

In all this there are valuable lessons for us. The Adversary is continually watching for opportunities to break down our testimony, and one of the most favourable from his point of view is when we have won some victory, or achieved something for God. If he can then puff us up with pride, he will have gone a long way towards accomplishing his end. Thus in 1 Sam. 15, when Saul had returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites, Satan so filled him with self-importance that, before going to Gilgal to sacrifice to God, he went to Carmel to set up a monument to himself. (See 1 Sam. 15:12, R.V., with last clause of verse 21 ; and compare 2 Sam. 18:18, where the same Hebrew word occurs). Again, when Elijah had been victorious over the prophets of Baal, and successful in praying for rain, he was a few hours later made to flee for his life by a woman's threat. Let us then see to it that we keep on the "whole armour", even when a victory has already been won ; and that we are ever ready to use "the Sword of the Spirit which is the SPOKEN WORD OF GOD", the word which He has been speaking in power to our souls. To be able to do this we must be habitually getting these words from God ; and this needless to say is a very different matter from merely reading the Scriptures. We may and should expect to get them when reading, or we may get them from some other servant of God, as Abraham did from Melchizedek.

This hearing of the Lord's voice is one of the marks which distinguish His people from others, and it is interesting to notice the truth of it, as suggested in various passages of Scripture. One of these, as we have been seeing, is that we can use what He speaks to us for a weapon against the assaults of Satan, as did Abraham, and as our Lord Himself did in the wilderness. In the latter case it is noteworthy that Christ's three replies to the Devil are all taken from one short section of Deuteronomy, a wilderness book from which doubtless He had been receiving His Father's words during His forty days' wilderness fast.

Another fruit, also seen in Gen. 14, is that like Melchizedek, we can pass on such words to others, that they too may be helped by them. With this corresponds what is said of Jehovah's Servant in Isa. 50:4, R.V., "that I should know how to sustain with words him that is weary, He wakeneth mine ear to hear as they that are taught". This is a kind of ministry of which the Lord's people can never have too much ; and it will give them strength and help, where got-up addresses will utterly fail.

In Jer. 15:16, 17, as has been already shown in our first chapter, the getting of words from God gave Jeremiah joy in his heart, and separated him from the ungodly around him. In his days the Law of God, which had been lost for some time, was recovered when the Temple was cleansed by Josiah ; but to many the only result was to give them something to brag of. They said, "We are wise, and the Law of the Lord is with us" (Jer. 8:8) ; a boast which has been made by others besides them. On the other hand it became to Jeremiah food for his soul, and he could say, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them ; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart, for I AM CALLED BY THY NAME, O LORD GOD OF HOSTS".

Still another use to be made of words which we get from God is in pleading with Himself in prayer. It has been already shown that Jeremiah

so used them, and various other examples might be given. Abraham did it in Gen. 15:3 with the words which God gave him in verse 1 of the same chapter. And Moses, in Exod. 34:9, and again in Num. 14:17, 18 made a similar use of what God had said to him in Exod. 34:7.

Such are some of the fruits of getting words from God, and of the uses to which we can put them. Let us then examine ourselves as to whether we habitually get such words, to the joy and strengthening of our own souls, and for the help of others. If not, should we not pray earnestly as David did, "Be not silent unto me, lest I become like them that go down into the pit" (Psa. 28:1). Nay more, if we know nothing at all of hearing the Shepherd's voice, let us further examine whether we really are of His flock ; for He has plainly said, "MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE".

CHAPTER IX

MELCHIZEDEK

Only twice, in Gen. 14:18 and Psa. 110:4, have we Melchizedek named in the Old Testament, yet upon these two references to him the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews builds a line of teaching concerning the priesthood of our Lord which, while setting before us much important truth, teaches us this first of all, that he himself had firm and full belief in the verbal inspiration of the Word of God. He makes his deductions, not only from what the Scriptures say, but from what they leave out (Heb. 7:3) ; not only from the facts stated in them, but from the very meaning of the names employed in them, both for persons and for places (v. 2). In his view it was due to no mere chance, but to the Holy Spirit's guidance, that in Genesis with its many genealogies the ancestral list of Melchizedek is omitted ; and that, amidst its numerous references to births and deaths, there is none to either in the record of this priest-king.

Before we consider in a brief way how these two O.T. passages are used in the epistle for the purpose of setting forth the priesthood of Christ, let us turn our attention to another one, Isa. 50:4-6, in which, although Melchizedek is not named, there is described to us, in words attributed to our blessed Lord Himself, the course of preparation by which God fitted Him for doing Melchizedek-like work. It will be seen there that the learning of v. 4, the obeying of v. 5, and the suffering of v. 6, are all represented as having in view that He "should know how to speak a word in season to (R.V., 'sustain with words') him that is weary"; and this, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is just what Melchizedek did for Abraham. He had succoured him, not only physically with bread and wine, but spiritually with words which enabled him to resist the temptation presented by the king of Sodom shortly afterwards.

Similarly, in the time of stress, whether due to defeat, or as in Abraham's case and that of many another, to victory, will our own Melchizedek Priest minister to us "words in season" for our help.

Now if we carefully compare this passage in Isaiah with Heb. 2:18 ; 4:15, 16 ; and 5:8, it will scarcely be doubted that the writer of the latter verses had Isa. 50:4-6 in his mind as he penned them. The similarity between "able to succour them that are tempted" and "grace to help in time of need (seasonably)", on the one hand, and "know how to speak a

word in season to him that is weary" on the other ; as well as the reference in both cases to learning obedience through suffering ; form links too close to be merely accidental. And these verses in Hebrews suggest also that, although the writer does not introduce Melchizedek's name till the last one, yet in some degree the Melchizedek character of our Lord's ministry has been in his mind from his first mention of priesthood in the closing verses of chap. 2. For where was there anything in the priesthood of the house of Aaron which could be described as succouring the tempted, or supplying grace for seasonable help ? His use of such expressions implies that he is already preparing the way for the connection he is about to trace between the priesthood of Melchizedek and that of Christ.

But let us consider how he leads up to the first definite mention of the type in chap. 5, and to its further development in chap. 7. In chap. 5:1, 4 he points out that there are two great qualifications with which anyone claiming priesthood must comply ; (1) He must be "taken from among men"; (2) He must be "called of God". Both these qualifications, it is proved that Christ possesses ; in the first case by making reference to "the days of His flesh" (v. 7); and in the second by quoting Psa. 110:4, where God, who in Psa. 2:7 had said, "Thou art My Son", addressed to Him also the words, "Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (v. 6).

No sooner, however, has the writer emphasized in v. 10 the application of this citation to our Lord, than he turns aside to deal, in a long parenthesis which continues to the close of chap. 6, with failure in growth, and even retrogression on the part of his readers, which renders it difficult to minister "strong meat" to them. But in chap. 7 he resumes his subject, and occupies that entire chapter with proofs of the super-excellence of Christ's priesthood "after the order of Melchizedek" over that of the priests of the order of Aaron.

In doing so, he takes the two O.T. passages in which Melchizedek is mentioned as texts, so to speak, for his sermon ; and, as many preachers still do, he deals with each text under three heads, all six of which have in view the object already mentioned to display the "betterness" of the priesthood of our Lord. With these we shall not take space to deal at all fully, but will briefly enumerate them, that readers may study them for themselves.

Taking then his Gen. 14 text, the writer's first head (chap. 7:1-3) is that what was there said, and also what was left unsaid, with regard to Melchizedek, had all been carefully arranged of God in that far back time when it was written, so as to make it a perfect picture of Christ's priesthood. His name and title suit exactly, and each in its proper place, righteousness first and then peace. So also does the omission, to which we already have made reference, of his ancestry, birth, and death, in a book where those of others prominent in it are always given. Melchizedek is thus "made like unto the Son of God . . . a priest continually"; and stands in complete contrast to the Aaronic priesthood, in which, even after the captivity, those who could not show their genealogy were turned down as polluted (Ezra 2:62).

The second head under which the Gen. 14 passage is dealt with occupies vv. 4, 5, 8-10 of our chapter, and is that the payment of tithes by Abraham to Melchizedek renders the latter, for the purpose of the type and in the

incident recorded, the "greater" of the two, and that it equally subordinates Levi his descendant, who "was yet in the loins" of his ancestor at the time. With this second, the third head is closely connected, being indeed to some extent involved in it. We find it in vv 6, 7, where it is pointed out that the same superiority on the part of Melchizedek in the narrative is shown by the fact that he "blessed" Abraham, since "the less is blessed of the better".

Turning now to his other text, Psa. 110:4, the writer gets his three "heads" in this by emphasizing three of its clauses in turn. First he lays stress on the final clause, "After the order of Melchizedek", and points out (vv. 11-19) that the very mention of another order of priesthood in the Psalm implies failure in that order which Israel already had. Secondly, he takes up the opening clause, "The Lord sware", etc., and contrasts (vv. 20-22) this initiation to priesthood by means of an oath, with those who were made priests "without an oath". Then lastly he takes us to the middle clause, "A priest for ever", and dwells upon the contrast between those who "were not suffered to continue by reason of death" (vv. 23-25), and Him who "because He continueth ever hath an unchangeable priesthood", and who therefore is "able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them".

As we study these precious settings-forth of the dignity of our Melchizedek we may well conclude with the writer of Hebrews 7 that "Such an High Priest became us . . . the Son, who is consecrated for evermore" (vv. 26-28).

CHAPTER X

LOT

God often in His Word teaches us by means of contrasts, and of this the story of Lot is an example, for all through, it seems to be set, as of purpose, over against that of his uncle Abraham. In the latter we have a man who maintained a practically unbroken testimony for God during the hundred years or so of his sojourn in Canaan; whereas concerning Lot it may be said that, had we only the record of his outward life as given us in Genesis to go by, we would have little to prove that he was a true saint of God. It is only when the Holy Spirit tells us of the inner workings of his mind in 2 Peter 2:7, 8 that we are sure he was one.

There are too many Lots amongst God's people today, men and women whose manner of life gives but poor support to their claim to be called saints. Watch them at their business: you will not see much to suggest their Christianity in their methods of conducting it. Watch the company they keep: you will find them very much at home in that of the unsaved; and were you to listen to their conversation for a month, never a word of testimony for Christ would you hear. Watch them in times of political excitement: they are full of it, and quite as eager as the ungodly to record their vote, and so signify that one ungodly man is the man of their choice and some other ungodly man is not. Watch them in their home: their outbursts of temper, and general lack of consideration for others, do not mark them as those who have a desire to witness for Christ amongst their friends. It may be of course that, in spite of appearances, they have some exercise of soul before God; and at times we have been gladdened to find

tokens of this in some in whom we would not have expected it, any more than we would have thought of Lot as being troubled in soul about the sins of the Sodomites, had not Peter by the Spirit told us so.

Even in Genesis, however, we see at least one good point shining out in the character of Lot – his love of hospitality as portrayed in Gen. 19. It is not everyone who would have concerned himself whether the two strangers, who arrived in Sodom so late in the evening, had a bed for the night or not. That Lot at the time did not recognise who they were seems clear from Heb. 13:2, which passage, I cannot but think, refers chiefly to this act of his. In the visit to Abraham, recorded in Gen. 18, the word “angels” does not occur, as it does here; besides which Abraham appears to have had from the first some inkling of the true character of his visitors, while Lot had not. If this is so, is it not worthy of note that, although Lot is unfit to take his place alongside Abraham in that wonderful portrait gallery of men of faith in Heb. 11, he gets a little niche of his own, albeit a nameless one, in Heb. 13:2. And he is even set up for our imitation, as one who was “not forgetful to entertain strangers”.

This matter of hospitality must be of more importance than perhaps most of us think; for there are at least three general exhortations to it in the epistles, besides many examples. And there is also the fact that, both in 1 Tim. 3 and in Titus 1, amongst the qualifications of a bishop we find this, that he is to be “given to hospitality”. Furthermore, we need to beware lest, for lack of considering what it really means in the Scriptures, we should count ourselves above reproach in this matter when we are not. The fact that we from time to time invite to our homes those of God’s people who are special favourites, may make us feel self-satisfied, though possibly we do it with no higher aim than to entertain one another with local gossip, or even by discussing the failings of other Christians. But let us see in what connections the Scriptures introduce this grace. Putting together the various passages, we find four ideas prominent:—

1. In Hebrews 13:2 the hospitality is to be shown to strangers, who as such really need it.
2. In Luke 14:12-14 it is to be shown, not to friends, not to the rich, but to the poor and suffering.
3. In 3 John 5-8, where Gaius is set before us as a beautiful example of it, it is shown to those who “for His Name’s sake went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles”.
4. In 1 Peter 4:9-11 it is closely linked with the using of any ability we possess to help one another in the ways of God, and in the knowledge of His Word.

By these standards we may test ourselves whether we are really “given to hospitality” or not. Do we go out of our way to see that strange brethren who come to our meetings have all possible kindness shown to them, and the more so, if they are serving God, in His Gospel, or among His people? Do we invite to our homes, and in other ways assist those of our brethren and sisters, who from a material point of view are most needy? Do we see to it that in all our social intercourse with one another, it is our constant aim to give all the help we can, and get all the help we can, for our mutual edification in the things of God?

But we pass on to what is perhaps the best feature known to us in Lot’s

character, and the one which shows what he really was – his horror of sin, as described in 2 Peter 2. As Weymouth's translation expresses it, "Their lawless deeds were torture day by day to the pure soul of that righteous man". It may be that some of us, who would resent being called Lots, are much behind him in this respect. Is it not so that we can become used to the ungodly deeds and ungodly speeches of those around us, to such an extent that they cease to "torture" us, and become to us almost a matter of course? Well, Lot was not like that. Though in Sodom for years, it is clear from 2nd Peter 2 that he was never able to get used to its sins. Even his taking of the place of a "judge", which is noticed in Gen. 19:1, 9, was probably in part at least due to his desire to repress as much of the evil as he could.

This horror of sin is indeed a Christlike characteristic. Concerning our Lord in the Psalms there are many sayings which express it, as for example, Psalm 119:53, "Horror hath taken hold upon Me, because of the wicked that forsake Thy Law". We can form but little conception of what it meant to Him to see the wicked acts, and to hear the wicked sayings of the sinners amongst whom He moved. If such was torture even to a Lot, what must it have been to that Holy One, Who could so identify Himself with His Father as to say, "The reproaches of them that reproached Thee are fallen upon Me" ?

Moreover, this horror of the sins done around us is a good test of our own spiritual condition. If I do not abhor sin in others, I am likely to be found showing tolerance of it in myself ; while if I hate sin in myself, I shall hate it in others also. In Romans 1:32, "having pleasure in them that do" wickedness, is spoken of as though it were almost worse than doing wickedness oneself.

But while we are glad to find good things in Lot, his history in Genesis is, in the main, a series of warnings to us from the things wherein he failed. In the first place he was not a man of frequent and personal dealings with God, as Abraham was. This was perhaps the root cause of all his other failures ; for without it, to maintain a good testimony for God was and is impossible. Anything good he had, he seems to have received through Abraham ; and while he stayed with Abraham he got along fairly well. But, though we dare not slight the help we obtain through those more acquainted with God than ourselves, we must not, if we would make progress, depend on that solely. Many seem to do this, getting little directly from God through His Word for themselves, but living on what they get from others in meetings. If such through circumstances are brought into a position where these channels of supply are no longer available, their weakness is at once apparent ; and it is well if they do not turn aside as far as Lot did.

We notice next the mistakes connected with his choice of land in Gen. 13. We see there his selfishness in so greedily seizing the opportunity given him, instead of allowing Abraham as the older man to choose first. We see his rashness in taking such an important step without seeking guidance from God about it, or even waiting to give it due consideration himself. We see too his worldliness in the one-sided point of view from which he did choose. The land was good and well watered, which would conduce to his earthly prosperity. But it did not occur to him to weigh over against this the wickedness of its inhabitants, mentioned in verse 13, which would

so strongly militate against his spiritual prosperity, and prove a curse to his family. Unfortunately many a choice since then has been made by God's people on very similar lines.

Following upon his wrong choice, we have Lot's persistence and progress in the path which he had chosen. He comes nearer and nearer to Sodom till at last we find him in it (Gen. 13:11 ; 14:12). Yea, even when God laid His hand in chastisement upon him, and only by Abraham's intervention he was saved from captivity and possibly death, he appears to have gone straight back to Sodom once more. If God's children were as persistent in doing what is pleasing to Him, as some of the Lots amongst them are in continuing in what is wrong, what a power for good they might be.

Then there is (what already has been referred to) Lot's foolish idea that he might improve Sodom by taking office as a judge in it. Yet this was not a whit more foolish than the idea many saints have today that they can do good by dabbling in world politics and in local politics. Abraham went in for having power with God, Lot for having influence with the people, and when the testing time came, it is not difficult to see who proved the wiser. Abraham in chapter 18 through his intercession would have saved Sodom, had but ten righteous men been found in it. Indeed it was he who did save Lot, for in chap. 19:29 we read, "God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow". But Lot's influence with the men of Sodom vanished when he attempted to use it ; and even with his sons-in-law it was not sufficient to induce them to escape, with the result that his married daughters appear to have perished also.

An interesting contrast is that between Lot's conversation with the Sodomites in chapter 19, and that of Abraham with the Hittites in chapter 23. Lot addresses those ungodly wretches in the words, "I pray you, BRETHREN"; - but Abraham, to those among whom he had dwelt for over sixty years, says, "I am a STRANGER and a SOJOURNER among you". Then in Lot's case the reply is (and we can almost feel the cutting scorn with which they said it), "THIS ONE FELLOW came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge". But to Abraham the stranger the answer is, "My Lord, thou art A MIGHTY PRINCE AMONG US". The man who had climbed down from his excellency to call the ungodly his brethren is despised by them, as he richly deserved ; while the man who consistently maintained the path of separation has won the respect of everyone around him. And so it ever will be found, to the present hour.

Little need be said as to the sad after history of Lot. His choice had been lightheartedly made, when in years gone by the opportunity came his way ; and with little thought of the consequences. But as the old man's sun set in gloom on the mountain above Zoar, what sorrowful memories his must have been as he looked back to the happy days of fellowship with Abraham before he took that fatal step from which there was no recovery.

CHAPTER XI

CHRIST IN GENESIS 49

It is in Genesis 49 that we get the first extensive prophecy in the Word of God. Previous to it, from chap. 3 onwards, we meet with a series of short prophetic messages, the importance of which is out of all proportion to

their size ; but here for the first time we have a man speaking in the spirit of prophecy, at considerable length, and on a variety of matters pertaining to the future history of the people of God.

When we speak of the chapter as containing Jacob's dying blessing on his sons, we must not forget that there is in it much more than a mere fatherly blessing. Jacob himself knew this, even while he spoke it, as is proved by his opening words, "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you **IN THE LAST DAYS**". He here points us onward, not only to times subsequent to his own, but to times that are future even yet.

The Hebrew word which is translated "in the last days" occurs for the first time in this message, and is next used by Balaam, whose speeches, by the way, form the second long prophecy in the Scriptures. He employs it more than once, but most strikingly parallel with its use by Jacob is the occurrence in Num. 24:14, where he says, "Come therefore, and I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people **IN THE LATTER (or LAST) DAYS**". Afterwards it is found about sixty times in the Old Testament, generally in connection with Israel's remote future.

If we keep all this in mind, we shall not be surprised when in the sections of the various tribes we find statements, the full accomplishment of which awaits a time yet to come, either in the days of the great Tribulation, or in those of millennial blessing that follow. Most interesting of all, however, are three distinct references to the coming Messiah ; of which one is in the prophecy on Judah, where He is spoken of as "**SHILOH**" (v. 10) ; one at the end of that on Dan where, beyond doubt, it is He Himself that is meant by the word "**SALVATION**" (v. 18); and one in that on Joseph, where He is called both "**SHEPHERD**" and "**STONE**" (v. 24). Putting them together, we have a comprehensive picture of the work of Christ for His people, including His past sufferings on the Cross, His present care for His own, and His future glorious reign.

At v. 18, where He is spoken of as the Lord's Salvation, we are taken back to the great deliverance wrought at Calvary, though of course all the fruits which flow therefrom are suggested also. We have in it the first occurrence of "yeshuan", the Hebrew word for "salvation", which recurs so often afterwards, and finally becomes embodied in the name "Jesus". Indeed it might be said that we have that name in our verse, since we get in juxtaposition the two words of which it is compounded, "Salvation" and "Jehovah".

The verse is one which may readily escape notice when the chapter is read ; because it appears to be so little connected with what has gone before, and with what follows after. Yet this very fact should make it the more interesting, since it shows it to be an outburst from Jacob's own heart, in which his eager personal longing for the coming of the Saviour manifested itself, but why should there be such a personal outburst at this particular point ?

In the prophecy concerning Dan of the preceding verse, it had been said, "Dan shall be a **SERPENT** by the way . . . that biteth the horse **HEELS**". Now Jacob, if we might so express it, had a very small Bible, compared with ours. He had none of it in its present form, but doubtless the few messages which God had spoken to his ancestors, from Adam onward, had been treasured up, and were known to the godly of each successive gener-

ation, as may be seen, for example, in the saying of Noah's father at Gen. 5:29. Prominent among such messages would be the first of them, that spoken by the Lord ere Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden, in which His judgment on sin and His provision to meet the need that had arisen are blended together. Amongst the sayings of God known to Jacob that message would stand out, just as John 3:16 stands out to us in the completed Scriptures. Its every word had probably been weighed and considered by him many a time. When therefore he had been guided by the Spirit to employ in his own prophecy two of the more important of those words, "serpent" and "heel", does it not seem that by the utterance of them God's precious promise of Gen. 3:15 is recalled to the patriarch's mind, and that in this we have the clue to his longing outburst which comes after?

In his words, "I have waited for Thy Salvation, O Lord", there is an intensity of desire which shows how real was Jacob's faith in the coming One. It is noteworthy that the special act of faith on his part, recorded in Heb. 11, is one "when he was dying"; and there can be little doubt that his closing days were his best, and that the hope expressed in his words here were the secret of it.

The same attitude of soul was characteristic of all true-hearted saints in Old Testament times. Abraham "rejoiced to see the day of the Messiah" (John 8:56). Moses was willing to endure reproach, because to him it was "the reproach of Christ" (Heb. 11:26). David in what are called his "last words" says, "One that ruleth over men righteously . . . He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth . . . it is all my Salvation and all my Desire" (2 Sam. 23:3-5, R.V.). Isaiah tells us, "In that day it shall be said, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, . . . we will be glad and rejoice in His Salvation" (Isa. 25:9). Last in the long line, we reach Simeon who says, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word, for mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation" (Luke 2:29, 30).

It is noticeable that they all link "Salvation" with a person. It was not to them merely a thing nor a doctrine, but the COMING ONE. They were saved because of their faith they were united to the One who was to come, while we today are saved if by our faith we have been united to the One who has come. No learning of a doctrine, nor clearness of mind as to the theory of substitution can take the place of accepting by faith the Saviour Himself.

But while we look backward to the Victor on the Cross for our salvation, it is ours too, as it was theirs, to look forward. He is coming again; and when we consider the intensity of longing with which these O.T. saints were filled as they waited for Him, it should shame us, who, with far more light, have so little longing for the appearing of our Lord.

