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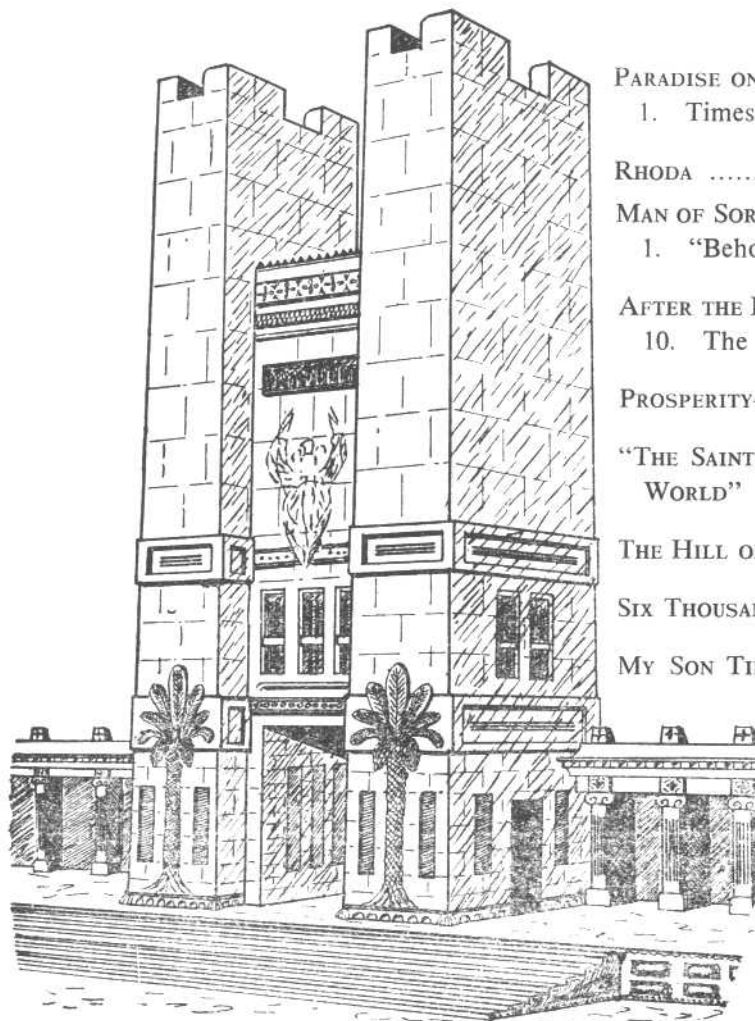
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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

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This journal is published for the promotion of Bible knowledge, maintaining the historical accuracy of the Scriptures and the validity of their miraculous and prophetic content viewed in the light of modern under-

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Notices

"For This Cause". A notice in the Sept./Oct. issue announced the then forthcoming showing in York, at the instance of the York Bible Fellowship, of the audio-visual presentation "For This Cause" dealing with the Bible story from Creation to the climax of the Divine Plan at the end of the Millennium with especial emphasis upon the life of our Lord. The audience gathered in St. Sampson's Church, York, numbered 116, of which some 90 were quite new to this understanding of the Divine Plan and some 15 of these expressed the desire to be kept in touch with a view to knowing more. The friends responsible were very gratified at the interest aroused by their venture.

New features for 1986

Paradise on Earth. The doctrine of the Millennium is as old as the Christian era; it was first declared by Jesus and dimly perceived by Israel several centuries earlier. In the days of Montanus and the Montanists, (AD 180), however, it passed under a cloud in consequence of their immoderate application of it to a sensually indulgent reign of the Church on earth and was then virtually extinguished by St. Augustine (AD 390) who had no place for it in his theology, which later became the theology of Christendom generally. From the 18th century onwards it began to come again into its own. This series will endeavour to examine the Scriptural basis for, and prophecies concerning, the Millennium. The Early Church possessed a fervent expectation that at the end of this Age our Lord would return to establish an all-righteous world in which sin, evil, suffering and death would have no place. The practical conditions of such a world and what changes it will involve in earthly conditions, and when it can be expected to materialise, will all find place in this series.

Man of Sorrows. This is a comprehensive exposition of the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, the noteworthy Old Testament passage which foretold the sufferings of our Lord. This treatise appeared in these columns some twenty years ago and is now being repeated in accordance with the feelings of some that it would be of equal interest both to new readers and those who did see it at that time.

Literature and back numbers. It is unavoidable that various sections of our work, handled by voluntary helpers, have to be handled in different parts of the country. On this account a certain delay is inevitable in fulfilling requests for literature and back numbers of the BSM. Letters arriving at Hounslow must first have the financial aspect dealt with by the Treasurer and receipts for donations sent out. They then go to the

circulation control manager to have details of BSM readership noted and recorded. From there they go to the literature despatch section which fulfils requests for same. It may easily be a fortnight after the letter is first received at Hounslow before the literature is despatched.

In the case of overseas readers literature is between seven and ten weeks in postal transit on the high seas. There is nothing whatever we can do about this. In recent times we have found instances where booklets or the Monthly itself have been as long as three months in transit. We would ask all overseas friends to bear this in mind before writing to enquire about our apparent failure to reply to their letters. But if three months has passed and still nothing arrives, then please do advise us of the fact so that we can send a replacement of what has apparently gone astray in the post.

It is for this reason that at times a reader receives a renewal notice or reminder after having posted a gift or a request for renewal. The two missives have crossed paths with each other in the post. If you have sent a request and received a receipt for any gift, take no notice of any subsequent printed reminder.

Back Numbers of BSM. Annual sets of back numbers of the BSM from 1980 onwards are available on request, stating the years desired, free of charge except that we do ask for refund of postage and packing costs, which are as follows:

Overseas (dollars) ...	1	2	2	3	4	4
UK	50p	£1	£1.50	£1.50	£2	£2
No. of sets	1	2	3	4	5	6

Gone from us



Sis. N. Dumont (*Hounslow*)
 Sis. M. King-Smith (*Birmingham*)
 Bro. J. Lewis (*Sunderland*)
 Sis. E. Pick (*Leicester*)



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

PARADISE ON EARTH

Earth's coming glory

1. Times of Restitution

"The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing . . . then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, the lame man shall leap and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy . . . and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isa. 35.1-10).

This rhapsody of the prophet Isaiah, who saw in vision the world as it will be in the day of Christ's kingdom on earth, is deservedly famous as one of the finest flights of imagery in the Bible. But it is no fantasy; Isaiah lived nearly three thousand years ago and he knew that the Golden Age would not come in his own lifetime nor yet for many generations after that; yet he died in the fixed conviction that it would surely come. He was not the only one; St. Peter, preaching a few days after the Day of Pentecost, declared that God would *"send Jesus Christ, whom the heaven must receive until the Times of Restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began"* (Acts 3.20-21). True to his words, references to, and descriptions of, this promised paradise on earth when, under the wise and just oversight of the Lord Christ and his followers, all the ills from which society now suffers will be done away, abound in the writings of nearly all the Bible writers. And the inception of that Age of peace and righteousness, nowadays variously called the Messianic Age, the Millennial Age, or just the Millennium, is always associated in the Scriptures with the return of Christ to this earth, his Second Advent. That is the focal point when *"the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever"* (Rev. 11.15).

One may be led to wonder why the accepted Christian faith of to-day seems measurably to have lost sight of this promised eminently satisfactory climax to the increasing trouble and confusion of this at present very unsatisfactory world. There is a reason, and for that reason one has to go back to mediæval times. Way back in the centuries before Jesus was born at Bethlehem the people to whom He then came had a very definite view of the Divine Plan for the future of this world. From the time that the nation of Israel was organised by Moses at the

Exodus from Egypt, they were told by their spiritual leaders that in the fulness of time the Messiah would come from above to establish a righteous rule in the earth in which the dead as well as the living would share, and that Israel was to become a kind of missionary nation to be *"a light to the nations, to declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth"*. This was on the basis of the Divine promise to Abraham in ancient times *"in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed"* (Gen. 12.37; 22.18). Singularly enough, little attention has been given to this basic promise in Christian teaching and yet it is the basis upon which the whole of God's plans for the human race is founded. The coming of the Millennium is the realisation of that promise.

The early Christians took over this belief in the future Divine kingdom on earth from their predecessors and for five or six centuries they looked for the promised return of Christ to bring it about. Then came St. Augustine, considered the most influential theologian of the Age, who transformed the accepted Christian faith into a system of Heaven for the righteous and Hell for the unrighteous and the total destruction of planet earth at the Day of Judgment. That proved so useful a tool in the hands of the priests and ecclesiastics of the day for the purpose of keeping their people in submission that the doctrine of the Millennium with its glorious hope for all mankind was all but lost for a thousand years, only to surface again after the Reformation and particularly since the 18th century.

The present-day view of the Millennial reign of Christ often falls short of the reality by visualising it as an extension of the present world order but under Divine sovereignty. Thus, it is suggested, life and death will go on much as at present except that the normal life span will be considerably increased; generation will follow generation in a world which is becoming progressively more god-like until at the end will come the Day of Judgment when the dead will be raised and all earthly affairs wound up. In this view of the Millennium there is no place for those who are living to-day or for those already dead; one might be justified in asking why those born during that particular thousand years of earth's history should be so favoured above the myriads of the present and past who have had to endure the sorrows and injustices of *"this present evil world"*. Unless the Millennium is to be for the

benefit of all men, back to the beginning, it has no logical purpose in the Divine plan of salvation in Christ and the blessing of all families of the earth.

It follows then, as a matter of basic principle, that the coming Age of righteousness is not an extension of the present world-order at all; it is an entirely new start. The existing system, with all its shortcomings and imperfections, with the powers and practices which support the domination of evil over mankind, is to be brought to an end and a new and benevolent order of things instituted in its stead, supervised by the returned Christ, and administered on earth by upright and able men who will come to the front for that purpose. Because it is the final phase of the "Day of Grace", in the which the issue as to worthiness or unworthiness of eternal life for each individual is to be decided, all who have ever lived must have their place and share in its benefits. What St. Paul called "*this present evil world*" is to be brought to an end, with all its evil, at the Second Advent of Christ, and superseded by a "*new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*" (2 Pet. 3.13). Jesus called that period "the regeneration" (Matt. 19.28) meaning the giving of new life, and that is precisely what it will accomplish.

Christ returns, then, to establish a new order of society the administration of which will be in the hands of men and women who during their earthly life have come into heart-harmony with him and his teachings and by reason of devotion to his service have become thoroughly conversant with every aspect of Divine Law. These are they to whom the educational and uplift work of that Age can safely be entrusted; such will have achieved a balance of judgment and clear apprehension of right and wrong which is lacking, and so sadly lacking, in many of even the most intellectual and able of to-day's leaders. It is to be expected that by that time many of these leaders, disheartened by their failure to avert the obvious imminent collapse of the present world system, will be ready to give way to the new administration. That the sin and selfishness of man must inevitably culminate in the breakdown of all human forms of self-government seems certain at the present time—and at no very distant date. The commercial and other institutions of the world which batten on the wants and weaknesses of humanity may be expected to put up a fight to preserve their interests, but the powers of Heaven will prove superior to their resistance and although a time of severe turmoil and stress may be expected when battle is joined, the issue is not left in doubt. The 19th chapter of Revelation affords a vivid picture of the evil forces of the world

gathered together to make war against the Son of God coming forth from heaven; they give way and from that moment the glories of the Millennium will begin.

There will then dawn a day when despairing mankind realises that a new power has taken control of earth's affairs. The politicians and statesmen, weary and dispirited at the failure of all their efforts, may at the first pay little attention to the new voice which is raised. Certain Biblical allusions seem to indicate that the men to take immediate control will be certain stalwart heroes of old, men who have walked with God and understand those principles of Divine government which are so much discounted to-day. The histories of Moses the founder of a nation, Daniel the statesman of Babylon, Nehemiah the patriot, and others like them, are sufficient to carry assurance that if men like these were alive to-day, then peace upon an honourable basis would speedily come to this war-wracked world.

The impact of this clarion call to righteousness and equity, resounding through the world, will awaken all men to a realisation of the new power that has taken control of earth's affairs. Many there will undoubtedly be, men and women of goodwill, who will at once hail this proclamation with eagerness and range themselves upon the side of these new leaders. As Isaiah said (25.9) "*It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will rejoice and be glad in his salvation*". Some there may be who will stand aloof, sullen, not willing that the searching light of Truth shall reveal the darkness of their lives. Those who have in the past become degraded and brutalised, have lost the finer instincts of humanity, may cry out that they want none of this new life; those whose lives have been spent in preying upon their fellows and gratifying their own pleasures and desires at the expense of others may fiercely oppose this threatened invasion of their vested interests. Yet this first reaction in favour of the new administration, even if confined to a proportion of earth's millions only, will produce an effect such as no reformation or revolution in past history has ever approached.

The next development will be even more startling, for men will begin to discover that vice and abuse of right principles no longer escapes retribution; moreover that the very attempt to injure or destroy another will be frustrated at the outset. The psychological atmosphere created by the strangeness of such things, the missionary zeal of teachers who will be at work amongst the people and above all the evident operation

of Divine power in a totally inexplicable manner will begin to render it literally true that *"they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain"* (Isa. 65.25). The maliciously minded and the evil-doer may injure themselves; others they cannot injure. When this realisation sinks into the minds of men, that dread enemy, fear, which today holds all men in thrall, will be swept away. *"My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places"* (Isa. 32. 18). In such an atmosphere of confidence there will be possibilities of rapid development in the knowledge of the laws of God, and the writing of those laws in the hearts of men.

In proportion as men sympathise with and desire the accomplishment of God's ultimate purpose, so will they come into harmony with his precepts. Each individual will become in turn a teacher, assisting less fortunate ones along the pathway on which they themselves are progressing. Opportunities for every form of Christian endeavour and social service will abound, and the sincerity of each man's heart will be demonstrated by the eagerness with which he throws himself into the work of helping others. Under such conditions it is easy to comprehend that mankind will become one great family, men consulting with men for the wise and effective utilisation of the common blessings and for the undertaking of those enterprises which will be necessary for the continued welfare of the human race. The present evils of competitive enterprise and international antagonism will cease to be, and so will be fulfilled the word which declares that *"He maketh wars to cease to the ends of the earth"*. *"They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more"* (Psa. 46.9; Isa. 2.4). Social service will be the keynote, and the "Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of Man" will become reality in a sense greater by far than has ever been dreamed by the most ardent of political reformers. The order of the day will be reconstruction. No longer will the brevity of human life discourage or dissuade men from setting their hands to enterprises which may require centuries for their full accomplishment. The pulling down of all that is drab and ugly in the dwelling-places of men and the painstaking erection of edifices beautiful to the eye and sumptuous in their amenities will provide occupation of the most pleasant kind. Agriculture will come into its own, for the earth itself is to be restored and made beautiful and to bring forth in abundance. Great irrigation schemes will transform the world's deserts into

fertile plains; hitherto inaccessible regions will become the playground of men; in every possible sense of the word it shall be true that *"the earth shall yield her increase"* (Psa. 67.6).

Nor is the new social order to content itself with the external aids to man's happiness. The arts and sciences, the pursuit of which is today so often restricted to the leisured classes among humanity, will then be open to all. Knowledge will be pursued for its own sake, and the fruits of scientific research applied to worthy objects for the increase of human comfort and happiness. The musical festivals and philosophical debates of that day will surpass by far the loftiest attainments of men in the present or the past.

So will the centuries pass, whilst the earth grows ever fairer and more beautiful and mankind attains to a better understanding of the message of Jesus Christ and the goodness of God. The days of evil will slip away into the background—never forgotten, always remaining an imperishable recollection of the terrible consequences of sin but no longer having the power to hurt or destroy. The song of the angels "peace on earth, goodwill among men" will have become an accomplished fact. Human beings will be fair of form and virile in body, magnificent examples of the creative power of God. With the consciousness of an eternity of supremely happy life before them they will rise at every dawn to pursue with unflurried minds the occupations and pursuits to which they have set themselves. The world's work will go on—men will till the soil and reap the fruits of their labours, they will foregather together for the study and practice of arts and sciences which will always have something new to reveal, they will travel and rejoice in the varied glories of Nature and live their lives in absolute peace and harmony with each other and with God.

Many Christian thinkers and writers of the past two centuries have eulogised the glories of that coming Millennial Age where peace, prosperity and justice will prevail and all men enter into the inheritance God has provided. Perhaps the most noteworthy is the pen-picture painted by Charles T. Russell in *"The Divine Plan of the Ages"* (1884) picturing the calm splendour of that Age.

"Close your eyes for a moment to the scenes of misery and woe, degradation and sorrow, that yet prevail on account of sin, and picture before your mental vision the glory of the perfect earth. Not a stain of sin mars the harmony and peace of a perfect society; not a bitter thought, not an unkind look or word; love, welling up from every heart, meets a kindred response in every other

heart, and benevolence marks every act. There sickness shall be no more; not an ache nor a pain, nor any evidence of decay—not even the fear of such things. Think of all the pictures of comparative health and beauty of human form and feature that you have ever seen, and know that perfect humanity will be of still surpassing loveliness. The inward purity and mental and moral perfection will stamp and glorify every radiant countenance. Such will earth's society be, and weeping bereaved ones will have their tears all wiped away, when thus they realise the resurrection work complete."

Of the everlasting years that lie beyond the end of the Millennial Age the Scriptures say little or nothing. That they will be years of continuing activity and increasing achievement in the interests of God's creation there can be no doubt. Nothing is or can be static in God's universe, and although it is true that at that point in time all who by then have become reconciled to God through Christ will have attained perfection and full communion with him, and all evil and evil-doers will have vanished for ever, it must be that

glories as yet unimagined await men in the great beyond. Of the triumphs of that progress into man's destiny it is not possible to speak, only to say that they are the destined inheritance of every man who will have given himself to the Lord Jesus Christ and obtained life through him.

But coming back to the present, the obvious question in every mind must be that first posed by the disciples when Jesus told them about all this; "*when shall these things be?*" (Matt. 24.3). The answer to that lies in a correct appraisal of the "signs of the times", which He at that time outlined to them. Sober Christian students and observers for nearly two centuries past have been getting progressively closer to the correlation of those signs with present-day current events; it can be said now with reasonable conviction that we are at the eleventh hour. The dawn of that promised Millennial Day is at the point of breaking upon the world. The arguments and basis upon which that expectation is founded must form the theme of the next chapter.

To be continued.

Solomon on Divine Law

Three notable texts in the Book of Ecclesiastes define the reason for Divine permission of evil, and three in the Book of Proverbs set out the fundamental law of the Millennial Age. Taken together, these six Scriptures provide a sound basis for faith in the accuracy of our belief.

"Because to every purpose there is time and judgment", says the Preacher, *"therefore the misery of man is great upon him"* (Eccl. 8. 6). The fact of man's misery is patent to all; not many realise that its apparently indefinite continuance is bound up with the time and judgment of the Divine Plan. The natural reaction of the average man to this situation is revealed in the words *"Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil"* (Eccl. 8. 11). But the pain and misery, wickedness and sin, prevalent in the world on this account is turned to good purpose by the One who caused to be written *"This sore travail hath God given to the*

sons of men to be exercised therewith" (Eccl. 1. 13). It is after this "exercise" has begun to do its work in the hearts of men that the higher Law can begin to be understood. *"In the way of righteousness is life; and on the pathway thereof there is no death"* (Prov. 12. 28). This is the law of the Millennial Age; righteousness will assuredly bring life. But the converse is equally true; evil must assuredly bring death, and so we have *"As righteousness tendeth to life, so he that pursueth evil persueth it to his own death"* (Prov. 11. 19). And that no man might in despondency conclude that his own present fallen condition precludes him for ever from receiving the glorious benefits of the future, there is the triumphant and assuring note of the declaration *"By mercy and truth iniquity is purged; and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil"* (Prov. 16. 1). Therein lies the blessed assurance that evil can and will be overcome. Whosoever will, may take of the fountain of water of life, and drink freely.

If God has once shown that He will make any sacrifice for the salvation of the guilty, must not that be always true of him? must He not continue to manifest his blended severity and mercy in the ages to come?
(Dr. Samuel Cox)

Prayer is not a Divine "aspirin" tablet to relieve every little ache and pain, neither is it to be used to get God to do what you want done. No! Our prayers must be in harmony with the will of God.

RHODA

A young believer—who believed

It was an unusually important prayer meeting, and Rhoda was there. Although she was only a fifteen-year-old she was as earnest as any of them and just as aware of the calamity that had overtaken them. She sat near the door, at the back of the room, next to sixteen-year-old John, whose mother's house it was in which they were meeting, and bowed her head in reverence as the strong voice of the elder John, leading the meeting, was upraised in supplication. Prayer was being made of the church unceasingly on behalf of Peter, cast into prison by King Herod and in imminent danger of death.

One of the appealing figures of New Testament history is this Rhoda, appearing on the stage with the dancing steps of a child and as quickly tripping off again. That she was barely out of her childhood is apparent from the word used to describe her, "damsel" (*paidiske*) which denotes a girl in late childhood or early youth, but not later. A different word altogether is used in the New Testament for young women of marriageable age. We meet her for just a moment at the memorable prayer meeting held in the house of Mary the mother of John Mark. Mary's house was the first centre of the church at Jerusalem and it was in that house that the first believers began to make progress in their new-found faith. Now the little community was faced with a crisis and the brethren had gathered together to make effectual fervent prayer. Whether Rhoda was the daughter of one of the believers and was herself just beginning to make the faith her own, or whether she had come in contact with the preaching of the Apostles independently and was attending the meetings on her own account we have no means of knowing; all we do know is that on this fateful night this young girl, hardly out of her childhood and necessarily quite new to the faith, became the means of impressing upon her elder brethren, at that meeting, and no less upon us, reading the story, several important lessons.

According to Acts 12 Peter, upon being miraculously released from prison in the dead of night by the angel, found himself standing in the darkened streets of Jerusalem. What he had thought, whilst it was happening, to have been a dream, he now found to be reality. It is probable that the intense coldness of the Judean night air quickly demonstrated to the somewhat lightly clad Apostle that it was no dream. The city was, of course, deserted at that time of night except perhaps for an occasional watchman. The

immediate question for Peter was: What next?

Perhaps this is the first point we should take from the incident, one not connected with Rhoda, "When he had considered" Peter turned his steps to the house of Mary (which is traditionally believed to have been just outside the city wall on the south side of Jerusalem). He did so being tolerably certain to find brethren gathered there and that is our first lesson. We do well to be where we can associate with the Lord's disciples, fellow-Christians in the Narrow Way. In seeking first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness we will best advance our spiritual interests by finding our associations, our friendships and companionships, our activities and interests, among those who like us are consecrated to the service of God and are fellow-heirs in the High Calling. The first thing Peter did upon his release, even although it was twelve o'clock at night, was to make his way to the place where he knew there was always open house for the brethren.

It was really a rare compliment that Peter paid Mary in so doing. He might have surmised, but could hardly have definitely known, that there was a prayer meeting in progress at the time of his release, but he evidently had confidence that his welcome at Mary's house would be full and free even in the middle of the night.

So it came about that Peter was presently standing at the gate in the outer wall of the premises, knocking for admittance, and this is where Rhoda comes into the story. Perhaps the entire meeting heard the knocking on the outer gate, maybe only Rhoda heard and slipped out to investigate; in either case, for all her youthful eagerness, it must have been with a certain amount of trepidation that she crossed the courtyard and stood behind the gate, resounding with the thunderous blows which it was very probably suffering under the hands of the impetuous and not always too patient Peter. For all that Rhoda knew, the knocking might be the harbinger of Herod's officers, seeking someone else, or even all of them, to be taken to prison. Peter, however, on the other side of the gate, was probably reasoning that the sooner he got out of the public street and into the cover of the house the better.