Yet, little though it be, we may well be thankful to God if we have any. For just as this soul exercise on the part of Jacob shows the reality of his faith, more perhaps than almost anything else in his life, so it is still; and where this is entirely absent, there is every reason to doubt the salvation of the person concerned. On the other hand, where it is present, even though like Jacob we have made mistakes by the way, we shall be able to say what Job said, immediately after he too had protested his faith in the coming Redeemer,—"The root of the matter is found in me" (Job 19:23-28).

CHAPTER XII

CHRIST IN GENESIS 49 (continued)

From the word "Salvation" of v. 18, which reminds us of what has been accomplished by the death of Christ, let us now turn to the reference made to Him in v. 10 as "Shiloh", which points to His glorious reign. This is equally the case, whichever of the two meanings that have at times been assigned to that title, we adopt as the correct one, whether "Pacifactor" or "He whose it is". The latter is the interpretation which seems to be preferred by most commentators, and is supported by Ezekiel 21, where there appears to be a direct reference to it at v. 27. In the two preceding verses the "crown" is seen to be departing from Judah, because of the wickedness of Zedekiah, the reigning prince ; and then in v. 27 a period is foreshadowed of which God says, "I will overturn, overturn, overturn, until He come WHOSE RIGHT IT IS ; and I will give it Him".

Although the "crown" was thus lost by Judah at the time of the Captivity, the "sceptre" (Heb. shebet) of our 10th verse did not depart as yet, nor did it until the actual time of Christ's first coming. This latter word is of much wider import than the former, and denotes possession of an executive authority, which is not necessarily regal. It occurs nearly two hundred times in the Old Testament, and is usually rendered "tribe"; of which there are two examples in Gen. 49 itself, for the word translated "tribes" in v. 16 and v. 28 is the same which is given as "sceptre" in v. 10. What is meant therefore by the statement is that Judah's distinctive place as a tribe would not be lost until Shiloh came, and this of course was literally fulfilled. At Christ's birth, for the first time, the once proud tribe of Judah was numbered in a Roman census, as being merely a fractional part of the Empire ; and soon afterwards took place the war in which their temple was burnt to the ground, and the people scattered to the ends of the earth.

While the first part of v. 10 has thus in a large measure received its fulfilment, the final clause, "Unto Him shall the gatherings of the people (R.V., 'the obedience of the peoples') be", awaits for its full accomplishment the coming again of the Lord. It is then that "He whose it is" shall claim what rightly belongs to Him, and by ending the unrest and tumult and strife of the nations, shall prove Himself the "Pacifactor" also. And then of Him, the real "Solomon", shall all that is so wonderfully pictured in Psalm 72 become true, so that "men shall be blessed in Him ; all nations shall call Him blessed".

Some brethren may feel that by this application of the final clause of v. 10 to our Lord's millennial reign they have lost something ; because "Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be" is a Scripture in common use in connection with our present gathering as companies of His people unto Himself, and owning His Name. I do not, however, see any reason why it should not be so used ; so long as we remember that a great deal more is included in it. In this respect as in many others we are "a kind of firstfruits of His creatures", and it is our privilege today to acknowledge Him as our Lord and Head, just as later the entire creation will. Indeed the very act of getting saved was a "gathering unto Him" individually ; in our Assemblies, if He gets His rightful place in them, we are "gathering unto Him" collectively ; and we look forward to the time when the whole

company of His people shall be found in that "gathering together unto Him" unitedly, which is mentioned in 2 Thess. 2:1.

But let us not forget, in connection with our meetings and otherwise, that qualification which I have inserted above, "if He gets His rightful place". The word rendered "gathering" in Gen. 49:10 is, as already pointed out, translated "obedience" in the R.V., which is in keeping with the fact that in Prov. 30:17 the only other place in which the word in the Hebrew occurs, it has to be translated "to obey". And "obedience" does not stop short with being baptized and coming into an Assembly. It includes all that our Lord commands, and covers our whole lives. If we claim to own Christ as our Lord and King, let us see that, like David's men, our response to Him is "Thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my Lord the King shall appoint".

But we must pass on to the third reference to Christ in this great prophecy, that in v. 24, which presents Him as "Shepherd". This word, while it has associations both with the cross and with the glory, chiefly brings to our thoughts His present care for His own, of which doubtless Joseph's care for his brethren and his father's house was typical. Here again we are at the first mention of a relationship of the Lord to His people, which is developed in a multitude of Scriptures afterwards, reminding us of that often repeated saying that Genesis is the seed-plot of the Bible. The passages which come to mind as to the Lord's shepherd care for His saints, starting from this point, range throughout the entire volume, until at last we reach the Revelation and read that, even in the glory, "The Lamb shall be their Shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of water of life" (Rev. 7:17, R.V.).

But especially our thoughts would turn to two passages, the best known of all, the 10th chapter of John, and the 23rd Psalm. In the former, the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep is the same that leads them in and out, whose voice they hear and know, and who so well protects them that out of His hand none can ever pluck them. In the latter, David tells us what his experience of having the Lord as his Shepherd was like; and in doing so, puts into the mouths of God's people in all ages since then, words to express their enjoyment of His shepherd care for them. Is it not remarkable that two of the greatest and best shepherds the world has ever had, Jacob and David, should be chosen, the one to introduce for the first time in the Scriptures the idea of the Lord being the Shepherd of His people, and the other to carry on and develop that idea to produce the glorious picture of Psalm 23?

CHAPTER XIII

THE BLESSING OF JOSEPH

Thus far we have dealt with Jacob's blessing on his son Joseph, merely as containing one of the three great references in Gen. 49 to the Christ. But the entire section in which it occurs is so full of interest that we may well stay to consider it in a more general way.

Joseph himself is one of the most beautiful and perfect types of our Lord that we find in the Old Testament; and if we were to notice every point of resemblance between the two, a mere list of them would fill much

space. Both in the honour accorded him by his father and in his rejection by his brethren, both in his humiliation and in his exaltation in the land of Egypt, yea in every part of the record which God gives us of him, we may trace the very lineaments of his great Antitype. And similarly in this blessing of Gen. 49:25-26, as we read of one who was "a fruitful bough by a well", whose "branches run over the (Jewish) wall", who was "grieved" and "shot at" and "hated", yet never overcome, and who ultimately became the "Shepherd" and "Stone" of Israel; we cannot, if we have spiritual sight at all, fail to see Jesus.

Compare, by way of illustration, the incident recorded in John 4, where Christ is seen seated by Jacob's well, "near to the parcel of ground which Jacob gave to his son Joseph". On that occasion His "branches ran over the wall" in blessing to the outsiders of Samaria.

But let us for a little while consider in these verses, not so much the type we have in the Saviour, as the pattern we have of a saint. Joseph's stedfast course of going on with his God in all kinds of differing circumstances, is well worthy of our imitation. In the home amongst his jealous brethren, in the temptations in Potiphar's house, in the hardships of prison life, in the dangerous path of worldly honour; in all these circumstances he acquitted himself as became a man of God.

The experience of many of us differs much from this. When our surroundings are favourable we get along fairly well, but when in any way they become unfavourable, we quickly manifest that there is less of Joseph in our make up than there is of Reuben, concerning whom it had to be said, "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel". We discover that our "goodness", like the "moving cloud" of Hos. 6:4 (used as an illustration of Joseph's own descendants, the Ephraimites), depends more on favourable environment than it does on strength of character. Young people are in our meetings, in not a few cases, because their parents were there, rather than because of personal soul exercise about the matter. Let circumstances move them into a different sphere, and they speedily drift. Let an attractive unconverted companion drop across the path of that sister or that brother, and away with the wind go all the convictions which they professed to have.

Let us then look into this picture of Joseph, to see what we may learn from it as to the source of his strength and stedfastness. His first is described as a fruitful tree (probably a vine), growing by a spring well, around which a wall has been placed. So flourishing is this vine that some of its fruitful branches stretch over the wall to the outside. Thus it is with any saint who sets himself to go on with God. In Him and in His Word he has a perennial spring of refreshment and nourishment, and "fruit unto God" is continually borne by him. Not only so, but his "branches" reaching over the wall, his brethren and even the unsaved are blessed through him. It is a similar picture to that which we find further developed in Psalm 1:3; Jer. 17:8; etc.

But the scene changes, and our next view of this man of God is as an archer sore beset by hostile bowmen. They hate him, and their arrows fly thickly around him; but he stands fast amidst it all, and his bow unbroken remains ready for action. The secret is that his arms and hands are made strong to use it by God Himself—the Mighty One of Jacob. In this too we have a picture which the later Scriptures more fully bring out; depicting the saint as the soldier of God or as it is expressed in 2 Tim. 2:3, "A

good soldier of Jesus Christ". It reminds us of Eph. 6:10-18, where the Christian warrior stands armoured and armed against all the forces of the Evil One. Let us not, however, forget that it is often through men and through outward circumstances that Satan makes war against us. In Joseph's case it was through his brethren first of all. Psalm 64 speaks of certain who "bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words, that they may shoot in secret at the perfect". Such arrows as these are quite enough to upset most of us.

The statement that Joseph's arms and hands were made strong by his God is the more interesting when we remember how frequently in his record it is said that "God was with him" (see chap. 39:2, 3, 21, 23). This was a working out in his case of the same promise which God had made to his father in Bethel in chap. 28:15, "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee, . . . for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of". And it was doubtless this which Jacob had in mind when in the closing part of Joseph's blessing he said, "The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors". The promise made to Abraham in chap. 22:16-19 was surely as great as any given to Jacob ; but the point is that Jacob had this one also (compare chap. 28:4, 13, 14), and then got an addition to it as above. The promise to Abraham had to do with the great and glorious future, but to Jacob there was added a promise of God's presence and keeping meanwhile. In accordance with this is the use of the words, "The Lord of hosts is with us ; the God of Jacob is our refuge". In Psalm 46, where God's people are in trouble ; and then in Psalm 47, where final deliverance and blessing have arrived, they are called "the people of the God of Abraham" (v. 9).

This further suggests that Jacob, in his message here to Joseph, is able to bring forth something from his own personal experience of God ; and that is still the sort of message which will come with warmth and power to the hearts of others, one through which God has had dealings with ourselves. Compare how Moses, in his blessing on Joseph at Deut. 33:13-16 repeats the latter part of Jacob's words over again, but then adds a little bit, "the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush", to show that he had personal experience of it also.

One more word of very special interest occurs at the end of Joseph's blessing, when he is described as "him that was SEPARATE from his brethren". The word "separate" is usually understood as having reference to the fact that he was lost sight of by his family for so long a time ; but while it doubtless includes that, it means much more. It is the word almost everywhere else rendered "Nazarite", the only exceptions being this and the parallel statement in the blessing of Moses on him ; with one other in Lev. 25:11, where it is translated "vine undressed".

Joseph, while not outwardly one, was in a very real sense a "Nazarite", a man consecrated to God, and as a result different in every way from those around him. He was indeed a twelfth of Romans man, one who had presented himself a living sacrifice to God, and who would do His will at any cost. He could "show mercy with cheerfulness" (v. 8), he could "rule with diligence" (v. 8), he could "abhor that which was evil" (v. 9), he could be "kindly affectioned with brotherly love" (v. 10), he could be "not slothful in business" (v. 11), he could be "patient in tribulation" (v. 12), he could

“distribute to the necessity of his brethren and others” (v. 13), he was “given to hospitality” (v. 13), he “blessed those that persecuted him (v. 14), he did “not avenge himself” (v. 19), but “overcame evil with good” (v. 21). May it be the ambition of each of us to be such a “Nazarite” as this.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RECORD OF REUBEN

While considering in our last chapter the things “written for our learning” (Rom. 15:4) as to Joseph’s steadfast course, reference was made by way of contrast to the instability of his brother Reuben, whose failures have also been “written for our admonition” (1 Cor. 10:11) in Gen. 49 and elsewhere. It may be well, ere we leave that chapter, to trace the contrast further, by examining what the Scriptures have to say concerning Jacob’s eldest son and the tribe that sprang from him. For it is remarkable how like to their ancestor the Reubenites showed themselves on various occasions, in indcision and instability; whereas it would be difficult to find any lineaments of Joseph in either of the tribes that descended from him.

Reuben’s father Jacob, who well knew his son’s character, labelled him “Unstable as water”, and the description would equally suit his seed. A New Testament Jacob (for James is literally Jacob) makes use of a similar phrase, “Unstable in all his ways”, at chap. 1:6-8 of his epistle; and in doing so gives us the genesis of such instability. It seems to be characteristic of that writer to trace the things with which he deals to or from their source (see chap. 1:14, 15; 3:6; 3:14-16; 4:1-3, etc.); and this he does with instability when he points out that lack of faith in God produces wavering, and wavering becomes doublemindedness, and doublemindedness is what makes a man to be “unstable in all his ways”. In other words, the trouble in its origin is one of the heart and its attitude to God; but ultimately it produces the evil fruit of an uneven and unstable outward testimony. We may, therefore, judge our true state before the Lord by inquiring: Does my life as a saint manifest this unevenness and instability? If so, it proves me a doubleminded waverer, and this again shows that I have not the confidence in God which I should have.

Those who are thus unstable can never advance to responsibility and honour. They will never “excel” (Gen. 49:4) in their testimony or service, no matter what privileges they may have to commence with. Reuben as firstborn was “the beginning of strength”, but his birthright was lost to the sons of Joseph (1 Chron. 5:1, 2); he was “excellency of dignity”, but his priesthood went to Levi; he was “excellency of power”, yet the kingship fell to Judah. Neither judge nor prophet nor priest nor king is ascribed to this tribe throughout Israel’s entire history.

Many things could be pointed out in his favour, both as man and tribe, but his fatal indecision spoiled all. He was a real “son”, as his name Reuben implies (Gen. 29:32 margin). He was of a gentler nature than most of his brothers (Gen. 37:21, 22, 29). His descendants had exercise of mind as to their responsibilities (Judges 5:15, 16, R.V.). With the other tribes they came together to make David king (1 Chron. 12:37, 38). They knew where to turn when in trouble, and could even at times win a battle (1 Chron. 5:18-20).

But on the other hand his father could not trust him (Gen. 42:37-38 in contrast with 43:8-11) as he could trust even Judah. He could not conquer his own lusts (Gen. 35:22). He joined Korah in murmuring and rebellion (Num. 16:1-3). He stopped at a halfway house (Num. 32:1, 2). His exercise of mind about helping his brethren in the battle was not sufficiently strong to stand against the "bleatings" of his flocks, the same flocks which were the excuse for his failure in Num. 32 (Judges 5:15, 16, R.V.). And he was among the first to fall into idolatry and to be taken captive by the Assyrians (1 Chron. 5:25, 26).

In all these respects how like he was to many of the Lord's people today. Doublemindedness and the instability resulting therefrom are common evils amongst us, and are a foremost cause of the comparative uselessness of a great number of the saints, even of those who, like Reuben, have much that can be said in their favour.

They may have a sound and clear conversion. They may possibly be of a gentle and kindly disposition. They may experience a certain amount of soul exercise, and have some measure of love to the Lord Jesus. Yet, like some of the kings of Judah, their heart is "not perfect with the Lord" (1 Kings 15:3, etc.); and they do not "seek first" the things of the kingdom, because they are of "doubtful mind" (Luke 12:29).

This unsteadfastness shows itself in much the same connections as did Reuben's. Like Reuben the individual, they cannot keep the flesh in its proper place, and like Reuben the tribe, they cannot keep the things of this life in their proper place.

As to the former, it is interesting to notice that, though Reuben's sin was great and glaring, Jacob does not lay stress on the enormity of it, so much as on the lack of self-control is manifested. Self-government is of prime importance, and he who is lacking in it, like Reuben cannot be trusted. The defect may be displayed in various ways, in lust as in Reuben's case, in bad temper and quarrelsomeness, in slothfulness, or even in intemperance in the matter of food.

In connection with the things of this life, the failure may be manifest either with respect to what we possess, or with respect to what we would like to possess. Reuben's "flocks", as has already been pointed out, caused him to stop at what we have called the halfway house (Num. 32:4); and later prevented him from giving help to his brethren in the war. The R.V. rendering of Judges 5:15, 16 exhibits the irresoluteness of the tribe on this occasion very clearly. It begins with "By the watercourses of Reuben there were great resolves of heart"; and then, after the question has been raised about the sheepfolds and the bleatings of the flocks, it repeats this statement, but with a significant alteration, "By the watercourses of Reuben there were great searchings of heart". The two words, 'resolves' and 'searchings' differ in Hebrew by only a single letter, but the former is much the stronger word; and thus the suggestion is that when the matter was first broached, these Reubenites seemed quite resolved to take part in the fight, but when their attention was drawn to their flocks, the resolve quickly died away, with the result that they stayed where they were. How many saints of today are stopped at halfway houses, instead of fully entering into their heritage; and how many are prevented from taking their due place in conflict with the forces of evil, through lack of purpose of heart, the Lord Himself only knows.

On the other hand, the desire to possess may have effects even more dangerous than actual possession itself ; for it is still as true as when it was written, that "they that desire (R.V.) to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition". This is surely as miserable an end as the captivity which overtook the Reubenites in 1 Chron. 5:25, 26 ; and would remind us that in many cases people such as we have been describing are without the possessions they desire, simply because, as already hinted, God cannot trust them with them. In this connection the last words of Moses concerning the tribe of Reuben are significant. "Let Reuben live and not die, yet let his men be few". This is the R.V. rendering, and it will be noticed that although the A.V. has tried to soften it into something brighter, it has to put its "not" in italics, there being no word to correspond with it in the Hebrew. How different it is from the Lord's purpose for His people as expressed in John 10:10, "That they might have life, AND MIGHT HAVE IT ABUNDANTLY".

CHAPTER XV

WHAT IS THAT IN THINE HAND ?

(Exodus 4 : 2)

WHAT HAST THOU IN THE HOUSE ?

(2 Kings 4 : 2)

"I am not able" (Num. 11:14), or "We be not able" (Num. 13:31), has been oftentimes the cry of saints afflicted with laziness and coldness of heart. "I have no ability for preaching ; I am not fitted for Sunday school work ; I have no gift for dealing personally with people ; there is really nothing I can do". So off they go and do it, oblivious of the fact that, in those pages of the New Testament which deal with the matter, EVERY saint is represented as having "gift" of some kind, and some function to perform.

God does not expect us to do work for which we are manifestly unsuited, but He does expect every one of His people to find out what his or her work is, and to get on with it. Nor will this be a very difficult matter, if only we are

*"Content to fill a little space,
If God be glorified".*

For, as a general rule, the work He would have us do is that which lies at our hand, and the materials required for it are those already in our possession.

This is what is suggested by the two simple and somewhat similar questions at the head of this chapter. By each of them we are introduced to a marvellous work wrought by God with weak instruments. To the former one Moses replies, "A rod", and with that rod he is sent forth to overthrow the might of Egypt, and deliver God's people from their bondage. To the latter, the answer of the widow is, "A pot of oil", and from that

pot of oil comes forth what paid her debt in full, saved her sons from being sold into slavery, and provided her with sufficient to live on afterwards.

Just think of Moses, a man of eighty years of age, going forth armed with a rod against the greatest ruler and best equipped army which could at that time have been found in the entire world, against Pharaoh's host of chariots and horsemen. Could he really be so foolish as to imagine that he had any prospect of success? So far as he knew, there was nothing about this rod of his to make it better than any other, which a shepherd might have cut from a convenient bush, to suit his own purposes. But when the rod was claimed by God it became God's rod; and thus we read a few verses further on that on Moses' return to Egypt, he took "the rod of God in his hand" (Exodus 4:20).

With it he smote the river, and it became blood; he smote the dust, and it sprang to life as lice; he stretched it toward the heavens, and they poured down hail; he held it out over the sea, and a way was made for Israel to pass through; he held it out again, and the enemies were swallowed up, chariots and all.

Equally insignificant was the widow's pot of oil, yet at the word of God she poured out from it a supply which filled to overflowing all the vessels she and her sons had been able to procure, and did not fail until their need had been more than met.

There are doubtless many lessons to be learned from each of these incidents; but let us at present confine ourselves to this one truth taught in them, and in many other Scriptures as well, that the Lord takes up and makes use of **THAT WHICH WE HAVE**, in performing His mighty acts. He could easily accomplish His purposes in other ways quite different, but it pleases Him to work thus, and so to take us into fellowship with Himself in doing His wonders. He might have broken the power of Egypt and set His people free without either Moses or his rod. He could have filled the widow's house with gold, apart from any pot of oil. But it was not His way to do so.

Similarly, the Lord might have fed the hungry multitudes without having recourse to the little lad's loaves and fishes. He could have brought Elijah through the famine without the barrel and cruse of the widow of Zarephath. But no! Then and now He is pleased to work with what His people have, however little it be, for

"Little is much, if God is in it".

In accomplishing His purposes of grace today, could not God well do without any of us? Or, alternately, could He not fit us with much greater ability in the way of knowledge, utterance, and acceptance with the people than we now possess? Yet when we love Him, and desire to serve Him, it is His good pleasure to take us up just as we are, and just with the little which we have; and to use us and ours in His glorious work.

It is of course only right that we should aspire to put our very best into the service of our Lord; but it is not right that we should be discouraged at the smallness and weakness of what is our best. It is not right that we should sit down and do nothing because we cannot preach like Paul in Acts 13 and 17; or that we should refuse to give anything because we cannot give gold in heaps as David did in 1 Chron. 29. "If there be first

a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" (2 Cor. 8:12).

The Lord, who had use for Rahab's red cord, for Shamgar's ox-goad, for David's sling, for Mary's pot of ointment, for Dorcas' needle, and for the widow's mites, would ask you, "What is that in thine hand?" and "What hast thou in the house?" Bring it to Him, whatever it is, to make use of as He will. So may you earn the commendation He gave to Mary, "SHE HATH DONE WHAT SHE COULD".

CHAPTER XVI

SACRIFICE – FEAST – SERVICE

"Let us go . . . that we may SACRIFICE to the Lord our God" (Exodus 3:18)

"Let My people go that they may hold a FEAST unto Me" (Exodus 5:1)

"Let My people go that they may SERVE Me" (Exodus 8:1)

In these verses we have God's threefold demand to Parah, a demand which was enforced by mighty judgments on him and his people. Its form differs in each case, and it is to this difference that I wish to call attention. In the first verse the words are "that we may sacrifice to the Lord"; in the second, "that they may hold a feast unto Me", and in the third, "that they may serve Me". That is to say, God desired their worship, He wished to have them enjoy fellowship with Himself; and He claimed their service.

These three things, WORSHIP, FELLOWSHIP, and SERVICE are constantly linked together in the Scriptures; and when so linked they tell us, not only all that God sought from Israel, but all that He seeks from His redeemed people today. There is nothing in our lives for Him but comes under one or other of these three heads.

But where shall we find the beginning of them? Let us go back to the story of Creation itself. God had formed the earth, with sun, moon, and stars, to fulfil His will. He had brought forth the dry land, the seas, and the atmosphere to serve His purposes. The fishes of the sea, the birds of the air, and the beasts of the field, each in turn, had been caused to exist for His glory. But something still was lacking, a creature that could render unto its Creator intelligent worship, that could intelligently hold communion with Him, that could yield to Him intelligent service. All this God found in man.