So Rhoda's clear young voice, possessing a confidence she probably only partly felt, ringing out on the still night air, "Who's there?" was answered by a gruff and well-remembered but at the moment decidedly impatient response "Peter,

of course. Let me in!" In her relief from apprehension, and joy that their prayers had been answered, Rhoda most inconsequently left him standing there and ran indoors to tell the others. One can almost imagine the lordly air of John Mark, from all the superiority of his twelve months' or so advantage in age, remarking "Just like a girl!" when it was all over and the explanations were being made.

Now here is the most intriguing part of the story. The assembled brethren did not believe Rhoda. "Peter at the gate: Rubbish" they said "You must be mad". They knew perfectly well that Peter was in prison and people didn't get out of Herod's prisons so easily as that. The girl was imagining things; whoever it was, it couldn't be Peter. They had been praying unceasingly for Peter's release, and now they were told he was standing at the gate they refused to believe it. One is really justified in wondering how much of faith was mingled with their prayers. Perhaps though it might be more charitable, and maybe nearer the truth, to assume that these immature and inexperienced Christians had not yet appreciated the true power of prayer. After all, the authority of Herod must have been a very immediate and real thing to their minds. They certainly took a lot of persuading. "Thou art mad" they told her. "But she constantly affirmed that it was even so." One can imagine the young girl trying by every artifice of reiteration and emphasis to induce the stubborn grown-ups around her to take her seriously. It would seem from that last expression that the argument went on for sometime—evidently the prayer meeting had been temporarily abandoned. Peter, of course, was still knocking but nobody took any notice of that. Finding it impossible to dissuade Rhoda, and being, it would seem, reluctant to test the truth of her news by sending someone else to the gate, the brethren decided that if there was anybody there at all it must be Peter's guardian angel—speaking apparently with Peter's voice. "Then said they, it is his angel." The early Christians had a very intense and definite belief in the existence of guardian angels, though why

they should expect an angel to stand out in the street knocking for admittance does not readily appear.

"But Peter continued knocking"—probably definitely thunderous knocking by now, so that at last for very shame's sake they had to open the door: "and when they saw him, they were astonished". This is the only place in all the Scriptures where a company of believers joining in supplicatory prayer are stated to have been astonished at receiving the object of their petition!

So Peter took charge of the assembly, and what had started as a prayer meeting ended in a stirring exhortation from one who by his very presence there evidenced how God can deal with the devices and plans of evil men in his own way and deliver his own people when it is his Will.

The meeting broke up; Peter, a free man, went his way; and Rhoda drops out of the story. The New Testament does not mention her again. Did she hold to the faith and in after years become one of the noble matrons who graced the Christian Church with their labours of love and good works? We do not know. Whether she lived the remainder of her days in Jerusalem and perhaps was one of the Christian community which witnessed the fall of the city when Titus besieged it some forty years later, or in later life found herself at Antioch, at Ephesus, or maybe at Alexandria in Egypt with John Mark who we know ended his days as Elder of the Church in that city, we have no idea. All we know of Rhoda is that she was the only one in that prayer meeting quick-witted enough to realise that the united fervent and unceasing prayer had been answered, and having given us that one brief glimpse of unquestioning simple faith she moves off the stage and is lost. But what we have seen is perhaps enough to give rise to some hope and expectation that in a day yet to be, when we have become citizens of the celestial land, among those whom we shall meet and recognise as our forerunners in the Narrow Way, we shall come face to face with "a damsel called Rhoda".

Brighter than the equatorial noon-day sun, purer than the polar virgin snow, hotter than the mercury or oxygen-fed flame is Divine jealousy for the right, the good, the true, and its zeal against sin and wrong and evil in every form.

* * *

Filled with the Spirit, we shall be a blessing to others, and rivers—not a mere stream—of blessing will flow out from us to refresh the dry and thirsty wilderness of this world.

The Church is not dying, nor likely to die, of too much truth; but it is sure to languish if its teachers, even for the most amiable reasons, suppress the truth that is in them.

(Dr. Samuel Cox)

* * *

We sometimes think we could bear another's cross more easily than our own but we cannot change crosses with our brethren.

MAN OF SORROWS

A study in
Isaiah 53

1. Behold My Servant

The latter part of the Book of Isaiah presents a grand panorama of the Divine Plan of Salvation, the means by which that salvation is accomplished, and the nature of the world that is to witness the accomplishment of that salvation. This noble prophecy presents a picture of the "servant of Jehovah", a "suffering servant", who because of his unquestioning loyalty to his Father in Heaven and his uncomplaining acceptance of the suffering on earth which that loyalty involves, becomes the means whereby God is able to reconcile to himself "whosoever will". The story closes with a wonderful pen-picture of the new heavens and earth, cleansed from the defilement of sin, which results from that reconciliation. The end of the vision is strikingly like the closing scene of the Book of Revelation, where the Holy City has come to earth and its light enlightens the nations, nothing that defiles being able to enter into it.

The whole of this Messianic prophecy of Isaiah forms a setting for its brightest jewel, the sublime passage which constitutes the 53rd chapter and from which we have our conception of Jesus as a lamb who is led to the slaughter and a man of sorrows who is acquainted with grief. That is not the only aspect of Jesus of which we know. We realise that in his earthly life He was not always and even not habitually overshadowed by sorrow. His countenance was more often lighted by happiness and benevolence than it was darkened by grief and sadness. His relations with men were not always that of an unresisting sheep being led to death; there were times when He took full command of the situation in indignation and even anger, reproving Pharisees and priests for their hypocrisy and greed. There were times when He held his hearers spell-bound, teaching them as "one having authority". But here in Isaiah 53 we have what is intended to be a doctrinal presentation of the "Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world" and therefore it is only to be expected that the suffering aspect of our Redeemer's ministry should be stressed to the exclusion of every other consideration.

This study opens with verse 13 of chapter 52; this is really the commencement of the description and this is where chapter 53 should in fact have started. In verses 13-15 of chapter 52 the voice of God is heard speaking from heaven declaring the mission of his Servant the Redeemer. Verses 1-10 of chapter 53 contain the spoken response of those on earth who under-

stand the message and accept the Redeemer. Verses 11-12 are the closing words from God giving assurance of the triumphant fulfilment of all that the Redeemer comes to accomplish. In this chapter we have a number of vital Christian doctrines established. Foremost in the picture is the Ransom ("*brought as a lamb to the slaughter*", "*cut off out of the land of the living*" vs. 7, 8) and the Sin-offering ("*He hath borne our griefs . . . wounded for our transgressions . . . His life an offering for sin*" vs. 4, 5, 10). Next, perhaps, comes the human nature of Jesus, "the Word made flesh" ("*His visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men*" (52: 14); "*despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows*" vs. 3); Consecration ("*He shall see his seed, He shall prolong his days*" vs. 10), and glorification ("*Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great*" vs. 12). This chapter is a most important one in its bearing on the Divine Plan of the Ages, and it is well worthy of examination verse-by-verse in detail.

"Behold, my servant shall deal prudently. He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high." (vs. 13).

Although the term "servant" in the Old Testament usually carries the thought of a slave, since most servants were bound to their master's house and family and could not leave even if they wanted to, it does also include the thought of reverential respect and obedience as from a son. Here at the outset we are reminded of that word in Hebrews "*Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.*" Throughout his earthly life Jesus made clear that He was always consistently carrying out his Father's will and purpose. The absolute supremacy of God the Father is everywhere acknowledged. Even though for the work and duration of the Millennial Age "*the Father judgeth no man but hath committed all judgment unto the Son*" it comes about that at its end "*then shall the Son himself be subject unto him that did put all things under him, that God may be all in all*". But here in Isaiah there is something more than the usual significance in the word "servant". There is no other servant anywhere in the Bible like this one. Here we have the suffering servant of God who by means of his suffering is going to restore God's erring creation to him. Abraham (Psa. 105: 6), Job (Job 1: 8), Moses (Josh. 1: 1), Joshua (Josh. 24: 29), David (Psa. 18: 1) and Isaiah himself (Isa. 20: 3) were all honoured by being called servants of God,

but none of them held the position before God that was occupied by this "suffering servant". Mighty as were the works that all those men did in their several spheres, none of them could match the work done by the One who is described with such eloquent pathos in Isa. 53. "Behold my servant". The injunction is imperative. We are to look upon this One and see in him all that we need to take away the load of our sins and all that we need to show us the way back to harmony with God, and everlasting life.

He shall deal prudently—wisely, is the meaning. The word is from a root meaning to attend closely, to be circumspect. In the Book of Proverbs the same word is often used in the sense of having understanding. "*The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him*" says Isaiah in chapter 11 "*the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord*". The rest of chapter 11 goes on to describe the practical outworking of that wisdom in the work of the Millennial Age when many are to be turned to righteousness and the stony hearts taken away from men and replaced by hearts of flesh.

Here in verse 13 the "dealing prudently", or with wisdom, would seem to have reference rather to his First Advent and his life on earth rather than his Second Advent and his reign over the nations. Even though He was to be despised and rejected and ultimately put to death his whole life was to be characterised by Divine wisdom and it was so truly thus characterised that his opponents "*could not gainsay the wisdom with which he spake.*"

Now come three verbs, crowding one upon the other, all expressive of his ultimate triumph and glory. "*He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high*". Obviously this must refer to the outcome of his earthly life, the glory that was to follow, for none of these things were true while He lived on earth. It might be that here we have an indication of the three steps by which the One Who died on the Cross in obedience to the Father's Will was ultimately brought to be seated at his right hand "*from thenceforth waiting until his enemies be made his footstool*"—his resurrection, his ascension, his "entry into the presence of God for us". The first word "*exalted*" means to be raised up, the second, "*extolled*" to be borne up or lifted up, as by angels or other medium, and the third just what it says, to be very high. Our Lord after his ascension was "*higher than all heavens*". We might very reasonably therefore take these three words as descriptive of the upward progress of our Lord after the close of his earthly life to be glorified with the glory which He had with the Father

before the world was, as He prayed the Father in his Gethsemane prayer recorded in John 17. "*Wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and in earth and under the earth.*" (Phil. 2. 9, 10).

"*As many were astonished at thee: his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men*". (Isa. 52. 10).

The first phrase means to be dumb with astonishment, to be compelled to silence by the solemnity or the strangeness of what is seen. The subject of astonishment is the second phrase "*His visage was so marred*" and here it is very possible that the traditional view is hopelessly wrong. The word for "marred" occurs only this once in the Old Testament and there is serious doubt whether it is correct. It means, not only "marred" in the modern sense of that term, i.e. to deface, but it means to destroy utterly by decay and corruption. Such an expression carried to its logical extreme is quite out of place in any description of our Lord. There is no evidence that our Lord was in any sense unlovely to look upon. There is at least some piece of evidence to the contrary. We know that little children came spontaneously to him. Children do not come spontaneously to a miserable man and are not likely to come spontaneously to a deformed or hideous man. Jesus as a perfect man must have arrived at the maturity of human life in possession of a physical beauty far excelling anything that had been seen on earth since Adam. The sorrows and disappointments of life may and probably did leave their mark on him to the extent of a more serious and reflective mien but there is no more likelihood that those experiences, or the "going out of virtue" from him as He expended vitality for the good of others, rendered him unlovely to look upon than it does in our own cases to-day. We are witnesses that such experiences in the life often tend to make the countenance sweeter and more attractive; it is usually bitterness and discontent which sours the visage, and that we do not associate with our Lord.

The Septuagint has it "*so shall thy face be without glory from men, and thy glory shall not be honoured by the sons of men*". This rendering must have come from a different Hebrew text than the one which declares his countenance to be in process of destruction by decay, and it makes a much more fitting commentary upon the person of our Lord, so much so that we are perhaps justified in accepting it in place of the Authorised Version. Our Lord while in the flesh did indeed manifest a glory all his own, a "*glory as of the onlybegotten of the Father, full of grace*

and truth" but it was not a glory He obtained from men, neither was it a glory that was honoured by the sons of men. They despised and rejected him instead. The words of the Septuagint are literally true therefore in our Lord's experience.

Some scholars consider that the word has suffered the alteration, at the hands of an ancient copyist, of one letter which has changed the word from one meaning "to anoint" and that on this supposition the reference here is not to a countenance that has been marred by disfigurement but one that has been anointed for ceremonial purification. The word in this case would be the same as that used in Leviticus for the consecration of Aaron and his sons, and elsewhere for the anointing to office of the kings of Israel. If this be in fact the true interpretation—and such cases of a changed letter altering the whole meaning of a word are not uncommon—then this verse indicates the astonishment of the beholders at seeing one among them who is anointed for the purpose of cleansing the people from sin, which is itself a fitting introduction to the sublime theme of the 53rd chapter. It is tolerably certain that the passage in the original never taught that our Lord's physical appearance would be repulsive or unattractive and if we can at least dispose of that relic of traditional thought we shall have approached to a more accurate conception of Jesus' human nature.

"So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him; for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider." (chap. 52. vs. 15).

This "sprinkling" is the same thing as Moses' sprinkling of the blood upon the altar and the people (Exod. 24) and of the blood of the sin-offering in the Day of Atonement ceremonies. (Lev. 16). It is also the sprinkling of water for purifying and making clean in Lev. 19. The sprinkling of many nations is the purification and cleansing of many nations, and the purifying agent is the blood of Jesus Christ, the blood of the Sin-offering. Hence the Apostle tells us that we have come to *"Jesus the mediator of the new covenant and the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel"*. (Heb. 12. 24). Hence we are *"elect . . . unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ"*. (1 Pet. 1. 2). What a triumphant testimony this is to the final success of God's Plans. "So shall he sprinkle many nations." It is not that only a few will eventually attain eternal salvation and the many suffer everlasting loss and cutting-off. The Divine Plan is going to be gloriously successful, and "many nations", the majority of earth's children,

receive lasting benefit from the ransom-sacrifice of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

There is a subtle allusion here to the priestly function of the "servant's" work on earth. After the institution of the priesthood, only the Levitical priests could lawfully sprinkle the blood of the offerings. Hence this servant who comes to execute the will of God in the realm of human salvation is qualified and authorised to act as a priest—as we have it in the Epistle to the Hebrews *"We have such an High Priest . . . a minister of the true tabernacle"*. (Heb. 8. 1-2).

Now we are told that kings shall shut their mouths at him, seeing things of which they had never before heard, and understanding things which heretofore had never come upon their minds. This is quite clearly spoken prophetically of the far distant future when Messiah will come in the glory and power of his Kingdom. These words are quite inappropriate to the First Advent. If kings shut their mouths at him it is because they respect and honour him. So it was in the days of the patriarch Job's prosperity and glory, when he was the acknowledged lord of his community and nation. *"When I went out to the gate through the city, when I prepared my seat in the street, the young men saw me, and covered themselves; and the aged arose, and stood up. The princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth. The nobles held their peace, and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth."* (Job 29. 7-10). Poetically Micah says *"the nations . . . shall lay their hand upon their mouth"* (Micah 7. 16) at the rising up of God to fulfil his age-old promise to Israel. So here, the mighty exhibition of Divine power that will eventually reveal the all-conquering Christ to mankind will cause kings and mighty men to stand abashed and silent in the presence of One Who is to exercise all rule and all authority and all sovereignty in the earth.

"That which hath not been told them shall they see, and that which they had not heard shall they understand." This is a Millennial promise also; it is easy to say, as do most commentators, that these words were fulfilled in the coming of the Gospel to the world when Jesus came, and in the preaching of the Gospel in the world throughout the centuries since, but that, although a comfortable doctrine for those who expect the world to be converted during this Age, is not the right understanding. It is an obvious fact that the kings and great ones of the earth still do not "see" and "understand" the things which heretofore had not been proclaimed. With all the making known things that beforetime had been kept secret from the foundation of the world the "seeing" and "understanding" is still not an accomplished fact. It is still mainly the "poor of

this world, rich in faith" who have seen and understood; most certainly not the kings and mighty men. We are led therefore to the only and obvious conclusion, that this word will have its fulfilment in the coming Age. In that day things that the powerful and influential and intellectual of earth had either never considered seriously for a moment, or if they had, had dismissed as unworthy of further consideration, will be brought prominently before their attention and demand acceptance. "God will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

It requires only a moment's thought to appreciate what a revolutionary change in the thinking of educated men and women will be brought about by the Kingdom. Every one of us is familiar with the half-pitying, half-cynical, smile that comes over the face of some as we try to tell them the message in its simplicity and beauty. "Do you really believe that?" "Rather fantastic, isn't it?" "You'll never change human nature"—we have heard all the stock replies. There are so many in the world brought up in the ways of the world and according to its standards who find it quite impossible to consider the story seriously even for a moment; it is so foreign to their way of thinking and alien to all their conception of things. That is why one can truthfully say that they have never heard or been told of these things. The message has fallen upon their ears, perhaps repeatedly, but the ears were deaf to the message; they could not receive it. Now, says the prophet, in that day when the servant of the Lord commands the attention of all men, they

will see and understand the Truth. It is a true word, applicable in principle to men in the next Age although really intended in its fulness to the Church in this Age, which says "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love him". (1 Cor. 2. 9). Isaiah first uttered those words, so well known because the Apostle Paul used them in his epistle. And Isaiah's phrase is vivid when we think of these kings who are to see and understand. "For since the beginning of the world, men have not heard, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him." (Isa. 64. 4). Paul's words were intended for the Church, the spiritually-minded sons of God in this Age; Isaiah's rhapsody was designed to embrace all men and to bring within its scope those who in this "present evil world" do not know God. "Him that waiteth for him" says Isaiah; this is none other than every son of mankind who ultimately inherits the earthly Paradise. "It shall be said in that day . . . we have waited for him, and he will save us." (Isa. 25. 9).

In the glorious outcome of God's redemptive Plan, when all that are in heaven and on earth join together in one vast song of praise and adoration to the One sitting upon the throne, and to the Lamb, the men who formerly doubted and disbelieved and disparaged and denied will perceive in the ways of God and the benevolence of God heights of wisdom and love such as the heart of man, unaided, could never have conceived.

To be continued

Simon the Canaanite

Simon Zelotes the Apostle (Luke 6. 15; Acts 1. 13), one of the Twelve, is the same as "Simon the Canaanite" in Matt. 10. 4 and Mark 3. 18, but he was a Jew, not a Canaanite. "Zelotes" is the word transliterated into English as "Zealot". The Zealots were members of a political party sworn to overthrow the Roman power by violent means; Simon must have been associated with this group before his call to discipleship, hence the name. The expression "Canaanite" in the other two texts is an error; the word in Greek is *Kananites*, mistranslated Canaanite. It denotes an inhabitant of Cana the Galilean village. It could also be a transliteration of the Hebrew *ginah*, meaning "zealous", so bringing the word in line with the first two texts. Cana was near Nazareth and there is nothing unlikely in Jesus having chosen one of his twelve disciples from that village.

John Bunyan on riches

One of the football pools firms looking for new clients addressed a set of trial coupons to Mr. John Bunyan, Elstow, Bedfordshire. The firm concerned evidently did not get this particular name out of the telephone directory, neither, apparently, were they aware that John Bunyan died three hundred years ago. But there is no doubt of the reception which the tinker of Elstow would have accorded the plausible mis-sives which find their way through so many of our letter-boxes nowadays. "Here is a silver mine" said Demas, "and some digging in it for treasure. If you will come, with a little pains you may richly provide for yourselves." "Let us go and see" said Hopeful. "Not I" said Christian; "I have heard of this place before now, and how many have there been slain; and besides, that treasure is a snare to those that seek it, for it hindereth them in their pilgrimage."

AFTER THE FLOOD

10. The coming of the gods

With the deaths of the patriarchs Eber and his son Peleg within a century of each other, the Golden Age of the sons of Noah ended. For more than eight hundred years the people of Shinar had remained faithful to the God of Noah. The evidence lies in the form of innumerable inscribed clay tablets which have been unearthed and deciphered. Those which are later than about 2000 BC—roughly the times of Abraham—abound with references to the names of the many gods of Babylon, anything up to a hundred in number. Tablets earlier than that date refer to lesser and lesser names of gods the farther one goes back in time, until by some four centuries earlier there are only three gods worshipped. Before that for as far back as any written records exist there is only one God known—they called him An, the God of heaven, the Most High. Even in the later days of many gods An was always the supreme God, the creator and controller of all things. Strangely enough, the same tablets reveal no signs of war or warlike weapons until this same period. The evidence is that paganism and war came into the world together.

One of the leading archaeologists of this century, Stephen Langdon, expressed this fact in his book *"Semitic Mythology"* saying *"both in Sumerian and Semitic religions monotheism preceded polytheism and belief in good and evil spirits. The evidence and reasons for this conclusion, so contrary to accepted and current views, have been set down with care and with the perception of adverse criticism . . . the history of the oldest religion of man is a rapid decline from monotheism to extreme polytheism"*. Written during the early years of this century, Langdon—who died in 1937—never knew of the many modern finds which have confirmed his deductions. In the 19th century it was fashionable to insist that monotheism, the worship of one God, developed from preceding belief in many gods, and is still asserted by many text-books which have failed to keep up with the times. Today there is abundant documentary proof, which cannot be denied, to the contrary. One of the most telling evidences in this connection is due to excavations in 1930 at the ancient 25th BC century city of Eshnunna, not far from Baghdad, by Frankfort. He found a mass of inscribed tablets and cylinder seals, some from the temple and some from private houses, which, he says *"can all be fitted in to form a consistent picture in which a single god worshipped in this temple forms the central figure . . .*

At this early period his various aspects were not considered separate deities in the Sumero-Akkadian pantheon" (*"Excavations at Tel Asmar—Eshnunna"*). In other words, the various aspects of the Most High, his love, justice, wisdom, and his methods of operation in the powers of Nature, the sunshine, the storm, the seasons, and so on, were gradually viewed in separation and personified under individual names and in this manner men became accustomed to the idea of a plurality of gods. Almost every modern excavation of 3rd BC millennium sites is now providing confirmation of Frankfort's findings.

The taint of idolatry affected the line of Abraham. Joshua, addressing Israel just before his death, told them that their fathers dwelt beyond Euphrates in the remote past, and *"served other gods"* (Josh. 24.2). The *"Book of Jubilees"* declares that Serug, Nahor and Terah were all idolaters; this might be an old legend without foundation, nevertheless these are the only three before Abraham who could thus have worshipped pagan gods. And this brings us to the introduction of those gods amongst men.

Like so many later human philosophies, the development of the gods was inspired by a desire to explain the unrevealed things of God by means of human analogies. The first was an endeavour to explain how the world was created and life arose upon it. It cannot be said at this present time to what extent the already existing story of creation in Genesis was woven into this dawning mythology but that it played some part is certain. Genesis chaps. 1 to 9 were certainly in existence in written form for two centuries before mythology began. There have been claims that certain Babylonian and Sumerian legends preserve the Bible story of creation but as yet this cannot justly be maintained. What is more apparent is that these legends are a fusion of original creation with events occurring after the Flood in the early days of the Sumerians and in the present state of knowledge the task of disentangling is impossible. But throughout the mythology there are threads of thought which do suggest the remains of an earlier clear—much clearer than modern times have been disposed to admit—understanding of the Divine Plan.

So, how did God bring life to the earth? The Sumerians expressed this by telling how An, the Most High God, took the goddess Ninhursag, which means the *"great lady of the earth"*, and so humanity was created and given life. As a

figure of speech denoting the union of the Spirit of God with the elements of earth to produce man this could be a satisfactory picture. Eve said much the same thing when her first son was born: *"I have gotten a man from the Lord"*. In fact Ninhursag might be a dim recollection of Mother Eve, but here she became the consort of An and therefore a goddess and therefore to be worshipped and that was a very different thing.

Next there had to be defined the power by which the earth itself, with all its vegetation and its animal wealth, was brought into being. Genesis says *"the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters"* and the work of creation proceeded apace. Just so, said the Sumerians and the Semites of Serug's day; the invisible power of An, the Most High, a silent and unseen energy like the wind, executing his commands. In their language that power was denoted by the word *lil*, which meant wind, breath, spirit, exactly as does the Hebrew *ruach* and the Greek *pneuma*. So the unseen power of the Spirit of God became personified under the name of Enlil, meaning Lord of the Spirit, or Lord of the air, and since this conception first arose in the Sumerian holy city of Nippur, Enlil became the special god of that city. To denote his subordination to the supreme god An, he was looked upon as the son of An (The Sumerian name for the city later and usually known as Nippur, "Calneh" in Gen. 10, was Enlil-ki, meaning the city of Enlil).