The Fall took place, and everything was altered. By it man lost a great deal, but God for the time lost the worship, the fellowship, and the service, which had been His delight (Prov. 8:31). Not for long, however, since on a basis of grace we see them restored almost at once. A saved sinner, Abel, presents to Him intelligent, spiritual, and acceptable worship. A saved sinner, Enoch, walks in fellowship with Him for three hundred years. And a saved sinner, Noah, with obedient service, builds an Ark according to His instructions.

A little later we find another saved sinner, Abraham, who worshipped and communed and served to perhaps a greater extent than any who had been before him. Or should we say that we have three activities in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, taken together, the worshipper, the communer, and the servant.

If, turning to the other side of the matter, we ask, Where shall we look

for the end of this threefold cord, the answer is, it has no end. For when we pass from Genesis to the closing chapters of the Word of God, the glorious scene which meets us there is a scene of perpetual worship (Rev. 21:22), of perpetual communion (chap. 22:4), and even of perpetual service (chap. 22:3). The state of things which will then exist is beautifully pictured for us in the description of the supper at Bethany given in John 12:1-3, where, following upon the resurrection scene of chap. 11, the Lord is shown in happy fellowship with His own; where Mary worships, and Martha serves, while the risen Lazarus sits feasting with Him who had raised him.

Coming back to our three texts in Exodus, let us note the order in which they occur. The Sacrifice comes first, the joyful Feast next, and the Service last. Such is God's own order, and it cannot be improved upon. Looking at it from the simplest point of view we have, first the sacrifice on which salvation is grounded; then the festal joy in the soul of the one who has accepted that salvation; and finally the gladsome and willing service which such a one will render. Men cannot alter this order without making a mess of things. Some would put the service first, and have salvation by works. Others would put the feast first, and have salvation by feelings. But the sacrifice must ever come first, as the Foundation of all.

Or if we think of the three, as we have already been doing, in connection with the saint, the order is still the right one. It is when worship is given the first and highest place, and when there is enjoyed communion, that the service which follows will be such as is acceptable to God.

The place where all these activities were to be in exercise in the case of Israel is described by God as "three days' journey into the wilderness" (chap. 3:18; 5:3; 8:27); and even yet it is a "three days' journey" from the present Egypt-world to the place where worship, fellowship, and service to God can fittingly be rendered. It is a remarkable fact, and worthy of note, that when they did go three days' journey into the wilderness at chap. 15:22 their first experience was "no water", and their next, "bitter" water. But there was a tree in the place which, cast into those bitter waters, made them sweet. God had lessons for Israel in this, and lessons for us, upon which we cannot at present stay to dwell.

Another interesting point is that, in a salvation sense, they had in the Passover all three things for which God sought. In chap. 12:27 we read of "the SACRIFICE of the Lord's Passover". In v. 14 of the same chapter it is described as "a FEAST to the Lord". And in v. 26 it is spoken of as "this SERVICE". The same association of ideas is to be noticed in the story in another form - in the three features which, it was suggested, they would be called upon to explain to their children. These were: (1) The sacrifice of the lamb itself, chap. 12:26, 27; (2) The feast of unleavened bread, chap. 13:7, 8; and (3) The devoting to God of the firstborn, a type of true service, chap. 13:14, 15.

We find the antitypes of these last three closely associated together in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. In chap. 5:7 we read, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us"; and this is followed in the next verse by, "Let us keep the Feast . . . with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth". Then at chap. 6:20 we get, "Ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's". These are some of the lessons which those "things written aforetime" have for us today.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FAITH OF MOSES

In Hebrews 11 **THREE ACTS OF FAITH** on the part of Moses are recorded, and three considerations which led to them are mentioned. The first, in verses 24-26 is his great choice, in which he disowned relationship with Pharaoh's daughter, turned his back on the treasures in Egypt and the pleasures of sin, and cast in his lot with God's people instead, to suffer with them the reproach of Christ. And the reason given for his doing this is that **"HE HAD RESPECT UNTO THE RECOMPENSE OF THE REWARD"**. The second, in verse 27, is his braving the king's wrath in the departure from Egypt ; and his firmness therein is ascribed to **"SEEING HIM WHO IS INVISIBLE"**. The third act, in verse 28, is the keeping of the Passover at God's command ; and this we are told he did **"LEST HE THAT DESTROYED THE FIRSTBORN SHOULD TOUCH THEM"**.

Thus we may learn that in Moses' creed there were at least three great clauses :

- 1st. That God's rewards are worth going in for.
- 2nd. That God Himself, though invisible, can be counted on as a very present help in trouble.
- 3rd. That the judgments of God are to be dreaded.

Let me ask, Have these truths the same power over us that they had over him ? I ask not if we believe them, for that we profess to do. But does our belief in them influence us when we have a choice to make, to such an extent that no earthly consideration is of weight as compared with them ? Does it hold us steadfastly to a course of action when everything outward pulls us in the opposite direction ? Does it make obedience to God's command a matter of course with us ? All this it did in the case of Moses ; but when we measure ourselves alongside him, most of us come far short.

How often in our decisions we have been guided almost exclusively by business gain, or social advancement, or some other form of self-pleasing ; and the question of what the Lord will most reward in the coming day has had very little to do with them. How often, even when we have decided on a right and godly course, we have allowed ourselves to be deflected from it by the fear of man, or by the difficulties of the way ; whereas if we had realised that the invisible God was with us, these things would have been of little account in our eyes. How often on the other hand, when we have turned from what the Lord commanded us to do, we have tried to persuade ourselves that somehow or other we would escape the bitter reaping of what we had sown. When our faith is measured by the foot-rule of James—the works which are produced by it ; some of us may be almost led to wonder if we are real believers at all.

As it was with Moses, so it was with Enoch, Noah, and others of Hebrews 11. They believed in a God **WHO IS**, Who abundantly rewards those that seek Him, and Who punishes those who turn their backs to Him. What effects their beliefs had upon their actions, this chapter has placed on record.

So too it was with the apostle Paul. He "looked not at the things which

are seen, but at the things which are not seen"; and since his light (?) affliction was working for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, he welcomed it, and gloried in it. He saw the Lord, not only on the Damascus Road, but many a time afterwards ; and the consciousness of His presence with him held him to a path, from which both the trials he knew to be before him, and the persuasions of his brethren might well have turned him. He knew also "the terror of the Lord", and it helped to keep him walking in the path of obedience.

May we be imitators of the faith of such men, as we consider the issue of their lives. Thus shall a like "good report" be obtained by us in heaven's roll of honour ; and we shall be able to sing with truth,

*"By faith in a glorified Christ on the throne
We give up the joys of the world to its own".*

But the faith of Moses went further than the truths which we have so far been considering, as we shall soon show. To the sufferings of the Israelites in Egypt there is applied in Hebrews 11 a remarkable expression, "THE REPROACH OF CHRIST"; and it is used of them in such a manner as to imply that Moses somehow connected it with them. For how else could it be said that he "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" ?

But in what way can these Egyptian afflictions be termed "the reproach of Christ" ? There appear to be only two possible explanations. One is that their history is typical of the history of Christ. That this was so there are many proofs ; among them being the citation by Matthew from Hosea of "Out of Egypt have I called My Son". In its connection in Hosea it plainly refers to Israel ; but Matthew just as clearly applies it to Christ. Yet the thought that their sufferings were to be a type of the afflictions of Christ could scarcely have been present in Moses' mind, so we must look for something more.

In reading through the Old Testament it becomes evident that God unfolded only gradually His purposes as to the coming Deliverer ; and that this is particularly true of the line of descent through which He was to come. It may be also noticed that, as God's purpose with regard to this became known, each revelation seemed to give Satan a fresh opportunity of trying to thwart it by venting his rage on the line or individual indicated. Thus the promise to Eve of "the Seed of the woman" is followed by the murder of Abel by Cain, who was "of that Wicked One". The promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are followed by the destruction of the male children in Egypt. The promise to David is followed by many attempts against David's line, the more prominent being the wiping out of the seed-royal by Athaliah in which only one little babe escaped, and the confederacy referred to in Isaiah, in the reign of Ahaz, to dethrone the House of David, and set up an individual called "the son of Tabeal" instead. Similarly, when the birth of Christ did actually take place, there was the destruction of the children of Bethlehem by Herod.

All this suggests the thought that the afflictions of the Israelites in Egypt were the outcome of Satan's rage against the people from whom the Deliverer was to arise, and were to that extent the reproach of Christ. And while it is unlikely that Moses understood their typical teaching, he could, and evidently did realise that these suffering slaves were the people

with whom the promise was linked and that it was better for him to take his stand with them in their misery, as one who looked for the coming Redeemer, than to enjoy for the little span of his earthly life the best that Egypt could give him, and then die without hope.

Thus we see in Moses, not only those definite beliefs as to God and His power to reward and punish, but also a real looking forward by faith to the fulfilment of His promise in the appearing of the Messiah. It was indeed this that energised those other truths with living power to control his actions, and to make him live for God and eternity. And the same is true for all the men of faith in Hebrews 11.

Many there are, even in these present days of unbelief, who hold sound doctrines, yet have never set their hope upon the Christ of God. This is manifest in the little power which the doctrines have over them. They live and act and die as those who belong to earth ; and their sound doctrines will not save them from the eternal judgment of God, any more than they are able to save them from their sins while here. Reader, do the doctrines, which you hold, hold you ? If not, it is because you have never been linked in life-giving faith with God's Great Deliverer.

CHAPTER XVIII

THREE GREAT WILDERNESS FAILURES

In Numbers 14:22 God charges the Israelites with having rebelled against Him "ten times"; and though that expression seems to be used in various Scriptures for an indefinite but large number (e.g. Neh. 4:12 ; Job 19:3), it would not be difficult to find ten actual instances of murmuring or disobedience in the wilderness, prior to the time when the words were spoken. (See Exo. 14:11; 15:24; 16:2; 16:20; 16, 27; 17:2; 32:8; Num. 11:1; 11:4; 14:1). Some of the occasions were, however, more serious than others, and there are three failures recorded in Numbers which stand out as worse, both in their character and in their effects, than any of the rest, with the exception of the idolatry of the golden calf at Sinai.

Of these the first was their unbelief on receiving the report of the spies (chap. 14), which resulted in the forty years' wanderings, and lost entrance into the promised land to that generation of Israelites. The second was the rebellion of Korah and his fellows (chap. 16), which caused the death of about 300 directly (vv. 33-35), and afterwards that of 14,700 of their sympathisers (v. 49), making 15,000 in all. The third was the association with the Midianites and Moabites at Baalpeor (chap. 25), and the evil effects of which were being felt long after the people had arrived in the land (Josh. 22:17).

It is in connection with these and the other wilderness rebellions that Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "These things . . . are written for our admonition" (1 Cor. 10:11), so we shall do well to study them carefully, that we may be preserved from falling into the same snares by which they were entrapped.

It is of interest to note what variety there was in these failures of theirs. In the three mentioned it was not a recurring again and again of one particular sin, as was the case with idolatry in their later history, but each is separate and distinct from the others, and the devil seems to have been

at a loss for some fresh way of getting at them. We hear people at times speak of their "besetting sin"; but do not the Scriptures rather teach that all sin is of that character ; so that while we are guarding against the evil to which we may think ourselves specially prone, Satan will perhaps ensnare us in something quite different, something, it may be, from which we fancied ourselves almost immune. Just as in some of the great sieges of history, entrance was gained at a point considered impregnable, and therefore the more carelessly guarded ; so we find, both in Scripture and from experience, that saints fail in the very thing which was their strong point – Abraham in his faith (Gen. 12:10-13 ; 16:2; 20:2) ; Moses in his meekness (Num. 20: 10) ; Peter in his boldness (Matt. 14: 30; 26: 70; Gal. 2: 12).

In the three instances before us, the sin in the first case was UNBELIEF, in the second it was PRIDE, and in the third what today we would call WORLD-CONFORMITY. And as we think of these, we seem to see before us the lineaments of our three well-known adversaries, the world, the flesh, and the devil ; the flesh in chap. 16 shrinking from conflict with the giants ; the devil in chap. 16 filling Korah and his friends with what has been called his favourite sin ; and the world in chap. 25 luring the Israelite young men into unhallowed alliances with its own people. In yet another way we may realise the variety which these failures present, when we consider that the first was against God directly, the second against the leaders God had appointed, and the third against His oath of separation from the world. It would not be too much to say that every failure which had manifested itself amongst the people of God from then till now has taken one or other of those three directions.

To fully understand the story of the sending of the spies and the rebellion that followed their report, we must turn to the first chapter of the book of Deuteronomy. Numbers 13 begins by telling us that the Lord said to Moses, "Send thou men, that they may search out the land"; and if we had no further light on the transaction than is contained in that chapter we should look upon it as originating solely with the Lord Himself. But in Deuteronomy 1 we read that when they came to Kadesh-Barnea (v. 19) on the southern border of the land, Moses said to them, "The Lord thy God hath set the land before thee ; go up and possess it". This would have been the proper course to pursue, but they said, "We will send men before us, and they shall search out the land" (v. 22). Moses acknowledges that their saying pleased him well (v. 23), and thus it is made clear that the Lord's words in Numbers 13:1 were merely of the nature of a permission to him and them to have their own way.

Evidently then, the unbelief and lack of confidence in God were already in their hearts, and were the cause of the suggestion that spies should be sent. There was no need for it whatever, since God Himself had "espied" the land for them (Ezek. 20: 6), and had told them that it was "flowing with milk and honey, the glory of all the lands". They had no reason to doubt either His word, or His ability to give them victory. Moses too appears to have shown weakness at this time in his ready acceptance of their plan ; and though we should not wish to read more into the connection than may possibly be meant, it is certainly a remarkable fact that the message by which he also was excluded from the land is set by himself in the very centre of the Lord's oath against the murmurers at Deuteronomy 1:37, although it was not actually announced until long afterwards on the

occasion recorded in Numbers 20:1-12.

The lesson for saints today in all this is well brought out in Hebrews 3 and 4, where the apostle, after quoting David's warning message based on the same incident in Psalm 95, "Today, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts", adds the solemn words, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of YOU an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God, but exhort one another daily . . . lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin".

Let us then honestly test ourselves on this point. Could it be possible that there is anything of this evil heart of unbelief in us? Are we completely satisfied with the way that God has led us and is now leading us? Or have we been, as it were, sending out spies with a view to shaping another course for ourselves? Certainly no fault can be found with the exercise of whatever intelligence God has given us, when we have arrangements to make, business, domestic, or other. But do we first give God His place in such matters? If so, one proof of it will be that we shall be clear from the tricks, and meannesses, and overreaching which men of the world at times use for their own advancement. We shall realise that they are not only sinful, but against our best interests in every sense. It is walking in practical obedience to the Word of God that evidences our trust in Him, and every act of disobedience is a vote of "no confidence" in His leadership.

CHAPTER XIX

THE REBELLION OF KORAH

From the narrative of failure through unbelief in Numbers 14 we turn now to the havoc wrought by pride in chapter 16.

Korah and his fellows were great men, "famous in the congregation". Like the fomenters of rebellion in antediluvian days, they are described as "men of renown". But great as they were, they unfortunately were greater still in their own estimation.

Their leader, Korah the Levite, had been chosen, as Moses reminded him, to minister in the service of the tabernacle; but his pride told him that he should have received higher honour still. His cousin Moses was above him; his cousin Aaron was above him, and he had not been given the place of head even in his own section of the tribe, for in chap. 3:30 we read that another cousin, Elizaphan, had been appointed to that dignity. As for his friends, Dathan, Abiram, and On, although they were descendants of Reuben, Jacob's firstborn son, they had been passed over entirely, so far as leadership was concerned.

So these men formed a league of malcontents, just as men of their type have done many a time since, and by their scheming they managed to get the greater part of the congregation to favour them (see v. 19). One of the manoeuvres by which they did this may easily be guessed at from their words to Moses in v. 3, "Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, . . . wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord". Here their real motive of self-aggrandisement is concealed under professed zeal for the interests of the rank and file of the people.

That in all this there are lessons for God's people today no one who

carefully reads his New Testament can doubt. Jude, when describing certain lawless men who would "creep in" among the saints in the last days says of them, "Woe unto them, for they have . . . perished in the gainsaying of Korah". And Paul, in his last letter to Timothy, deals with two men in particular, Hymenaeus and Philetus, who desired preeminence as Korah did, and who, like him, were willing to leave the path of truth in order to attain it. Yea, they would even overthrow God's foundation, had they been able, so that they might gain their ends. But, says the apostle, despite all such, "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, **THE LORD KNOWETH THEM THAT ARE HIS, and, LET EVERY ONE THAT NAMETH THE NAME OF CHRIST DEPART FROM INIQUITY**".

These sayings, which turn what he calls the "seal", show that Paul recognised a similarity between the upstart teachers of whom he is speaking and the rebels of Num. 16, because the former one is partly quoted from the LXX version of the 5th verse of that chapter, and the latter contains an evident allusion to its 26th verse.

The danger from such persons is always existent. Again and again, since the apostle's days, have men arisen, jealous of other leaders or teachers who had more standing among the saints than themselves, and willing not only to divide God's people, but even to barter the truth, if by so doing they might come to the front. And, sad to say, they can usually gain a following as did Korah, and "overthrow the faith of some" as did Hymanaeus and Philetus. The fact is there are always those to be found amongst us who naturally incline to side with any who, to use an Irishism, are "agin the government"; and since the Korahs of all times are willing to use the means of ingratiating themselves with others, which true men of God would not stoop to employ; they sometimes bring over the majority to their side. It is a remarkable thing that even after judgment had overtaken the leaders in Num. 16:31-35, a wave of sympathy for them broke out again at v. 41, and resulted in the death of no less than 14,700 of the sympathisers.

Even more remarkable, however, is the fact that Korah and his company appear to have actually set up a secession tabernacle in the encampment of Reuben for themselves. Read carefully vv. 24-27, noting the difference the passage shows in its use of the words "tabernacle" and "tents", each of which is found in it twice. "Tabernacle" is each time in the singular number, and is joined with the names of all three men; it is "the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan and Abiram" (vv. 24, 27). "Tents" on the other hand is in the plural, and is linked with the names of Dathan and Abiram only (v. 26 read with v. 25, and v. 27); for of course the "tent" of the Levite Korah was not in the camp of Reuben, but in that of the Levites themselves. When to these considerations we add also the fact that out of nearly 140 times that the Hebrew word here rendered "tabernacle" occurs in the O.T., at least 120 have reference to God's dwelling-place, there seems little room to doubt that something more than the dwellings of the Reubenites is suggested by its use in the passage.

Most of the divisions and secessions which have marred the history of the church of God have been brought about by no higher motives than those which influenced these men of olden time. Their story should therefore be a warning to each of us, "not to think of ourselves more highly than we

ought to think" (Rom. 12:3), and not to "follow a multitude to do evil" (Exod. 23:2). And if anyone should have been already ensnared by Satan to enter upon such a course, let him at least follow the example of the Reubenite On, who although joined with the others in v. 1, seems to have quietly slipped out of the company ere judgment fell on them, since his name appears no more.

One thing more we would refer to, ere passing on to the last of these great failures. In chap. 26:11, where this judgment of chap. 16 is recalled, it is specially stated that "the children of Korah died not" in it. No reason for this is given, either there or anywhere else, other than that it was an act of mercy on God's part toward them. But the points to which we have already been calling attention would at least suggest the manner in which it came about. The destruction that took place was twofold – fire consuming the men who dared to come before the Lord at His own tabernacle with their censers, while Dathan and Abiram, who refused (v. 12) to leave their home, were swallowed up alive with their families. But Korah's children, being some distance off, in their own Levite encampment, escaped both of these disasters, and were spared. Their descendants of a later day appear to have learned a lesson from what befell their ancestor and his friends, as may be seen from the sentiments attributed to them in the Kohathite psalms. In Psalm 84 particularly, they are shown satisfied with God's Tabernacle (v. 1), as well as with the work allotted them as Singers (v. 4) and Doorkeepers (v. 10); and they desire to have no truck with "the tents of wickedness" (v. 10. Compare Num. 16:26). May each of us ever be likeminded.

CHAPTER XX

BAALPEOR

We now come to the last of these sad experiences, the mingling with the Moabites and Midianites recorded in Num. 25. How serious a matter in God's sight this was, we may learn, not only from the plague sent upon them at the time, in which 24,000 of them perished, but also from the references made to it in later Scriptures.

First there is Numbers 31, in which vengeance is executed on the Midianites for ensnaring Israel. The part which their women had in the matter is specially noted there, and also the fact that they had acted on the counsel of Balaam (v. 16), who himself was slain on that occasion (v. 8).

Passing the solemn warning of Moses to the people in Deut. 4:3, based on the judgment which overtook "the men that followed Baalpeor", we come to Josh. 22:17, where the leaders of Israel are expostulating with the two and a half tribes concerning the great altar they had set up by Jordan, and they ask, "Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, FROM WHICH WE ARE NOT CLEANSED UNTIL THIS DAY?" That is how they felt about the matter after eight or ten years had elapsed.

Again, in Psalm 106:28, 29, the scene is recalled in the words, "They joined themselves also unto Baalpeor, and are the sacrifices of the dead: thus they provoked Him to anger with their inventions, and the plague brake in upon them".

But most remarkable perhaps of all is the reference in Hos. 9:10 (R.V.),

"I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness ; I saw your fathers as the firstripe in the fig tree at her first season : but they came to Baalpeor, and consecrated themselves to the shameful thing ; and became abominable, like that which they loved". Here we find that what had been as refreshing to the heart of God as "grapes in the wilderness", became an abomination in His sight. BUT WHY ? Not because of the incident of the golden calf at Sinai ; nor through their frequent murmurings, which culminated in the unbelief of Num. 14 and the rebellion of Num. 16 ; but simply by associating with the people of Moab and Midian, and thus being led to take part in their idolatrous religion.

This was what the counsel of Balaam brought about, and lest any should think of it as a danger not to be apprehended in our own times, let us remind ourselves that "the doctrine of Balaam" was working havoc in the church of Pergamos in Rev. 2:14. So much, indeed, was this the case that the "sword" (compare Num. 22:31 and 31:8) was again about to be used for the Lord says, "I will fight against them with the sword of my mouth".

It is interesting to notice how invariably Satan sets to work to spoil, if possible, anything in which God is said to have found pleasure. When the earthly creation was completed, and Adam set over it, we read, "God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). But in chap. 3 the devil puts an end to this happy state of things, until it has to be said of God, "He drove out the man". Similarly in the case of Israel, that in which God had found refreshing, as Hos. 9:10 tells us, "became abominable, like that which they loved".

We may think too of Job, concerning whom God said, "There is none like him in the earth". Immediately Satan plots his ruin ; and if he did not succeed, it certainly was not due to any lack of energy or malevolence on his part. And we may even think of the blessed One of whom God bore witness, "This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"; and may remember that the very next words are "Then was Jesus led up . . . to be tempted of the devil" (Matt. 3:17 ; 4:1). Here, of course, his defeat was complete ; and God could later repeat His testimony (Matt. 17:5), with the added "Hear ye Him", in which He calls upon others to share in the delight which He finds in Him.

When in Acts 2 a new development takes place, and the beginning is seen of that wonderful Building, Body, and Bride, in which very largely the Lord Jesus "shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied", Satan is on the alert at once. Not only does he induce persecution from without, but he seeks to cause discord within (Acts 6:1, etc.); and as each new company of the saints is formed, he assaults it in turn. We see his efforts particularly successful in the case of the Corinthians, for he has them (just like the Israelites at Peor) hand in glove with their unsaved neighbours, and sitting with them at meat in the idol temples.

One of the most encouraging starts made by any company was that of the Thessalonians, of whom Paul could recall with joy their "work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope, . . . in the sight of God and our Father" (1 Thess. 1:3). Yet even here the apostle, who was not ignorant of Satan's devices, and in dread concerning them, "lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain" (1 Thess. 3:5).

Balaam, at the behest of the king of Moab, had endeavoured to curse

God's people ; and although he did not succeed in that, he discovered (possibly through the very sayings God had put in his mouth) how they might be ensnared so as to bring a curse on themselves. He had been caused to say, "Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Num. 23:9); and for a man of his ability it was not difficult to evolve from this a plot for their ruin. "Let us", he may have said to Balak, "not suffer them to dwell alone. It is altogether too narrow and bigoted. Let us get them to freely associate with us, and we shall see what the result will be".

So it is today. Those who formerly persecuted us become friendly, and invite us to their religious festivals, as the young women of Moab did the Israelite young men. And not a few saints who kept true to God's Word and walked on the path of separation from the world while persecution raged, have been enticed by these friendly overtures to turn aside from it, and to build again the things which once they destroyed.

It might be thought out of keeping with the present dispensation of grace if we expressed a wish that a Phineas might again stand up (Psa. 106:30) to vindicate with his javelin the honour of God. But we certainly do need to have young men raised up among us, marked by purpose of heart as Daniel was, who will be turned aside neither by reproaches, nor by blandishments, from carrying out personally, and teaching others to carry out the commandments of the Lord.

CHAPTER XXI

THREE WILDERNESS LESSONS

We have considered the threefold object which God had in view in bringing Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness, their worship, fellowship, and service. We have also looked at three great failures of theirs while in the wilderness, resulting from unbelief, pride, and world conformity. Let us now think of three lessons which their forty years' wilderness experience was designed of God to teach them. For while it is clear from Num. 14:22, 23, etc., that it was as punishment for their sin the desert wanderings were imposed on them, it is just as clear from Deut. 8:2-6 that God meant these years to be a time of training for the nation.

We shall better understand the matter if we remember that during this period there were two separate generations of Israelites with which God was dealing ; the generation of His wrath, that is, the older men who were gradually being exterminated ; and the generation of His mercy, who had left Egypt as children, or had meanwhile been born in the wilderness itself, and who were being trained to take possession of the promised land. We hear much from time to time of the failures of the former, but not so much as perhaps we should of that rising generation which afterwards, under Joshua, conquered the Canaanites, a generation of which Phinehas and Othniel were samples, a generation that on the whole was perhaps the sturdiest and most valiant which Israel ever produced. On them the wilderness training was not altogether lost.

It is, as we have said, in Deut. 8 that this educative aspect of the forty years' experience is most fully brought out, and in that passage three great subjects for learning are given prominence, HUMILITY (vv. 2, 3), TRUST

IN GOD (vv. 3, 4), and OBEDIENCE TO HIS COMMANDMENTS (vv. 2, 6) ; opposite exactly of the pride, unbelief, and world conformity, to which the failures that we have been considering were due. They are lessons which every successive generation of God's people requires to learn, and lessons so difficult that even forty years of Christian experience have not sufficed to make some of us proficient in them.

The record in the gospels of our Lord's forty days' temptation in the wilderness has many interesting links with other scriptures, not the least important of which is with this forty years' testing of Israel. There is a parallelism between them, not fanciful, but real and purposed, being indeed suggested in the narrative itself by the fact that Christ's three replies to Satan are quotations taken from this part of Deuteronomy, in which Moses is recalling to the people how God had led them.

That not only individual Israelites, such as Moses, Joshua, David and Solomon, but the nation as a whole typified Christ, is made plain in many scriptures. In Isa. 49:3, for example, He is addressed as "Israel, in whom I will be glorified", evidently by contrast with the nation which had failed to be to the glory of their God. And the words of Hosea 11:1, "Called My Son out of Egypt", which primarily refer to the Exodus, are stated in Matt. 2:15 to have been "fulfilled" when Jesus was taken there and brought back again by His parents. God had proclaimed Israel as His Son in Exod. 4:22, "Israel is My son, My first born", just as He afterwards, though of course in a deeper sense, proclaimed Christ to be His Son in Matt. 3:17, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased". And it is of interest that Israel began their forty years of testing by the "baptism" (1 Cor. 10:2) of the Red Sea ; while Christ's forty days of temptation followed His baptism in Jordan.

Now the three great assaults made by Satan on our Lord had to do with matters very similar to those wherein the nation's failure in the wilderness was most marked, and also to those wherein God was instructing them during that period. The first had regard to His trust in His Father for the supply of His food. Like Him, Israel had been "suffered to hunger" (Deut. 8:3) ; but they had murmured thereat (Exod. 16:3), so unwilling were they to learn the lesson that "Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord" (Matt. 8:3 and Matt. 4:4). And the parallelism is displayed even in the fact that while Christ's need was ultimately supplied by angels ministering to Him (Matt. 4:11), that of the Israelites was met by what in Psalm 18:25 is called "angels' food".

The second test, "cast thyself down", in Matt. 4:6 was in a sense the opposite to the first. For while the one was to lack of trust, or unbelief, the other was to a counterfeit of real trust, or what might be called presumption. Yet the two are closely allied, for in the very same chapter in which Israel failed so grievously through unbelief (Num. 14:11) they also "presumed" (v. 44) to go forward when God had warned them against it, and brought further disaster on themselves. No wonder that Moses had to give them the very message wherewith Jesus repelled this attack of Satan, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Deut. 6:16 and Matt. 4:7).

The last assault had to do with worship, "All these things will I give Thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me". Christ did not fall down to worship Satan ; but the Israelites very soon fell down before the golden

calf, and they later joined the Midianites in their idolatrous worship at Baalpeor. The Lord's final reply to the Devil is taken from the warning Moses had to give them on this subject of idolatry in Deut. 6:13-15, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve".

Thus we have before us "for our learning", on the one hand the failures of the Israelites, or at least the older generation of them, with regard to these great lessons of FAITH, HUMILITY, and OBEDIENCE ; and on the other the perfect example of Jesus, who "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin", and who, because "He Himself hath suffered being tempted, is able to succour them that are tempted". May the Lord enable us to profit by the study of both.

CHAPTER XXII

THINGS TO BE REMEMBERED

In the early part of Deut. 8, which, as we have shown mentions three great lessons that God designed to teach Israel by the forty years of wilderness experience, there occurs a word deserving of special notice. It is the word "Remember", found in the exhortation, "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years".

Deuteronomy is one of the many books of the Bible which contain what might be called key-words, that is, words and phrases reiterated with unusual frequency, consideration of which will assist us to understand the book as a whole. And of those found in it, one of the simplest and oftenest repeated is this word "Remember", which occurs some fourteen times, and in all the occurrences but one is used in exhortations to the Israelites to remember certain things connected with their past history. In addition to this, we find the word "Forget" used at least nine times in warnings to them not to forget those same things.

The repetition of such words may serve to remind us that the matter contained in Deuteronomy was spoken and written by Moses, not during the course of the wanderings, but at their end, which was at the close of his own life. In these circumstances the exhortations to remember and the warnings not to forget, on the one hand their needs and failures, and on the other God's deliverances and mercies, are just what might be expected.

These calls to remembrance are by no means confined to the Old Testament or to Israel, but are met with also in the New addressed to ourselves. For example we find two in the letters to the Seven Churches in Rev. 2 and 3, "Remember therefore from whence that art fallen", spoken to Ephesus, and "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard", spoken to Sardis. The one Church is charged to remember its own failure, the other to remember the great privileges it has had. And this being so we may read the exhortations to remember, contained in Deuteronomy with the expectation that we shall find something in our personal experience to compare with most of them.

The last one, in the order in which they occur in the book, is at chap. 32:7, 8, but is of such a character that it may well be remembered first. It calls on them to remember how God had chosen them for His own, and had arranged for their welfare, long before they existed as a people. When in "the days of old", soon after the Deluge, He was dividing to the

nations their inheritance in the earth, He kept in mind all the while the needs of His people yet to be, and "set the bounds of the peoples, according to the number of the children of Israel". Does not this remind us of the yet grander statement concerning ourselves in Rom. 8:28, 29, "All things work together for good to . . . them who are the called according to His purpose; for whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate . . . ; moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called" ? And as we are thus led to look backwards at the perfection of God's arrangements for us in the past shall we not find ourselves encouraged to add confidently the further words, "and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified" ?

But there was another past than that of God's purpose concerning them, for Israel to look backwards to – the bitter past of their Egyptian bondage. No less than five times in Deuteronomy are they exhorted to remembrance of this, and each time as an incentive to obedience to one or other of the Lord's statutes. The first of these is at chap. 5:15, in a passage where Moses is repeating to the people the Ten Commandments spoken by the mouth of God at Sinai. When he comes to the fourth, the command to keep the Sabbath Day, instead of appending to it the reason annexed on that occasion, "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, etc.", he introduces a new reason. "And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out . . . therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath Day".

Similarly when instructions are being given: (2) as to keeping the annual feasts, chap. 16:12; (3) as to their treatment of their poor brethren who had become their slaves through debt, chap. 15:15; (4) as to the legal rights of the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, chap. 24:18; (5) as to leaving for these the gleanings of their harvest and vintage, chap. 24:22; in each case there is added, "Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt". Such remembrance should surely stir up in them humility, obedience, and compassion, unless they were callous indeed; and that we too must be, if there is in us no response to God's "Wherefore remember that . . . ye were without Christ, being aliens . . . having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:11, 12).

Following these reminders of their bondage, we get in chap. 7:18, "Remember what the Lord thy God did unto Pharaoh; and in chap. 16:3, "Remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt". Then with regard to desert experience, we have the comprehensive "Remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness", chap. 8:2; and on the other side of matters "Remember, and forget not, how thou provokedest the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness", chap. 9:7. As for separate incidents, we read, "Remember what the Lord thy God did unto Miriam by the way", chap. 24:9; and again, "Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way", chap. 25:17.

In all these there is much that can be learned for our own profit, but which we cannot now dwell upon at length. We would, however, say this, Let us beware lest, like the Israelites, we find it easier to "remember" the fish, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic (Num. 11:5), than to think upon, either our bondage and deliverance, or God's mercies to us since then.

And lastly, as a fitting conclusion to all the other "Remembers" of

Deuteronomy, we would quote chap. 8:18, 19, "Remember the Lord thy God, for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth; . . . and it shall be, if thou do at all forget the Lord thy God, . . . I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish".

CHAPTER XXIII

OUT OF THE MIDST OF THE FIRE

In our last chapter reference was made to words and phrases which are frequently repeated in the book of Deuteronomy. Another of these is the expression quoted in our title, "Out of the midst of the fire". It is found in chapter 4:12, 15, 33, 36; chapter 5:4, 22, 24, 66; chapter 9:10, and chapter 10:4; ten times in all; while its only occurrence in the Scriptures elsewhere is at Ezek. 1:4. It is, however, but one mode of expressing the idea, which appears often enough in various forms throughout the Word of God, namely the setting forth of the presence of God in holiness or in judgment as fire. The merest reference to the many passages where this is done would occupy much space, so we shall mention but a few of those that are more intimately associated with the phrase we have quoted.

In Exodus 19 we get the record of the event itself, to which the expression points back, the Lord's manifestation of Himself at Sinai, when He gave to Israel what is called in Deut. 33:2 His "fiery law". There at verse 18 we are told that "Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire"; and at a later stage it is said in Exod. 24:17 that "The sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount, in the eyes of the children of Israel".

This last statement is doubtless the ground of the one made at Deut. 4:24, "The Lord thy God is a consuming fire"; which in turn is quoted and employed in a New Testament connection at Heb. 12:29, where the words are "OUR God is a consuming fire". The thought in it is also made use of in several expressions of Isaiah, as at Isa. 29:6; 30:27, 30, and 33:14, in all of which the phrase "devouring fire" is the same as that rendered "consuming fire" in Deuteronomy. The significance of the question asked in the last of these, Isa. 33:14, by the sinners and hypocrites of Zion, "Who among us shall dwell with (the ONE who is) devouring fire" is not always recognised, and as a result the force of the entire passage is lost, as well as the link between it and other passages such as Malachi 3:1, 2, and 4:1; Matt. 3:11, 12; and those in Exodus already referred to.

Israel in Egypt, at the beginning of their history, cried to God for deliverance from their oppressors (Exod. 2:23). God answered them, and His judgment came down upon the Egyptians as fire devours the "stubble" (Exod. 15:7). But the Israelites soon found that the God they had called to their aid was to themselves also a God of consuming fire. He revealed Himself thus to them at Sinai, so they had to remove and stand afar off in fear of His presence (Exod. 20:18-21). And later He manifested Himself as fire in consuming Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1, 2), the complaining multitude (Num. 11:1), and the rebellious worshippers (Num. 16:35).

Now let us place alongside this Isaiah 33, which is doubtless a prophecy of their future history. Again Israel, but this time in Zion, cry to God

for salvation in their time of trouble (verse 2). And again God answers, and His judgment comes down on the "peoples" (verses 10-12 R.V.) like fire devouring "stubble" and "thorns". But, as of yore, those who have called on Him for help discover that to them too He can be "devouring fire" (verse 14); and the sinners and hypocrites amongst them are no more able to endure His presence than at Sinai.

The similarity between the two scenes becomes the more striking when we remember that in Heb. 12 Sinai and Sion are brought together; and though the darkness and gloom of the one are contrasted with the light and glory of the other, yet, as we have already pointed out, the chapter ends with the solemn warning, "Let US have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, for OUR God is a consuming fire".

If the occurrences of the expression "OUT OF THE MIDST OF THE FIRE" in Deuteronomy are studied, it will become evident that its frequent reiteration has a twofold object. On the one hand it is designed to impress upon the people the high privilege that is theirs. See for example chap. 4:33, "Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire", and chap. 5:4, "The Lord talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire". On the other hand it sounds a note of warning, as in chap. 4:15, "Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves, for . . . the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire".

That privilege and responsibility ever go together is the teaching of all the Word of God; and the more fully the Lord reveals Himself to any, the more fiercely will the fire of His jealousy blaze against sin and failure on their part. It is as He said to Israel in Amos 3:2, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities".

If then the saints of the present day have even higher privileges and still closer relationship to the Lord than Israel ever had, should this be made, as we fear it sometimes is, an excuse for complacency and carelessness on their part? Should they not ever keep in mind the principle that "unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required", and that "if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, MUCH MORE shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven"? Should they not the more diligently seek grace to serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, knowing that, whether at Sinai or at Sion, the unchanging One, Israel's God and OUR God, is a consuming fire?

CHAPTER XXIV

SAYINGS IN THE HEART

Another expression characteristic of Deuteronomy is found in some half dozen passages of it, which suggest what the Israelites might, in certain circumstances, "say in their hearts". These sayings are none of them very wise, yet many a time God's people, then and now, have said in their hearts something like them. And since it is "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh", they in most cases soon arise to the lips, and serve to show the state of heart of the person concerned, but serve no other good

purpose. Rather are they as "roots of bitterness" whereby many others, as well as the speaker of them, are defiled.

This was what Asaph feared in Psalm 73, when after referring to some thoughts of discontent which had been in his mind, he adds, "If I say, I will speak thus, behold I offend against the generation of Thy children". So he kept his thoughts to himself until in the Sanctuary he got deliverance from them ; which, doubtless, he got all the speedier on that account. It was a good principle, and worthy of our imitation, lest we be found passing on to our brethren and sisters that which will only wither their souls. When we cannot speak what is "good to the use of edifying", we had better be silent.

The first of the sayings in the heart is at chapter 7:17, and it is one of UNBELIEF : "If thou shalt say in thine heart, These nations are more than I ; how can I dispossess them?" Can we imagine it possible that those who had so recently experienced God's power in delivering them from the mightiest nation of that time might speak thus ? Yes, more than possible, for it was the very thing of which those of them who fell in the wilderness had been already guilty. "WE BE NOT ABLE to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we", they had said (Num. 13:31); while Caleb, who had confidence in his God, said, "WE ARE WEL1. ABLE". And not only was it possible in their case, but in our own also ; for how often since then has a similar "HOW CAN I" arisen in the hearts of God's people when He had shown them the way in which He wants them to walk, or the work that He wants them to do. But the answer which He here gave in advance to Israel will serve for us still, and will remove any excuse for disobedience. It was, "The Lord thy God is among you, a mighty God and terrible" (v. 21). While He is with us there are no impossibilities.

The second saying occurs in chapter 8:17, and is one of SELF-CONFIDENCE. "And thou say in thine heart, My power, and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth". The speaker has now arrived at the opposite extreme. Before the thing was attempted he said, "How can I"; but when it has been done he says, "I did it myself". How like to us again this is ; to seek to rob God of the glory of what He has wrought, and to take it for ourselves. But how unlike to the apostle who said, "Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me".

Having been set right as to this in the verses that follow, another and more insidious thought presents itself to his mind ; and at chapter 9:4 we come to the saying of SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS. "Speak not thou in thine heart saying, "For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land". Here he seems prepared to give God the glory of bringing him in ; yet he thinks that it has been done because he deserves it. And let us remember that since this, like the others, is a saying of the heart, it may be present in the hearts of some whose lips are saying quite the opposite, and expressing the utmost self-abasement. Can anything be more hateful in the Lord's sight than that the lips should pray the prayer of the publican, while the heart says, "God I thank Thee that I am not as other men" ?

In chapter 15:9 we get the fourth saying, which is one of SELFISHNESS and greed. "Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart saying, The seventh year, the year of release is at hand ; and thine eye be

evil against thy poor brother". This spirit, which counts up how much we shall lose by it, before we obey God or help our brethren, is not yet dead. Rather has the character of the times in which we live increased it to an alarming degree. We should do well, therefore, to have it impressed upon us, as it is here, that it springs from a "wicked heart". The poor widow whom the Lord commended had cast into the treasury "all her living" (Mark 12:24) although, had she been so inclined, she might have questioned in her heart, "What am I to live on afterwards". Or she might have thought, "What is the use of putting money where it may get into the hands of the scribes, who are only too glad to devour widows' houses" (v. 20). Had she thus reasoned, it is unlikely that the two mites would ever have been put in.

The fifth saying we find in chapter 18:21, one which betrays LACK OF DISCERNMENT. "If thou say in thine heart, how shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken". This lack was never, perhaps, more prevalent among the Lord's people than it is today. It is given as a mark of the Lord's sheep that "they know His voice", but one might feel like saying that if this be so, His true flock must be very small. What is generally sought for and accepted is ministry that pleases the flesh, by its cleverness, or by its fluency, or by its power to amuse ; while a message from God, especially if it crosses our own preferences, or touches our own sore spot, is turned away from and scorned. In Jeremiah's days they said, "As for the word that thou has spoken unto us in the Name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee ; but we will certainly do whatsoever thing that goeth forth out of our own mouth" (Jer. 44:16, 17).

The last saying, and the worst of them all, is that of the man in chapter 29:19, who not only refuses to bow to the message of God, but who, even when he has listened to the solemn curse upon disobedience, has the PRESUMPTION to say in his heart, "I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst" (i.e. though I gratify to the full, when the opportunity comes my way, the lusts that are in me). No wonder that it should be followed by the pronouncing upon him of more terrible judgment still, is it not remarkable that a man, who almost certainly stood listening to Moses that day, did something very similar to what the words suggest, within the space of a few weeks ? Ignoring the curse on the one who took of the Jericho spoils, Achan appears to have said in his heart, "I shall have peace, though I gratify the covetous thirst that is in me, which in the wilderness I had no opportunity to gratify". So he took the wedge of gold, and the silver, and the goodly Babylonish garment, and having hid them, thought that all was well. But the Lord had been watching him, and all Israel suffered until the matter was brought to the light, and the sin judged.

Our God says to us, "KEEP THY HEART WITH ALL DILIGENCE, FOR OUT OF IT ARE THE ISSUES OF LIFE".

CHAPTER XXV

FREEWILL OFFERINGS

Read Exodus 35:29 ; 1 Chronicles 29:5, 6 ; Ezra 2:68 ; 3:6 ;
Judges 5:2, 9 ; 2 Chronicles 17:16 ; Nehemiah 11:2

Some of our brethren seem very much at home when explaining the typical teaching of the Levitical sacrifices, and can set before us with great clearness the meaning of each little detail in the laws concerning them. But in the above verses we have a group of Old Testament offerings of which we do not hear much, yet which in their way are quite as important for our instruction. In each passage there occurs the Hebrew word which means "freewill offerings", but in each it occurs in a somewhat unusual connection.

The first three have as their subject the people offering themselves and their gifts for the building of God's sanctuary ; in the next two they offer themselves willingly to fight the Lord's battles ; and in the last some are mentioned who put His interests first even in their choice of a residence.

As the epistle to the Hebrews sets forth the Antitypes of the Levitical sacrifices, so it also suggests the New Testament counterpart of these other offerings, when it says in chap. 13:16, "To do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased". Compare also the exhortation of Romans 12:1, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service".

In this latter passage the reference to the "living sacrifice" is followed by a list of the various ways in which our presented bodies may be used for God, according to our "differing gifts"; and so in Exodus 35, the first of our text scriptures, we have no less than two lists to show us how varied is the work of the Lord, and to take from us the excuse that because we cannot do one particular thing we cannot be expected to do anything. In verses 5-9 we have the things which God desired them to give. Everyone in Israel might not have gold or silver, but by considering this list they would be sure to find something they had, that would fulfil some "necessary use" (Titus 3:14) in the building of God's dwelling place. Again in verses 11-19 there is a catalogue of the work God required to be done ; and while it was not given to every Israelite to have the skill of Bezaleel or Aholiab, each one as he or she heard the forty or more items mentioned, might find amongst them the very job they had ability to do. The chief thing was that they should present themselves as freewill offerings first of all ; they would then without difficulty find something to give and something to do.

This was also the important thing in 1 Chron. 29. David asked the question, "Who then offereth himself as a freewill offering, to fill his hand this day with service unto the Lord ?" And in Exodus, so here, a response beyond all expectation was made. David himself, though he had the tremendous concerns of his kingdom to occupy him, could say, "I have prepared with all MY MIGHT for the house of my God"; and in the next verse he gives us the reason, "because I have set MY AFFECTION to the house of my God".

Thus, in later days, it was also with the saints of Macedonia, as described in 2 Cor. 8. Paul says there that they had done more than he expected ;

for they "first gave their own selves unto the Lord, and unto us by the will of God". It was themselves first, and then their substance. Urging the Corinthians to imitate them, he says, "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not". God does not except from us what we have not got, but He has a claim upon what we have.

In the 4th and 5th chapters of Judges there is another aspect of this truth. Things in Israel had become very different from what they were in Moses' time. On account of their sins the people had been subjected to the longest and bitterest bondage which they had experienced since they had come into the land. Deliverance was urgently needed, and it came. But when did it come? Chapter 5:2 supplies the answer. It was "when the people offered themselves as freewill offerings", and when as in verse 9 we further read, "the governors in Israel offered themselves as freewill offerings among the people". Well it would be for us today if there were more of this spirit amongst the people of God in general; and if we had more "governors" of this type, men willing to do anything however humble, so long as it helps the Lord's service and warfare. If such men were not offered a "commission" they were quite ready to volunteer "among the people" for service "in the ranks".