Enlil in later times was depicted as a fatherly, beneficent god, always solicitous for the welfare of his creatures. He gradually assumed the prerogatives of An his father, so that An the Most High God receded into his heaven but Enlil was more immediately at hand to see to man's interests. Says one of the hymns of praise which were chanted in his honour *"without Enlil, no cities would be built, no settlements founded, no sheep folds established, the fish of the seas would lay no eggs, the birds of heaven would not build nests, plants and herbs would fail to grow, in field and meadow the rich grain would fail to flower, the trees would not yield their fruit"* and so on. Enlil was the Divine spirit by means of which everything came into being and pursued its allotted course. And so Enlil became a manifestation of the Most High God in so far as his creative spirit was concerned.

But away down in the south country, on the shores of what is now the Persian Gulf, men's minds were working in a different manner. Not for these the mystical, reverential, perhaps philosophical reasonings of the custodians and people of Nippur, looked to by all Sumerians as their holy city and the spiritual centre of their country. These men of the southern cities, Eridu and Ur

of the Chaldees and Uruk and Badtibira, were traders, merchants, seafarers, artisans. Their ships went as far east as India and Ceylon and down the coast of East Africa and brought the products of those countries back to their own. They were practical, hard-headed, men of the earth rather than the heavens, and they began to think of God in more concrete down-to-earth terms than could be afforded by the more visionary form of Enlil. So just as Enlil was the god of the spirit, of the air, and eventually became the god of heaven, so now men in the south began to talk of God manifest in a more practical manner as the god of earth, of sea, and of the nether-world, the world of the dead. They called him Enki, the lord of the earth and they too made him the son of An the supreme god.

So now in the days of Serug there were four gods instead of one—the four "creative gods" as they were known in later days. But Enki was not pictured as a benevolent, fatherly deity like Enlil; he was a rather brusque and short-tempered god, usually taking up an antagonistic attitude to Enlil, but he was at least credited with inventing or introducing more than a hundred laws by which the civilised life of the community was to be regulated, and responsible for the development of agricultural and mechanical devices where-with life became easier and the community richer. It is not difficult to see, in these two deities, thinking men's view of the two spheres of Divine power extended towards man—the spiritual on the one hand and the earthly, practical, on the other and that is how it must have been in the beginning; only later did they take on the form of distinct personalities.

The process did not stop there. Men were looking for something visible to the natural eyes in which the invisible God could be manifested. Men have been doing that ever since and this is the source of all idolatry. Faith in the unseen things does not come easily to the natural man. So they turned their attention to the heavenly bodies, the sun, moon and planets, and pictured them as the eyes of the Lord, watching everything that takes place on earth. In a fanciful way they considered those heavenly bodies as attributes of Deity and before long were venerating them as manifestations of the personal unseen God. So they gave Enlil five sons, Nannar, the Moon; Nebo, Mercury; Nergal, Mars; Niburu, Jupiter and Adar, Saturn. Then they credited Nannar the Moon-god with a son and daughter, Utu, the Sun, and Inanna, Venus. These seven were termed the "immortal gods", the "watchers". They formed a second level of gods, whose duties were generally to oversee matters occurring on earth. A remarkable reference to the continuance of this belief

into future ages is provided in the Book of Daniel (4.17) where Nebuchadnezzar the king, recounting his dream of the tree to Daniel, says that "a watcher and a holy one" came down from heaven to declare the decree and told him "this matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones, to the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men . . ." Here is a singular evidence that the great king, Nebuchadnezzar, two thousand years after the emergence of idolatry, accepted the existence of the seven "watchers", their overlords, the "creative gods"—the "holy ones"—and above them all, the Most High God who, worshipped since the days of Noah, still retained his position as the supreme God of heaven. Even the Jews in later time were not immune from the same failing; Jewish legend had it that there were seven archangels in attendance upon God, overseeing various departments of world affairs. Michael—the only archangel mentioned as such in the Bible—was the champion and defender of Israel and Gabriel the messenger of God, just as Utu was the champion of the Sumerians and Nebo the messenger of An; and there were five others.

It would seem there are no bounds to the ingenuity of men once they begin to depart from the living God. Tablets belonging to a couple of centuries later begin to reveal new gods, one after another, lesser gods, each devoted to the welfare of one particular sphere of human activity or one particular calling amongst men. Thus there suddenly appears Kulla the god of the brickbuilders, Ninkurra of the stonemasons, Ninilda of the carpenters; Adad the god of rain and storms; Ninurta of war; Arazu of prayer; Symugan of cattle and vegetation; Ninkurak of medicine and healing. There were fifty of these altogether, known as the "great gods", all created by An. The individual citizen was expected when in difficulty to go to the appropriate god for help and only when that failed to go higher up the scale to one of the "watchers" or even to Enlil or Enki or An as a last resort.

As if this motley crowd of gods and goddesses was not enough, there next came, on the fourth level, three hundred spirits of earth and three hundred spirits of heaven, together with a multitude of fiends and evil spirits bent on harassing and persecuting defenceless humans. Much of the said humans' time was spent in supplicating the gods for deliverance from these terrors.

The decline from monotheism into paganism was remarkably rapid. A matter of two centuries saw the entire pantheon of gods established; temples and ziggurats (temple-towers) which had been sacred to the Most High God from their foundation were re-named and made sacred to

one or another of the new gods. Then for another five hundred years the system grew increasingly elaborate and complex to the point where every city and community had its own system of gods to an extent which is the despair of modern investigators endeavouring to make some sense of the often mutually contradictory beliefs of these ancient peoples. Eventually, a little before the time of Abraham, Marduk the deified Nimrod was introduced as the son of Enki and became particularly associated with Babylon, which by that time had become the capital of the whole country. Marduk was hailed as the world's redeemer and champion of all men and eventually superseded most of the others, except An the Most High. Millenniums later, a century before Christ, when the glory and power of Babylon had passed away and the great city lay in ruins, deserted, travellers found a decaying priesthood in the ruined Temple of Babylon continuing a ritual in honour of An and Marduk. The Most High God of Noah was never completely forgotten.

It is possible that this incursion into idolatry did not go unchallenged. There must have been some who, like Eber and his fellows, would have none of it. In the 22nd BC century, by which time idolatry was firmly established—and the birth of Abraham was to be only two more centuries away—there began to appear in all the city-states of Sumer an element of the Semitic part of the population known as Hebrews. They were notably conspicuous as merchants and traders, and this at a time when communication with distant countries was opening up and goods being transported and exchanged meant they became well-known throughout the Middle East. Students of Genesis will of course recognise them as descendants of Eber, from whom they derived their name. Abraham, one descendant of his, is referred to in Gen. 14. 13 as "Abram the Hebrew". Now this people in that 22nd century BC and onwards referred to God as "El" a word which in the later Hebrew language means powerful or mighty. It is derived from the Semitic *ilu* which from earliest times meant "God". The Sumerian proper name "An" (Semitic "Anu") for the Supreme Being was derived from the conception of his being the God of Heaven—the Sumerian word for heaven or the sky is also An. This appellation "el" for "God" is found to have been in general use among the Canaanites of Canaan up to the time Joshua and his hosts entered the land a thousand years later, and is in fact the same word which denotes God in Arabic today—Allah. The expression "*el elion*"—"God Most High" which occurs in Genesis and again in the Psalms perhaps had its origin at this time in an effort to maintain the authority of the One True God of Noah against

the rising tide of "gods many and lords many" which was being created by the ingenuity of man.

But the odds were too great. The number of false gods continued to increase and the corruptions of their religion multiplied, until the Lord looked down from heaven much as He had done

in the days before the Flood and knew that the time had come to intervene. And in Abraham He found the man whose faith would set in motion a chain of events which at the end would bring about the execution of his purpose.

To be continued.

PROSPERITY — ADVERSITY

"In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of evil consider. God also hath set the one over against the other, to the intent that man should discover somewhat at his latter end" (Eccl. 7. 14).

The final phrase in that verse is not as rendered in the A.V. As there presented, it declares that God has arranged prosperity and adversity in order that man should find nothing at the end. That does not make sense, and in consequence this verse has been one of the obscure statements of Scripture. But modern Hebrew Bibles omit the prefix *lo* which is the negative, so that *lo-meumah*, meaning "nothing", becomes *meumah* which means "something, anything, somewhat". Now this opens the way to a notable reflection on the Divine way with man and the permission of evil. Prosperity and adversity have been set by God "the one against the other", as though effecting the balancing of a scale by equal weights, "to the intent that man should discover somewhat at his latter end". Prosperity and adversity in the Old Testament are indistinguishable from good and evil; the same Hebrew words—*tob* and *ra*—do duty for both ideas. The age-old question "Why does evil exist; why does God permit evil?" is answered in this verse, but man does not find the answer until his "latter end".

In the day of prosperity be joyful! There is good reason for accepting such of the good things of this life as come our way with joy and thanksgiving, and making use of them to the fullest degree. These things are the gifts of God, part of the design He has drawn up for the life of man. There is nothing meritorious in rejecting them for the sake of a too sombre view of religious devotion. And they can be means in our hands for the greater benefit of others. The Divine intention is for the happiness of mankind and in the final outworking that intention will be fully achieved. In the meantime we do well to make full use of such means of happiness as are afforded us by life as it is.

In the day of adversity be thoughtful and reflective! At such times life is of necessity lived in a minor key. The outward signs of exuberance can hardly be expected and are perhaps not appropriate, even although there is peace and content in the heart. This is the time for a more than usual quiet contemplation of the work of God both in the individual life and in the world. Adversity can develop character in a manner that the mere bestowment of gifts and blessings can never do. The fires of affliction can purify and temper a man's inner being so that he emerges at the end a better man than he would ever have been otherwise. Adversity tests and proves a man's inward strength; as Solomon said in Prov. 24. 10 "If thou faintest in the day of adversity, thy strength is small."

After this acceptance of the sunshine and shadow of life's experiences, the man is still left without the final achievement or even the final answer. There is a Divine law of recompense as there is one of retribution—what a man soweth that shall he also reap—but in neither case does the final balancing of accounts take place in this life. That must wait until man's latter end—which is of course really a new beginning, for there is much to come beyond the present proverbial threescore years and ten. One might ask why God does not give a more evident revelation of these things to man and so save the doubt and perplexity and unbelief. The answer to that is surely that too clear a revelation now would stultify man's progress toward that understanding which alone will make him fit for the life of the eternal ages. Like the emerging butterfly, struggling to free itself from the encumbering chrysalis, a struggle essential to bring its newly developed organs of flight into operation, so must man develop under the twin forces of prosperity and adversity if one day he is to emerge into the "glorious liberty of the children of God". In that manner, at last, man will "discover somewhat at his latter end".

"THE SAINTS SHALL JUDGE THE WORLD"

"Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world . . ." (1 Cor. 6. 2).

St. Paul's casual remark to the Corinthian believers highlights in sharp relief what seems at first sight to be an instance of utter conceit—that certain men and women, Christians though they be, shall at some future time be entrusted with the responsibility of judging their fellows in matters connected with the issues of life everlasting. The remark seems the more out of place when it is remembered that the general Scriptural presentation is that Jesus Christ is the judge of all men when the time for judgment has come.

In reality the declaration is in no way out of harmony with the revealed purpose of God and neither does it savour of conceit or any improper sentiment, once there is a proper understanding of what is involved in the judgment to which St. Paul refers, and the purpose of the Age in which it is to be true.

The judgment is, of course, that of all the world during the Millennium, when the Heavenly administration of the Lord Christ rules the earth. It is a basic fact of theology that his Church will then be associated with him in that sphere of rulership. The judgment is not an unqualified judicial condemnation; it includes the entire process by which man, standing before God, will be subjected to the entire process of education and discipline for which that Age is designed. *Krino*, which is the word here employed, denotes the picking out, selection, choosing, approving, of those who measure up or can be made to measure up to a displayed standard, the intellectual sifting and weighing up of the evidence upon which the final decision must be based. The substance of this "judging", therefore, is to educate, to persuade, to convert, and only at the end of the process to give the final decision which means life or death for the individual—and that final decision in the Scriptural picture is the prerogative of the Lord Christ. The spirit in which, and the intention with which, the work will be conducted is indicated by the words of Jesus *"The Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."* (Luke 9. 56) and of St. Paul *"(God) will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth"* (2 Tim. 2. 4).

It is in this light that our Lord's words to his disciples must be understood; *" . . . ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of*

Man shall sit in the throne of his glory ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel". (Matt. 19. 28) and Rev. 20. 4 *"they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years"*. There is a difference between earthly and heavenly ideas of rulership and of thrones. With man the words denote a lording it over one's fellow men and usually not to their advantage. With God they indicate service and sacrifice for the benefit of the ruled. *"The princes of the nations exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your servant"* (Matt. 20. 25-26) is the principle laid down by Jesus, a principle He himself exemplified by his washing of his disciples' feet.

"Ye which have followed me"; it must also be remembered that those who in the Lord's sight have shown their fitness for this admittedly exalted position of responsibility in the next Age do not attain it easily. This is not a question of favouritism or of a reward for lip service or mere profession of godliness. The whole purpose of the dedicated Christian life in this Age is the development of qualities, and assimilation of experience, which will produce the sterling character needed for the position of wise and just administrators in that Age. It means devotion to the ideal and complete dedication to the service of God, and none can say who among us will be found fitted for that high destiny when the time comes. As Guy Schofield says at the end of his book *"The Purple and the Scarlet"*, speaking of some such at the beginning of this Age and the suffering they endured, *"Inasmuch as they were instruments, lesser people, while revering them, must also pity them, for their lot was hard. Inasmuch as they were mortals caught up from their amiable lives to go a-soldiering a tremendous campaign, we must bow our heads before them. For no triumph has been like their triumph, nor did any seed-sowing yield so great a harvest . . . Believers will call them instruments of Providence, but it is a terrible thing to be an instrument of Providence."* Those who are to lead and teach the world in the coming Day do not reach their positions by an easy path. *"Through much tribulation shall ye enter the Kingdom"* (Acts 14. 22).

It is a mistake to think that God has no use for any who do not become "saints" in the New

Testament sense here and now, and live their lives in the intensity of devotional observance. Just as it takes all kinds of men to make this world, and all men do not share the same function and place, so the Divine scheme of things provides for a variety of station and duty, and all creatures supremely happy in their appropriate environment. None can ever attain to enduring life without intelligent acceptance of Christ and his supremacy, but within that acceptance will be found loyal citizens of the Divine empire on various planes of being, working together in complete amity and harmony for the common good. It need not be thought strange therefore that from the same stock of mankind is taken one company of the redeemed to be eternally associated with Christ in one of the "many mansions" He declared exist in his Father's house (John 14. 2), and another company in a somewhat different "mansion" equally part of creation and equally a part of Heaven. That the "Church" is complete and ruler over the nations during the Millennium is definite Scripture truth. That there are masses of mankind ready to enter into enduring life at the end of the Millennium long after the Church as such is complete is an equal Scripture truth. Beyond that point we enter into the everlasting years about which the Scriptures say little or nothing, but there can be no doubt that in the glories of that eternal world or worlds in which sin, suffering and death have no place, all creatures will find utter content and abundant scope for their initiative and activity.

In our own day the ambition of some men is to become astronauts and soar away above their fellows in the heights of space. The remainder do not envy them; they are perfectly content to follow their own chosen activities on earth. Those who go and those who stay each fulfil their chosen tasks and in them find their lives' satisfaction—to the extent, that is, that any man can find true satisfaction in this very unsatisfactory world. Future ages will be different in that respect. It is written, under the picturesque metaphors of an agricultural people of long ago, "*And they shall build houses and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the longevity of a tree shall be the longevity of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.*" (Isa. 65. 21-22). That is a Messianic foreview and will become reality in the next Age.

St. Paul's words regarding the "saints" who shall "*judge the world*", therefore, will find substance in that wise, just and inherently benevo-

lent Administration which, under the direction of the Lord Christ, will take over this well-nigh ruined world at the end and introduce what St. Peter called "*a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness*" (2 Pet. 3. 13). The whole object of that Administration is to evangelise the world, to preach Christ and assist all who are willing to overcome their ingrained habits of wrong and build up characters strong for righteousness. It will be a day of self help; we are familiar in our own time with Alcoholics Anonymous and Smokers Anonymous and so on, organisations of men and women, slaves to some habit which they wish to break, banded together for the purpose of helping each other by encouragement and example to achieve their objects. We may see, in that Age, a Wrong-doers Anonymous, the membership of which extends to practically the whole world—for it is not probable in practice that a very great proportion of humanity prefers sin for its own sake. The programme is a very extensive one; the saints may be appointed to rule the world but they are going to have to work very hard in doing it. There is a great deal of ignorance and prejudice and selfishness to dissipate and much instruction in the principles of right living to be inculcated. The sights are set high—nothing less than the conversion of "whosoever will" to the service and worship of the Lord Christ, which in itself implies unequivocal harmony and co-operation with one's fellows in every affair of life.

It is evident that this rulership must come to an end. There is and can be nothing permanently immature or incomplete in Divine creation. The necessity for the Messianic reign and the ministrations of the Church in that reign lies in man's own immaturity and failure to develop along right lines without such ministrations. The day must eventually come when each man has taken the final and irrevocable decision — for Christ or against, for the principles of righteousness or evil. Since life comes only from God, and evil is inherently destructive, it follows that at the end the only ones who continue into enduring life are those who have accepted Christ and attained harmony with God. And at that point the saints who until then have ruled the world must step aside and leave all men in possession of their maturity in Christ, fully fledged citizens of Divine creation. That is what Jesus meant in his parable of the Sheep and the Goats, where the King is depicted as saying to those who have thus attained, "*Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" (Matt. 25. 34). That is what St. Paul meant when he said of that same climax

"Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father . . . that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15. 24-28). The Millennial reign of Christ over the earth is an event in time, the final phase in man's

preparation for his destiny. At the end of that reign man steps into eternity; he needs the ministration of the Church no longer. The grand design is completed; man, at long last, has attained the full image and likeness of God.

THE HILL OF OLIVES

"Oh for the wings of a dove to fly far away and be at rest! Fain would I fly from it all, and live within the desert." How often have we expressed similar sentiments; the surroundings from which the Psalmist would escape have their counterpart in the hurly-burly which makes up life in this post-war world. "I have seen violence and strife in the city; day and night do these encompass it upon her walls; and wrong and trouble are in her midst; mischief is in her midst; guile and deceit depart not from her street." We think of another and greater than David who trod those same streets; how much more must his perfect nature have revolted against the squalor, the selfishness and the scheming which met him at every turn. The Psalmist said "I would spend my night in the wilderness" (*Leeser*), but Jesus, to whom came trial and temptation in the wilderness, found sanctuary elsewhere. He spent many of his last days in this same city, but at night he left it and its distractions and ascended the "Hill of Olives". The calm dignity which elevated him far above the treacherous priests and the angry mob, and which called for the exclamation "Behold, the man" was surely the outcome of those quiet hours spent in solitude upon Olivet. We say "in solitude" but we realise of course that while apart from human companionship, it was here that Jesus drew very near to his Father.

The record says "He went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives" and again "at night He went out, and abode in the mount of Olives". John 8. 1 (*Moffatt*) has it "So every one of them went home, but Jesus went to the Hill of Olives". Here Jesus was "at home"; after the strenuous labours of the day—teaching in the Temple, healing the sick, comforting the sorrowing, bearing with his disciples, and meeting the scorn of the "learned ones", Jesus found rest on Olivet. The tired limbs, the throbbing brow, the aching heart would preclude all possibility of sleep, but Jesus found rest and refreshment, not in sleep but in quiet and undisturbed communion with his Father.

Centuries earlier, David, taking flight from Absalom, mounted the ascent of Olives, weeping as he went, until he reached the summit "where

God was worshipped". Doubtless he worshipped God on this occasion, and later when he was "a little beyond the summit" he received a gift of "asses for the king's household, bread and fruit for the troops, and wine for those who faint in the desert". Thus weeping was turned to joy upon Olivet. Do we ever mount the ascent of Olives weeping? The trials of this life, at work or in business, the multitude of problems which confront those responsible for the home, all tend to weary and depress us; but when we can leave the "city" and ascend the hill of Olives, "where God is worshipped", there we can release the mind from its burdens, there we find rest and peace, all the weariness and the heartache melt away, and we regain our poise and sense of proportion. Here too we find "asses for the King's household"—aids for our heavenward journey—bread and fruit for the soul, and wine to drink when we faint in the desert.

There are three aspects of this hill which may be used to portray differing experiences in drawing near to God. From Jerusalem, figurative of all that is worldly, the pathway dips steeply down to the Kidron valley, then upwards to the garden of Gethsemane. From thence it continues to the summit, then down again to Bethany. Bethany—the scene of some of the happiest and most blessed of our Lord's earthly experiences, but also of the saddest. Can we visualise the scene as the golden sun is setting over the great city? The humble home, kept clean and bright by the practical and industrious Martha, is filled with the sound of happy voices. Left behind are the labours of the day, and Jesus, with Lazarus by his side and Mary at his feet, converses quietly with them and his disciples. Martha, mindful of the needs of the natural man, enters with refreshments, and for a while a fitful silence reigns. Supper over, the murmur of voices in pleasant conversation rises again, giving way anon to the sound of voices blended in the sweet harmony of psalms and spiritual songs. But it was not always thus. Gone now is the sound of happy voices raised in song, the lowly home is now filled with the sound of mourning. Lazarus is in the tomb,

and Mary and Martha, hope all gone and faith departed, wait with heavy eyes turned towards the pathway along which their Lord will surely come. With his presence faith revives a little and hope stirs again, Silence reigns as the Lord of all the earth weeps over that sad scene; but by the mighty power of God sorrow is turned to holy joy.

As the time drew nearer Jesus increasingly sought the sanctuary of Olivet and Bethany; it was on Olivet that He wept in sorrow over Jerusalem and foretold the destruction of the temple; it was here too that He uttered that wonderful discourse concerning his return and the end of the Age.

To Jerusalem went Jesus for the Passover but after the Last Supper and his valediction He was drawn again to Olivet. There, in the garden of Gethsemane, He reached the crisis of his earthly sojourn, but with the ministry of an angel of the Lord his strength and courage returned. How he must have longed to continue over Olivet to that sweet haven of rest at Bethany; but to the cruel city He returned, there to suffer and be condemned to a criminal's death. But the power that raised Lazarus from the dead brooded over the Son of Man and brought him forth from the grave, the first born of a New Creation. After a little while came the glorious culmination of the greatest chapter in the world's history; Jesus left this earth to enter the Heavenly courts, to receive a name which is above every name. Not from the city which had hailed him as king, not from the Temple which was so defiled, did He ascend, but from Olivet. Opinions may differ as to the exact spot at which Jesus made his departure from this earth, but to him Olivet and Bethany were all one.

We like to think of him walking over Olivet for the last time, leading his disciples along the familiar pathway to Bethany, there to bid farewell to those dear ones who had contributed so much to his earthly comforts and joys, then retracing his steps towards the summit, taking leave of his friends and brethren from that hill which had witnessed his greatest joys, his deepest sorrows and closest communion with his Father.

If we would follow Jesus into the heavenly realm we must follow him daily up the ascent of Olivet, and continue on to Bethany; then when

the time comes for us to follow him through Gethsemane we shall pass the crisis safely, and wing our way from Olivet to dwell with him through eternity. Maybe much water must flow beneath the bridges ere this day comes; who knows what lies before us as we seek to follow our Master to the end? Even as Olivet and Bethany brought to Jesus the highest joys and deepest sorrows, so we too may find that, as we seek to draw near to God and faithfully keep his law, we shall ascend the heights and plumb the depths. The Apostle Paul followed Jesus up the ascent of Olivet, and on to Bethany too. He soared up into the third heaven to view scenes kept from the eyes of angels; he too was plunged into the depths as he came to "know the fellowship of his suffering". He must have spent many a happy hour at "Bethany"; it was he who urged the brethren at Ephesus to "*converse with one another in the music of psalms, in hymns, and in songs of the spiritual life*", and likewise to those at Colosse to "*teach and train one another*" in the same. Should we occupy our time thus, there would be less time for unseemly arguments about so-called "essentials to salvation".