Amasiah the son of Zichri, mentioned in 2 Chron. 17:16, appears to have been of this class. He is third in the list of Jehoshaphat's captains, but there is something said of him that is not said of any other. Some of them led a bigger array of men than he did, but no service could be done from a higher motive than his. We are told of him that he "offered himself as a freewill offering", not merely to Jehoshaphat, but "unto the Lord". This as we have seen in the case of the Macedonians, was the right way of doing; first "unto the Lord", and then "unto us by the will of God". The others may have gone the same round of military duties as Amasiah did, because of loyalty to Jehoshaphat's person, or from a sense of duty, or even because of a warlike disposition. But he did it because he believed it to be the work the Lord had for him to do; it was for the Lord's land, and for the Lord's people.

In Neh. 11:2 we have a very interesting example of how far real devotedness to the Lord will take us. A certain number of Israelites offered themselves as freewill offerings to dwell at Jerusalem. They agreed to live there, not because they preferred the city to the country, not because they could make more money there, but because they realised that it was for the Lord's interests that they should do so. In 1 Chron. 4:23 there is a beautiful statement which deserves to be placed alongside this, "These were those that dwelt among plains and hedges; there they dwelt with the king for his work". They dwelt in the country, as the others dwelt in the town, not for love of it, but for the sake of the king's business.

In view of such examples we may well ask how it is with ourselves? Do I dwell in town because I believe the Lord would have me there? Do you live in the country because you feel that you can best serve Him in that sphere? Do we ever think of the matter in that way, or have our own selfish interests and preferences all to do with settling it for us? Brother X is about to leave A and go to B. Is there an Assembly of the Lord's people in B? He does not know, and has not inquired. And who is to take his Sunday school class in A, or do the little service for the saints

that he was accustomed to do ? He does not know that either. Why then is he going to B ? Simply because there is more money to be made there, and the attraction of this is so great that things of infinitely more importance have been forgotten.

In Titus 3:14, to which reference has already been made, there is a command which deals with this matter : "Let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful". The "OURS ALSO" in this charge is the key to the understanding of it. It seems to set some people alongside others already mentioned, but who ? Reading the previous verse we find that the apostle is there asking Titus personally to bring on their journey two preachers whom he names, and to see that nothing is wanting to them. The verb "bring" of that verse is in the singular number. But this sort of work is not meant to be the burden or privilege of one only ; and therefore Paul adds verse 14, which may be freely rendered and paraphrased thus: "Not only so act yourself, Titus, BUT (Gr. de) let ALSO our people in general learn to maintain good works (or as in the margin, "honest occupations"), for THE (Gr. tas) necessary needs which arise from time to time in connection with the Lord's work, that they may not be without fruit". The linking of verse 14 to verse 13 by means of "BUT" and "ALSO" and "THE" implies that the "NECESSARY USES" are, in the first instance, of a similar kind to that described in verse 13 ; and not, as is usually thought, to the supplying of the saints' personal requirements. To apply the phrase to the latter only, robs the verse of its beauty, spoils its connection, and renders meaningless its last clause, "that ye be not unfruitful". It is God's will that we should do our daily work, not merely to provide our daily food, but with a view to helping on His work in every way we can. A similar thought is found in Eph. 4:29, "Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good". It might have been expected that this would conclude with "that he may provide for his own needs honestly"; but no, it is "that he may have to give to him that needeth". In both the passages God, and His work, and His people come first ; and our daily business, whatever it may be, is to be carried on with this in view. It is the old command of the Lord over again, "Seek ye FIRST the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you".

In closing, we may again ask David's question : "WHO THEN OFFERETH HIMSELF AS A FREEWILL OFFERING, TO FILL HIS HAND THIS DAY WITH SERVICE TO THE LORD ?"

CHAPTER XXVI

'THE PLACE WHICH THE LORD THY GOD SHALL CHOOSE'

In the words quoted above we have an expression which is as characteristic of Deuteronomy, and at the same time as interesting as any that we have yet considered. Although it is not found in it until the 12th chapter, it occurs there no less than six times, and in the entire book twenty-one times, of which nine have the final explanatory clause, "TO PUT HIS NAME THERE", while in the others it is evidently to be understood.

The subject of the Name of the Lord in relation to His people is a very big one. Indeed, in a sense it is as big as the Scriptures themselves, for God's Name implies His character, in so far as that has been revealed to us. Even to merely quote the passages, which have a definite bearing upon it, will fill many pages. We should have to begin at least as early as Gen. 4:26, where men began to call upon His Name and to call themselves by it, as the margin of the A.V. has it, for both things were doubtless true. And we could not finish till Rev. 22:4, where those who are God's "workmanship" (Eph. 2:10) are seen a completed and perfected job, upon which the great Worker is not ashamed to impress His Name; even though some of them in the past had so acted as to cause that Name to be blasphemed among His enemies (2 Sam. 12:14; Romans 2:24, etc.). Between these extremes we should have to note the many places in which calling upon His Name is mentioned as being a marked feature in the testimony of some of the greatest of His servants, of Abraham, and Isaac (Gen. 12:8; 26:25), of Samuel and David (Psalms 99:6; 116:2, 4), and of others. Also, the many passages in which the Lord acts, or is called upon to act, in deliverance, etc. "for His Name's sake", in order that it may not be dishonoured (Josh. 7:9; 1 Sam. 12:22, etc.); and on the other hand, the many in which, as already mentioned, His people had themselves acted so as to dishonour His Name.

With all these and many more in mind, we might, perhaps, be in a better position to understand how much is involved in the Third Commandment, "Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His Name in vain", and how much in the Lord's commendation of those "that thought upon His Name" (Mal. 3:16), and of those that had "not denied His Name" (Rev. 3:8). We shall also realise more fully the importance and the sacredness of the "place where the Lord hath chosen to put His Name", and of the place "where two or three are gathered together unto His Name", the O.T. material centre, and the N.T. spiritual centre of gathering for His people.

The 12th of Deuteronomy, where this expression, "The place which the Lord shall choose to put His Name there", is first given prominence, is in many ways a remarkable chapter. As well as its six references to the above, the careful reader will notice its three times repeated "Take heed to thyself" (vv. 13, 19, 30), and the contrast that is emphasised in it between doing "every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes" (v. 8), and "doing that which is right in the eyes of the Lord" (vv. 25, 28, R.V.). He may remark also the similarity of wording between verse 4, "Ye shall not do so unto the Lord your God", and the opening clause of verse 31, "Thou shalt not do so unto the Lord thy God", and may note that while the words are alike, the point in view is somewhat different. In the former it is that of not worshipping the Lord in the PLACES where the Canaanites had worshipped their idols; but in the latter it is that of not worshipping Him after the MANNER in which they had worshipped.

The central portion of Deuteronomy, from the beginning of chapter 5 to the end of chapter 26, is occupied by one long address of Moses to the people, but this divides itself readily into two sections; chapters 5-11, in which are laid down broad and general principles; and chapters 12-26, where particular circumstances and matters, with which the Israelites would have to deal when once they entered the land, are separately taken up.

At the head of the latter section our chapter stands ; and, fittingly enough, it is concerned mainly with the objects of worship, the places of worship, and the modes of worship, which they would find prevalent in the country that they were about to occupy. There was to be no toleration of Canaanitish religion, and there was to be no imitation of it. Not only were they to destroy the gods, even to their very "names" (v. 3), but also the centres where they were worshipped (v. 2), and the forms of that worship (vv. 30, 31). Not only were they to serve the Lord their God alone, but the place and the manner of their doing so were to be of His choosing and not theirs.

With regard to both these points, the after history of Israel was a record of continual failures. The "new cart" of David (2 Sam. 6:3), and the "great altar" of Ahaz (2 Kings 16:15) are but samples of many similar departures from God's order ; while the statement in Neh. 8:17 that, from the days of Joshua until then, the Feast of Tabernacles had never once been kept in the manner which God had prescribed, shows how lightly even great and good men, during the preceding centuries, had treated His instructions on such matters. Nor need this cause surprise to us, for the history of the Church has been in this respect a repetition of that of Israel. Truths which lie on the very surface of the Acts and the Epistles were entirely overlooked by those who in other respects were mighty leaders among the people of God ; and when rediscovered, as it were, by Nehemiahs of these latter days, are kicked against and resented by many who withal claim to be lovers of the Lord.

As for the place where God chose to put His Name, Shiloh at first (Jer. 7:12), and ultimately Zion (2 Chron. 6:20), His command in that matter was flouted completely, not only by the wicked kings and people, who worshipped idols and raised altars to them in all parts of the land (2 Kings 17:10), but also by those who served "the Lord their God only" (2 Chron. 33:17), yet sacrificed to Him in the "high places", instead of in the place of His own choice.

In passing it may be as well to point out that an understanding of the difference between these two classes, and between their respective errors will "reconcile", as the commentators call it, certain passages in Kings and Chronicles, which are to some of them sources of needless difficulty. They read, for instance, in 1 Kings 15:14 that "the high places were not removed" in the days of King Asa ; but in 2 Chron. 14:3 that Asa "took away the high places". Similarly, in 1 Kings 22:43 that in Jehoshaphat's reign "the high places were not taken away", but in 2 Chron. 17:6 that he also "took away the high places". Here is contradiction, they say. How are these two statements to be reconciled ? And those of them, whose ideas of inspiration are somewhat lax, begin to discuss which of the two accounts is the more reliable. The matter, however, becomes more difficult to fix up, when it is discovered that the writer of Chronicles, who in the passages abovenamed has stated that Asa and Jehoshaphat took away the high places, elsewhere agrees with the writer of Kings that they did not do so (see 2 Chron. 15:17 and 20:33). And it becomes more complicated still when it is noticed that the writer of Kings, in the very context of his statement that the high places were not taken away by Asa, asserts that he "removed all the idols", and even that he "removed" the queen-mother Maachah for having an idolatrous centre of worship for her private use (1 Kings 15:12-14).

Yet the explanation of all these differences is very simple. There were high places and high places – high places of idolatrous worship, and high places where they worshipped the Lord only, as we have already pointed out. Even Samuel (1 Sam. 9:12), and Solomon, ere the temple was built (1 Kings 3:2, 3), sacrificed in the high places; though the last-named verse suggests by the contrast drawn that David did not. Asa and Jehoshaphat destroyed the former, but left alone the latter. Each passage which asserts that they destroyed them makes mention in some way of the idolatry connected with them, whereas the others contain no reference to idols at all.

The first king of Judah to make a clean sweep of both kinds of high places was Hezekiah, who “utterly destroyed them all” (2 Chron. 31:1); and so alien was this procedure to prevalent ideas of what was right, that the messenger of the king of Assyria, in his speech to the men of Jerusalem, called their attention to it as a reason why they could not expect God’s help. Said he, “Hath not the same Hezekiah taken away His high places and His altars, . . . saying, Ye shall worship before *one* altar” (2 Chron. 32:12). But how God really looked upon this act of His servant is made clear by His commendation of him in chap. 31:20, 21; and as for the people, however “narrow” and “bigoted” some of them may have thought him in his lifetime, when he was gone they marked their approval by burying him “in the chiefest of the sepulchres of the sons of David” (2 Chron. 32:33).

Is there not much “for our learning” in all this? The place where the Lord hath put His Name, though no longer a centre in the physical sense, is none the less real for all that. And Matthew 18:20, in spite of the whittling and explaining it has undergone, still contains a principle of gathering for saints, concerning which many of them are woefully ignorant. On the other hand, the “high places” still vary much in character; some of them being so honeycombed with evil doctrines that no child of God who has any respect for his testimony could have truck with them; while others have such good points that many, like Asa and Jehoshaphat, would spare them, and even frequent them. Hezekiah, however, had the Word of God in Deut. 12:11-14, etc., for his attitude, and that is what we too must seek to have, if we wish to obtain the crown given only to those who have striven “lawfully” (2 Tim. 2:5).

CHAPTER XXVII

“THEM THAT LOVE HIM”

A feature of Deuteronomy which is seldom noticed is the frequently recurring mention of love to the Lord as characteristic of His people. In the four books of Moses which precede it, there is but one such reference, that in Exod. 26:6; but in Deuteronomy there are no less than twelve. (See chapters 5:10; 6:5; 7:9; 10:12; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 19:9, and 30:6, 16, 20). It is interesting to compare how, in the New Testament epistles, love to God is stressed in 1st John, which was probably the last written of them, much more than in any of the rest. It would seem as though Moses and John in their old days, when nearing the end of their service among God’s people, realized more deeply than ever before the importance of the truth taught by Christ in Matt. 22:37, 38, etc., that love is the fulfilling of the law.

In Moses' view, one who did not love the Lord was no true Israelite, however unimpeachable his genealogy may have been ; and in that of John, one without this love is no true Christian, however loud and clear his lip profession may be. On the other hand, they and all the other writers of the Scriptures agree that where the love to the Lord exists, there will be obedience to what He enjoins on us.

In 1st John we are given three outstanding marks which the one who loves God will bear. The first of them is **SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD**, for "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (chap. 2:15). The second is **LOVINGKINDNESS TOWARDS OUR BRETHREN**, for "whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (chap. 3:17). And the third is **KEEPING GOD'S COMMANDMENTS**, for "this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (chap. 5:3).

Now a careful study of Deuteronomy will show that all these marks are given much prominence in it also, and that love of the Lord bore the same fruits outwardly in those days as now. For the **SEPARATION**, see in chap. 7:1-6 how those who "love" (v. 9) the Lord are expected to have no fellowship with the nations who dwelt in the land, either in marriage, or in religion, or in any other way. For the **LOVINGKINDNESS**, see how it is to be evidenced in their treatment of their poorer brethren in chap. 15:1-8. For the **OBEDIENCE** to God's word and commandments, see this enjoined throughout chap. 6, with love to the Lord as the very foundation of all in verse 6. And these are only samples of what is to be found everywhere throughout the book.

The sad story with which we are confronted in the next book but one, the book of Judges, is that of a people who had failed in these very matters. Like the church of Ephesus in the New Testament, Israel had lost her first love, that love to the Lord which is so graphically portrayed in Jeremiah 2:1-3 ; and instead of the fruits of love, there are seen bitter fruits of apostasy from God. They mingled among the nations in the opening chapters of the book ; they ill-treated one another and quarrelled among themselves in its closing chapters ; and all through it they are found time after time disobeying the commandments of the Lord, and thus bringing His chastisements upon them.

In the early Church, separation, brotherly kindness, and obedience are much in evidence in the beginning of Acts ; but when we turn to what we might call "The book of Judges" in the New Testament, the first epistle to the Corinthians, we get failure in each respect. The saints there are reigning as kings (chap. 4:8), and are "disposed to go" to the feasts of the unbelievers (chap. 10:27), instead of walking in a path of separation and rejection. They drag one another to the law courts, and defraud their brethren (chap. 6:1-8). They seem ready to flout the commandments of the Lord (chap. 11:16 ; 14:37, etc.). And for these things they already are being "chastened of the Lord" (chap. 11:30-32).

This is the Church to which the apostle finds it necessary to write an entire chapter on **LOVE**, and to which he utters the solemn closing message, "**IF ANY MAN LOVE NOT THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, LET HIM BE ACCURSED**" (chap. 16:22); a message and warning which was never more needed than today.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MOAB'S YOUTH

In the recital by Moses of God's dealings with Israel, which occupies the first four chapters of Deuteronomy, there are many interesting points that are not mentioned elsewhere. Amongst them are the statements made in chapter 2 concerning the early history of certain nations who were to be Israel's neighbours, and most of whom had gotten their territory by conquering in battle a giant race who had dwelt there before them. The Edomites gained Mount Seir by defeating the Horim (vv. 12, 22); the Ammonites obtained their land by destroying the Zamzummin (vv. 20, 21); the Caphtorim (a branch of the Philistines) drove out the Avim from the neighbourhood of Azzah, or Gaza (v. 23); and, of course, the Israelites themselves had at this time already conquered the Amorites ruled by Sihon and Og (vv. 32-36 with chap. 3: 1-11).

But there is one nation mentioned in chap. 2, the Moabites, of whom we are told that they dwelt in the country formerly inhabited by the Emim (vv. 9-11); but in contrast with all the others, it is not said that they destroyed the Emim. That this omission is made merely to save repetition is unlikely, because the Moabites are among the first of these nations to be mentioned in the passage; and that it is due to inadvertence is a view which will scarcely be accepted by those who believe that the writers of the Scriptures were divinely guided, both as to what to set down and what to leave out. It would appear therefore that the Moabites succeeded to, or intermingled with the Emim, without having to do any such fighting as the other nations named had to do.

Nor was their peace broken in upon at this time by the Israelites, for the latter were specially warned (v. 9) not to interfere with them; and the prohibition is emphasised by the fact that, even when Balak their king, with the assistance of Balaam, sought to encompass the ruin of Israel, vengeance was exacted, according to Num. 31, not on Balak or Moab, but upon their allies of Midian.

Moreover, in the book of Ruth, which deals with a period more than a century later than this address of Moses, we find that on an occasion when there was famine in the land of Israel, their neighbours of Moab must have been practically free from it, since it was to Moab that Elimelech and his family went to escape its effects.

Now if, keeping the above facts in mind, we turn to the 48th of Jeremiah, a chapter dealing with God's judgment on Moab, and in which the name "Moab" occurs no less than thirty times, we shall find that they throw light on a remarkable statement made in verse 11. There we read, "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity; therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed". It is clearly implied here that the history of Moab, especially its early history, has been uneventful and peaceful in comparison with that of other nations, and particularly of Israel; and this is just what from those earlier Scriptures we have seen to be the case.

We do not assert that the Moabites never had to fight, for we know that even before the Israelites reached their country, there had been at least one war in which they suffered defeat (Num. 21:26), and we know that they

and the Israelites had many conflicts from time to time afterwards. But on the whole they had no such record of changes and disasters as the latter had, in keeping with God's word to them through the prophet Amos, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). While Israel's experience was "Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth" (Psa. 129:1, 2), Moab was "at ease from his youth"; yet all the while he was heaping up wrath against the day of wrath, and even as he "skipped for joy" (Jer. 48:27) at the misfortunes of his neighbour, that day for him was at hand.

Have we not in all this an illustration of the truth taught in Heb. 12:7, 8, "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons, for what son is he that the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons"? Moab, though related to God's people, was literally of bastard origin (Genesis 19:36, 37); and his national history was in keeping with this. Israel, on the other hand, was recognised by God as "son" (Exod. 4:22; Hosea 11:1) and was subjected to chastening as a son.

Are there not still to be found amongst us those who, so far as spiritual experience is concerned, are but Moabites? They have, it may be, professed conversion, and have been received into some company of saints. But while others, like the writer of Psalm 73, may say, "All day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning"; about them, however wrong or self-willed their course may be, it can be said, "They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men". They please themselves, and disobey God's Word, and wound the consciences of the rest, and seem to get off with it every time. It becomes increasingly evident, as the days go by, that their "taste" has remained in them, and their "scent" is not changed.

All such, if Hebrews 12:7, 8 means anything, will yet have a dire awakening, when they too late discover that God has never put them "among the children", and that they have escaped being "CHASTENED OF THE LORD", only to find themselves "CONDEMNED WITH THE WORLD" (1 Cor. 11:32).

CHAPTER XXIX

LESSONS FROM OXEN

We have already drawn from the book of Deuteronomy a number of important lessons for the people of God today, and we are by no means at the end of them, since there is in it an inexhaustible mine. But someone may ask, What right have you to use Deuteronomy in this way, seeing that its instructions and precepts were for Israel, not for us? Well, in the first place we rest on the statement made in Romans 15:4 and cited in our title, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning", as well as on the similar one in 1 Cor. 10:11, that "All these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition".

But further, we get in Paul's epistles many examples of how he, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, makes use of this and other early books of the Old Testament, and if we examine these we shall find that he

recognises both spiritual principles and spiritual types, of present application, even in the most unlikely passages. Let us look at one remarkable instance of this.

In Deuteronomy 25:4 there is a command, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn". Has this injunction become obsolete, now that we no longer use the feet of oxen to do our threshing. Not so, for in 1 Cor. 9:9 the apostle quotes it in support of the proposition that "They which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (v. 14); and in doing so he definitely states that "For our sakes no doubt this was written" (v. 16). Moreover, to make assurance doubly sure, he quotes it once more in 1 Tim. 5:18 in connection with the "double honour" to be paid to elders who rule well and who "labour in the word and doctrine". And here he places it as "Scripture" alongside a saying spoken by Christ personally, that "The labourer is worthy of his reward".

We, therefore, have the highest authority for seeking in Deuteronomy spiritual lessons for saints of today; and this being so, let us turn to chapter 22, where we shall find more than one law with reference to oxen, in connection with which we may again ask the question of 1 Cor. 9:9, 10 (R.V.), "Is it for the oxen that God careth, or saith He it altogether for our sake?" and may reply, as Paul there does, "Yea, for our sake it was written".

First then we have in vv. 1-3 the responsibility of the Israelite with regard to an ox or other beast that has gone astray, and has been seen by him; and this is followed in v. 4 by another somewhat similar case in which the animal has fallen down by the way. Three times over, the Israelite is enjoined not to "hide" himself (vv. 1, 3, 4) from the affair, but to do all that lies in his power to rescue his brother's animal. Now there still will arise occasions when help such as this, in the most literal sense, is needed; and it is surely becoming in a saint, and will tend to give acceptance to his testimony for God, if he is found ready to assist in any such emergency.

But even in the Old Testament itself, we find the principle which underlies these precepts given broader and fuller application; as for example in Prov. 24:11, 12, "If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold we knew it not; doth not He that pondereth the heart consider it? . . . and shall not He render to every man according to his works?" And its implications in New Testament times were well understood by the apostle who said, "Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel . . . that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:16-22).

But where do we ourselves stand with regard to this matter? All around us, not even oxen, but the souls of men are "going astray". Are we "hiding ourselves" from them, or are we doing all we can to reach and save them? Nearer still to us, there are some of our brethren and sisters who have "fallen down by the way". Have we done anything to help to lift them up again; or have we like the priest and Levite, passed by one the other side? Shall not many of us have a sad reckoning on this score, when, as cited above from Prov. 24:12, the Lord will "render to every man according to his works"?

Further on in our chapter, at verse 10, we meet with another ordinance concerning the ox. "Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together".

That this too is "for our sakes . . . written", is made clear by the apostle himself, when in 2 Cor. 6:14 he says, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers", for the form of this command makes it evident that he had Deut. 22:10 in mind as he gave it. The ox was a clean animal, and the ass was an unclean one under the Law, so they may be fitly taken to illustrate any yoke into which the Lord's people might enter with the unsaved; whether in business, as righteousness having fellowship with unrighteousness; in politics, as light having communion with darkness (cf. Eph. 5:8; 6:12); in pleasures, as Christ in concord with Belial (cf. 1 Sam. 25:17, 25); in marriage, as a believer having part with an unbeliever; or in religion, as a temple of God in agreement with idols.

Such yokes are good neither for the saints nor for the sinners concerned in them. An ox-and-ass ploughing team would be uncomfortable for both its members, and even more uncomfortable for the ploughman who had to work with it. It would be bad for the plough they were drawing, and not good for the field that was being ploughed. And in like manner, the yoking together of saints and sinners is bad for both parties, a loss to God and His work, and a cause of stumbling to others; yet, sad to say, almost every believer who enters into one manages to convince himself that his case will prove an exception to the rule.

CHAPTER XXX

MIXTURES

The command of Deut. 22:10, "Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together", to which, amongst others that have to do with oxen, reference was made in our last chapter, is one of a group of five (vv. 8-12), each of which occupies but a single verse, and all of which are suggestive of simple and practical lessons for today. The first of them (v. 8) has to do with the HOUSES of God's people, the second (v. 9) with their LAND, the third (v. 10) with their LIVESTOCK, and the fourth and fifth with their CLOTHES; and as we see all these brought together in one short passage, it can scarcely fail to remind us that God is interested in everything which concerns His people, a thought that has in it both comfort and warning.

The close relationship between the three middle verses of our five is evident at a glance, for in each of them we see how God hates mixtures, whether they be in the labourer's clothes, or in his ploughing team, or in the seed that he scatters. Between the first and the fifth there is also a link of connection, though not so apparent. It may be expressed in this way – in the one the people are enjoined to put borders, or battlements, around the flat roofs of their houses, lest someone should fall off and be killed; while in the other they are to put borders, or fringes, around the edges of their garments, that by these they may be reminded of the danger of themselves falling out of the path of obedience to the commandments of God. That this was the purpose in view in the last case is made plain in Num. 15:37-40, where the command was originally given on the occasion of the stoning of the Sabbath breaker; and there we also learn that the fringes were to be interlaced with a ribband of blue, the heavenly colour, as if to suggest that, even to the outmost fringe of their garments, they belonged to the Lord.

There are two references to the border or fringe in the New Testament, in very different connections, but each interesting in its own way. It was the "border" of our Lord's garment that was touched by the woman with the issue of blood (Luke 8:44), as well as by many others who wished to be healed (Mark 6:56), and healed they were, every one. On the other hand, Christ speaks of the Scribes and Pharisees as enlarging the "borders" of their garments (Matt. 23:5) that all might see how saintly they were. No power had they to heal however, for their professed godliness and separation were a pretence and a sham. Let us see to it that ours are not of the same kind, but are the outcome of a real desire to be obedient to the One who has purchased us for Himself with His blood.

As for the first of these commands, its teaching for us lies on the very surface. It is that we are neither to take unnecessary risks ourselves, nor to expose others to them. One man may be able to walk about for a long time on a roof without a battlement; another, who endeavours to imitate him, may topple over almost at once. And even the one who prides himself on his steadiness may have a fall when he least expects it. David took a walk one day on the roof of the house concerning which he had made solemn vows in Psalm 101 (see vv. 2, 7), and he got such a fall that never to the end of his life did he get clear from the effects of it.

Thus it still is. You may think yourself so steadfast as to be able to take risks without coming to any harm, but beware. God says, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall", and He says it in a passage (1 Cor. 10:6-12) which deals with this very matter of receiving admonition from Old Testament happenings. Moreover, even though you should come to little harm yourself, what about others who, imitating you, may fare worse? What about your children for example? It is interesting to note that when God is commanding the Israelites not to mingle with the nations around them, one of the strongest considerations urged upon them is what these will teach their children to be and to do (see Deut. 7:2-4).

Coming back again to the middle three of our five commands, does not the variety in them suggest that there are many ways in which we can be guilty of these mixtures which are so hateful to God? When dealing with the unequal yoke of verse 10 in our last chapter, it was pointed out that the number of terms used for it in 2 Cor. 6:14-16 shows that the spiritual application, even of it alone, is very wide. But here in addition we have mixed seed in verse 9 and mixed cloth in verse 11.

In the case of planting the vineyard with mixed seed, the trouble is that the effects are not manifest at the time but later, when the plants begin to grow up. Now the vine and the vineyard are among the earliest and most interesting figures of God's people, see Psalm 80:8, "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt", and Isaiah 5:7, "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant". That being so, we shall not be far wrong when we link up the warning in our verse with Gospel work, the work by which the number of the people of God increased and which the apostle Paul himself likened to planting a vineyard in 1 Cor. 9:7.

His planting, like the Lord's own in Jer. 2:21, was done with "right seed", but much of the present day planting is with "divers seeds", and the result is a crop of "degenerate plants of a strange vine", which only "defile" the vineyard. Anything other than the Word of God used in the

power of the Spirit of God, is a mixing of seed, whether it be "excellency of speech", or "enticing words of men's wisdom", or any other of the up-to-date methods of manufacturing converts; and "the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow" (Isaiah 17:11).

But there are many ways in which we sow, besides gospel preaching; and to all of them the warning of our verse will apply – that mixed sowing is hateful to God, and will produce a queer crop. When ministering the Word to God's people we are sowing. In our life testimony before our children and others we are sowing. And of all our sowing we may well ask in the words of the old hymn, "What shall the harvest be?"

In the third example of mixtures we have a garment that is neither one thing nor another, neither entirely of linen which is fitting priestly wear, nor entirely of wool which is not (Ezek. 44:17), but a mingling of both. Garments in the epistles and elsewhere are used to represent our conduct and ways, as in 1 Peter 5:5, "Be clothed with humility", and in Rev. 19:8 (R.V.) "The fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints"; so it is but natural that we should think of these in connection with our verse. And in this respect most of us are a strange mixture indeed, a thread of generosity here and a thread of meanness there, a thread of kindness followed by a thread of harshness, and so on. Even in the best things we do of service to our Lord, it is not all "fine linen white and pure", for there are strands of woollen fleshliness, the wool of pride, the wool of desire for the praise of men, the wool of self-interest in many forms.

The outcome of all this mingling of saved and unsaved, of clean and unclean, of what is spiritual and what is carnal, is only too plainly visible. It has gone far towards producing companies of those who profess to be God's people, which are marked only by the self-satisfied lukewarmness of Laodicea, which was so hateful to the Lord that He said, "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I WILL SPUE THEE OUT OF MY MOUTH".

CHAPTER XXXI

THE LORD'S OWN

In the 25th chapter of Leviticus there is a series of laws which God promulgated while Israel was still at Sinai, relating to the seventh or Sabbatic year, and to the fiftieth or jubilee year. They fall into two groups, laws as to the land in verses 1-34, and laws as to servants in verses 35-55. They are laws such as it would have cost something to obey, and therefore laws which the Israelites during the greater part of their history did not obey. It was required that in each of these years they should sow no crop, nor even reap that which grew of itself; and that, in addition, they should in the year of jubilee permit those of their brethren who had come into servitude to them through poverty to go out free, and restore to them their land.

But these laws were based on an important principle, of which it was fitting that the people of God should be reminded by means of them. It is the same principle that long after was asserted by the vineyard owner of our Lord's parable of the labourers, in his indignant question, "IS IT NOT LAWFUL FOR ME TO DO WHAT I WILL WITH MINE

OWN ?” And it is set forth very clearly in connection with each of the two groups of laws in our chapter. The basis of the land laws is stated in verse 23 in the words, “The land shall not be sold for ever ; FOR THE LAND IS MINE ; for ye are strangers and sojourners with Me” ; while that of the laws as to servants is in verse 55, “FOR UNTO ME THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL ARE SERVANTS ; they are My servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt”. Both the land and themselves were the Lord’s own property ; and so long as these two facts were recognized the laws in this chapter would seem reasonable enough ; however onerous they might appear when the true position was forgotten or ignored.

As has been said, the Israelites during most of their history refused to obey the laws here given to them. According to 2 Chron. 36:21 one great cause of the Babylonian captivity was that the land had not been enjoying its Sabbaths or Sabbatic years ; and from Jer. 34 : 8-20 we learn that another cause was the holding of their brethren in bondage. Not only so, but even after the return from captivity we find them in Neh. 5 : 1-9 falling into similar sins once more, as though they had not yet learned their lesson.

In contrast with this general refusal to acknowledge the claims of God is the attitude of David in 1 Chron. 29:14, 15, when after he and his people had given immense gifts to provide for the building of the Temple, he says “OF THINE OWN have we given Thee ; for we are strangers before Thee, and sojourners”, thus quoting almost the very words of Lev. 25:23. Similarly in Psalm 39, after a reference made in verse 6 to those who heap up riches, though they know not who shall gather them, he again applies Lev. 25:23 to himself, saying in verse 12, “I am a stranger with Thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were”. Moreover, not only did David realise that all which he possessed was the Lord’s, but himself also, as is shown by his numerous references to himself as God’s servant, and particularly by his words in Psalm 116:16 where he appears to have Lev. 25:55 in mind as he says, “O Lord, TRULY I AM THY SERVANT ; I am Thy servant, and the son of Thine handmaid ; Thou hast loosed my bonds”.

In 1 Cor. 4:7 two questions are asked which clearly imply that saints of the New Testament times are in a position similar to Israel’s, with regard both to their persons and to their possessions. “Who hath made thee to differ”, the apostle exclaims, “and what hast thou that thou didst not receive ?” The only possible answer is of course that it is the Lord who has made us what we are, and who has given us what we have ; and that therefore we, with all we have, are His property.

These were facts of which the Corinthians needed much to be reminded, since their conduct was in many respects a denial of them ; and therefore in chapter 6:19, 20 Paul calls their attention to them once more in the words, “Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price ; therefore glorify God in your body”. Not only so, but in chapter 7:23 he repeats again the middle clause, “Ye are bought with a price”. The apostle had himself a deep realisation of what the Lord’s ownership of him meant, and it was a controlling force in his life, so that he could say, “God, Whose I am, and Whom I serve” (Acts 27:23). He was therefore well fitted to impress it upon others.

But what of ourselves in this connection ? We often sing

*“Gladly let us render to Him
ALL WE ARE AND HAVE”*

and

*“Nought that I have mine own I’ll call ;
I’ll hold it for the Giver ;
My heart, my strength, my life, my all
ARE HIS, AND HIS FOR EVER”.*

But do we really mean this, or is it just a piece of sentimental hypocrisy on our part ? If it be the true expression of our soul’s desire, there will surely be an outcome in devoted and wholehearted service for God. Always, and in everything, His interests will come first with us, and those with whom we are brought into contact cannot fail to see and be impressed.

Like Leviticus, the Corinthian epistles contain injunctions which restrain and control God’s people in a great variety of ways, their legal rights (1 Cor. 6), their marriages (1 Cor. 7), their company (2 Cor. 6), their money (1 Cor. 16 and 2 Cor. 8 and 9), their food (1 Cor. 8 and 10), even the very length of their hair (1 Cor. 11). Do we resent these regulations, and feel they are irksome and unreasonable ? If so, we have never learned or have forgotten that we are “BOUGHT WITH A PRICE”. The servant in Matt. 25:24, 25 thought of his lord as a “hard man”, who reaped where he had not sown, and gathered where he had not strawed; and as he handed him back the talent, he said, “Lo, there thou hast that is thine”. But in so speaking he entirely ignored the fact that, being a “bondservant” (see R.V. margin) he was himself his master’s property, just as much as the talent was. Paul, on the other hand, gloried in calling himself the “bond-servant” of Jesus Christ, and in acting as such. And so should we.

CHAPTER XXXII

BALAAM AND HIS SPEECHES

We have had occasion to mention Balaam in an earlier chapter, as the evil counsellor whose advice to the king of Moab brought about the ensnarement of Israel at Baalpeor (Num. 31:16). This man was one of the most remarkable personalities of his time, and his history contains many lessons for us, the importance of which is emphasised by various references made to them in the New Testament. In 2 Peter 2:14-16 (R.V.) we are warned against “children of cursing, who forsaking the right way went astray ; having followed THE WAY OF BALAAM the son of Beor, who loved the hire of wrongdoing”. Then in Jude 12 we are told of them that “they ran greedily after THE ERROR OF BALAAM for reward”, and in Rev. 2:4 that they “hold THE DOCTRINE OF BALAAM, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication”. Thus his WAY, his ERROR, and his DOCTRINE are all spoken of for our admonition ; and when we add to these passages the reference in 1 Cor. 10:8 to the disastrous outcome of his plot against the Israelites, they should surely bring us to realise that covetousness on the one hand and world conformity on the other are snares still to be feared and shunned by the people of God.

In the story of Balaam, as told us in Numbers, two scenes stand out as of special interest: that in which his ass spoke to him, after the angel of the Lord had thrice withstood him in the way, and that in which he does his best to carry out Balak's wishes, but every time is made to pronounce a blessing instead of the desired curse. In the former is set before us what we might call Balaam's last and lost opportunity to repent; for although his words to the angel were, "I have sinned . . . if it displease thee, I will get me back again", the Lord, who looketh on the heart, did not accept this as true repentance. It meant little more than if he had said, "Since you insist upon killing me if I go forward, I will turn back". And the permission given him in verse 35 to continue meant little more than that the Lord, for His own purposes, allowed him to live for some time longer, instead of slaying him out of hand. It is comparable with the message to Pharaoh in Exod. 9:14-16 at the end of the sixth plague: "I will this time send My plagues upon thine heart . . . for now I had put forth My hand and smitten thee, . . . and thou hadst been cut off from the earth; but for this cause I have made thee to stand, for to show in thee My power" (see R.V.).

That such a man as Balaam, who had wilfully set himself to do what he knew was wrong, should be used by God to utter the four sublime prophecies of Numbers 23 and 24 is certainly remarkable; yet perhaps not more so than that Caiaphas should speak the words of John 11:49-53 concerning the purpose of Christ's death. There was, however, this difference—that Caiaphas appears to have misunderstood his own speech, with the result that he and the other Jewish leaders set themselves to accomplish it by putting Jesus to death; whereas Balaam, "the man whose eyes were opened", as he twice calls himself, understood what he was constrained to utter sufficiently well to realise from it that his only chance of turning Israel's blessing into a curse was to lure them away from the "dwelling alone" of which he had spoken (chap. 23:9, and to get them to mingle with "the nations". This, for a time, Balak and he accomplished only too well; as have also his followers of the New Testament warnings, in days nearer to our own, with those whom the Lord had separated to Himself as really as ever He did Israel.

Much might be said about the subject-matter of the three great blessings, and of the closing words of prophecy and warning with its sad finale, "Alas, who shall live when God doeth this?" But we shall at present do no more than call attention to a link between each blessing and the position which Balaam occupied when pronouncing it. On the first occasion Balak "brought him up into the high places of Baal (by the way, the earliest mention of this idol in Scripture) that thence he might see THE UTMOST OF THE PEOPLE" (chap. 22:41). What this expression means might be doubtful were it not that on the second occasion, when he brought Balaam to the top of Pisgah (from which later Moses was to view the promised land), he said, "Come . . . unto another place, from whence thou . . . shalt see BUT THE UTMOST PART of them, and shalt not see them all (chap. 23:13, 14). This of course implies that on the former occasion he had had a view of the entire camp to its utmost bounds, and makes clear what Balak's previous saying of chap. 22:41 meant. What the outlook was from the top of Peor, the third place to which they ascended we are not informed in chap. 23:27, 28; but in chap. 24:2, as Balaam was about to speak, it is

stated that "he saw ISRAEL ABIDING IN HIS TENTS ACCORDING TO THE TRIBES", a plain hint that he was now looking rather at the central and best position of their encampment.

Thus we are justified in concluding that when Balaam made his first speech he was gazing upon the whole of God's people ; when he made his second he was looking at the outer fringe, or the stragglers of them, and when he made his third his eye was caught by the arrangement of the central portion of the camp. Let us then compare what he said with what he saw on each occasion.

As he beheld the full extent of that great company of people, spread out in four encampments or sections (see chap. 2) he cried out, "Who can count the dust of Jacob (perhaps a hint that he had heard of the ancient promise of Gen. 28:14), and THE NUMBER OF THE FOURTH PART OF ISRAEL" (chap. 23:10). When he saw merely the outer borders, or what we may think of as the worst of them, he had to say, "He hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it. He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel ; . . . it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought ?" (chap. 23:20-23). And when he looked upon the order displayed in the arrangement of the central part of the camp, he exclaimed, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel ! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the riverside, as the trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters". The suitability of each message to the circumstances under which it was delivered is apparent. The first emphasises their separation by God and their multitude, the second their pardon and security, the third their order and fruitfulness ; and we may add that his concluding address of chap. 24:15-24 stresses their future victories and glory under the One who was to be the Star of Jacob and the Sceptre of Israel.

All these have their counterparts in God's dealings with His people of the present dispensation ; and the four messages may therefore be to us as springs of refreshments in the dry and thirsty land, through which we have to pass as we journey to our eternal rest and home.

CHAPTER XXXIII

SPOTS

In Letiticus 13 we have some exceedingly solemn lessons with regard to the "risings", the "scabs" and the "bright spots" that are at times to be found on God's people ; and concerning the steps which may have to be taken to deal with them. In modern, as well as ancient days, the appearing of spots on the skin is amongst the most easily recognised signs of the onset of certain physical ailments, and drastic measures are still in many cases required when they show themselves. But when it is a question of spiritual disease, and "spots" break out upon saints, they usually receive much less attention, and may even remain unnoticed until the trouble is almost beyond remedy.

One of the first things we learn from our chapter is that some spots are much more serious than others, and that the worst kinds have two main distinguishing marks. They are "deeper than the skin" (verse 3), and they tend to "spread much abroad" (verse 7). Both these features render them

more difficult to treat as well as more dangerous ; and may we not add that in both respects they are the more like SIN. For sin is not merely skin-deep but heart-deep (Mark 7:21-23); and sin ever spreads out into other sin, so that the old saying about a lie, that it has no legs and cannot stand alone, is true of every other sin as well.

Some of us, however, on learning that there is a difference, may seek to comfort ourselves with the thought that if we have any spots on us they are of a lesser kind. If so, we need to be reminded that the smitten Israelite was not left to diagnose for himself whether his spot was serious or not, but had to go before the priest. And we, when we come into the presence of the One Who is our great Priest, may find our spots to be far worse than we thought them. Isaiah, who previously had seen and rebuked the defilement of others, when he got into the presence of the Lord in Isa. 6:5 discovered that he himself was a defiled leper, "a man of unclean lips".

Moreover, even though our spot or spots should not be as dangerous as some others, they are anything but becoming to us as the people of God. In the olden time a man with a blemish, even where there was no question of his being a leper, could not minister before God as a priest (Lev. 21:17-21). And many good brethren and sisters today have their good points offset, and their usefulness spoiled by some little blemish. It may be a rough ungracious manner, or a loose tongue, or meanness in business transactions, or love of display, or something else of a similar kind, and it may really in some cases be only skin-deep. But such things are a hindrance to our testimony for God, and to our ability to help others ; and they should be got rid of ; all the more so because a close examination will generally prove them to be more deeply seated than we had imagined they were.

We have three Old Testament examples of leprosy in Israel, and they very well illustrate the above points. Miriam in Numbers 12 had evidently let her tongue wag too freely ; but it was more than a skin-deep matter, since it was the outcome of a jealous and envious mind. It proved to be of a spreading nature too, for Aaron became infected. So the Lord marked His displeasure by making her leprous for seven days, and as a further result the progress of the entire camp was held up for the same period. Sad to say, there are still amongst the saints not a few like Miriam, whose tongue-wagging propensities spring from envy and spitefulness, though they themselves do not realise it, and may even feel persuaded that they have the honour of the Lord at heart. How widespread the mischief wrought by them can be is best expressed in the picturesque language of James, "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth. And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity ; so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body . . . and is set on fire of hell" (James 3:5, 6).

Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, would doubtless have been called a mean man by anyone unfortunate enough to have business dealings with him. But this characteristic also was more than skin-deep. It was proved to be plain covetousness, when he set out to "take somewhat", as he said, of Naaman the Syrian. And it "spread" too, for the covetousness had to call in lying and deceit to its support. So he who was spiritually a leper already, became one physically. It is remarkable that the first backset to the progress of the Israelites when they entered Canaan, and the first to that of the Church in apostolic days, were each due to this sin of covetous-

ness, the covetousness of Achan in the one case, and the covetousness of Ananias in the other. It is therefore not without good reason that so many warnings have been given us in the epistles against it.

It is very probable that a love of display had always been a feature in the character of King Uzziah. We may see it in the long record in 2 Chron. 26:9-15 of his building walls and towers, and setting up engines of war on them ; of his raising an army of fighting men, and equipping them with the most up-to-date weapons possible ; of his laying out extensive farms and ranches, and digging wells for them. But many of these projects of his were in themselves commendable ; and if the king did wish to show that he could be a builder, and a warrior, and an engineer, and a husbandman, all at the same time, it did not seem a serious matter. At length, however, the "spreading" nature of what might till then have been called Uzziah's little weakness became evident, when "his heart was lifted up to his destruction" (verse 16) and he endeavoured to add to all his occupations that of priest. Then was his infirmity displayed in its true light as the deep seated disease of pride ; and smitten by God in his body, the king had to retire from all his activities and spend the remainder of his days as a leper. His fate, like that of the other two, has in it a much needed warning for today ; and even a leader amongst God's people requires to take heed "lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil" (1 Tim. 3:6). Concerning one form of leprous spot we read in Lev. 13:44 "His plague is in his head", and both in the spiritual and in the physical sense this could have been said of Uzziah that day when the leprosy appeared "in his forehead".

But Mark 7:21-23, to which reference has already been made above, would show that, in all three cases the sin had its origin in their hearts. For in the list there given of thirteen evils which proceed "out of the heart of men" we find these three: "an evil eye", such as Miriam must have had ; "covetousness", the sin which ruined Gehazi ; and "pride", the cause of the terrible downfall of King Uzziah.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MORE SPOTS

In the Song of Deuteronomy 32 there is mentioned at verse 5 a "spot" which we might speak of as the worst "spot" of all, one which marks the person who has it as not being a true child of God. Moses says, "They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of His children ; they are a perverse and crooked generation". It must have been a sore grief to him to have to utter such a description of the people amongst whom he had chosen to cast his lot, and whom he had been leading and teaching for forty years. It has, however, to be remembered that his Song is a prophecy of evil times to come, rather than descriptive of those who were present when he was speaking. This is made plain in verse 29 of the preceding chapter, as well as in various passages of the Song itself.

Yet there was then, and there are today far too many to whom the words of this verse can be applied. They claim to be possessors of God's salvation, and have in many cases been received into companies of God's people ; but as time passes it becomes increasingly evident from their conduct and

ways that there is no "newness of life", and that "their spot is not the spot of His children". Well it is for such of them as discover their mistake in time, for most of them either continue in the same state till the end of their days, or gradually drift away, and sink into utter indifference to spiritual things.

It is interesting to notice the use made of this verse, Deut. 32:5, by the apostle Paul in Phil. 2:15 (see R.V.). He partially quotes it, but in quoting reverses the thought of it. He wishes that the Philippian saints may be "children of God without blemish (or spot), in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation"; instead of being, as in Deuteronomy, a "perverse and crooked generation" themselves, and spotted with a spot that proves they are not His children.

The very fact, however, that the apostle expresses this wish for the Philippians suggests that the danger of becoming "spotted" is a real one; and as we have considered three Old Testament illustrations of spots amongst Israelites we may turn to three passages in the New Testament which hint to us in what directions the danger lies.