Even as Jesus sought the quiet joys of Bethany as an antidote to the restless excitement of the city, so we should find time to relax and rejoice and, to the best of our ability, converse with one another in the music of psalms and hymns, and in songs of the spiritual life. We must not be surprised, however, if we find our deepest sorrows at Bethany too. In worldly affairs the greatest sorrow, the sharpest pang usually comes from those who are nearest, so in the spiritual life it may be among our brethren that we shall experience the greatest heartbreaks, the deepest distress; so did our Master before us. It matters little whether the sun shines or heavy storm-clouds gather overhead, on Olivet we can rise above the "seen" things, and, with the eyes of faith, behold the things as yet "unseen". Going on to Bethany, whether it be to songs or to sighing, we shall find our Master there to share both joys and sorrows; then when our time comes to face the last ordeal, we too may mount the ascent of Olivet weeping, but in Gethsemane we shall find the ministering angel, and gain strength and courage to face the loosing of the silver cord, and in the resurrection morning reach the summit of Olivet whence we shall enter into everlasting joys.

We must leave the earth or heaven will never be ours. Our arms are not long enough to reach heaven while we hold on with one hand to earth.

The individual who tries to live without God—and the majority, unhappily, are like that today—is less than human.

SIX THOUSAND YEARS FROM ADAM

Nearly all systems of Bible chronology have been built upon the assumption that the span of this "present evil world" is limited to precisely six thousand years, and that the seventh millennium will mark the Second Advent and the establishment of the Kingdom of Christ upon earth. On the basis of data provided in the Authorised Version of 1611 this belief has given rise to the many and varied dates set by scholars and writers for the Second Advent; the consistent failure of such predictions has surrounded the subject with a certain scepticism. Nevertheless the tradition goes back a long way and the subject is important enough to warrant dispassionate consideration.

There is no doubt that a fixed belief existed among the Jewish people of several centuries before Christ that the world was to endure for six one-thousand year periods from Creation to the coming of Messiah and then would come the Last Day when the righteous would be exalted and sinners destroyed. The earliest written statement seems to be in the writings of the Greek historian Theopompus (350 BC) to the effect that the wise men of the Persians believed the world was to endure six thousand years after which Death and Hades would be abolished and all men live together in peace and happiness. Between then and the First Advent of Christ the Jewish Rabbis taught similarly, Rabbi Elias (200 BC) said that the world was destined to endure two thousand years without the Law, two thousand with the Law, two thousand years under the Messiah, and in the seventh thousand the earth would be renewed and the righteous dead raised. The Kabbalists (Jews who interpreted the Scriptures in a "numeric" fashion) held that the six occurrences of "aleph" (first letter of the Hebrew alphabet) in Gen. 1.1. indicated the six thousand-year periods the world would endure. ("Aleph" with two dots above is the Hebrew numeral for 1000). Although the Kabbalists flourished during the early Christian era their "science" incorporated many very ancient Jewish philosophies. Round about the time of the First Advent the thesis was well established. Thus the Second Book of Enoch, about AD 10-50, speaks of a thousand years of Sabbatic rest after six thousand of history (2 Enoch 22. 2-25.2). The Sibylline Oracles, a collection of Christian-pagan writings of about the same time, agrees. The Epistle of Barnabas, about AD 70, has it "*in six thousand years the Lord God will bring all things to an end*" (Ep. Barn. 13. 3-6). A little later on, in the 3rd century, the Gospel of

Nicodemus declares "*. . . after five thousand five hundred years, Christ the most beloved Son of God was to come to earth*" (Gos. Nicod. 22.11). The "*Book of Adam and Eve*", 1st century, says (42.1). "*When 5500 years have expired then will come upon earth the most beloved king Christ the Son of God to revive the body of Adam and with him to revive the bodies of the dead*" (This is thought by R. H. Charles to be a Christian interpolation but nevertheless shows the state of thought in that century).

The early Christians quickly picked up this belief from the Jews, and this for an understandable reason. The chronological statements of the Bible of their day showed that at the appearance of Christ at his First Advent the number of years elapsing since the creation of Adam was 5500; the expectation that at the expiry of 600 years the Second Advent would take place brought that event to within 500 years of their own time. Thus we have Hippolytus, Bishop of Porto, AD 220, writing that at the end of the 6000 years, in the year 500, Christ would return, raise his saints' from death and institute his Millennial reign. Lactantius, AD 310, went on record as saying that the Advent and Millennium would commence in 200 years from his own time. Epiphanius, AD 375; Chrysostom, AD 400; Hilary, AD 350; Jerome, AD 360; all these and many other of the "Early Fathers" so called, insisted that 6000 years from Adam would end in AD 500 or thereabouts and then Christ would be manifested at his Second Advent. Some of these were not millenarians; these held that this year would be that of the Day of Judgment and the final burning up of this world.

This universal expectation in the first five centuries of the Christian Church, to the effect that the Second Advent and the dawn of the Millennium would take place in the year AD 500 or thereabouts was due to the fact that the Old Testament Scriptures then in general use were in Greek, the version which is now known as the Septuagint. This version was translated from the Hebrew text round about 250 years before Christ and the figures it gives for the ages of the patriarchs at the birth of their sons differ widely from the present Hebrew text on which the Authorised Version is based. The total discrepancy is something in the order of 1400 years and this accounts for the difference between the expectation of the early Christians in the fifth and sixth centuries based on the Septuagint and those of modern

chronologists working from the Authorised Version which would indicate the 19th or 20th centuries as the significant time. The question of course arises; which is correct?

A century ago the dilemma hardly existed. The Authorised Version of the English Bible was largely derived from the official Hebrew Bible which attained its present form in the 9th Century A.D. It had been generally assumed, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, that this was in all respects the Hebrew text handed down from the time of Ezra more than a thousand years earlier. The fact that at the time of the First Advent Hebrew had become a dead language and the Bible of the Jews and the early Christians was in Greek—the Septuagint—was known but since the first translation of the Septuagint into English did not appear until 1808 few were familiar with it and the differences between the Hebrew and the Septuagint were put down to inaccuracies in the latter. Hence the chronological data of the modern Hebrew text became the basis for all “time” calculations and with this conviction various investigators from the date of the A.V. in 1611, starting with Archbishop Usher in 1624, to those of the present century, have produced a bewildering array of dates for the Second Advent ranging from 1653 to 2038. The 19th century seems to hold the palm with an advocate for every few years.

With the coming of the 20th century the situation changed. The combined effect of scholastic research into ancient manuscripts, increasing knowledge of the histories of ancient nations, and the results of archaeological discoveries in lands of the Middle East, have uncovered a mass of factual information, which was not and could not have been available to the students and writers of the 19th century. So far from there having been just one supremely accurate Hebrew text proceeding from Ezra and remaining intact through all the ages since, it is now known that just before the time of Christ there were at least three, and perhaps more, versions of the Hebrew Scriptures, varying in detail much as do our present-day modern translations of the Bible. The Greek translations, collectively called the Septuagint, were made on the basis of these versions, during the three centuries preceding the First Advent, and since Hebrew was dead and Greek the common tongue this became the Bible of the times. Only the priests retained the knowledge and reading of Hebrew.

Round about the year AD 100 the need for a standard “Received Text” of the Hebrew Bible became evident and a body of Jewish scholars set about the accomplishment of the work. These men were known as “Masoretes”, a term derived

from the Hebrew word for “tradition”—hence the official Hebrew Bible to this day is known as the “Masoretic Text”. All the varied versions in existence were consulted and a standard version created. In accordance with Jewish practice, the superseded manuscripts, as fast as they could be located, or were worn out by use, were consigned to the “genizah”, a store-room in the synagogue where they remained until, after the lapse of years, they were destroyed. In this way all previous versions of the Hebrew Scriptures passed out of existence and only the standard “Masoretic” version remained. In this present century it has been definitely established that while preparing this version the Masorete scholars deliberately reduced the ages of the antediluvian patriarchs at the birth of their sons, in the Genesis account, in order to push the end of the 6000 years forward by another 600 years, in an effort to refute the Christian claim that Christ had appeared at about the time expected. At round about the same time the Samaritans, who of course were independent of the Jewish Rabbis, altered the same periods in their own Bible, the Samaritan Pentateuch, by 900 years with the same end in view. The effect on the Christian world was negligible since all translations into European languages up to the sixteenth century were from the Greek Septuagint, hence the original longer time periods remained.

By about the 8th Century the advantage gained by this manouvre had all but run out and the end of the 6000 years was getting perilously close again. The Masoretes of this period made another adjustment, this time by reducing the patriarchal ages in the period between the Flood and Abraham, and omitting the life of Cainan altogether. This yielded another postponement of some 800 years. Once more as the existing copies of the Hebrew Bible went out of circulation the new periods became authoritative. (Full details of, and the evidence for, both these transactions are given in BSM Mar/Apr and May/June 1976, and of Cainan in Jan/Feb 1975). The last and greatest Masorete authority, Aaron ben Moshe ben Ashur, was responsible for the final recension of the Hebrew Bible at the end of the 9th century; this is known as the Masoretic version. The earliest known copy of this complete Hebrew Bible in existence is dated AD 1008 and the first printed one was published at Milan in 1483. The present Hebrew “Received Text”, on which the 1611 Authorised Version was largely based, was produced by Jacob ben Chaiyim in 1524 and no changes have since been made.

The Masoretes through the centuries performed an exceedingly praiseworthy work in producing a standard rationalised text from the vari-

cus Hebrew texts available to them, comparable only to the "Received Text" of our English Bible produced much later on in much the same way. They added the vowels to the old text, which had no vowels, and regularised the pronunciation. They probably justified their alteration of the time periods on the ground that the lengths of men's lives in the sacred record was of no vital importance and by this means the claims of the Christians could be countered.

Early witnesses to these facts include Josephus the Jewish historian of AD 90, who asserted that he took his information from the Hebrew Scriptures and uses the Septuagint figures in his chronology, which indicates that in his day, before the Masoretes commenced their work the Hebrew text had the "longer" chronology identical with the Septuagint; Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch thirty years later, who produced the first Christian chronology, agreeable to the Septuagint; Justin Martyr AD 148; Hippolytus AD 220; Origen of Alexandria, AD 230; Lactantius AD 310; Eusebius of Caesarea, AD 320; Ephrem Syrius of Nisibis, AD 370; St. Augustine the great theologian, AD 400 and George Syncellus, AD 800. All of these, and others, insist that the longer chronology represents the original Hebrew; many of them give details of the manner in which the Jewish scholars shortened the figures to serve their purpose. It is interesting to note that Ephrem Syrius in the 4th century gives the amount of shortening from Adam as 600 years, thus indirectly testifying to the fact that it was not until the 9th century that the second alteration was made, by shortening the periods between the Flood and Abraham.

To this day there is a marble plaque fixed in the wall of the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, stating that it was placed there by the Emperor Justinian to commemorate the completion of the building in the year 6021 from Adam. Justinian reigned from AD 527 to 565.

A hundred years ago the earliest reliably fixed date in ancient history was the end of the Babylonian empire at the hands of Cyrus the Persian

in 536 BC. The earliest written inscription which had been deciphered was the Moabite Stone of 800 BC and it was held by many scholars that there was no writing before that date. The dates of earlier great events in history could only be surmised and the Bible — to English-speaking peoples the Authorised Version of 1611—was the only authority. Today all that is changed. The discoveries of this century have established reliable dates in the annals of many ancient nations back as far as fifteen centuries before Christ, and reasonably approximate ones for another thousand years before that. Only the span of time between the Flood and Abraham indicated in the present Septuagint could possibly allow for the rise and career of the ancient civilisations of Sumer, Babylon and Egypt, and others as they are now known. The conclusion would seem to be that according to the pre-Christian Hebrew text six thousand years from Adam ended round about the time of the First Advent, and their ending has no direct connection with the time of the Second Advent.

It is important to realise that this does not in any way affect the familiar application of the "dispensational" prophecies. The "Days of Daniel", the "Jubilee cycles", the end of the Times of the Gentiles, all those presentations which have been used for several centuries past to point to the events and the time of the Advent, are quite unaffected by any possible era for the end of six millenniums. There is no indication in Scripture that the Advent must occur at the end of six thousand years, only Jewish traditions stemming from a few centuries before Christ. Our Lord said "of that day and hour knoweth no man" but He did indicate the time would be made known to the "Watchers" by means of the "signs of the times". "When ye see these things begin to come to pass, then know that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand." More positive and more assuring than any arithmetical calculation is when we can perceive in the events and state of the world around us that we are living in the days of the Advent.

Amen

"Amen" is a Hebrew word meaning literally FIRM, SURE, FAITHFUL. Revelation 3. 14 says *And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write: "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness."* Hence it came to be used as an adverb of confirmation, placed either at the beginning of a statement to give emphasis or at the end of prayer or some important statement where it is used as a sort of spoken signature by which the speaker or hearer attests and adopts as his own what has been said. An example is found in John 1. 51. "Verily, verily, (Amen; amen.) I say unto you, hereafter ye shall

see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." Again in John 3. 3 "Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." In 1 Cor. 14. 16 it is used as a signature. Paul says in effect that if we use not our gifts so that they are easily understood "how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say, Amen, (add his signature), at the giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?" The Psalmist adopts what has been said (Psalm 41. 13), "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and amen."

MY SON TIMOTHY

A character
Study

One of the most beautiful experiences recorded in the life of the Apostle Paul began at the commencement of his second missionary tour. It was at Lystra that he met one who was to be his close and dearly beloved companion for the remainder of his life. *"Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed, but his father was a Greek: which was well reported of by the brethren which were at Lystra. . . Him would Paul have go forth with him"* (Acts 16. 1-3). Paul had recently parted from his former companion, Barnabas, who had sailed to Cyprus with Mark, and Paul had chosen Silas to accompany him.

Of this visit to Lystra made by Paul and his companion only one incident is told us but it happily affected all the future of the great Apostle. In his former visit he had converted the young Timothy, and it was in the house of the boy's mother, Eunice, and his grandmother Lois that he and Silas were probably received.

The youthful Timothy is one of the best known and most lovable of that little circle who were henceforth associated with the wanderings of Paul. Of the many who Paul loved, none was dearer to him than this young disciple of Lystra. He adopted Timothy and regarded him as a son in all affectionate tenderness. Hear the terms with which he addressed him, *"Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith."* (1 Tim. 1. 2). *"To Timothy, my dearly beloved son. . . I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day."* (2 Tim. 1. 2-3) and he reminds the Philippians how well they knew *"that, as a son with a father, he had served with him for the Gospel."* (Phil. 2. 22). In spite of his shyness and timidity, which were increased by his youthfulness, he was so entirely united in heart and soul with the Apostle that among his numerous friends and companions he found no one so genuine, so entirely unselfish, so sincerely devoted to the furtherance of the cause of Christ. *"For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state."* (Phil. 2. 20). He was in fact, more than any other, the *'alter ego'* (other self) of the Apostle. That their knowledge of each other was mutual is shown in Paul's letter to Timothy, *"But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long suffer-*

ing, charity, patience," etc. (2 Tim. 3. 10). One whose yearning and often lacerated heart had such deep need of a kindred spirit on which to lean for sympathy, and whose distressing infirmities rendered necessary to him the personal services of some affectionate companions, must have regarded the devoted tenderness of Timothy as a special gift of God to save him from being crushed by overmuch sorrow.

Much as Paul loved Timothy, he loved the churches more, and if any church needed warning or guidance or Paul himself desired to know how it prospered, Timothy was required to overcome his shrinking modesty, to console the persecuted churches of Macedonia (Acts 19. 22. 1 Thes. 3. 2) or face the conceited turbulence of Corinth (1 Cor. 4. 17. 1 Cor. 16. 10) or to be the overseer of the Church of Ephesus (1 Tim. 1. 3). In fact no name is so closely associated with Paul's as that of Timothy; not only were two epistles addressed to him but he is associated with Paul in the superscription of five. *"Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother."* (2 Cor. 1. 1. 1 Thess. 1. 1. 2 Thess. 1. 1. Phil. 1 and Col. 1. 1). Timothy was with the Apostle Paul during the greater part of his second missionary journey; he was with him at Ephesus (1 Cor. 16. 8-10), he accompanied him on his last voyage to Jerusalem (Acts 20. 4), he helped to comfort his first imprisonment at Rome (Phil. 2. 18-20), he was urged in the second epistle Paul addressed to him to hurry from Ephesus, to take with him the cloak, books and parchments which Paul had left with Carpus at Troas and to join him in his second imprisonment before it was too late to see him alive. (2 Tim. 4. 9 and 13). Some sixteen years had elapsed between the days when Paul took Timothy as his companion at Lystra and the days when, in the weary desolation of his imprisoned age, he wrote once more to his beloved disciple, yet even at that latter date Paul addressed him as though he were the same youth who had first accompanied him to the hallowed work.

This was the youth whose companionship Paul now secured. Young as he was, the quick eye of Paul saw in him the spirit of loving and faithful service. He read the indications of one of those simple faithful natures which combine the glow of courage with the bloom of modesty.



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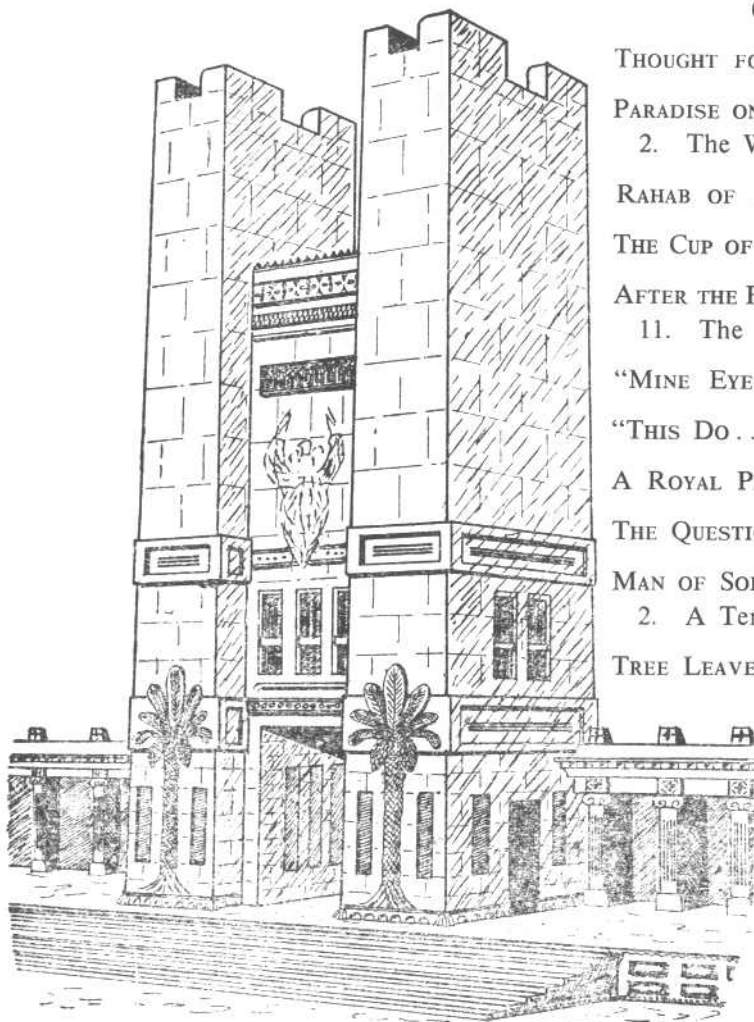
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

Published March 1st

Next issue May 1st

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

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Thought for the Month

"If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is vain" (I Cor. 15.14 RSV).

Later on in the same chapter St. Paul says *"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable"*. To have followed the star all our days and find at the end that it sets in eternal night; the very thought is unendurable. Some men in high positions tell us that this is all there is in it; there never was a resurrection and no mighty Divine power waiting behind the Vail for the moment when it is time to begin the rescue of the world from the impasse it has created for itself. St. Paul knew better; triumphantly he says (vs. 20) *"but in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep"*. His resurrection is the guarantee of ours—all men. *"As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive"* (vs. 22). We may not know—we do not know—with clear perception just what does lie beyond the curtain of death but that the future does hold life, life abundant, life free from the disabilities and injustices and sorrows of the present, we do know and in that confidence we can go in the assurance that, as he said (vs. 54) *"death is swallowed up in victory"*.

Gone from us



Sis. M. Allbon (London)
 Sis. B. Brown (St. Helens)
 Sis. E. Callaghan (Wirral)
 Bro. W. R. Chandler (London)
 Bro. H. E. Everett (Rugby)



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

NOTICES

The Memorial. For the information of those who hold a Memorial service on the anniversary of our Lord's death it may be noted that the date this year is Tuesday, 22nd April.

* * *

Yeovil one-day gathering. The annual one-day Home-gathering of the Yeovil Bible Fellowship will be held on Sunday, May 4 at Westfield School, Yeovil. Details from Mr. H. Charlton, 14 Orchard Road, Milborne Port, Sherborne, Dorset.

* * *

Yeovil Convention. The annual Spring Bank Holiday convention will be held over the period Friday, May 23 to Tuesday, May 27 at Hillgrove Avenue with some Sunday sessions at Moose Hall. For full details and accommodation please write to Mrs. M. Robinson, 26 Rands Meadow, Holwell, Hitchin, Herts., SG5 3SH.

* * *

Chesham Convention. Attention is called to the fact that Chesham Convention this year will be for one day only, viz., Sunday, 15th June, commencing at 10.45 with four sessions, venue as usual. Details Mr. F. Binns, 102 Broad Street, Chesham, Bucks.

* * *

New study circle. A Bible study group organised by a reader of the BSM has been started in the Tyne and Wear district and this notice is for the convenience of any other readers in that locality who may feel disposed to become associated with it. In such case please contact Mr. M. Hallowell, 6 Pennine Grove, West Boldon, East Boldon, Tyne & Wear, NE36 0NN, who will furnish details and extend a welcome to such. It is understood that the group is an entirely local and independent one not organically a subsidiary of any Christian group or denomination.

* * *

New Pamphlet. The article "The Call and Purpose of the Church" which appeared in the Nov./Dec. issue, is now available in 12-page pamphlet form. Copies free on request accompanied by postage (UK stamps accepted); 5 copies UK 12p. 20 copies UK 34p, overseas one dollar.

* * *

"The Spirit of Prophecy". Twenty years ago the BSM featured a series under this title dealing with the nature and underlying principles of Biblical prophecy—First principles; prophetic foresight; visions and dreams; prediction and revelation. This series is at present available as a 52-page booklet. Copies free on request accompanied by postage (UK stamps accepted); One copy UK 18p. 4 copies UK 34p, overseas one dollar.

PARADISE ON EARTH

Earth's coming glory

2. "The World passeth away"

The promised establishment of Paradise on earth demands that the present world order, based on selfishness and ignorance, productive of injustice, cruelty, disease and death, be brought to an end. If the Lord Jesus Christ is to assume the rulership of the world and bring about peace, happiness and life where at present there is only war, misery and death then it follows that earth's present rulers will vacate their positions. It is probable that at the end they will do so thankfully. Despite the enmity and bitter feelings which now exist between the great Powers, it is only logical to suppose that most at least of earth's politicians desire only peace and security within their own borders. If the new order to be instituted by Christ can show them a better prospect of attaining that desired object they may well, after some initial resistance, hail it as the solution they have been seeking. Zech. 8. 20-22 gives a very vivid picture of the leaders of the nations coming together to seek and consult with the new rulership. *"We will go with you"* they are depicted as saying *"for we have heard that God is with you"*.