In 1 Tim. 6:14 Paul warns his young friend against the "spot" of disobedience. He says, "Keep the commandments **WITHOUT SPOT** . . . until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ". Such is the sort of obedience that our Lord would ever look for from us; not partial obedience, but obedience "without spot". But what is the 'commandment' which is to be so exactly obeyed. It is not merely to be baptised, nor to observe the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, nor to separate from unbelievers. It includes all these things and much more besides; for it appears to take in here all concerning which the apostle had been exhorting Timothy, and in fact every part of his service and testimony for God.

Have we any "spots" of disobedience to mar our record? Many are spotted with regard to the matters just now mentioned, and if questioned about them say that they are "non-essential". But it is no trifle, no skin-deep spot, to disregard any command of the One we call Lord. He will ask us, "Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Then there are others who, having been baptized, and having separated themselves from the world's religious systems seem to think that this is all the obedience that is necessary; and they treat His Word lightly in other matters pertaining to their conduct and testimony. Such are even more blameworthy than the former class, because in most cases they have more light and knowledge. "To him that knoweth to do go, and doeth it not, to him it is sin".

In James 1:27 there is suggested the "spot" of worldliness, when it is said that "pure religion and undefiled" is (amongst other things) to keep oneself "**UNSPOTTED** from the world". This spot is more prevalent amongst saints in our days than almost any other; and its "spreading" character is shown in more ways than one, for it spreads and grows in the person afflicted with it, and it spreads from him to others in contact with him. It is therefore not surprising that in this matter, as in that of obedience, the Lord permits no compromise. We are to keep "unspotted", and this is the only safe way. Yet with many it seems to be a question of how far they can go in conformity to the world without being swallowed up entirely by it. Some of those to whom James was writing had gone so far that he had to say to them in chap. 4:4 (R.V.), "Ye adulteresses, know ye not that

the friendship of the world is enmity with God". In chap. 2:23 he had spoken of their ancestor Abraham, who had walked with God in separation from the world for more than a century, as "the Friend of God"; but these degenerate descendants of his, instead of imitating him, were rather copying Lot, who "pitched his tent toward Sodom", and later, when his "spot" of world-conformity had further "spread", was found sitting in the gate thereof.

Another "spot" to which we would draw attention is mentioned as a solemn warning at Jude 23. It is the spot of fleshliness, and so deeply seated and spreading is it that one who would endeavour to recover a victim from it, is warned to do so "with fear . . . hating even the garment SPOTTED by the flesh". Lot, to whom reference has just now been made, "vexed his righteous soul from day to day with the filthy conduct of the Sodomites ; and doubtless his sitting in the gate as judge was with a view to their amendment, but does not the story of his own last days show that he was not proof against infection ?

In this case, as in those of disobedience and worldliness, the safe path is to keep as far from the danger as possible, although, seeing we have "the flesh" within us, this is not easy to do. God's way to success in the matter is given us in Romans 13:14 in the words, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and MAKE NOT PROVISION for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof".

It is refreshing to be able to turn from consideration of our own weakness and failure, and view the perfectness of what the Lord has done, is doing, and will yet do for us. Seen in His own comeliness which He had put upon us (Ezek. 16:14), He can say of us from the moment that we became His, "Thou art fair, My love, there is NO SPOT IN THEE" (S.S. 4:7). Yet in order that personally we may be fitted to enjoy the coming glory, He is sanctifying and cleansing us with the washing of water by the Word, that He may present us to Himself, "NOT HAVING SPOT OR WRINKLE, OR ANY SUCH THING" (Eph. 5:26, 27). Being confident then that "He that hath begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6) we can with good courage set ourselves to carry out the exhortation of 2 Peter 3:14, "Beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, WITHOUT SPOT, AND BLAMELESS".

CHAPTER XXXV

THE MEEKNESS OF MOSES

Moses is perhaps, with the exception of our Lord Himself, the greatest human figure in the Scriptures ; and yet with the same exception he is the only one who is described in them as "MEEK". Moreover, his claim to meekness is set forth in a manner which cannot fail to catch the reader's attention, for it is said of him in Numbers 12:3, "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth".

On the other hand, there are in God's Word many references of a general character to the meek ; and in particular there are many promises to them, so many indeed, and so great, that they might well cause all of us to covet meekness. For example, in Psalm 22:26 we are told that the meek shall be satisfied ; in Psalm 25:9 it is said that they shall be taught God's way

and guided in judgment ; while both in Psalm 37:11 and in Matthew 5:5 there occurs the most remarkable promise of any, that is the meek who shall ultimately inherit the earth.

Now in the record of Moses' life there are at least three occasions on which he would seem to have displayed a spirit that was anything but meek; and if we consider these alongside the statement of Numbers 12:3 we may perhaps learn some lessons about meekness that will prove helpful to us. For if there is one virtue more than others, concerning which most of us would require lessons, it is this ; since of all the nine fruits of the Spirit enumerated in Galatians 5:22, 23 none is less in evidence amongst us than meekness.

The first of the above-mentioned occasions is described in Exodus 2:11, 12, where we get Moses intervening to save an Israelite who was being beaten by an Egyptian. If we were able to enquire of the rescued man, "Do you look upon Moses as a meek person?" he would probably reply, "No, I would not call him meek. He tackled like a hero that Egyptian who was ill-treating me, and did not lay off till he had killed him".

The second occurrence took place at Sinai, and is pictured for us in Exodus 32:19, 20. Here let our witness be Joshua, who was Moses' companion at the time. "Did you notice, Joshua, the meekness shown by Moses when, on coming down with you from the mount, he saw the vile orgy that was taking place in the camp?" "No", he might answer, "I cannot say that I noticed any meekness ; but I saw him so overcome with indignation at the sin of the people that he threw down and smashed the tables of stone upon which God had written the commandments".

The third incident is recorded in Numbers 20:10-12 and it occurred towards the close of Moses' life. In this case many witnesses could be produced to tell us how their great leader, who had long borne with much provocation on their part, at length lost his temper with them, and so spake and acted that because of it he was not permitted to lead them into the promised land.

One important lesson to be learned from these narratives is that meekness was not natural to Moses, any more than it is natural to ourselves. It had to be acquired, and that by a long process of training. The first and last of the three outbursts show us what the natural Moses would have been like ; and it required every one of the forty years of retirement in the middle part of his life to render him the meek man with whom we are familiar in the later portion of it. There is much truth in the old saying that Moses' first forty years were spent in learning to be a great man, the next forty in learning to be little, and the last forty in proving what God could do with a great man who had become little in his own sight.

Another lesson, suggested by the occurrences in Numbers 20, is that however well the spirit of meekness may have been acquired, there is still a danger of "proud flesh" rising up again, as in Moses' case at Meribah. This is one of quite a number of instances in the Scriptures where men failed in the very thing in which they were strongest. Abraham was pre-eminently the man of faith, yet it was in his faith that he failed when he went down to Egypt because of famine, and while there got into trouble with Pharaoh. Elijah was remarkable for his courage, yet he ran away when a woman threatened him. And thus it was here with the man of meekness.

Although we have grouped together these three incidents in the life of Moses, we are not to think of him as being equally to blame in each of them. In the last case we know that he was very far wrong, since God has told us so. In the first he was no doubt in fault for acting in rashness. But in Exodus 32 he is deserving of praise rather than censure, and his actions were in no wise inconsistent with his meekness, though at first sight they might appear so.

The difference in the three cases will be more clearly seen if we inquire what was the motive of Moses' action in each instance. In the first it was evidently zeal for God's people, with whom he had at that time decided to join himself, as Hebrews 11 tells us. In the second it was just as clearly zeal for the honour of God that stirred him to wrath. But in the third it was nothing more than zeal for self which caused him to speak and act as he did.

Zeal is a good thing, if the motive behind it is right, and if it be rightly directed. It is anything but good if the motive is wrong, or if wisdom be lacking. Saul had zeal of a certain kind for God's people, according to 2nd Samuel 21:2 ; but as we are told there it caused him to slay the Gibeonites, thus breaking the promise given them by Joshua, and bringing trouble upon Israel long after he himself was dead. Jehu, according to his own statement of 2nd Kings 10:16, had zeal for the Lord ; yet in the same chapter we read that "He took no heed to walk in the Laws of the Lord". Both Saul's zeal and Jehu's zeal had selfish motives in the background, and neither of them sought guidance from God. So in New Testament times the Judaizers who had gotten in amongst the Galatians had zeal, as we see in Galatians 4:17 ; yet Paul says of it that it was "not well". And of the zeal of his fellow-Israelites in general he writes that it was "not according to knowledge" (Romans 10:2).

One more lesson as to meekness is taught by a comparison of the incident described in Exodus 32 with that of Numbers 12. There is a danger of this grace being looked on as one of a very negative character, or even as not far removed from slackness and cowardice. But by putting these two passages together we see that while the meek man will remain passive if it is himself that is slighted, he can be moved in intense indignation, and the use of stern measures when he is dealing with that which infringes the honour of God. Compare how the meek and lowly Jesus Himself, on two separate occasions, was stirred to anger by the trafficking carried on in His Father's House, and took strong action to put a stop to it (John 2:14-17; Matt. 21:12, 13).

CHAPTER XXXVI

JABEZ

The story in 1 Chronicles 4:9, 10 of Jabez and his prayer is one of a number of similar digressions which occur amongst the genealogies with which this book begins, and by comparing it with some of the others we shall the better understand it. For example, in the end of the same chapter we have the story of a successful war waged by certain Simeonites, and in chapter 5:18-22 that of another one fought by the tribes dwelling beyond Jordan. These campaigns were for the purpose of taking possession of the

land which God had promised them, and were therefore in accordance with His will. In chap. 5:22 we read that "the war was of God", and in v. 20 of the same passage it is said, "They cried to God in the battle, and He was intricated of them, because they put their trust in Him". Here, as in the case of Jabez, we have a prayer answered; and when we note that it was for a victory which meant the enlarging of the borders that these tribes occupied, have we not a key to what it was that Jabez sought, when he requested that his coast, or border, might be "enlarged"? He did not mean that his little farm should be increased at the expense of those belonging to his Israelite neighbours; but doubtless that he might be helped and enabled to dispossess the Canaanites from some more of the land to which they still clung, and which God meant His people to enjoy.

It was in this respect that he showed himself "more honourable than his brethren" (v. 9). They, like many other Israelites, settled down on what had been won for them by the valour of their predecessors, and thought that if they held it intact they were doing very well. But Jabez believed in making progress, and he went in for it wholeheartedly.

The statement that he "called on THE GOD OF ISRAEL", and also the first clause of the prayer itself, "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed", both take our thoughts back to the one from whom the name "Israel" was derived, and who on the very occasion when he got that name had cried, "I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me" (Gen. 32:26-28). To that same one, at an earlier time, God had given a remarkable blessing, consisting mainly of two great promises. The first of these was that the land would be given to him and to his seed, and that they would spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south. The second was that God Himself would be with him and keep him. Now it is an interesting fact that the prayer of Jabez contains two requests exactly parallel to those two parts of Jacob's blessing. He appears to have had that blessing in mind as he prayed, and to have realised that, since God meant Israel to be a spreading-abroad people, there was a responsibility on him, Jabez, to do some of the spreading. Therefore he asks, "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed and enlarge my coast". And realising further that only the presence of the God of Jacob with him (Psa. 114:7) could preserve him from the "evil" into which his brethren all around him were falling, through mixing with the Canaanites instead of conquering and exterminating them, he makes a second request, "That Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil". Thus he claims the fulfilment to himself personally of both the promises of Gen. 28:13-15, showing himself to be a true son of Jacob, though strangely enough his actual genealogy is entirely omitted from his record. Apparently he was of the family of Judah, though his connection with it is not traced, and possibly a near relative of Caleb, to whom at least he was akin in character.

But if Jabez sought the blessing of the Lord, which, as we read in Prov. 10:22, "ADDETH NO SORROW", he also dreaded His curse under which EVIL and SORROW are inseparably linked together. In Gen. 3 Adam and Eve had to their cost learned this, for God's word to them was "In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children", and "In sorrow shalt thou eat of it". The mother of Jabez must in her turn have known something of this sorrow, for the name "Jabez" which she had given him at birth,

and which is formed from a word kindred to those rendered "sorrow" in Gen. 3, was a constant reminder of the fact. He himself has not forgotten this connection, and he ends his prayer with "that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, THAT IT MAY NOT BE TO MY SORROW" (R.V.). One is reminded of how another saint, the writer of Psa. 139, prayed, "Try me, and see if there be any way that causeth sorrow in me".

Having thus come to understand, with some degree of clearness, the circumstances and meaning of the prayer of Jabez, we shall be the better able to draw from this little paragraph, set like an oasis in a desert of hard names, what God would have us to learn. In the first place, we may be sure that He intends His people still to be a spreading people like Israel, though not in the same sense. It is His will that those who have received life from heaven should use every opportunity to pass on the message of life to others, that they may receive it also. It is also His will that His saints should be continually learning more of His purpose concerning them, that they should explore in the length and breadth the good land into which He has brought them. Are we doing these things, or have we merely sat down to enjoy that for which others have laboured, feeling no responsibility as to ourselves. Let us beware of this, for when the Israelites ceased to spread the nations around them soon began to take away what they already had, and something of a similar kind may be taking place amongst God's people today. Are the truths which were learned and held fast in years gone by prized now as they used to be? Are our assemblies increasing in numbers and in spirituality as they once did? Are they not, in at least some cases, dwindling almost to the point of extinction? Yet it is just in circumstances such as these that a "Jabez" has the opportunity to prove himself "MORE HONOURABLE THAN HIS BRETHREN" by taking his stand upon the promises of God to His people, claiming their fulfilment to himself, and thus continuing to make progress, while others go back. The hand of God will ever be with such, as it was with Jabez of 1 Chron. 4.

We also need to be reminded that the link between evildoing and sorrow has never been severed, though some, even among the Lord's people, seem to believe that it has. Like the men in Deut. 29 they say, "I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart". But let us not forget that to New Testament saints it was written, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap".

Furthermore, if like Jabez, we are anxious to be kept from evil, that it may not cause us sorrow, there can be no safer path for us than that in which he sought to walk, that of making progress in God's ways and in His work. He who is at a standstill, or who is idle, is an easy prey to Satan, but the one who is busy enlarging his border has no time to get into mischief.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE MEN OF KEILAH

An interesting study in 1st and 2nd Samuel is the contrast between the character of Saul and that of David. The story in 1 Sam. 23 of the rescue of Keilah illustrates several of the points of difference between them. In it, as elsewhere, these seem to be grouped around two main distinctions,

the first of which is that David sets high value on seeking the face of God for guidance and help, whereas Saul does not, and the second is that David considers the need of others, while Saul does only what pleases himself.

It is to the second of these distinctions that we wish at present to call attention. While Saul, jealous on his own behalf, was giving his whole mind to the pursuit of David, the latter, jealous for God's people and for His land, was eager to do battle on their account. In verse 1 we read, 'They told David', but in verse 7, 'It was told Saul'. Thus each man hears the news in which he is most interested. The Philistines may be at Keilah, and Saul apparently hears nothing about it. But when David is reported to be there, he hears of it at once. In like manner, in chap. 18, his ear was quick to take in the song of women concerning David's achievements and his own, and his jealous heart was very wroth thereat. It would have been well for him had he on both occasions acted as he had done in chap. 10:27 (see margin). When certain there expressed their contempt for him it is said of him, "HE WAS AS THOUGH HE HAD BEEN DEAF".

Are we not often very like Saul in these matters? How quickly we hear anything that has been said or done against US! How eagerly we seek to get even with one whom we think has wronged us, or of whom we are jealous! It is, perhaps, those who are most prominent in the Lord's service, who need most to be careful as to this. Has it not been the case that the news of some other servant of the Lord having slain his ten thousands, while we have only slain thousands, that he has seen ten saved where we have seen but one, has at times awakened within us a similar feeling to that which the song of the women of Israel aroused in Saul? Have we not been found expressing a hope that the ten may be "real" in a tone which implied that we very much doubted it? Now there are, of course, certain men whom one is apt to associate with unreal work more than others. Their manner of preaching, their way of dealing with individuals, and still more their life and character, lead to this. But the danger is that the personal element may be introduced into such matters; and that we may be jealous on our own behalf, while we fancy we are above self-examination as to this. And let us remember that all true men who have done really good work for God have been very free from such jealousy. Their spirit was that of Moses, who said, "Enviest thou for my sake. Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets".

Now while Saul's thoughts were thus occupied, David, harassed and persecuted as he was, found time to concern himself about the news that some of God's people were in trouble; and, careless of the consequences to himself, he desires to help them. His men do not understand his action nor see things from his point of view. They say, "We be afraid here in Judah, how much more then if we come to Keilah, against the Philistines". But to David a fight with his brethren, and a fight with the enemies of God's people, were two very different things. The one was to be avoided at almost any cost, the other was a matter of course. As Abigail, on one occasion when he had almost gone astray in this respect, reminded him, his business was to fight the "BATTLES OF THE LORD", and not his own battles (1 Sam. 25:28). Concerning Saul, he himself said to Abishai, "The Lord shall smite him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall descend into battle and perish". Till then, David was content to wait.

This care for God's people was ever a feature of David's character, just

as selfishness was a pronounced characteristic of Saul. His whole course in this matter is beautifully summed up in the closing words of Psalm 78. "He chose David also His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds ; from following the ewes great with young, He brought him to feed Jacob His people, so he fed them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands". David's early training as a shepherd had taught him to enjoy the great truth that **THE LORD WAS HIS SHEPHERD**, but it had also taught him to enter into his own responsibility as **THE LORD'S SHEPHERD OF HIS PEOPLE**. We see this evidenced in 2 Sam. 5:12 where we read how he perceived "that the Lord had established him king, for **HIS PEOPLE ISRAEL'S SAKE**". Again in 1 Chron. 21:17, when the pestilence was in the land, his cry was, "These sheep, what have they done ; let Thine hand be on me". Thus he was like Moses, who prayed, "If Thou canst, forgive them, and if not, blot me out"; and like Paul, when he exclaimed, "I could wish that I myself were accursed for my brethren". In all three, we surely see a little of the same love which moved the Good Shepherd to give His life for the sheep. In speaking of this great fact, John is led to add, "And we **OUGHT** to lay down our lives for the brethren".

In closing, let us note the return David got from the men of Keilah for his help. The people he fought for and delivered were ready to deliver him up to the men who had shown so little care for their recent distress. So it was with Moses, Paul, and many other of God's true servants. It is well to reckon thus, that none of us should count on anything else, lest we be disappointed. Those who count the smile and sympathy of God's people may win them to their side, but those who simply act for their welfare as before the Lord, may need to be content to wait for their recognition and recompense till that day when He shall "make manifest the counsels of the hearts, and then shall each man have his praise from God".

CHAPTER XXXVIII

SATAN'S MOUTHPIECES

"And David said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye should this day be adversaries unto me ?" (2 Sam. 19:22).

"He . . . said unto Peter, Get thee behind Me, Satan (adversary); thou are an offence unto Me" (Matt. 16:23).

There does not, at first sight, appear to be much to link together the verses quoted above, but closer examination will reveal a very real connection, and will show that here, as in many other places, David is typical of the Lord Jesus Christ. The link will be more easily seen when we learn that the word translated "adversaries" in the former verse, is simply the plural form of the word Satan, so that we might almost read it, "that ye should this day be Satan unto me". This of course is explained by the fact that the word Satan means "an adversary". But there are other Hebrew words of nearly the same signification, and David's use of this one, in preference to those, looks as if he perceived the workings of the real Satan behind Abishai's "Avenge thyself, David", just as our Lord saw his workings in

Peter's "Pity Thyself, Lord". In both cases Satan was doubtless the originator of the suggestions, while Abishai and Peter were his mouthpieces; and in both his object was to turn the Lord's servant out of the Lord's path.

What should give to these passages special importance is that the same suggestions are being used by Satan today, and very often with success, to upset the testimony of the servants of God. His servants we all are, who have been made His by redemption; and while Satan doubtless sets himself in a special way against those who are in the forefront, none of us is so insignificant as to be exempt from his wiles.

How often has he said to us, "Pity thyself", or has got some Peter to make the suggestion for him. Perhaps it was someone whose advice we had already proved to be that of one who invariably savours of the things that be of men, and to whom therefore we should have known better than to listen. Or perhaps it was one through whom God had spoken to us in the past, just as we find Peter, a few verses earlier in the chapter, giving out what he had got, not from Satan, but from God. We need constantly to beware of this, for there is that within ourselves which responds very readily to such a suggestion, and inclines us to indulge in self-pity – one of the most unprofitable occupations in which we could be engaged. "Pity yourself" when the Lord wants you to do some service for Him. You have been working hard already, and are tired. You do more than your share, as it is. You had planned something else that was pleasanter. "Pity yourself", when He withdraws from you even the smallest of the conveniences or comforts with which He has surrounded you, and which seem to have become necessities to you, though many even of His own never had them at all. You wonder why He should allow this to happen. Oh yes, we scarcely need a Peter to stir up our self-pity. Yet it is "pleasant", is it not, when he comes along and chimes in with the very thing our hearts have been already telling us.

But Satan has other ways of working. To David the suggestion was not "Pity thyself", but "Avenge thyself". It was not the only time temptation was put in his way, for even when Shimei was actually cursing him, Abishai had said, "Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head". David's answer on that occasion was, "Let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him". Still earlier in his career, Abishai had urged him to avenge himself on Saul; and in 1 Sam. 25 is the story of how Satan almost succeeded in getting him to take vengeance on Nabal. He was actually on the way to slay him when Abigail (no doubt used of God) met him and stayed his hand. In this case, he learned a signal lesson on the wisdom of leaving his honour in God's hands. For Nabal was cut off ten days later.

Well would it be for us were we always content to go on with our service for God and to leave our honour, and our avenging of our wrongs, in His hands. But no, that brother or that sister had said things about me, and I must have them "cleared up". He has slighted me, and I must show him how little I care for him. And of course Abishai is at hand with his – or it may be her – "Avenge thyself". And, to fan the fire, he has brought along a story, highly coloured it may be, of what the other has been saying about me, and doing against me. A little verse says :

Self-vindication shun ; if in the right,
What gainest thou by taking from God's hand
Thy cause ; if wrong, what dost thou but invite
Satan himself, thy friend in need to stand ?

Brethren and sisters, do say to all the Abishais and to all the Peters, "Get thee behind me, Satan". Make them realise that, while they profess to be seeking your interests, they are lending themselves to be the devil's mouthpieces. And do get on with your work for the Lord Jesus Christ, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left. For His sake, help and serve His people, whether they appreciate you highly or not. For His sake, spread the Gospel to the utmost of your ability. To tire yourself in His service will seem a small thing when you remember how He was wearied and hungry, and thirsty, and homeless, while here for you. To be slighted and misrepresented will not hurt much, if you are considering Him that "endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself". If He is enthroned in your heart there should be no room for SELF-pity, nor for SELF-vindication, nor for any other form of SELF-ishness. As the Lord went on to say to Peter and the others, "If any man will come after Me, let him DENY HIMSELF".