The world will be in a sorry state, the result of human selfishness down the ages, a selfishness which has been accentuated by the modern drift away from God. It is already in a sorry state, politically, commercially, socially and from the ecological standpoint. One wonders if it could possibly get much worse and few there are who see any hope of it getting any better. Human society is disintegrating into lawlessness. The Apostle Paul foresaw this when, writing to Timothy, he told him *"in the last days perilous times shall come, for men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God"* (2 Tim. 2. 1-4). It is a terrible indictment, but who can dispute its truth in the world of today. During this present century man has advanced immeasurably in scientific knowledge and mastery over the elements but that advance has been at the expense of his knowledge of, and his faith in, God. In the past all men believed, and were the better for their belief. Today only the few really believe, and the rest are the poorer for their lack. Hugh Miller, the Christian geologist of more than a century ago, pointed to the evid-

ence that to the extent a community or a generation rejects God, to that extent they relapse into barbarism and eventually die out and become extinct, just because the natural instinct inherent in man to strive for better things and rise to greater heights, has become stultified so that at last there is nothing left that lives. That process is going on today in the world and there is no power or influence capable of calling a halt. The present generations, raised on superficialities and bereft of any real purpose in life, proceed on the path of degeneration and slow suicide. Man sorely needs salvation from himself and that salvation can only come from God. It is time for a great change.

The philosophy of the Bible displays not only the certainty but also the nature of that change. Putting it perhaps a little more crudely and yet just as reasonably, it foresees the end of this Age and describes what it will be like. The twelve disciples, sitting with Jesus on the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem and listening to him talking about all this, asked him *"Tell us, when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of thy presence, and of the end of the Age?"* (Matt. 24.3). In answer He told them not to expect this very desirable climax at once; there was to be a long catalogue of wars and rumours of wars, nation fighting against nation, famines, pestilences, all manner of calamities *"but the end is not yet"*. Nevertheless it would come eventually, and those then living would, if they properly understood these Bible foreviews, recognise the significance of the "signs of the times", and begin to expect the coming of the new order accordingly. The Gospel must first *"be preached in all the world, for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come"*. (Matt. 24.14). Not until the middle of the 19th century could it justly be claimed that the gospel had been preached to "earth's remotest bound" but by then, or very soon after, the combined labours of churches and missionaries could be shown—and have been shown — to have fulfilled this element of Jesus' words.

Our Lord, of course, was not the only one to see in prospect this cataclysmic ending of the present world order in preparation for the Advent of Christ. Many of the Hebrew prophets, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, did the same. Joel, and Isaiah, and Zechariah, to name but three, in the 8th to 5th centuries before Christ, waxed eloquent with their pen-pictures of this

condition of the world with which men are faced today and the coming of Christ to restore order out of chaos. The prophet Daniel, for example, five centuries before Christ, speaking of this time, predicted that *"many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased"*. The celebrated scientist, Sir Isaac Newton, in the year 1670, writing about this, ventured the opinion that in some future day human achievement would make it possible to travel at the "fantastic speed of fifty miles an hour", for which he was derided. At a time when the most rapid rate of travel possible was by stage coach at about ten miles an hour that was natural enough. Within two centuries the advent of steam railways fulfilled the prediction. But not even Sir Isaac dreamed that only one more century would see Concorde crossing the Atlantic at a thousand miles an hour and man travelling the quarter of a million miles to the moon in a few days. And as for knowledge being increased, the rapidity of one discovery following another, and one invention superseding its predecessor—there seems to be no end to the inventive genius of the human mind.

But most of this is misused and turned to base ends. The marvels of surgery have lengthened and made more tolerable many blighted lives, but world pollution and commercial food manufacture is shortening many more. Research into the atom has made possible the manufacture of many useful chemical substances, the production of increasingly useful food plants and the treatment of baffling diseases; but it has also given us nuclear fission and the nuclear bomb, with all the horrifying possibilities inherent in that creation. The benefits of the one are more than overshadowed by the menace of the other. And it was in foreseeing this that the Lord Jesus, knowing that such a day would surely come, described it in words burning in their intensity. *"There shall be signs..... upon the earth, distress of nations with perplexity..... men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming upon the earth..... and except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved..... but those days shall be shortened"* (Luke 21.25-26; Matt. 24.22). But as though to assure those who in the end of the Age find themselves face to face with these dark events, He went on to say *"and then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads, for your deliverance draweth nigh"* (Luke 21. 27-28). It is the recognition that the state of society and the nature of the events of which Jesus and the prophets spoke are those existing today which gives confidence that the great deliverance which

they foresaw is in absolute fact imminent. The Day is at hand.

The nature and magnitude of world conditions and world events in this latter half of the 20th century is such that Christian observers familiar with the Divine purposes no longer doubt that the time of the transition from human rule to Divine rule on earth is upon us. Our Lord characterised the principal features of this transition time as comprising universal war, famine and pestilence. Elaborated to a global scale this is just the situation confronting mankind. Since the first world war of 1914-18 the world has never been free from war in one place or another. The destructiveness of military weaponry has increased a million-fold. For the first time in human history the human race has it within its power to wipe itself off the face of the earth, and this not only at the behest of a few politicians ensconced at the top, but almost in the power of every terrorist and, perhaps, experimenting schoolboy. The marvellous power of radio control can lead to the fate of millions being determined by irresponsible lunatics. At the head of things are two great Powers, each desiring only peace, but knowing not how to reconcile that desire with their own vested interests. Behind them stand other powers rapidly approaching technical equality with them, and with that, equal threatening and bargaining power, Behind them, in turn, stand the terrorist groups seeking to bring about their own systems of control, also by force—and at the bottom the schoolboys who with their home-made radio sets and computers are already finding it possible to "muscle in" on the sophisticated defensive and offensive systems of the nations, and who knows, could perhaps "trigger off" a cataclysm of nuclear attack which could not be stopped. The final irony of the long history of human invention and achievement could be the destruction of it all by an irresponsible schoolboy—if the Lord allowed it. But, of course, he will not. That is why He said that except those days be shortened—cut short—there should no flesh be saved. But, *"those days shall be shortened"*.

It is possible that the nuclear threat is not the most serious one in the modern world. Increasing alarm is being voiced at the progressive increase in the pollution of the environment. Over half a million different types of pesticides, detergents and poisons, all inimical to animal and vegetable life, have been identified in the world's rivers and seas, all put there by modern man. These substances are steadily destroying marine life and so upsetting the balance of Nature. Acid rain, rainfall contaminated with sulphur dioxide and other toxic chemicals emitted by power stations and large industrial plants, is affecting

farm crops and destroying buildings. The steady deforestation of the world at the behest of powerful financial interests, greedy for the timber, and the minerals lying below the forests, has its adverse effect in rainfall and world climate and leads to the creation of vast deserts where life is impossible. The last of the world's great rain forests, that of the Amazon region in northern Brazil, is now being systematically decimated and no one in authority or power cares. Two thousand years ago there was no great desert in northern Africa; there were forests and grasslands teeming with life. The Romans commenced the destruction of the forests and the process has gone on ever since, resulting in the present vast Sahara desert which is already larger than the entire United States and is increasing in size every year.

Now there is another threat. In 1967 the American Association for the Advancement of Science issued a warning that this decimation of the world's forests, coupled with the pollution of the seas and the vastly increased burning of fossil fuels—coal, oil and natural gas—poses a real possibility of the world's supply of oxygen running out and so rendering life on earth impossible. Oxygen, essential to human and animal life, is produced only by growing vegetation—70% by marine vegetation in the oceans. Every year fifteen hundred square miles of oxygen-producing trees and plants disappear under roads, buildings and airports, depriving the world for ever of the oxygen needed to keep ten million human beings alive. The A.A.A.S. point out that the world is getting perilously near the "point of no return" when oxygen production falls below consumption and life begins to die out from the earth. But no one listens.

A related problem is that of over-population. From the beginning of the Christian era to the year AD 1700 it is estimated that the world's population increased from one hundred millions to five hundred millions. In the next two centuries, to AD 1900, it trebled to some 1700 millions. Since then, in less than a century, it has shot up to over four thousand millions, of whom three-quarters today do not get enough to eat. The fault does not lie in the land; there is enough potential food-growing land in the earth to feed a great many more than this present population. The fault lies in the present economic system under which food is grown for private profit and those who cannot pay cannot eat. That leads to the existing immoral system in which Europe and other productive lands build up huge stocks of foodstuffs which cannot be sold and are ultimately destroyed whilst in Africa and India and China sporadic famines occur and millions starve to death. Nothing can or will change this system

until the coming of Christ to organise earth's resources on a right and just basis.

So, after the first factor in our Lord's prediction, war, this fulfils the second, famine. All these things mean famine on a world-wide scale; famine, a sign of the End.

There is a third factor—pestilence. The word usually conjures up visions of typhoid, yellow-fever, bubonic plague, raging unchecked through whole communities and carrying many of them away. In past times and among primitive peoples, destitute of medical knowledge, that was a fairly frequent occurrence. Modern medicine prides itself on having eliminated many of these scourges. But there is a greater menace which modern medicine is finding increasingly unable to combat, and that is the progressive physical and mental degeneration of the human race. That may seem a strange thing to say in this day of advanced scientific knowledge and the wonders that doctors and surgeons can do in combating the ills of humanity. But the odds are against them. Men and women, in the so-called civilised lands anyway, are living longer, but they are becoming increasingly susceptible to ill-health and disease. National health services are being stretched as never before. New and alarming "killer" diseases are making their appearance, diseases not heard of in former times, and the doctors have no antidote. And the reason is becoming apparent. God ordained that food grown in the unpolluted earth should be sustenance for man, to maintain strength and vigour and life. But the land is no longer unpolluted, and the food it does grow is passed through a long series of manufacturing processes in which it is converted into "convenience foods" involving little or no labour for its presentation to the table but no one really knows what harm is done by the additives and preservatives and colourings which have been added to it in the process. Now, perhaps too late, official investigation and action is being instituted to decide upon and rectify these demerits, but even so the complexities of the modern competitive system and the sheer magnitude of the problem would seem to offer little hope of righting the situation whilst the rule of man continues. With men and women finding themselves less and less able to cope, relying more and more upon the never-ending stream of drugs which are proffered to cure or alleviate human ills, it may no longer be unthinkable that unless intervention comes from above the prospect before mankind on the score of physical vitality alone is a slow decline from civilisation to barbarism and finally extinction.

Plenty of Christian thinkers and students have known these things. Even in the days immediately after the Apostolic Church there was an

eager looking for the promised Second Advent and the dawn of the Millennium—for the two were always associated in men's minds and for four centuries there was general belief that the event would happen about the year AD 500. Then the Council of Rome under Pope Damasus in AD 373 denounced belief in the coming Millennium as heresy and it was not until the 16th/17th centuries, following the Reformation, that it came to light again. But from then on, although never formally endorsed by the established Churches, Catholic or Protestant, it began to come into its own, and with that men began to look for those signs in the events of history which would herald its approach.

Those signs began to gather thick and fast. Men began to set dates for the predicted events, based on Bible records and allusions, dates which usually failed. Others, perhaps more far-seeing, drew attention to the historical events of the times and their relation to those predicted in Scripture. It is a remarkable fact that as far back as the 17th century, expectations began to focus around the late 19th and the entire 20th century. Almost every well-known Christian minister and writer—and many others not so well known—had something to say on this subject. The result was the tremendous upsurge of Second Advent expectation of the 19th century, when on both sides of the Atlantic there were important conferences and the rise of movements devoted to the subject, books and periodicals innumerable. In the year 1880 it was found that in Great Britain alone seven hundred Church of England ministers were consistently preaching the imminence of the Second Advent from their pulpits. Three at least of these heralds of the coming event had their expectations fulfilled to the year; Dr. Grattan Guinness in 1887 declared (*"Light for the Last Days"*) that the years 1917 and 1923 would be marked by important developments respecting the return of Israel to the Holy Land in fulfilment of prophecy. He did not live to see the day in 1917 when General Allenby captured Jerusalem from the Turks and the Balfour Declaration of the following year promising Palestine as a Homeland for the Jews, nor the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 which ended Turkish sovereignty over Palestine and opened the door to Jewish immigration. Pastor Charles Russell in 1890 in *"Thy Kingdom Come"* pointed to 1914 as the commencement of world disruption preliminary to the coming of the Kingdom of God upon Earth, beginning with a world-wide war which would engulf and weaken the nations. He lived long enough to witness the realisation of his foreview. Earlier in time than either of these was the London

minister Robert Fleming, who in his work on Bible Prophecy (*"The Rise and Fall of the Papacy"* 1699) predicted, on the basis of certain Biblical allusions which nowadays may or may not be considered valid methods of interpretation, that there were three significant dates, then still far future, which would prove to be vital marking-points of events associated with the end of this Age and the coming of the Millennium. To begin with, he considered that the year 1794, then still a century future, would mark the commencement of the progressive destruction of the secular and political power of the Papal dominion which ruled Europe for over a thousand years, and 1848 a further step in the process. No one took much notice of that until in the year 1793 the French Revolution broke upon an unsuspecting world, Pope Pius VI was taken captive to France where he died, and the sovereignty of the Popes over Europe outside Italy virtually ended. Political turmoil between France and the Italian States continued until 1848, when an Italian revolution drove Pope Pius IX from Rome and began a series of secessions of the various "Papal States" until by 1870 nothing was left to the Pope but the city of Rome. In that year the forces of King Victor Immanuel captured Rome and made it the capital of the new united Italy. In the short space of seventy years the Papacy had lost the whole of its thousand-year old empire. The fulfilment of this prediction created profound impressions at the relevant times but the force of that has long since died away.

But—in his book Fleming also predicted that *"the Millennium starts immediately after the total and final destruction of Papal Rome in the year 2000"*. It is a fact that although, following the events of 1870, the Lateran Treaty of 1929 between Italy and the Pope gave the latter an area half-a-mile square inside the city of Rome, to be known as Vatican City, so that within this restricted space he could claim the status of a temporal sovereign, by a superseding agreement in 1985 this concession was abrogated. Vatican City is now itself part of the Italian Republic, Rome no longer to be designated the "Holy City", and there is no longer any claim of Papal sovereignty. It may be a lot to expect Fleming to be right three times in succession, but with the world in its present state one might be pardoned for fervently hoping that he is right.

Thus all the evidence of Christian students over the past three centuries is that this 20th century is the time of the end. That such an end, and such a change for the better in all the affairs of men must and will come, is stressed in the Scriptures. The outward evidence that the

world condition foreseen so many centuries ago by the Bible writers is at this present time a reality gives reasonable grounds for certainty that "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand". It could burst upon the world at any time.

Perhaps one of the most telling descriptions of that coming day is that penned by the prophet Isaiah in his 32nd chapter. He speaks of Christ reigning as king over a restored and renovated earth in which the twin keystones are righteousness and peace. "Behold", he says "a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule in justice. Each will be like a hiding place from the wind, a covert from the tempest—then the eyes of those who see will not be closed, and the ears

of those who hear will hearken. The mind of the rash will have good judgment and the tongue of the stammerers will speak readily and distinctly. The fool will no more be called noble, nor the knave said to be honourable . . . the wilderness will become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be deemed a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places". For God has declared "As truly as I live, the whole earth shall be filled with my glory".
To be continued.

RAHAB OF JERICO

An Old Testament
character study

One of the women mentioned approvingly in the New Testament as an example of sterling faith is Rahab the harlot of Jericho, the woman who gave shelter to the Israelite spies sent to reconnoitre the city before its destruction. The writer to the Hebrews says "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days. By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace" (Heb. 11. 31). James, in the course of his homily on the relation between faith and works, asks (2. 25) "Was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?" These allusions are based upon the story as we have it in the Book of Joshua. St. Matthew appears to have had access to genealogical records not now surviving when he compiled the first chapter of his Gospel; he indicates that this same Rahab married Salmon, leader of the tribe of Judah, and that from this union came Boaz, who stands in the direct line of descent between Abraham and Christ (Matt. 1. 5). Thus this otherwise unknown woman of Jericho is an ancestress of our Lord.

Jewish Rabbinic sources many centuries ago propounded the suggestion that the word here rendered "harlot" can also mean "inn-keeper" and that in reality Rahab was a most respectable custodian of a local hostelry at which the spies booked in for the night. This hypothesis owes its existence to the Rabbis' desire to relieve King David, descended from Rahab, of what they felt to be a stigma on his ancestry. It is perpetuated by some Christian commentators and others with the same intent as respects Jesus Christ. There is no foundation for the idea; the word occurs some ninety times in the Old Testament and never

means anything else in Hebrew than the mediæval English term by which it is always translated. And this little fortress town, only two hundred and fifty yards long by a hundred wide, is most unlikely to have had need of an "inn" of any description. Such places existed only in the country districts, where travellers might be caught after nightfall, and even then only in much later times. It is said by those who should know that at the time of the Exodus and earlier the whole idea of inns and hostelries for travellers was quite unknown; those caught out at night slept under the stars.

The story itself is related in the 2nd and 6th chapters of Joshua. After forty years sojourn in the desert, following the Exodus, Israel was encamped in the plains of Moab east of the Jordan waiting for the word to march. The river lay between them and their goal but they had been assured that God would remove that barrier at the crucial moment. Five miles from the other side of the river, inside Canaan, lay the military frontier fortress of Jericho, a town surrounded by high walls, crammed with defending soldiery, and thought to be impregnable. It probably contained a number of Egyptian troops, for Canaan was still nominally under the sovereignty of Egypt, although for many years now the land had been in a state of turmoil and rebellion, and Egypt had very largely abandoned any attempt to govern. But Jericho was obviously the first strong city to be besieged and captured as soon as the host of Israel invaded. So Joshua sent two trusty men across the river to investigate the defences.

The town was not large; a man could walk right round it in ten minutes. The spies, dressed like people of the land, apparently gained entry at twilight before the gate was closed and explored

the little settlement unchallenged. They found it closely packed with small flat-topped houses and a central solid building which was the abode of the garrison. The defences consisted of two massive walls about thirty feet high, the outer one six feet and the inner one twelve feet thick, with a fifteen feet space between them. In many places the two walls had been bridged by masonry and stout timbers and houses built actually upon the walls, straddling between inner and outer. All this is known because the city lay, just as Joshua left it, concealed under an increasing mound of sand and earth, with little interference, for three thousand years, until in the years 1930-1936 Prof. John Garstang of Britain excavated and found everything exactly as described in the Book of Joshua, even to the remains of the houses on the wall, one of which must have been Rahab's. Going round the city, the spies discerned that the inhabitants were terrified of the Israelite menace and were not likely to offer much resistance once the walls had been breached. After all, the population in a town of that size could hardly have exceeded two or three thousand and there were six hundred thousand Israelite warriors threatening them only a few miles away.

By this time it was dark and the city gate closed. The intruders had to find concealment for a few hours and make their escape in the morning when the town opened for normal business. They solved this problem by getting themselves accepted for the night at the house of a harlot named Rahab. Probably they felt that the presence of strange men at such an establishment would be less likely to excite suspicion than anywhere else. They could hardly have known that, despite her profession, Rahab was a woman who exercised belief and faith in the same God as they, and was prepared to run almost certainly a grave risk in protecting them. The hand of God must have been in this thing that they were led to this house in any case, and that Rahab knew them for what they were; they are not likely to have revealed their identity, even to their hostess.

They had not been so fortunate in escaping detection as they had thought. Someone had seen them go in and was suspicious. Before long the representatives of law and order were knocking at Rahab's door with a demand that the men be produced. Rahab was evidently quick-witted. The house had a flat roof like all in Jericho and on Rahab's roof there was laid out a quantity of freshly cut flax for drying—she evidently had a second source of income, in connection with some aspect of the local textile industry. She quickly hurried the spies up to her roof and concealed them under the flax. Whilst the investigators searched her house she blandly admitted that two

men had been with her that night; that as usual she had asked no questions and eventually sent them on their way. Where they went afterwards she had no idea and was not interested, but if, as asserted, they were enemy spies it was not likely they had got very far. If her interviewers would stop wasting time in her house and go after them they might yet overtake and capture their men. The officers appreciated the point of this argument and were apparently out of the house and down the street with considerable promptitude; the city gates closed with a clang after them and they spent the rest of the night in an unavailing search of the countryside between Jericho and the fords of Jordan five miles away.

In the meantime this very practical woman had gone up to the roof and engaged her guests in very serious conversation. "I know" she said "*that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your fear is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the waters of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt . . . and our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you; for the Lord your God, he is God in the heaven above and in the earth beneath*" (Josh. 2. 9-11). That is quite a striking testimony from one whose life was lived among idolators and who probably had learned but little of the God of Israel. Perhaps Rahab was already sick of the life she led and looking for the light; like Mary Magdalene of much later times in similar circumstances, she was nearly ready to be cleansed of the "seven demons". Israel had sojourned in the desert not much more than a hundred miles away for forty years past and some knowledge of their laws and standards and the God they worshipped must have filtered into Canaan, carried by wandering nomads and caravans of traders from time to time during that period. The wilderness of Sinai was on the highway between Egypt and Canaan and travellers were constantly passing through. Rahab may very well have heard something of all this and in her heart wanted to know more of this worship so much loftier in its tones and ideals than the sensual religions of Canaan. At any rate, on this night when the men of Israel came to her she took her stand with the people of the Lord, and in so doing, one might hope and reasonably expect, turned away for ever from the old life.

The two men readily agreed to her request that in recognition of her espousal of their cause they would see that she and her family were spared from the doom that was to fall upon the city. "It shall be" they told her "*when the Lord hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and*

truly with thee". With that assurance she planned their escape. This was, providentially, an easy matter. Her house was upon the two walls and a window gave access to the exterior of the city. "*She let them down by a cord from the window; for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall*" (ch. 2. 15). Under cover of the friendly darkness they made their way down the rope to the ground, and following Rahab's instructions headed westward away from Jordan and "*into the mountain*" — Mount Kuruntul, which still rises three thousand feet immediately behind the site of ancient Jericho. There, said she, they must remain hidden three days before venturing back to the lowlands and the river. Evidently she had anticipated several days' search before the hunt was called off. Her judgment appears to have been pretty sound, for "*the pursuers sought them throughout all the way, but found them not*" (ch. 2. 22). Eventually the intrepid pair arrived safe and sound in the camp of Israel and reported to Joshua the result of their mission.

A fortnight later the city fell to the besiegers and was utterly destroyed. Faithful to their promise, and in obedience to the command of Joshua, the two spies went in amidst the turmoil and the fighting to the house now marked with the scarlet thread hanging from the window, the agreed sign that those within were waiting and trusting in the integrity of the promise. So they were brought forth, Rahab the woman of faith, her father and mother and all her family, and conducted to a place of safety away from the fighting. They were the only citizens of Jericho to survive. The ferocity of Joshua's troops saw to it that everyone else was slain, the city levelled with the ground and consumed by fire. Garstang found the evidence of that fire, earthenware pots containing charred and burnt foodstuffs, stonework and brickwork scorched and split by the heat, and layers of ashes six inches thick. Every single detail in the Joshua account has been verified by investigation on the site.

"*And*" concludes the ancient scribe who compiled the Book of Joshua, speaking still of Rahab, "*she dwelleth in Israel unto this day*". If the book was completed in that generation this need only mean that she was still alive and amongst them, but it is unlikely that this is the meaning. It was always believed in after ages in Israel that Rahab became the wife of Salmon, and in such case this expressoin would refer to the perpetuation of her descendants in Israel. No reference to a marriage is found in the Old Testament and in fact Rahab is not mentioned again, but Matthew does state definitely that Boaz was born to Salmon and Rahab; this information he must have taken

from a documentary source and not relied upon mere tradition.

The marriage raises the question of Rahab's nationality. It was against the laws of Israel for an Israelite to marry any of the "women of the land" i.e., native Canaanites, Hittites or any other of the Hamitic race (descendants of Ham). There was not, however, the same objection to Semitic women, descendants of Shem through Abraham and others, even though they were not of Israel, through Jacob. Zipporah, the wife of Moses, was of a tribe descended from Abraham through Keturah. There were many such descendants of Abraham's many children scattered through Canaan. Although there is no Scriptural evidence regarding Rahab's racial origin, it is at least possible that she was of Abrahamic stock, and this could account in part for her leaning towards the God of Israel and her faith in him in preference to the Canaanites' gods, besides rendering Salmon's choice of her as wife easier to understand.

A very significant fact is that Rahab's name is included in what has been called the "gallery of faith" in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. This chapter has long been renowned for immortalising certain "heroes of faith" of Old Testament times, prior to the establishment of the Christian Church, whose sterling faith and whose deeds springing from that faith place them in a special position in God's sight. It has often been suggested that those immortalised in this chapter are destined for inclusion in the company of world rulers in the next Age, administering the Millennial Kingdom in the name of the King, the Lord Christ. The terms "Old Testament Saints" or "Ancient Worthies" have been coined to apply to such. Out of sixteen names selected by the writer to the Hebrews two only are women. One is Sarah the wife of Abraham and the other is Rahab. That the writer was subject to the guidance of the Holy Spirit when making his selection is hardly open to question. The logical and irresistible conclusion therefore is that this woman of ancient Jericho, despite the kind of life attributed to her, was one in the sight of God possessing the character and moral calibre and strength of faith which would make her a fitting choice as one of the "*princes in all the earth*" (Psa. 45. 16) who are to exercise functions of rulership "in that day". The one little scrap of history we have concerning Rahab the harlot shows her loyal, far-seeing, resourceful, courageous, and above all, inflexible in her faith that God is true and the purpose of God will certainly be carried out. If in fact, as appears to be the case, she did indeed marry Salmon prince of the royal tribe of Judah, and so became ancestress of

Israel's Messiah and the world's Saviour, then again we have an instance of the wonderful power of God Who can make vessels of honour out of weak and common clay. Once more we are

reminded of the truth that God looks not at a man or woman's past, only at their present condition of heart and the possibilities that lie in them for their future.

THE CUP OF COMMUNION

A word for Easter

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" (I Cor. 10. 16).

It is impossible to lay too much stress upon the word "communion" in this very well-known passage. All too often it is taken to mean an entering into fellowship, a sense of union, of "being together", much as is implied by modern usage of the English word "commune". There was more, far more, than that in the Apostle's mind when he penned these words. The ceremony he was talking about, the remembrancing from time to time of our Lord's death, with all that it implies for the Church and for all mankind, is something too holy and too sacred to be defined merely in terms of a getting together in the bonds of a fellowship or a family relationship, intimate though these bonds may be. St. Paul here is reminding his readers that in putting to their lips the chalice which represented the life-blood of their Lord, slain on their behalf, they were deliberately and knowingly associating themselves with him in the purpose for which He was about to die, the reconciliation of mankind to God. This word communion, *koinonia*, means to share, to participate, and this implies action, joint action with the One who was about to give his life for the world. That meant in turn that they were consecrating themselves to follow him into death, baptised into his death as Romans 6 has it, that they might rise with him in newness of life and thenceforward be associated with him in his destined work of giving life to the world.

The key to the inner meaning of the text is perhaps found in our Lord's words at the Last Supper, recorded in Matt. 26. 27-28. *"He took the cup . . . and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"*. The ceremonial drinking of the cup with him in the knowledge that it represented his shed blood denoted a great thing. It meant that they were to share with him, to be associated with him, in that still future work which was ensured by the shedding of his blood. To drink of his cup meant to follow in the same way, to be devoted to the same end, to be dead to the world in the same sense as was Jesus, and consequently to be joined to him in the resurrection life and be co-workers with him in all that He is to do for mankind in that resurrection life. It is not always easy

to distinguish between the two aspects of our Lord's sacrifice and death. In the first place He came to earth to give himself a Ransom for all, as Paul states in I Tim. 2.6, and this is something He must needs do alone, for only He could be acceptable in the sight of the Father as the Redeemer of men. When God *"so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son"* He did so in light of the fact that no other Redeemer was possible and no other available. It is in Adam that all men die, and it is only in Christ that men can be made alive (I Cor. 15.22). But the making men truly alive involves two things; they must first be raised from the death state into which they have fallen on account of sin, and this is the effect of the Ransom. They must then be restored to the Divine likeness in order that they can enter into the eternity which is the crown of eternal life, for nothing that is defiled can enter into the Holy City (Rev. 21.27). It is this work of restoration of man in which the followers of Jesus are associated and to which they pledge themselves when they partake of his Cup. It is a cup of dedication, of service, of endurance, of faithfulness even unto death. *"If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him. If we suffer (endure) we shall also reign with him"* (2 Tim. 2. 11-12). This is why Jesus called his blood the "blood of the New Covenant". There had been an Old Covenant, an agreement with God entered into by Israel at Mount Sinai by virtue of which that people was constituted a holy nation dedicated to proclaiming the promise of Divine salvation to the ends of the earth and so announcing the coming fulfilment of the Divine purpose. They failed, lamentably, because of unbelief and hard-heartedness. So God told them through the prophet Jeremiah that one day He would make a New Covenant, which would succeed where they had failed; when Jesus came He made it clear that its success would be because the power behind it would be the giving of his own life as was foretold in Isaiah 53, and its ministers would be the faithful of the Christian Church, who would endure to the end in a manner that Israel had not.

We share in the communion cup, then, we who are Christ's, because we are to be ministers of his in extending the blessings of the New Covenant to whosoever will of all mankind, living and dead alike, who will turn from whatever there is of sin in their minds and lives, and serve the living God.

AFTER THE FLOOD

11. The Captains and the Kings

"There always have been wars, and there always will be wars". So runs the old cliché, repeated every time anyone talks of ways and means to end wars. The assertion is born of ignorance and it is untrue. There will be a time in the developing purposes of God when He "maketh wars to cease unto the ends of the earth" (Psa. 46.9). That will be in the day of Christ's reign over the world, the Millennial Age. There is no doubt about that. Likewise there was a time when war was unknown among men; all nations lived in peace and harmony. Whilst in the past that ancient "Golden Age" was known only by tradition and legend the wise men of this world dismissed the whole concept as mythical and unreal. Now that the discoveries of archaeologists have confirmed the truth of the old legends the lofty dismissal begins to look a bit hollow. So far as present discoveries can show, war arose between the primitive nations more or less simultaneously with the worship of pagan deities beginning to supersede the worship of the One God, at a time which looks to be about twenty-five centuries before Christ.

Before looking at the evidence for this conclusion, let the conditions which could conceivably have given rise to the emergence of such unhappy condition be examined. There were probably two factors. In the first place, the family relationships which existed between men when they were relatively few in number and congregated over a fairly small area were disappearing as men pushed farther afield and became separated into distinct nations. Communities of men became strangers to each other and jealousies and rivalries began to develop. Greed for the acquisition of land or crops or products possessed or produced by one led to attempts by another at forcible seizure and so fighting for offence or defence began to break out. In the second place, contributing to the first, was that unpredictable element, the weather. By this time, according to Brooks, the world was already a century into that sub-boreal cold and dry phase which was to continue for another three centuries. The warmth and rains of the immediate post-Flood centuries which had nurtured and stimulated the early descendants of Noah had given way to a period of cold and drought which made life arduous and tempted men to satisfy their own shortages at the expense of others. It is significant that the very earliest armed conflict between communities

of which there is at present any concrete evidence arose out of a dispute regarding water supply—in a land which up to that time had consisted largely of watery marshlands continually supplied by three major rivers. The city-states of Lagash and Umma, between the Euphrates and the Tigris, went to war over the possession of a waterway which both sides coveted and claimed. The ruler of Lagash, Eannatum, defeated his opponents and erected an obelisk to mark the agreed boundaries between the two lands, an obelisk which still survives, part in the British Museum and part in the Louvre at Paris. This obelisk displays the earliest known representation of soldiers on active service, marching men armed with pikes and bodyshields. War was a primitive and simple occupation in those days; there seems to have been involved only about six hundred men on each side, although it has to be admitted that, emboldened by his success, Eannatum went on to wage offensive war against others of his neighbours and finished up temporarily as ruler of all Sumer.

It is quite a remarkable thing that, according to the apocryphal "*Book of Jubilees*", written about 150 BC, all this happened in the days of Serug the great-grandfather of Abraham. The relevant passage in "*Jubilees*" asserts that it was in the days of Serug that men first began to worship false gods and to make war one upon another, and this is just the time which modern discovery places as the beginning of war and paganism. "*Reu took himself a wife and she bare him a son, and he called his name Serug. . . . and the sons of Noah began to war on each other, to take captives and to slay each other, and to shed the blood of men in the earth, and to build strong cities. . . . and to go to war, people against people, and nation against nation, and city against city, and all began to do evil, and to acquire arms, and to teach their sons war. . . .*" (Jub. 11. 1-4). According to the chronology of Genesis the early years of Serug coincide with the beginning of what archaeologists call the "Early Dynastic" period, which saw the onset of paganism and war among these people. But how did the writer of "*Jubilees*" in 150 BC know this? The Sumerian language had been dead for two thousand years, their records buried in the sands of Iraq, only to be recovered and deciphered in the late 19th and this 20th century. In a great many respects it has been

noted that "*Jubilees*" exhibits a more detailed knowledge of events before and immediately after the Flood than is contained in the Hebrew Bible; this may conceivably have come from old Jewish legends, but there is also growing agreement in recent years that there must have been at least three differing versions of the Hebrew Scriptures extant in the centuries immediately before Christ, all of which disappeared after the standard "Masoretic" text was established in the early AD centuries and that one or more of these might well have contained data which formed the basis of the passages now preserved in "*Jubilees*".

It must have been about this time that the hackneyed phrase "the fortunes of war" was coined. Before thirty years had passed the troops of Umma—all six hundred of them—had invaded Lagash, killed the reigning king and seized back the canal which had been the cause of the original trouble. This, of course, could not be tolerated and so within a further twenty years, the next king, Entemana, gathered his troops together and fought Umma on their own ground and so got his canal back. By now the pattern was getting well established. If the people of any one city-state wanted something another city-state possessed, they just sent their warriors in and took it—if they could. Some of the older men among them, veterans of the days of Eber and Peleg, must have sighed for the old peaceful days when all men worshipped the one God and lived in peace and harmony, but they of course were old-fashioned and out of date and would soon be in the grave anyway. Knowledge and discovery was increasing daily; new lands and hitherto unknown products were being discovered to the advantage and enrichment of life; one cannot halt progress and if that progress involved fighting to get possession of what one coveted, well, war was inevitable and only impracticable idealists imagined there was any alternative. So went the reasoning. All the modern arguments were in all probability first thought out and advanced, there in the land of Sumer, four thousand years ago.

So the sorry tale unfolded. Uruk fought Kish and prevailed, and the supreme rule passed from north to south. Then the Elamites up in the mountains took a hand in the game. There were rich pickings of grain and food crops to be had in the plains and they sent their army to see what could be done about it. The men of Sumer chased six hundred of them into their own mountains and brought back five hundred and forty of them as prisoners to be slaves. Thus was born another fruit of war, the institution of slavery.

Then, less than two centuries after war first

appeared among men, there appeared on the world stage the man who has been called the first great military conqueror of history—the renowned Sargon of Agade. Serug was still alive and Nahor, the grandfather of Abraham, had just been born. Rising from humble beginnings to an important position at court—cup-bearer to the king of Kish, the chief city of the Semites, Sargon rebelled against his overlord and set up a rival centre in the hitherto insignificant city of Akkad, where he speedily gathered an army of determined followers. Sargon was not a Sumerian; he was a Semite, of the sons of Shem, a hardy fighter like all the Semites, and he straightway embarked upon a career of unashamed conquest.

This Sargon was a far-seeing man. His capital city of Akkad lay astride the trade routes which had grown up between south and north. The Sumerian cities to the south were now engaged in active trade with many lands verging on the tropics. From Elam in the Iranian mountains they drew supplies of metals, building stone, timber and precious stones, all necessary for the exploitation of their artistic skill. From farther afield, at the other end of the Persian Gulf, they imported copper, and from greater distances still, on the east coast of Africa and the west coast of India, all kinds of tropical products of utility and luxury. The Semitic peoples to the north, descendants of Arphaxad and Aram, sons of Shem, carried these goods overland to the Canaanites in what is now Syria and Lebanon, and from there across the sea. Sargon realised that an empire, including all those lands, of which he could be the undisputed head was an empire worth creating, and he set about doing so. Over the short space of fifty years his army of five thousand four hundred men, the largest army the world had seen so far, ranged from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean, far into what is now Turkey, and, probably, across the sea to Cyprus. By the time he had finished all these lands were united under the rulership of one man, Sargon, and all the trade of the then known world was under his control. As later empires went, it was not a very large empire; it did cover all of what today is known as the Middle East and it was certainly the first serious attempt at building a world empire.

Then Sargon died, and immediately his empire began to fall to pieces. Ravaging tribes from the mountains swept down to loot and destroy the cities and towns. Uruk and Ur revolted and carved up the south land of Sumer between them, developing between them a revival of the Sumerian supremacy. The powerful state of Mari, the people of Arphaxad to the north, grasped inde-

pendence and control of the trade routes. Sargon's capital city of Akkad, which he had hoped to make the capital of the world, was destroyed so utterly that only in quite recent years have men located what is thought to have been its site.

He did leave behind him a map of the world, his world, one of the earliest maps ever discovered, in the form of an inscribed clay tablet, which is now in the British Museum. It is more like a diagram than a map, made to record the area of his military campaigns, from the southern sea to the northern mountains and showing the encircling ocean which at that time was believed to encircle the entire land mass of the world. That and a quantity of inscribed clay tablets recording his victories constitute all that is left of the great Sargon, the world's first military dictator.

The coming of war to the other great power of these ancient times, Egypt, is more difficult to locate. Unlike Sumer, whose records were enshrined on indestructible baked clay tablets which survive to our own day, those of the Egyptians were written on papyrus, a paper-like vegetable product which decayed in time so that no ancient records exist, and all that is known of ancient Egyptian history is derived from the early tomb paintings. The Egyptians were a peaceable people without tribal animosities and they were, geographically, far removed from the political and commercial animosities of the Semites and Sumerians. Not until they came in contact, in later times, with Cushite colonists who had crossed the Red Sea at the tip of Arabia and were pushing up from what is now the Sudan is there any evidence of warfare and that was almost at the time of Abraham. About the only earlier evidence of warlike behaviour is on a painting of the time of Sneferu, first king of the 4th Dynasty, who is seen smiting a luckless captive with a mace, but since the setting is in the Egyptian copper-mining

district of Sinai, there is equal likelihood that the incident depicts nothing more than the punishment of a recalcitrant miner criminal. All this would seem to infer that warlike activities were unknown to the Egyptians, as to the Sumerians, at least until the 24th or 25th centuries BC.

The Phoenicians did not go to war; they were too busy trading and making profit. Neither were the Phutites, blood-brothers of the Sumerians. They were by now strung out across North Africa, in the area at present occupied by the Sahara Desert, as far as the Atlantic coast, and they too were traders and merchants. In their day what is now the world's largest desert was thickly forested and replete with wild animals and game, a fitting home for a virile increasing race of men. It was war which put an end to that. The Romans started cutting the forests down at the time of the Punic wars in the Third and Second centuries before Christ for fuel and battleship building. As the trees disappeared their humidifying effect on the ground disappeared and the sun beat down on the bare earth; the population turned increasingly to sheep and goats grazing on what was left of the greenery and so the terrain turned to dry sand—the process has continued ever since and the Sahara is spreading steadily southward year by year. Northern Africa began to die on that day two thousand years ago when Rome declared war on Carthage. The whole world is dying today largely because of mankind's persistent proclivity to war, to inter-nation strife motivated by selfishness, greed and lust for power. It started back there in the 25th century BC among the Sumerians. It will cease when the Prince of Peace takes his great power and commence his reign over the earth, when men shall "*beat their swords into pruning-hooks*" when "*nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more*" (Isa. 2.4). *To be continued.*

DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

The following eulogy was written many years ago by a Christian minister as depicting the aspect from which the typical thinking citizen of Pagan Rome regarded the Christians of that day. Although that assumption may or may not be justified, surely we would in our day ask for nothing better than that we should be regarded in the fashion expressed in these words.

"Mysterious people", might the perplexed and pensive heathen say within himself. "Mysterious people. Moving amongst us, and yet not seeming to be of us. Passing through the world without

seeming to be deeply concerned in its forms or fashions, its prizes or blanks; tranquil amidst its contentions, humble amidst its pomp, silent amidst its bondage. Wrapped up, it should appear, in thoughts of your own; happy in yourselves, and never so happy as when shedding quiet blessings on all around you. How have your ways won on me, durst I but say so. How has your simple character told its tale on me, more touchingly than all the arguments of philosophy, more convincingly than all the logic of the schools. How have you almost persuaded me to be a Christian".

"MINE EYE SEETH THEE"

"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee" (Job. 42. 5).

The climax to the drama which is the Book of Job comes at this verse. All the arguments and debates, all the wisdom and knowledge, displayed by Job's three philosopher friends, had contributed nothing to his understanding of God. It was experience, the effect of all that life brought him of good and evil, prosperity and suffering, happiness and heartbreak, which enabled him at last to see God. His bitter comment upon the philosophy of suffering as expounded by the three *"I have heard many such things; miserable comforters are ye all"* is matched only by the scornful, peremptory demand of the Almighty *"Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?"* Job started out in life believing in God and the overruling benevolence of God; what he got in return was an overwhelming succession of disasters which led him at last passionately to exclaim *"O that thou would'st hide me in the grave"*. But at the end he was able to say what perhaps very few men in any age have been able to say; *"Now mine eye seeth thee"*. His belief held firm because he knew—and the whole tenor of the Book of Job reveals this as its outstanding thesis—that God is working to a purpose which involves progress and development through discipline and endurance, a purpose of a nature which transcends the events and time-span of this earthly life, so that whatever may be the apparent evidence to the contrary it is true of God with respect to every man that *"He knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold"* (Job. 23. 10).

There are so many to-day who look at their Christian background in the light of what they know of modern science and the wisdom of this world, find the two apparently irreconcilable, and jettison their faith in consequence. Because God cannot be defined in terms of the measure-

ments used to define things of daily experience they decide God does not exist. Because they have never heard in modern times of One coming from another world to live among men for a spell and return whence He came, they declare such a happening is impossible. Because the existence of such other world, asserted in the Christian Scriptures, cannot be demonstrated by telescope, radio or mathematical calculation they refuse to believe in the possibility. And this in an age when every incredible wonder becomes commonplace within a few years of its invention or discovery. Of all ages in the world's history this present one with all its discoveries from the formerly unknown should surely be the one in which men could be expected the most readily to admit not only the possibility but even the probability of a sphere of life and power still unperceived by any means the natural man has at his command.

The position is more tragic when the man who thus announces his loss of faith is one who to that point has stood before his fellows as a minister of the Gospel. There have been a number of such cases in recent times. The fact that the stand is usually an honest and sincere one does not minimise its tragedy. *"We do not know what God is; Jesus was a good man but only a man; Resurrection? Impossible!"* Contrast the calm confidence of the Apostle Paul at the end of a long life of arduous experience. *"I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded"*; that of the ancient patriarch *"Now mine eye seeth thee"*. Is there not a real likelihood that such assurance is positive knowledge due to an actual attunement with that other world, that such men may have bridged the gap which no manmade detecting instrument and no philosophical investigation can ever bridge?

All the best things in a human friendship are true of our friendship with God. Prayer is the way we keep that friendship alive, saying "thank you" for it, saying we are sorry when we have done anything to spoil it, telling God all about our lives, letting him tell us what He wants us to do. Most of all, prayer helps us to remember that God is the friend who is always with us though unseen.

To be a disciple of Christ signifies much more, both in the way of responsibility and of advantage, than many think. Our Lord's words are very explicit in defining the terms of discipleship to be nothing less than a full, complete consecration of all that we have and are to him who has bought us with his own precious blood. It must be a consecration to daily crossbearing and to following in the footsteps of Christ, even unto death.

THIS DO . . .

It was in the same night that our Lord was betrayed that He said, with deep concern in his soul: ". . . *this do, in remembrance of me . . . this do, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me*" (1 Cor. 11. 24-25). Paul had not been dependent upon any member of the "twelve" for his knowledge of the order of events, nor for the nature of words and phrases spoken during the institution of the new Memorial. So important was every detail of the little ceremony to the mind of the risen glorified Lord, that it was He himself, and none other, who passed on to Paul the record of the event, and of the actual words used by the suffering Master when addressing the little band. "*For I received of the Lord, that which also I delivered unto you . . .*" (1 Cor. 11. 23) says Paul.

So sacredly and seriously important was all this detail, for the believers of a later day, and in a wider sphere, that the Caretaker and Shepherd of the Christian Church would not allow this detail to be dependent upon the possibly faulty memory of either Peter or John, or any other member of the band. Though there were many incidents of that night which could never fade from the disciples' memories, and on which their recollections were likely to be trusty guides, there were these special words, and these little actions, that could not be entrusted to such leaky vessels. It is to the sanctified and exalted memory of the Blessed One himself that we owe the possession of this outline which the pen of Paul has placed on record. That fact invests those words with especial authority and accuracy, and gives to the Christian Church a firm foundation for the memorial celebration of the world's greatest sacrifice.

When, therefore, Paul had stated the course and nature of the little ceremony as revealed by his gracious Master, there can be little wonder that he could speak and write with such jealous severity about the condition of those who from year to year met to "do this" in remembrance of the Lord's dying hours. ". . . *whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the Cup of the Lord unworthily shall be GUILTY of the body and blood of the Lord*" (V. 27, R.V.). Whosoever shall "do this" in an unworthy manner shall be held guilty, along with the actual betrayer, of a gross and wilful attack upon the person of God's anointed Son. Blind passion actuated the treachery of the unhappy Judas; a similar blind inordinate lust would actuate the conduct of those who "ate" and "drank" such transcendently impor-

tant morsels without due sense of their important symbolism and worth. Judas professed to desire the establishment of the Lord's throne among men, yet, in his impetuous haste he had not discerned the need for the breaking of the body, nor of the shedding of the blood of the Lord. Dazzled by the prospect of sharing great honour with the coming King, he wanted to hasten the day of power; but, because Jesus did not move toward the expected goal with the speed Judas desired, his love for Jesus—if it ever existed—and his respect for the Great Teacher evaporated. In his vexation and annoyance at Jesus' tardy progress towards the Kingship of Israel, he came, at length, to think of him as just a mere common claimant to David's illustrious throne, so much so, that he hesitated not, nor scrupled, to connive with the scheming opponents of Jesus for his apprehension. Perhaps Judas believed that Jesus would bestir himself when under arrest, and do some great thing, not only to free himself, but to mete out recompense to his enemies. In all the guilt-worthy aspects of that great tragedy enacted between the Gethsemane agony and the death-cry of Calvary, one man, and that one man's vile act, was guilt-worthy above all else. The compact of betrayal and the false kiss of the once "familiar friend" plumbed the lowest depths of infamy and shame, and to this day, wherever Christian standards are accepted, this base treachery is esteemed the vilest of all the world's vile acts.

Judas was guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, not only in that he connived at his mishandling, but also by reason of his failure with open eyes to esteem the speaker of the kindly word, and the doer of the gracious act for what He was. He dared to challenge both the testimony of his Lord, and the corroboration of his God, as to the object for which Jesus had come into the world. Whatever the full range of his guilt might be, he was guilty of not appreciating the body—the person—and the blood—the spotless life—of Jesus for what it truly was.

Judas was the first man to "eat" the "body," and "drink" the "blood" of the Lord in an unworthy manner, and while all later cases may not be so flagrant or so vile, Judas stands as the awful example of all who eat the body and drink the blood of the Lord unworthily.