CHAPTER XXXIX

DAVID'S BEHAVIOUR

In the 18th chapter of 1st Samuel an expression which seldom occurs in the Scriptures is used no less than four times of David—that he "BEHAVED HIMSELF WISELY". It would be well for God's people if this could be said of them always, but such is far from being the case, and as we shall see, it was not always true even of David himself. Our unsaved friends and neighbours invariably attach more importance to our behaviour than to our preaching, so it is more needful that we should behave wisely before them than that we should preach wisely to them. If we do so, as 1st Peter 2 reminds us, our godly living will either win them (verse 12) or at least close their mouths (verse 15) ; while if we behave foolishly, that very fact should close our own.

It is interesting to notice how varied are the circumstances under which David's behaviour is commended. In verse 5 it is when he has been receiving the highest honours, as the result of his victory over Goliath. The people are praising him, Jonathan has stripped himself out of love for him, Saul has advanced him to be head over his men of war. It surely was enough to make a young man top-heavy, and many there are who have made fools of themselves through the pride engendered by similar circumstances. Popularity has always been a snare to saints, and perhaps never more generally and more manifestly so than today. If the world which despised and rejected our Lord turns to praise and patronise us, we have need to be instantly on our guard. It means either that we have already left the path trodden by Him, or that Satan, by these insidious wiles, is seeking to allure us out of it. But amidst all his honours David, we are told in verse 5, "behaved himself wisely", and so maintained a good testimony "in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants".

But now a new factor is introduced into his history, the jealousy of Saul,

which so relentlessly pursued him from this time onward. God had warned Saul in chap. 13:14, and again in chap. 15:28 that He had taken the kingdom from him and given it to a neighbour of his. Ever since then, Saul doubtless had been on the look-out to discover who it was that was to supersede him ; and now as he "eyed" David (verse 9), his suspicious mind got to work. Here was a man who might well be called his "neighbour", since he came from Bethlehem, only eight or nine miles distant from Saul's own home in Gibeah. Here was a man who quite evidently had the Lord with him (vv. 12, 28). Here was a man to whom even the common people were giving more honour than to himself. "What can he have more but the kingdom?" (verse 8). At a still later stage, when his suspicions had become certainty, he said to Jonathan, "As long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom" (chap. 20:31). But first his jealousy takes the form of removing David from about his person, and degrading him from his position as head over the men of war (verse 5), to be merely "captain over a thousand" (v. 13).

Thus the man who, a short time previously, had been tested by prosperity, is subjected to the opposite extreme ; and the question must have arisen in the minds of those who looked on, how will he now act ? Will he stand up for his rights and rebel against the king ? Or will he pout and sulk and leave the royal service ? But David did neither of these things, for it is again recorded of him that he "behaved himself wisely in all his ways" (verse 14), and yet again that Saul "saw that he behaved himself very wisely" (verse 15). As we read this let us do some questioning ourselves. How does adversity affect us ? How have I acted when I got a setback from my brethren, which in my own opinion I did not deserve. Did I fight and make trouble amongst God's people ? Or did I sulk or give up my part in the various activities of the assembly, and perhaps even absent myself from the meetings for a time ? Can I honestly say that when such circumstances have arisen I have always behaved myself wisely ? Many an assembly trouble would have been avoided and many a division among the saints averted had this been oftener the case.

The last occurrence in the chapter of the expression we have been noticing is in its closing verse, where we read that "the princes of the Philistines went forth (i.e. to battle) and it came to pass, as often as (R.V.) they went forth, that David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was much set by". In this verse we have still another setting for it, that of actual conflict with the enemy, in which once more David's wise behaviour shines forth preeminently. At a later time in his life we read that "at the time when kings go forth to battle", David tarried behind. But not so here, although if he had he could have given a better reason for it than then. He had recently taken a wife, and according to Deut. 24:5 was exempt from war for a year. But these battles with the Philistines were not merely Saul's battles, or Israel's battles. They were the "battles of the Lord" (1 Sam. 25:28), and David would not be absent from them on any account. This clear view of the real issues of the conflict is still very necessary for God's people. It is not only that we should come to the help of our brethren, and share with them in the fight, but that we should come "to the help of the Lord" (Judges 5:23). And though He can conquer without us, let us beware lest we bring on ourselves the curse of Meroz.

But there is another expression used of David, to which we would draw attention, one sad in itself, but all the sadder when contrasted with what is so often said of him in 1 Sam. 18. It occurs in chap. 21:13, where having through fear of Saul gone down among the Philistines, and having while there become afraid of the Philistines themselves, it is said that he "CHANGED HIS BEHAVIOUR", and acted the fool. What a grievous change it was, and how clearly did it show that something was wrong! These enemies of Israel had seen queer things before. They had seen a man whom God had made strong to do impossible things brought down so low as to do women's work in their prison, and to make sport for them. Now they see another mighty man of God scrabbling on the doors of the gate, and letting his spittle fall down upon his beard.

What did it mean, and why such a change from the wise behaviour of chapter 18? The difference lay here, that in the former instance each change of circumstances came to David while walking in the Lord's path, and was not of his own choosing. But now he had left that path, in leaving God's land through his fear of Saul. Then he could count on God being with him, but now he is left for a time to his own devices, and what a poor figure he cuts. The story teaches a lesson much needed by saints today, when God's commandments are trifled with, and His path for His people, whether collectively or individually, is departed from, and self-chosen paths substituted, as lightheartedly as if it were a matter of no importance.

How David got deliverance we learn from Psalm 34, which as its title shows, has reference to this occasion. There he tells us how the Lord delivered him, first "from all his fears" (verse 4), and then "from all his troubles" (verse 6). And there we are taught that he who has the fear of the Lord in his soul (vv. 7, 9, 11) need have no other fear, and so has no occasion to leave God's path, nor to leave out any of God's commandments.

CHAPTER XL

JOY IN DAVID'S DAYS

Read 1 Sam. 18:6 ; 1 Chron. 12:40 ; 15:25 ; 29:9, 17

The four passages above, all of them connected with the days of David, describe scenes of rejoicing and contain the word JOY. The circumstances differ in each case, but all four are suggestive of experiences connected with ourselves.

The JOY of which we read in 1 Sam. 18:6 was caused by the slaying of Goliath ; and what David did on that occasion forms a beautiful picture of the fight and victory of Calvary, where the Lord Jesus, as it is said in Hebrews 2:14, by death destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the Devil. Indeed the very form of expression there would suggest that the writer had the slaying of the giant in mind when he penned it. For it was with his own sword that David cut off the head of that "strong man armed", who for many days had kept the Israelite army in bondage through fear. And in like manner it was, so to speak, by his own weapon death that our Lord defeated Satan and delivered His people.

Three things are given prominence in 1 Sam. 18 as being the outcome of David's victory. One is the joy in Israel of which we speak. A second

is the love for David to which it gave birth, on the part of the Israelites in general (v. 16), and on that of Jonathan especially (vv. 1-4). The third is of a very different kind – the fear and hatred of David which it produced in Saul (vv. 8-12). Similarly, the death and victory of Christ brings joy to every soul that learns by personal experience its value and meaning. It also begets love in that soul to the One who has wrought this great salvation. But on the other hand there are the “enemies of the Cross”, and the “offence of the Cross”; for it wounds the pride of foolish men who would fain have the glory themselves ; even as the pride of Saul was wounded by David getting the honour due to his victory.

Where does my reader stand with regard to this matter ? Have you ever rejoiced in the salvation of the Lord ? Can you look back to a time when you first learned its worth, and gave glory and praise to the One who had fought the fight on your behalf ? Is your soul so filled with love to Him who first loved you that, Jonathan-like, you would strip yourself of all your treasure to honour Him ? Or has pride and love of self kept you till now an enemy of the Cross ?

The second occasion of JOY we have to consider was when David was made king over “ALL ISRAEL”. The honour which he deserved was at last given him, and the time of his rejection was over. In like manner we today look forward to the time when our Lord Jesus Christ shall get the place that is His by right, and we shall no more sing, as many a time we have sung,

*“Our Lord is now rejected,
And by the world disowned”.*

One day the great proclamation will go forth : “The Kingdoms of this world are become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ ; and He shall reign for ever and ever”. Then shall the poor earth enter into “abundance of peace”, such as it has never known since sin came into it, and never will know until then.

But while His rejection still continues, and we do not as yet behold Him the acknowledged King of all the earth, it is for us to see that He is at least crowned King in our hearts, and in our Assemblies. Nominally we do own Him as such, but are we doing it with the “perfect heart” of which 1 Chron. 12:38 speaks ? It is of interest to note that there are three differing expressions used of the heart in that chapter, though they are referred to at times as if they meant exactly the same thing. In verse 33 we have “NOT OF DOUBLE HEART”, while in verse 38 there is both “ONE HEART” and “PERFECT HEART”. A ‘double heart’ (or, “a heart and a heart”, as in the margin) is that of the hypocrite who pretends to love you, while in heart he is plotting against you. This is made plain in Psalm 12:2, the only other place the expression occurs, where we read, “With flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak”. No real Christian could be “of double heart”, so far as the Lord is concerned, for those who love not the Lord Jesus Christ shall be for ever accursed. But on the other hand many of His people have not a “perfect heart”, that is to say, an undivided one. Solomon was no hypocrite, yet when he loved many strange women we are told that “his heart was not perfect with the Lord, as was the heart of David his father”. Is not this what “losing one’s first love” means – not that all affection for Christ

has gone, but that other things have come in to share with Him that throne of the heart which should be His alone ?

The third expression, "of one heart", refers to yet another matter. It implies that a number of people have their heart so turned to the same object that it is as if they had but a single heart amongst them. In 1 Chron. 12 it is used of the complete agreement that was amongst all the tribes to make David king, and it is noteworthy that all the thirteen tribes are mentioned in the chapter. This very unity was doubtless one reason for their joy, as well it might be, because for years the nation had been divided. Notice the statement which in verse 32 is made about certain men of Issachar, for it means more than perhaps it is usually taken to mean. It is said that these men of Issachar, who came to David at Hebron to make him king over all Israel, were **MEN THAT HAD UNDERSTANDING OF THE TIMES, TO KNOW WHAT ISRAEL OUGHT TO DO**. Does this mean no more than that they were intelligent men ? Ask first another question. What did these men, who had understanding of the times, think that "Israel ought to do" on this particular occasion ? The answer comes at once. They thought that Israel ought to make David king, as being the real remedy for all their troubles. They looked at the divisions and discord within, and they looked at the pressure of the enemies without, the Philistines in the west, the Syrians in the north, the Ammonites and Moabites in the east, and the Edomites in the south. And they unitedly came to the conclusion that the one thing to do in such circumstances was to make David king over the entire nation, as a sovereign cure for the evils, within and without. The decision was carried into effect, and the result proved that they were right. For the first time in many years all Israel was of one heart ; and for the first time in many years they knew what it was to have victory withersoever they went.

But have we not seen division and discord enough in our own days ? Have we not felt the sore pressure of the adversaries ? What then have the men amongst us who have understanding of the times to say about this ? What ought the Lord's people do ? Various remedies have been at times suggested, but they do not go to the root of the disease, which is that neither individually nor collectively have we been giving the Lord His rightful place. As has been already stated, we do it nominally, but more seldom than we think do we do it "with a perfect heart". When we crown Him King in our hearts, and in our Assemblies, not merely in name, but in reality, the divisions and misunderstandings will right themselves, the defeats will change to victories, and assuredly there will be JOY amongst us.

Our third time of JOY was at the bringing up of the Ark to the place which David had prepared for it. Although it was the special symbol of God's presence with His people, they had managed to do without it for about a hundred years ; since the time when the Philistines had taken it and were glad to get rid of it again, because of the disaster it had brought upon them. On its return it had also brought disaster on the men of Bethshemesh, and in consequence had been left neglected in the house of Abinadab at Kirjathjearim. At first, as is stated in 1 Sam. 7:2, the time of its absence from the sanctuary seemed long, but apparently the people became used to this. At the end of twenty years there was a measure of revival under Samuel ; but they do not seem to have troubled about the

Ark, either then or later for David could say, "We inquired not at it in the days of Saul". As for David himself, he tells us in Psalm 132 that he had been thinking of it, ever since the time when, as a little lad, he kept his father's sheep at Ephrath, or Bethlehem. Kirjathjearim, where the Ark lay, was only about ten miles distant, and David evidently felt keenly the neglect shown to it, and even in his boyhood vowed that one day he would find a restingplace for it. Though years had passed, and he had met with many vicissitudes, he never forgot his oath. When the opportunity came he sought to fulfil it, but at first made a serious and costly mistake as to how the Ark should be carried, imitating the Philistines by putting it on a new cart, instead of going to the Book of the Law for his instructions. After some time, however, he had it brought up according to "the due order", and there was a scene of great rejoicing, both of himself and of his people.

It is a solemn thought that we, like Israel, may become accustomed to being without the presence of God. It is our privilege as redeemed ones to have it, and when the joy of it is lost the time at first will seem long. But many of God's people become used to this, and have but little consciousness that there is anything the matter. Is not this what is behind much of the present-day weakness and failure, and our inability to discern the path which the Lord would have us to take?

God's presence with His people meant power; it meant that the sea fled and Jordan was driven back, that the mountains skipped out of their way like rams (Psalm 114:1-8). It meant also that the God of the Ark went before them to search them out a restingplace (Num. 10:33), and that He turned the flinty rock into a fountain of waters. Is it any wonder that the bringing up of that which was the symbol of His presence should occasion joy? It will bring joy too to our souls today, if we have the presence of God restored to us. But let us beware of the spirit of those described in Micah 3:11, who while continuing in their sins say, "Is not the Lord among us; none evil can come upon us". For the presence of God will not manifest itself with us while we walk in our own ways, unless it be in consuming fire. The judgment on Uzzah (1 Chron. 13:10) is a case in point, for this was as real a manifestation of the presence of God as was His blessing afterwards on the House of Obededom (v. 14).

Poor Michal, David's wife was an outsider to all that was going on. She knew nothing of the joy of the presence of God. And there are still many like her, wife, child, brother, or sister to some child of God, wondering at and despising experiences in which they have no share.

In our fourth passage above we see the JOY that DAVID and his people had in giving to the Lord. Some folk's idea of joy is in accumulating more and more, but those who do not know the joy of giving have missed much. One of our hymns says,

*"Scatter it with willing fingers ;
Laugh for joy to see it go".*

And it does not say a word too much, for "God loveth a cheerful given" (2 Cor. 9:7), and such a one ever gets more than he gives.

But what is giving? What was it in David's case? We are told that he did it "with all his might". Could our shilling or so, put in the box out of our abundance, be described in that way? The poor widow who

put in the two mites was giving with all her might, in the Lord's view of it, while the other big folk who were there that day were only playing at giving.

But let us in closing add one more occasion of JOY, mentioned by David himself in Psalm 16. "In Thy presence is FULNESS OF JOY, at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore". The one who has known the joy of deliverance from the power of darkness, the joy of exalting Christ, the joy of the presence of God in his soul, and the joy of giving back to Him that which as David said is really His own, can look forward with joyful anticipation to the time when JOY will be unhindered and unending in the glory that lies ahead.

CHAPTER XLI

THE BLIND AND THE LAME

Few if any of the Old Testament saints are in so many ways typical of Christ as David is ; yet in his case, as in others, there are contrasts to be observed as well as similarities. Of these Paul mentions one very evident example in his address of Acts 13 when he says, "David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption ; but He whom God raised up again saw no corruption". There are, however, others which are not so readily noticed.

In Matthew 21, after a description of the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and His cleansing of the Temple, the words are added in verse 14, "AND THE BLIND AND THE LAME came to Him in the Temple, and He healed them". Why, one might ask, should this fact be mentioned at this particular juncture, seeing that throughout His entire ministry Christ had been doing such works of mercy ? And why should "the blind and the lame" alone be named, and not also the deaf, the dumb, etc., as elsewhere ?

Now in the story of David also we have a triumphal entry in Jerusalem. It is described in 2nd Samuel 5:6-9 and 1st Chronicles 11:4-8 ; and it is remarkable that in the former of these passages there is a somewhat obscure reference to "THE BLIND AND THE LAME". Apparently the Jebusites, one of the seven nations of Canaan whom God had doomed to utter destruction (Deut. 7:1), were at this time still in possession of the fortress of Zion, and when David sought to take it they, in their confidence of its security, boasted that even "the blind and the lame" amongst them would be able to keep the Israelites out. David however captured their stronghold, after having promised that whoever would be foremost in the taking of it would be commander-in-chief of his army ; a feat in which, as the passage in 1st Chronicles 11 informs us, Joab was successful.

When making this promise the king, according to 2nd Samuel 5:8, spoke of "the lame and the blind that are hated of David's soul"; probably meaning by this, not merely those literally so afflicted, but the entire body of the Jebusite defences. His expression however, according to the closing words of the verse, gave rise to a saying or proverb, "THE BLIND AND THE LAME SHALL NOT COME INTO THE HOUSE". And since it is not preceded in the narrative by any earlier reference to a house, the

phrase "THE HOUSE" must surely refer to the House of God. Whether the further implication is that those physically blind and lame should be kept out, or that Jebusites such as those who had resisted David's entrance should have no place there, we are not told ; but in any case the king's stern expression, "the lame and the blind . . . hated of David's soul" stands out in contrast with the scene where the blind and the lame came to Jesus for healing in the Temple in Matthew 21. The utter destruction of Canaanites was according to the Law ; the healing was according to grace, and to the spirit of the Gospel as proclaimed by our Lord in Luke 4:18.

A further interesting fact comes out in 1st Chronicles 21:18 ; 22:2, where one Jebusite, Ornan, who appears to have escaped the destruction which overtook others of his race, not only supplies David with the threshingfloor whereon he offered sacrifice, but also with the site upon which the Temple was afterwards erected.

CHAPTER XLII

QUALITY versus QUANTITY

In the twenty-third chapter of 2nd Samuel we have the record of David's mighty men ; in the twenty-fourth chapter we get the numbers of his entire army. Does it not almost seem as though these are placed alongside each other for the sake of contrast ? It is quite otherwise in the parallel passages in 1st Chronicles, where the numbering of the people is described in chap. 21 at the close of David's reign as here ; but the list of the mighty men is given at its beginning in chapter 11.

The contrast is important as well as striking, because we are ever inclined to set more store by numbers than by quality. If a gospel preacher goes to a district and preaches so successfully that a large number profess to be saved, it is talked of (by those at least who have interest in such things) as a matter of more than usual importance. If he goes to another place and labours as much or more for the conversion of perhaps one individual it is scarcely worthy of notice. Yet in some cases that individual may prove more faithful and more useful in God's service than all the others united.

Philip the evangelist was called by the Lord to leave Samaria, where he was having a most successful mission, and to go forty miles or more into a desert place, where he was used in the salvation of just one soul. Yet if ever we learn the after history of that eunuch of Ethiopia we shall probably find that he became a mighty testimony for God in his own far distant land ; while on the other hand it is possible that many of those who were saved in Samaria turned out to be numbers but very little else.

The contrast is emphasised in an interesting way in connection with the deeds of some of David's mightiest men. In chap. 23:9, when describing how Eleazer on one occasion fought against the Philistines till his hand and his sword stuck together, the words are added, "and the men of Israel were gone away". These were of the number of God's people all right, but they were not present when they were needed ; and the same could be said of many of the saints today. They are needed at the gospel, at the open-air meeting, at the prayer meeting, or it may be to do some little tidying up required in the hall, or take a class in the Sunday school. But "the men of Israel are gone away", and the women too. They have their own business

to attend to, or they are on holiday ; but the real trouble in the back-ground is that they are both selfish and lazy.

Another reference to them occurs in the next verse when describing the completeness of Eleazar's victory. It is said, "the people returned after him to spoil". They were willing enough to reap the benefits of his toil, though they could not put forth a hand to help him in the conflict. When some gain was to be had without any trouble they were on the spot at once, though at the beginning they could not be found anywhere. Have we not some like this also in our midst today, ever willing to seize an opportunity of personal advantage ?

A remarkable example of this type of person is seen in Joab the commander of David's army. He is nowhere named amongst the mighty men, although his two brothers, Abishai and Asahel are there (vv. 18 and 24), and even his armourbearer (v. 37). But in a little paragraph set in by itself (1 Chron. 11:6) is described the act by which he gained his high position. David when seeking to take possession of the citadel of Zion from the Jebusites offered the post of commander-in-chief to the one who would be foremost in capturing it. Joab was successful in the dangerous feat ; but though he gained the coveted position, it did not win for him a place among the mighty men. His bravery, unlike theirs, sprang from a selfish motive.

Again in our chapter (2 Sam. 23) we have at verse 11 a third reference to "the people" who counted for numbers but not for quality. We find it in the description of how Shammah defended the plot of lentils, where it is said, "the people fled from the Philistines". They evidently were cowardly as well as lazy and selfish. Doubtless they could have given perfectly good reasons for their flight. It was only a small plot of lentils, not worth risking their lives for. The Israelites would not starve even if the Philistines ate every lentil in the plot.

As has already been stated, we have these folk with us still. To them this or that truth of the Word of God is "non-essential", not worth contending for. So, in their laziness, selfishness, and cowardice they are willing to let go the very things that some of their fathers would have given their lives for. To them a little place and honour accorded them by the religious world is of more value than the honour that cometh from God only. It is easily seen that they never paid much for the truth which they are ready to sell so cheaply. Saints of a generation gone by learned it at much cost and prized it highly, but with their children it is "Lightly come, lightly go".

It will be noticed that, although their brethren fled or were not to be found when they were needed, the Lord did not forsake these mighty men ; and when the victory was won they gave to Him the glory of it. Both in Eleazar's case and in Shammah's it is said that "the Lord wrought a great victory"; and in the story following, of the three who brought David a drink from the well of Bethlehem, we are told that he poured it out "unto the Lord".

This suggests another point, which indeed has already been hinted at, by way of contrast with Joab. It is that these men had a right motive in what they did ; and that motive, perhaps even more than their natural ability and courage, enabled them so to act. They wrought out of love to David and to the Lord, and so they required no sharp word of command to do this or that. It was David's land, that plot of lentils, yet it was the

Lord's land, so it could not be allowed to pass into the possession of the Philistines. It was David too who longed for a drink of the well from which he had so often drunk in his boyhood, so it must be gotten him, despite all the enemies who lay between.

Their love to David and their company with him was indeed what made them the valiant men they were. The incident of the drink is connected with the time when David was at Adullam, and we know from 1st Sam. 22 what sort the men had formerly been who joined him there, "in distress, in debt, and discontented". Poor material out of which to make "mighty men", and yet they can have been only a short time with him when three of them proved their love for him in this remarkable way.

And their love proved stedfast, for when towards the close of David's reign his son Adonijah sought the throne, and gathered followers around him, though he drew Joab with him, it is expressly noted (in 1st Kings 1) that he called not David's mightymen. He knew better than to attempt to turn them from allegiance to their lord.

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About the Book:

For a number of years it has been the desire of certain brethren to have these writings of the late Mr. William Rodgers compiled into one volume. We are now happy to present this collection of Bible Notes and Expositions and trust that it will be for the edification, instruction, and encouragement of God's people.

A look at the Contents page will show the wide field which Mr. Rodgers has covered in a lifetime of Bible Study. The Subject Index at the back will provide the student with a useful and convenient reference.

Christians who desire to grow in grace and live triumphantly will find vital help in this book.

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