Failure, after enlightenment, to appreciate all that the body and blood of the Lord Jesus means to the Plan and Purpose! Treating with

levity or light-hearted esteem the facts of the life and death of the Man of Sorrows, so that one can present himself at the Table of the Lord as a professed follower of the Lord, with unclean hands and sin-stained hearts! Failure to appreciate all that it means! "Not a very serious indictment, that," the unworthy offender might say! But if the spiritual sensibilities of any have been dulled, through neglect of attention of spiritual things, or through failure to attend at the Throne of Grace, or through the chilling influence of modern life, or the increasing difficulties of present-day experience, it is very necessary not only to take stock of the situation, but also to pray earnestly for grace to help towards the restoration of spiritual tone in the heart and mind, and in every activity of life, so that attendance at the Table of the Lord may be a blessing of real worth surely it can never truthfully be said in these momentous days, after so many years of contact with the Truth and with the Lord, that any child of God would become "guilty" of the body and blood of the Lord! Surely our knowledge of the "deeper" truths would prevent any who have covenanted to follow the Lord by "baptism into his death" from incurring grievous responsibility by failing, even though under stress and strain, to appreciate all that the Saviour's person and sacrifice mean to the purposes of God!

Though persuaded that all who have entered into the secrets of the Lord will ardently desire to take the proper course when appearing before the Lord, yet Paul's words stand on record as describing a possibility which could occur. Paul's warning still stands as a red light, telling of what could be, but entreating that it should not be the case. No true child of God would long to be listed with Judas, and bear the onus of being "guilty" in the sight of God!

It is a privilege beyond all comparison to have learned the purpose for which the Sinless One assumed human form, and shed his precious

blood. To know that the body and blood of the Lord was the one thing—the only thing—absolutely indispensable to the Plan of God, that without it there could be no Plan, no redemption, no restitution, no eternal peace on earth, is to know the quintessence of all earthly knowledge, and of all heavenly revelation. To know that these eternal and absolute facts are represented before us in the simple elements of bread and wine will lift the little ceremony into a sphere all its own. To know that the modest act of "eating the bread" and "drinking the cup" is accounted in the highest heaven as "eating the body and drinking the blood" of the indispensable Lamb of God, will invest the occasion with a sacred seriousness too deep for words. To know that this act of partaking is not only a token of feeding upon the Lamb of God, but also of participating "with him" in the great surrender to the Will of God will create an atmosphere of solemnity as though God himself stood there.

Let every child of God scrutinise and judge himself or herself with searching severity, as we draw nearer to the hour for this act of remembrance, scanning every motive of heart and mind, to find, if it be there, every morsel of the old leaven of sin (1 Cor. 5; 7-8).

By the kindly providence of God we have been brought forward on our way, and through dangers manifold have been kept and preserved through another round of time. Another year of grace and favour has slipped away, and, through it all, his promise has not failed. Another year lies behind—that means one less in front, with all its tokens of Shepherd care. What, then, can we render to him who has blessed our pilgrim way?

With the Psalmist we can do none other than say: *"What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me? I will take the Cup of Salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord, yea, in the presence of all his people"* (Psa. 116. 12-14).

Stars shine brightest in the darkest night, spices smell best when bruised, young trees root the faster for being shaken and gold looks the brighter for scouring. Such is the condition of all God's children. They are most triumphant when most tempted; most glorious when most afflicted; most in the favour of God when least in man's and in their own. As their conflicts, such are their conquests; as their tribulation, such their triumphs. They live best in the furnace of persecution.

Our life is like the dial of a clock. The hands are God's hands passing over and over again—the short hand, the Hand of Discipline; the long hand, the Hand of Mercy. Slowly and surely the Hand of Discipline must pass and God speaks at each stroke; but over and over passes the Hand of Mercy, showering down sixtyfold of blessing for each stroke of discipline and trial; and both hands are fastened to one secure point, the heart of God.

A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD

*On the priesthood
of all believers*

The sheer wonder of New Testament Christianity is that in its simplicity it is sublime. The words "Ye are a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2. 9) were addressed to a very ordinary people, who by reason of their relationship to the King-Priest were constituted a royal priesthood. Every Christian a priest with the inestimable privilege of direct access into the Divine Presence, is a fundamental New Testament principle. It clearly teaches the priesthood of all believers. Alas! ritualistic Christendom has drifted — tragically drifted—from this apostolic position.

It may help us if we consider for a moment how we first came to read of the priest in the Old Testament. When man rebelled against God, the personal intimacy which he had enjoyed with God came to an abrupt conclusion, and so there arose the necessity of finding some means for the re-establishment of communion with God. Since access into the Divine Presence became possible only by way of sacrifice, the sacrifice demanded a priesthood.

In patriarchal times, the head of each family was the household priest. For example, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob built altars and offered sacrifices to Jehovah. After the flood, Noah offered representatively on behalf of those who were saved in the Ark. Job offered sacrifices for his sons. So the story continued until the priesthood became a most elaborate system. At last we see the priestly class quite distinct from the remainder of Israel: its members alone could draw near to God, and no other Israelite had such a privileged position. But when our Lord, the great High Priest who offered himself as a sacrifice for sin, came, all such distinctions were removed: "the veil of the temple was rent in twain" (Matt. 27. 51): the former order had passed away. Now all believers have an equal right and privilege to draw near to God.

New Testament Christianity recognises no special distinctive priesthood — all Christians are alike priests. Observe that in 1 Peter 2. 9 Christian believers are spoken of together, and together they make up one indivisible priesthood. A distinctive sacerdotal class, in contrast to the rest of the believers, is not only unknown to the New Testament, but contradictory to its whole spirit. When the apostles founded churches, they never linked them up with any priestly conceptions such as had obtained in the Old Testament. We never read of priests and people, but of bishops (elders), deacons and saints. So that when a man claims

for himself that he is a priest, beyond and above the sense in which all Christians are so, we must reject his pretensions.

We must be careful to distinguish between the priestly privileges which are the right of all believers, and the calling of those qualified to be shepherds and teachers of the Christian assembly. Their distinction is one of gift rather than privilege.

It is vital that we should lay hold of the thought that ALL Christian believers are constituted a priesthood. Peter was not addressing a privileged class when he said "Ye are a royal priesthood"; when we are in Christ, we have our priestly functions to fulfil. This royal priesthood is not made up of those who could plead any merit in themselves or declare any derivation of grace from men by apostolic succession and the like. It is composed of all those who have been united to the great High Priest. This is not some outward and visible order, but is of a much nobler fashion.

The priests of Aaron's line were priests by birth and so are we—by a high spiritual birth which brings the priesthood with it. Were they anointed? At their consecration the blood was sprinkled on ear, hand and foot (Lev. 8. 24). We assume our spiritual priesthood by the anointing of the Spirit of God, which dwells in us.

Have we not the listening ear which waits to respond to his voice? And have not hands and feet come under the same binding act of consecration? That is why we sing—

*"Take my hands, and let them move
At the impulse of thy love:
Take my feet, and let them be
Swift and beautiful for thee."*

For us there are no priests save those who are in Christ, and of ALL who are in him we say, indeed the New Testament says, that they are priests. To us all is given the right of access into the presence of God. "For through him we . . . have access by one Spirit unto the Father." (Eph. 2. 18). "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb. 4. 16). "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near . . ." (Heb. 10. 19. 22).

This, then, is what we understand by the doctrine of the priesthood of believers.

Now it will follow that in our thinking we develop this truth of profound significance and thus come to see what our priesthood means to us

personally, and how it enables us to function in the interests of others. To us personally, our priesthood should mean worship, confession and sacrifice.

Worship! To worship God aright, it is not essential to have altars, candles, images and vestments. "The heart of worship is worship (or adoration) in the heart." All the ritualistic trappings of men are a sign of spiritual retrogression. As men drifted spiritually, they came more and more to rely upon externals. Said our Lord, "*the true worshippers . . . worship the Father in spirit and in truth*". (John 4. 23).

We worship God as priests whenever in our hearts we think magnificently about God. And this we may do when far removed from any earthly temple. But how much do we know of genuine spiritual worship, that adoring contemplation which causes us to cry out "My God, how wonderful thou art"?

Confession! It is significant that though the apostles had received a unique Divine commission, they never heard confessions as such, and never pronounced absolution. The confession of our sins is essentially a personal matter. And the promise is given, "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1. 9). Let there be with any son of Adam's race a sincere confession with the resolve to amend his ways; to him there is given pardon full and free. We have no need of a priest, we are members of the priesthood.

We sometimes hear evangelists speak of a lack of sense of sin in the world today. That is not the real problem. The problem is within the Believers. Is it not because of our own inadequate conception of the holiness of God that we do not perceive the exceeding sinfulness of sin? We may rejoice in the fact that we do not need a priest to act in our interests, but do we fulfil our own priestly functions for ourselves? There will never come a time in the life of any one of us when we shall not need so to do.

Sacrifice! That is a priestly function—to offer up sacrifices. "*Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*" (1 Peter 2. 5). These are spiritual sacrifices as opposed to the literal. We bring no oxen, sheep, goats, and so on. He became the perfect sacrifice "to put away sin". We offer up spiritual sacrifices.

We offer the sacrifice of ourselves. "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*" (Rom. 12. 1). The word "present"

in this verse is a technical word for a priest's action. And is there not a very real sense in which this is exemplified in the New Testament practice of Baptism? It declares that our lives should be lived as a continual offering to God, with a continual denial of self.

We offer the sacrifice of praise. "*By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.*" The singing of a hymn of praise is a solemn and significant act: it is a priestly offering. How can our lips be mute and our attitude careless and indifferent during the singing of a hymn to God's praise? Needless to say, the sacrifice is invested with deeper significance when the singer is being beaten about by the contrary winds of life.

We offer the sacrifice of all good works as a priesthood. "*But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*" (Heb. 13. 16). Let us consider then how our priesthood enables us to function in the interests of others, as Intercessors, as Messengers and as Benefactors from God.

Intercessors! There is the privilege of not only praying for ourselves, but the responsibility of praying for others. The priests of old were set apart to speak with God on behalf of the rest of the congregation. Now, the word comes to the royal priesthood, "*I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men.*" (1 Tim. 2. 1).

We must needs pray for the Church of Christ, members of which we ourselves are, both with regard to its life and its witness; surely there will also be a special concentration of priestly intercessory prayer for any who have slipped from their earliest steadfastness. If we are in line with New Testament teaching, we shall pray too for all who are in positions of authority in national and civic life. (1 Tim. 2. 1 & 2). In fact, the scope for the priestly exercise of intercession would seem to be almost boundless. And if this be so now, how much more will it be true during the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ, when the privilege will be ours of using our priestly office so as to assist all families of the earth attain their right relationship with their God?

Messengers! We have no right to forgive sin, but it is ours to proclaim the gospel of pardon. We are to awaken others to a deeper sense of their responsibility to God, and to the doing of his Will. In Old Testament times, the priests had the keeping of the silver trumpets. They were to arouse the people. It was theirs to sound the trumpet on the new moon, to proclaim sabbath and jubilee. They gave the alarm of war. In the wilderness, the trumpets summoned the tribes to

march or bid them halt according as the Lord commanded. So we are to proclaim the message Jesus committed to his disciples, and so to us. (Mark 16. 15 & 16). Yet while proclaiming this message now, we must not forget that "*strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*". (Matt. 7. 14).

Benefactors from God! The people of Israel were blessed after the priest had been in the presence of God, and the New Testament teaches that the royal priesthood is to go forth into the world as benefactors from God. That is to be our function and ministry in every place. "*As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the house-*

hold of faith." (Gal. 6. 10).

We may think of God's priests as working in the office, in the factory, the shop, the school, or wherever they may be. They live in the presence of God, and go forth to bless all whose lives they touch.

May the thought ever be with us that we are not only a royal priesthood when we meet together in our place of worship. We carry our temple with us since the body itself has become a temple of the Holy Spirit, and we are arrayed in priestly garments as we do his Will.

What dignity God has placed upon us! Are we of the royal priesthood? Then let us ever "*walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called*". (Eph. 4. 1).

A NOTE ON MARK 6, 3

"*Is not this the carpenter?*" Mark 6. 3.

Those four words enshrine all that the Scriptures say concerning eighteen years of our Lord's life, from the age of twelve when He was presented at the Temple by his parents, to thirty, when He came to Jordan for baptism. He worked and was known as a carpenter; He had four brothers—James, Joses, Jude and Simeon—and at least two sisters. Mary's family, judged by present day standards, was a large one. Joseph disappears from the story after the incident at the Temple; it is often suggested that he must have died whilst Jesus was a youth, but two references to his name in the Gospels might be held to indicate otherwise. "*And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?*" (John 6. 42). "*And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?*" (Luke 4. 22). These texts are not conclusive, for such expressions could conceivably be used of a deceased person, but to say "whose father and mother we know" does almost seem to indicate living persons. On the other hand, the many references to Mary and her family without the inclusion of Joseph in any instance favours

the view that he was dead by the time Jesus entered upon His ministry.

So Jesus worked as a carpenter at Nazareth for eighteen years. At first He helped his father; later on, maybe, after Joseph's death, He took charge of the work and his brothers helped him. After his crucifixion his brothers James and Jude both became converts and in the course of time wrote the New Testament epistles which bear their names. James became leader of the Church at Jerusalem and his name is recorded in Church history as the first Bishop of Jerusalem. Grandchildren of Jude are known to have been living in the time of the Emperor Trajan (A.D. 103) but apart from this one well-authenticated fact the world has no record of any descendants of Mary's family. So the curtain which veils the details of our Lord's life before his ministry began is drawn only just enough to make us realise that our interest is intended to be fixed upon his mission and his message, the pouring out of his life to death on mankind's behalf, and not at all upon the days when He was but as a youth and young man amongst men.

The sweetest and most inspiring thought that a Christian can hold in his heart as he faces life's responsibilities is that God knows the sincerity of his heart devotions. To be able to look up into the face of God and confess amid all the fluctuating experiences of one's life, "Thou knowest that I love Thee" is to know a refuge and a place of rest for every glad and every troubled hour in life.

When Jesus said "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida" in his denunciation of the unbelieving cities in Matt. 11. 20-24, He used the Greek word *ouai* which means "Alas". It was an expression of pity and not of condemnation. He "reproached" those cities. Men reproach those whom they love and of whom they had expected better things.

THE QUESTION BOX

Q. *What is the "flaming fire" of 2 Thess. 1.7-8? Is it a symbol of purifying truth?*

* * *

A. The action of fire is used metaphorically in the Scriptures for two entirely different things. In the one case it is a cleansing and purifying agent, having the function eliminating dross and defilement, leaving the subject pure and genuine. An instance of this is the prophetic vision of Malachi (3.2-3) where the prophet speaks of the day of Divine intervention in earth's affairs. *"Who may abide the day of his coming and who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is a refiner's fire . . . he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver . . . and he shall purify the sons of Levi . . . that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness"*. On the other hand Malachi's 4th chapter, vs. 1, speaks of fire as a destructive agent, consuming that which is fit only for destruction. *"The day cometh, that shall burn as an oven . . . all that do wickedly . . . the day that cometh shall burn them up that it shall leave them neither root nor branch."* It is necessary therefore when considering any word of Scripture to decide in what sense the mention of fire is intended to be taken.

In 2 Thess. 1.7-8 the meaning is quite evidently that of judgment and destruction. Divine judgment is to be executed upon the obdurately wicked who both know not God and will not obey the gospel. The symbol is that of a violent storm in which the deadly lightning strikes down the enemies of God. There is no intimation of a purifying or cleansing influence here because the basis of the entire passage is that there is nothing left to purify or cleanse. The time of the event is defined in verse 10 as *"When he shall come to be glorified in his saints and to be admired in all them that believe in that day"*. The reference to "that day" places the whole matter in the time of the Messianic Kingdom when Christ rules as King. During that blessed time the evangelical witness will go out with such power, unhindered by the machinations of Satan, who will be *"bound a thousand years"* (Rev. 20.2) that all in whom resides the slightest capacity for repentance will heed the call of the Gospel and come to Christ and so to eternal life. If any should fail thus to enter into life—and if any such there be surely they must be few indeed—it can only be because they have wilfully set themselves against God in the face of full light and opportunity, and will not have him. These are the ones referred to in

2 Thess. 1.8-9. Since they will not have God, and life resides only in God and can come only from God, the only possible alternative is the absence of life. As the Psalmist puts it *"they shall be as though they had not been"* or as St. Paul has it here *"everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power"*.

Q. *What is the meaning of the text "When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38. 7).*

* * *

A. This is said of the time when the creation of earth was proceeding, before man existed and indeed before this planet could support life of any kind. The 38th chapter of Job reaches back to the time when the Architect of the Universe was fashioning his material in the mighty crucible of Nature. If the verse is to be understood literally it is evident that the "sons of God" who "shouted for joy" were the angels, the citizens of the spiritual world, the place of the Divine Throne. It is a reasonable conclusion from what is said about the subject in the Scriptures that the spiritual world existed before the material and therefore this "shouting for joy" could well describe the interest that angelic creation must necessarily have displayed in this new development of the Divine purposes.

The "morning stars" are not so easy to define. The chapter is a straightforward description of the operation of natural forces and although poetic to a high degree it is not metaphorical or symbolic, and literal stars do not "sing". It would seem that in harmony with the well-known parallelism of Hebrew poetry the morning stars which "sing" are complementary to the sons of God who "shout for joy", and therefore must refer to some in the spiritual world who, like the angels, rejoice at this new departure in God's creation. In all probability the allusion is to the Lord Jesus Christ, the "bright and morning star" of Rev. 22. 16, who before his coming to earth did, as the Divine Word, preside over its creation (John 1. 3). It might also include the one-time holy celestial being who afterwards rebelled against God and is commonly known as Satan, the Adversary, named by Isaiah Lucifer, the Morning Star. (Isa. 14. 12 margin). It can be supposed that this verse then pictures the entire hierarchy of Heaven, from highest to lowest, rejoicing in harmony together at the creation of this earth with all the possibilities that it held.

MAN OF SORROWS

A study in
Isaiah 53

2. A Tender Plant

"Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" (53.1).

It is an appealing question. It almost implies that none can be found to believe, and yet the story is a true one and the revelation waiting to break through to those who will bend their minds to consider. The speaker has changed his standpoint very rapidly from the one he occupied in chapter 52. Then, he gloried in the prospect of kings and great men shutting their mouths and giving heed to the coming of the Servant for their salvation and their instruction. Now, he bewails the fact that none will listen to the good tidings nor lift their eyes to the glorious vision resplendent in the skies. Very evidently the prophet has turned away from his contemplation of the glories due to be revealed in the Millennial Age, and bent his gaze again upon the nearer prospect, the darker days of the First Advent, with all that they hold of sorrow and suffering and death for the Anointed Deliverer.

The word rendered "report" means tidings or news, and is so translated in Psa. 112. 7 and Prov. 25. 25. Here it quite certainly denotes the declaration of the office and work of Jesus and the preaching of his Gospel, as is evident from Rom. 10. 16 *"They have not all obeyed the gospel, for Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report"*. The prophet, coming back as it were from the world of the future into the world of the present, is suddenly struck with the realisation that the glories which are so real and so precious to him and his fellows mean nothing to the world in general. He does not claim the message as his alone; he has fellow-believers and fellow-prophets. It is not "my" report, but "our" report. He pictures himself as one only of a dedicated company who have seen the light themselves and want to make it known to all and sundry. After all, Israel was a consecrated nation, intended by reason of election and training to receive the Servant when He came, in the way He should come. Isaiah really had a right to expect that the joyous declaration would be received with acclamation by his countrymen. Their ritual sacrifices on the Day of Atonement had pointed forward to this reality. They should know by now that only by suffering and sacrifice could there be cleansing from sin. But Israel did not believe, and Isaiah and his fellow-prophets found themselves but voices crying in the wilderness.

We often find ourselves in the same position. The Faith is so real and logical and convincing

to us, we fail to realise that it does not seem so to others. The promise of future restitution and, above that, the glories of the High Calling, take clear and definite shape in our minds but to others it oft times appears fantastic and improbable and all our arguments unconvincing. And we find that hard to understand. Why cannot these people see the same things that we can see so well? That is an old question but it will not be fully answered until we are beyond the Vail. Suffice it now to realise that, as with Jesus during his life on earth, so with his followers since, *"the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not"*.

So Isaiah is driven to proclaim his message to an unbelieving generation, knowing not to what extent his words would ever find lodgment and bear fruit. He must have thought of it as a witness to the people, a prophetic foreview that would be better understood and appreciated after the fulfilment had come. He could not have known of the Divine purpose that his inspired and glowing words should be preserved and recorded for all succeeding generations and taken by other zealous servants of God to the uttermost ends of the earth. Yet so it has been. Wherever the Gospel has been preached this 53rd chapter of Isaiah has been preached too, one of the Scripture's brightest jewels.

By way of doctrinal digression, it has been pointed out that there are no less than eleven expressions in this chapter referring to the vicarious nature of our Lord's sufferings while in the flesh. The modern schools of thought which portray our Lord as an inspiring example of right living but deny man's fall into sin and the need for a Redeemer must dispense entirely with this chapter and blot it out from the Divine revelation before they can begin to sustain their contention. The eleven points are:—

"He bore our griefs."

"He carried our sorrows."

"He was wounded for our transgression."

"He was bruised for our iniquities."

"The chastisement of our peace was upon him."

"By his stripes we are healed."

"Laid on him the iniquity of us all."

"For the transgression of my people was he stricken."

"Thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin."

"He shall bear their iniquities."

"He bare the sins of many."

All of this is very closely associated with the

typical ceremonies of the Day of Atonement, and the Priesthood which conducted those ceremonies. "Transgression"; "Iniquity"; "Sin"; these are words that are frequently used in the Leviticus accounts of the laws concerning the offerings, and it is only appropriate that we should meet them again here. If we could only but realise it, the whole of the complex ritual associated with the Day of Atonement has the reality toward which it pointed clearly set out here in this chapter. Isaiah 53 is in very truth the prophetic counterpart of Leviticus 16, and all that there is in that 16th chapter is presented in new guise here in Isa. 53.

"For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground." (vs. 2).

The word translated "tender plant" comes from "suckling" as in "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings" in Psa. 8. 2, and refers to the young saplings that grow up from the stump of a tree which has been felled. In our own day such shoots are still referred to as "suckers". This is a picture of the coming of Christ which is similar and yet in marked contrast to Isa. 11. 1 *"There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots"*. In that chapter the "Branch" comes forth to glory and power, the Spirit of the Lord resting upon him leading him to judge the poor with righteousness and slay the wicked with the rod of his mouth. Isaiah has passed over the day of humiliation and suffering and sees only the triumphant Kingdom beyond, when Messiah shall reign gloriously and all the nations flock to his banner. In this verse of the 53rd chapter the same "rod of the stem of Jesse" is depicted as a sapling growing out of dry ground to disesteem and spurning. Its growth and development is to be under unfavourable circumstances. But it is the same shoot. It will go on growing until it has survived the winter and passed into the light and sunshine of the spring, and it is then that the fully grown tree will spread abroad its branches in invitation to all creatures. Just as the stone which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his vision became a great mountain that filled the whole earth, so here we have the picture of a tender sapling which thrust its roots into the soil and its leaves into the air until it has filled the whole face of the land, and, like Israel in her own destined times, blossomed and budded and filled the whole world with fruit.

The background of the picture is the allusion in Isa. 10. 34 to the fall of the Davidic kingly rule under symbol of the cutting down a great cedar in Lebanon by the ruthless invader. The cedars of Lebanon were the mightiest trees known to the ancient world. It was only fitting that these

proud monarchs of the forest, standing erect in their towering majesty over all the other trees, should be chosen to picture the royal authority of the house of David, who "sat upon the throne of the Lord" and ruled Israel in the name of God. The apparent permanence of those cedars told fitly of the throne that was to endure for ever before God. But Isaiah in his day knew that because of faithlessness the throne of David must be overthrown, the upstanding cedar be cut down. That was the theme of his prophecy but he did not end there. The throne of David would one day be re-established, when "he whose right it is" appears to claim his possession. So in verse 34 of chapter 10 the prophet sees the Assyrian and Babylonian invaders ravaging the land and taking the people captive and destroying the kingly power, and he says *"he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one"*. Immediately following, in the first verse of chapter 11, comes the golden sequel *"and there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse . . ."* Like the tree of the Babylonian king's vision, which was cut down until seven times had passed over it, and then was to sprout again, so it is here. The great cedar of Lebanon which was the kingship of David's line was cut down by the oppressors of Israel. Zedekiah was the last king; but a tender sapling out of that cut-down stump would one day arise to grow into a cedar mightier by far than that which had flourished and perished.

So out of the apparent barrenness and failure of God's promises there grows the "root of David". Christ is to be as a root out of dry ground. The learned men of our Lord's day were quite unable to understand how Christ could be both David's son and David's Lord, even though Jesus quoted the Old Testament Scriptures to that effect and they had prided themselves on understanding the Old Testament Scriptures. This "rod out of the stem of Jesse", this "tender plant" or sapling from the cut-down stump, is also the root itself! *"I am the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star."* *"All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made."* Unless Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Lord from heaven, is the root of David as well as his Son, the whole of our faith is founded upon a falsity and we are of all men most miserable. The only possibility for salvation of this fallen race of which we are members lay in the active intervention of God from heaven. *"God, sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh . . ."* *"He Who was rich, for our sakes became poor . . ."* Without the root there could never have been the tender sapling growing up into maturity to the lasting benefit of mankind.

The "dry ground" is the "dry and thirsty land, where no water is" of Psa. 63. 1. The Psalmist longs and seeks for God but sees no evidence of his presence, until he finds him in the sanctuary and remembers him on his bed, meditating on him in the night watches. Unless we search for God, and finding him, hold him fast, even the promises and plans of God are as dry ground to us, barren and profitless. But for those who will have it, there is a root in that dry ground which contains within itself the springing life that is to burst forth into the light of day, bringing life and immortality to light through the Gospel, and causing, at last, the desire of all nations to come. To those who know these things, the dry ground has indeed become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water.

"He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." (vs. 2).

This is the idealised form, comeliness, beauty, of the Messianic King of Jewish hopes, that the prophet declares is absent from the Man who has at last fulfilled the prophecy. It is manifestly illogical to take these words as descriptive of our Lord's personal appearance when one remembers that He was humanly perfect as was Adam before his transgression, and that the physical aspect of Jesus must have been one of overpowering beauty and majesty. It is unthinkable that the Son of God should walk this earth in any form other than one suited to the fact that He was indeed the Son of God. It is a significant fact that the alleged descriptions of Jesus dating from the days of the Early Church all present him as possessed of grace and beauty; it was not until later centuries, when the dark influence of a gloomy asceticism was fastening itself upon the Church, that the conception of Jesus as physically unlovely and even repulsive took the lead, and texts like this were taken out of their poetic setting and interpreted in a grossly literal sense.

The glory of Jesus was not of this world. That was the great truth over which Israel stumbled and fell and that is why they saw no beauty in him to desire. A king must, in their eyes, be possessed of outward majesty and glory; he must be arrayed in costly raiment and flashing jewels; he must have courtiers and servants and a shouting crowd to attend him wherever he went. There were three things, yea, four, said the Wise Man in Proverbs, which "go well" and are "comely in going". A lion, which is strongest among beasts, took his admiration; a greyhound, a he-goat, and a king, "against whom there is no rising up". (Prov. 30. 29-31). He looked on the outward appearance and marvelled at the strength of the lion, the speed of the greyhound, the irresistible force of the he-goat, and the power of the king. These things, he said, are "comely"—but there was none of that comeliness in the demeanour and the life of the Prince of Peace.

Neither was there the kingly glory and power which shall in truth be manifested in the days of the Kingdom. "*Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and majesty; and in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness*" (Psa. 45. 3-4) are words spoken of this One Who "had no form nor comeliness", but they are words which wait yet for their fulfilment. Isaiah saw in vision the glory of Lebanon, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, resplendent earthly reflections of the glory of the Lord and the excellency of our God (Isa. 35. 2) but that again was a vision of the far-distant future, and there was no glory of Lebanon and no excellency of Carmel and Sharon when the Man of Galilee climbed their slopes and wended his way through their valleys. The time for his glory had not then come and there was no reflection of that glory on the earth, and so it was that men, gazing upon him, saw no form nor comeliness, no beauty that could make him desirable in their eyes.

To be continued

Travellers we needs must be, since here we have no continuing city; but it is left to us to determine whether as aimless wanderers we will journey along the road of life or whether it shall be as pilgrims that we will take that road. The pilgrim is he who has the wishing heart; who has seen a vision of the City of God and has willed to seek it along the pilgrim's way. His heart like a compass is ever pointing to that city of his fondest hopes.

Every member, in proportion as it is in harmony with the head and its spirit of love for the members, will be prompt to act. Sometimes in our human bodies the hand may stretch forth assistance to the injured member so quickly that it seems impossible to conceive that the message first went to the head, and that our hand was subsequently directed by the head to assist; and so it is with the members of the body of Christ.

TREE LEAVES

Leaves are common and yet quite uncommon. In Isaiah 64.6 are these words: "*We all do fade as a leaf*". In this short statement, many lessons may be learned about our lives which it will be profitable to observe.

Only God can make a leaf. Each leaf has life, each leaf denotes the plant or bush or tree from which it fell. Each leaf in itself tells whether it is a new leaf, young in days, or an old leaf that has withstood the storms of the season and is now ready to fall. In this respect human beings are quite like the leaf. There are young ones with their soft tender years, their lovely trusting hearts, their sweet ways and with the buoyancy of youth. The years may pass by and these begin to fade and to fail as the leaf on the tree.

Leaves are not fruit. Leaves in the Bible speak of a profession and a confession which may or may not be accompanied by fruit. Our Lord found a fig tree on which there was "nothing but leaves". He expects more than leaves in our lives. He would have us laden with fruit for his glory and blessing for our fellowmen.

Leaves are born to die. They appear in the spring and we know quite well that they shall fall in the autumn. By examining the leaf after it has fallen, we may tell something of its experiences through the summer. Some fall full-sized unmarred, beautiful in colour, glorious in tints; whereas others fall curled, shrunken, sear and yellow and even perhaps eaten by worms and other enemies. Some are split and torn by the savage winds. The condition of the leaf tells either a story of protection and progress or a story of adversity and hardship. So it is in the life of a man or woman who reaches the end of the long summer of life. A sudden gust of wind, some disease, or some accident may quickly tear the soul away from its moorings and it is blown to the grave. Some fall in the midst of the summer of life from the glorious heights of the tree top to the gutter of the street, to become soiled and wrecked long before their time. Some hang on through the storms of the seasons and cling throughout the winter to the limb of the tree as though it would not let go this life. These are they who live on, past the allotted threescore years and ten, past ninety, and attain even the

century mark.

Some believers grow more beautiful as they grow older. Others give a benediction of peace as one sits in their presence. Some develop most beautiful traits of character when the hair becomes whitened with the wintry blast and the face becomes wrinkled with the sorrows of the summer. Others become more cruel as age creeps on. They give way of their passionate tempers, they become unruly, hard to live with, unreasonable in their demands, unsatisfied, fault-finding, and critical. These are the leaves such as fall from the cottonwood and the peach trees. There is nothing attractive there, nothing beautiful. This leaf falls in the wind, is swept away from sight and is never missed.

Leaves such as the hard maple, which cling through the winter season, do not drop from the tree until new life appears in the balmy spring-time. The fresh young buds push off the old, dead leaves, and what the storms could not do the new life does. How true this is today in our social system. The older men who have served faithfully through the years are pushed out of the way and lose their positions because of the advent of younger men with their fresh courage and their buoyant ambitions. Thus the leaf must leave its accustomed place and be cast aside to wither and wilt and waste away.

There are the leaves which are so beautiful in the fall of the year that the school children gather them, place them in their memory books, take them to school for the botany teacher to see, and save them for after years. In gathering these lovely leaves, many leaves are ignored by the children because they are not attractive. They do not appeal to the child's sense of value. There are those in life who are like this. They seem to serve only themselves. They do not care to develop those Christian graces which will make them beautiful throughout their life and especially lovely in their last days.

Fig leaves proved to be only false finery for EVE. They shrivelled and shrank and left her exposed to the eyes of an offended God. So today, leaves of profession will not suffice to hide the soul from the living Lord.

Take heed of being offended at the cross that thou must go by, before thou come to heaven. There is no man that goeth to heaven but he

must go by the cross. The cross is the standing waymark by which all they that go to glory must pass by.
John Bunyan.



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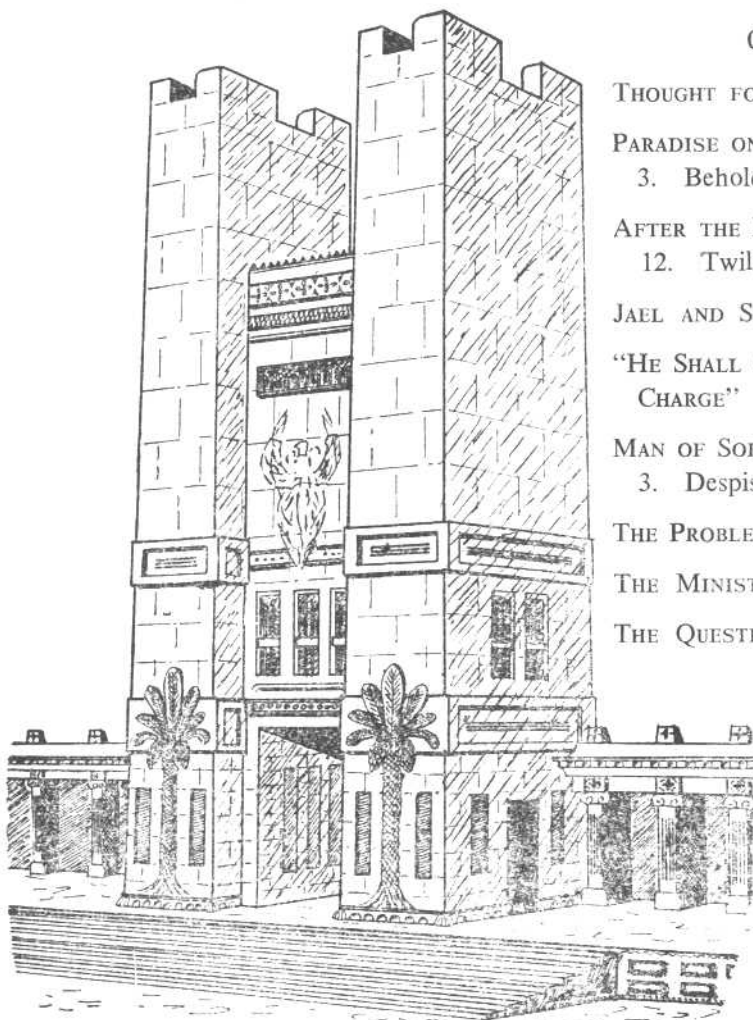
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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Next issue July 1st

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

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Notices

David Walton. This opportunity is taken to express appreciation to all those who made donations to Gainsborough House in lieu of funeral flowers.

* * *

Special Request. Arising from the unexpected Home-call of David Walton, there is doubt as to the efficacy of the distribution of March/April issue. If anyone failed to receive their copy, please advise to that effect and a copy will be sent at once.

* * *

Gainsborough House. Our Christian Residential Centre for the elderly at Milborne Port, Somerset-Dorset border, has one of its one-room flats available for an able-bodied resident of either sex (a man in early years of retirement fond of gardening would be welcomed at the moment) who must be a committed Christian. The flats are self-contained with own shower room, toilet, and other amenities, ground floor facing garden. Midday meal is served in the main house; in all other respects residents look after themselves but there is housekeeper-warden oversight in case of emergency. Fees have only to cover expenses so are moderate. If interested, apply to A. O. Hudson, Ashley House, Wick Road, Milborne Port, Sherborne, Dorset, DT9 5HF.

Gone from us

— ❁ —

Bro. N. Charcharos (London)

Sis. E. Lewis (Yeovil)

Sis. F. Shuttleworth (Thirsk)

Bro. D. Walton (Sherborne)

Sis. H. Woolgar (Birchington)

— ❁ —

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

BOOK REVIEW

Nebuchadrezzar and Babylon. Prof. D. J. Wiseman, O.U.P. 1985, Cloth, 142 pp, Illus., plates, diagrams and maps. £17.00. A fitting successor to Prof. Wiseman's "Chronicles of Chaldean Kings 626-556 BC" it brings together in one compass the latest discoveries and deductions regarding that fascinating period of Babylon's history so familiar to Bible Students in the Book of Daniel. The first section deals with Nebuchadrezzar the man—wise and tolerably just—his ancestry and family, his military and building achievements. The second section has to do with Babylon under his rule, with a number of plates, some coloured, depicting the ziggurat (Tower of Babel), the "Hanging Gardens" and other relevant features, with several "street maps" of the city as it then was. The third section will be of definite interest to "Daniel" students with its latest revisions of the detailed chronology of the period. It appears here that on account of his father's failing health Nebuchadrezzar became Crown Prince in 607; one would think he could be held to fulfil the function of Daniel's "head of gold" from this date. There are evidences pointing to the origin of the "four universal empires" thesis. It seems that "Sheshach" of Jer. 25.26 and 51.41, always assumed to refer to Babylon, is the native word ses-ku, meaning "holy city", as it was to the god Marduk. What is clearly a memory slip on the part of the author puts Daniel's three companions in the lion's den (p.112); in the story Daniel was there alone. A couple of printers' errors have Jer. 31.41 instead of 51.41 on p. 45, and Dan. 2.3-4 instead of 11.3-4 on p. 94 but these will doubtless be corrected in future editions. An appendix on Alexander in Babylon in the 4th BC century, a comprehensive 10-page Bibliography, and an eight-page index with glossaries. Altogether a vivid and up-to-date account of life in Daniel's Babylon as revealed by latest researches.

Obtainable through all booksellers. Overseas readers can obtain from their own booksellers by quoting the international book number, ISBN 019 726040 3.

CONVENTIONS

Yeovil Convention. The annual Spring Bank Holiday convention will be held over the period Friday, May 23 to Tuesday, May 27 at Hillgrove Avenue with some Sunday sessions at Moose Hall. For full details and accommodation please write to Mrs. M. Robinson, 26 Rands Meadow, Holwell, Hitchin, Herts., SG5 3SH.

* * *

Chesham Convention. Sunday only, 15 June, at Malt House, Elgiva Lane, from 10.45 onwards. Four sessions. Details from Mr. F. Binns, 102 Broad Street, Chesham, Bucks., HP5 3ED.

PARADISE ON EARTH

Earth's coming glory

3. Behold the King

Jesus told his countrymen, before his death, that they would not see him again until they were ready to cry "*Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord*". (Matt. 23.39). The world is not ready to say that yet; the many who do not believe will not have him because they do not know him; many who do believe have inherited so distorted a view from the general formal teachings of Christendom that they fear rather than joyfully anticipate the day when he fulfils his promise to "come again". The old mediæval idea that He comes as a stern and wrathful Judge intent on punishing men for their sins and taking only a minority to Heaven before burning up the earth and all that is in it ought to have been banished from Christian teaching centuries ago; unhappily it persists, and its persistence creates a barrier to the full understanding of the glorious future awaiting mankind when his Return is fully revealed.

The coming of Christ is an event to be eagerly anticipated. Says the Psalmist, "*Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad . . . let the field be joyful, and all that is therein. Then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord, for He cometh to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness and the people with his truth*" (Psa. 96. 11-13). An event which is depicted in such glowing terms can only be beneficial to those who experience it.

The general idea, inherited from the past, is that the Advent will be a sudden and unexpected event. The world will be going about its business, unsuspecting, when without warning Christ will appear in the sky with attendant angels, descending to earth, where He will immediately raise the dead from their graves and summon all, dead and living, before his throne for judgment. All this comes from the poetic imagery of the Bible, imagery which has to be used in order to convey the spiritual truths involved to people of many different mental outlooks in many different generations. In this Twentieth century it is necessary to interpret the Scriptures in the light of our present understanding of the purposes of God and the nature of both the other world and this world.

The revelation of Christ to the world at his Second Advent is a progressive one, embracing a great many significant events, some in this world and perceived by men, some in the other world and therefore not perceived by men. This

fact was understood by some Christian thinkers so far back as the second decade of the 19th century, when the apparent imminence of the Advent began to be advocated. At a series of conferences organised by well-known British ministers and Church leaders from 1826 onward one of the theses, not universally accepted but finding definite support in many quarters, was that the Advent consists of two stages, a preliminary one in which the Lord would be present unknown to men in general for the purpose of gathering his Church to heavenly glory, followed by a second stage at which He would be revealed with his Church to the whole world. This view of the Advent, originating in England, was later taken up by some sections of the American Adventist movement and is now more fully developed. The modern view is that this unseen phase of the Advent embraces the whole of this present century and that the returned Lord can be thought of as standing behind the scenes overruling and directing the course of world events so that the final disintegration of world power marking the actual end of the Age will come at the Divinely pre-ordained moment, when Christ will be revealed to all men in the glory of his Advent and take his place as earth's new universal ruler.

What is to be the nature of that revelation? How will men realise his coming and accept his rule when He thus appears? Is He to be manifested to the natural sight, or in the persons of some among men who are to be his representatives, or by the logic of events? We are of course dealing here with the impact of the spiritual world upon the material, the celestial upon the terrestrial, and so little is known about that celestial world. Modern knowledge makes it possible to think of that world and its occupants existing on a different wave-length, so to speak, so that whilst being a real world, a real environment constituting the home of real beings adapted to that environment, such beings and such environment are of necessity imperceptible to human senses. Our Lord after his resurrection did break through the barrier to manifest himself visibly to his followers, once as a gardener, again as a stranger, once to Thomas in his pre-crucifixion likeness—and yet on the other hand, to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road in an other-worldly glory so unendurable that Saul fell to the ground, temporarily blinded. It may be discreet to say that it is not possible to be dogmatic as to the

means by which our Lord will be manifest to men at his revealing, only that it will be completely satisfactory and conclusive to the observers. And it may well be that the most telling evidence will be the increasingly obvious fact that the evil and disruptive forces and institutions of the world are being progressively curbed and eliminated by a power which men can neither understand nor withstand. There will not be wanting, at any time during this transition period between this world and the next, men and women who know what these things mean, have been expecting and awaiting them, and will proclaim their significance in no uncertain voice.

Speaking of this time, Jesus declared (Matt. 24. 30) that following the "tribulation of those days"—the catalogue of world troubles which leads up to the end of the Age, "*then shall appear*"—a word meaning to make evident, manifest, not necessarily by physical sight, literally "to bring to light"—"*the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven . . .*" Just what is meant by the "sign of the Son of Man" has given rise to a variety of opinions; the structure of the sentence demands that it be something in the nature of a preliminary spectacle or happening which indicates the imminence of the actual revelation of Christ to the waiting world, something which men can see or appreciate as the evidence of that which is to follow. If one tries to visualise the point in history at which this world has all but reached its end, when society as we know it is on the brink of final disruption, when the world's politicians are on the point of giving up, then what is the outward evidence then being displayed before men that a great change is imminent? All Bible prediction in the Old Testament, as well as much Apostolic teaching in the New, conspire together to indicate the completion of a process which has an integral place in the events of the Time of the End but has not yet attained its zenith. That process is the resurgence of Israel.

Of all the strange events of this century, the appearance and continuity of the sovereign state of Israel is the most inexplicable. Occupying a territory only the size of Wales, it has become a power to be reckoned with in the counsels of the largest nations. In a world of super-powers armed to the teeth, it is classed by the world's strategists as the fourth strongest military power. When Britain relinquished its Mandate over Palestine in 1948, the world waited to see the handful of Israelis pushed into the sea by an overwhelming flood of Arabs. Instead, they saw ten million Arabs defeated by two million Israelis and the new State proclaimed in defiance of the

whole world. And no one has been able to do anything about it. Four wars have waged against these tenacious fighters and they are still there. More than two millenniums ago the Lord said through the prophet Zechariah that He would make Jerusalem a burdensome stone to all the world (Zech. 13.3); that prediction has come true. And the question has to be faced; what is the secret of the apparently miraculous survival of these people? What is the power that sustains them? What is to be the outcome?

The Scriptures are positive. Israel is to be a converted and holy people appointed to introduce the Divine Kingdom on earth and engage in a world-wide missionary work among all nations under the guidance and leadership of the Lord Christ and his Church from heaven. They are not, as a nation, converted and holy at present, but that will come. Their present politicians and leaders, with all their good qualities and skilled administration, are politicians of this world. Before Israel becomes the converted and holy people the Lord intends they will need new leaders, stalwart men of God, inflexibly set for righteousness, men of vision and character, turning the nation away from its reliance upon the policies and practices of this world, taking to themselves the practices of the world to come. With such men at the helm Israel will be invincible.

Is this the "sign of the Son of Man in Heaven", the immediate precursor of his revelation to the world, this unexpected and unexplainable phenomenon, the emergence of a righteous nation, led by righteous men, eschewing all human means of offence and defence, and relying in complete faith upon the power of God to protect and deliver them from all enemies? In the days of the Ten Plagues on Egypt, Pharaoh's magicians were able to reproduce the first two plagues and so Pharaoh took no notice of Moses, but when Moses called down the third plague the magicians found themselves powerless. So they said to Pharaoh "*this is the finger of God*" (Exod. 8.19). So will it be at this end of the Age; the rulers of this world, "taking counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed" (Christ) will find themselves faced with a mysterious power they can neither understand nor withstand, and they will have to say to each other "*this is the finger of God*".

For when Israel can be seen in the eyes of the world to stand in this position before God the full end has indeed come and the Lord Christ almost immediately to be revealed. Other Scriptures indicate that this is when the institutions and powers of this world realise at last that the true threat to each is not from one another, but from Heaven's forces of righteousness, and they will

forget their internecine quarrels in the attempt to join in a common resistance to this power, the nature of which they understand so little, but sense it threatens their own selfish interests. John the Revelator saw in vision this event, under symbol of a Rider on a White Horse with his followers, the Lord Jesus Christ and the armies of heaven, coming forth to do battle with "*the kings of the earth, and their armies*" and overthrowing them so that his beneficent Millennial kingdom can be established (Rev. 19. 11-21). The prophet Ezekiel at a much earlier time saw the same thing as it will affect the converted Israel nation in their own land, with the world gathered against them, and the Lord coming to their aid and establishing them for ever as his earthly missionary nation with every opponent rendered powerless (Ezek. Chaps. 38 and 39).

All this is going to take a long time, it may be said. It is not necessarily so. The forces that are going to bring about this great change can be gathering strength behind the scenes, unsuspected and unobserved by men, to be revealed suddenly when the time is ripe. There are two notable examples in our own day. The rule of the Czars endured in Imperialist Russia for four centuries and no one in 1917 dreamed that its day was done. Rumours reached England that some kind of insurrection was afoot but the British Ambassador in Moscow assured his Government at home that there was nothing in it; a rising was unlikely and if there was it would be easily suppressed. The next that anybody knew was that the Czar and his family had been apprehended, the Government overthrown and scattered, and Russia was a Socialist State. For twenty years Vladimir Lenin had been sitting in the British Museum library studying and preparing the constitution of the new republic; when all was ready that republic was proclaimed and set up in power as it were in a moment. The other instance is that of the State of Israel itself. When Britain renounced the Mandate and moved out of Palestine in 1948 it was expected by the nations that the Arab world would move in and after a certain amount of resistance organise the whole area as an Arab state. Instead of that, as the Union Jack came down the Israeli flag went up and the modern State of Israel was born. A lot of preparation had been going on for a long time under cover and when the critical time had arrived the event happened.

So with this great change which is due to occur at this end of the Age. Jesus likened it to the days of Noah, men going about their normal occupations and interests, eating and drinking, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage, heedless of the signs which indicate to

the watchful that the Lord Christ is about to be revealed taking his great power and commencing his reign. And this raises the obvious questions who will be the visible leaders among men who will pick up the reins of government as they are relinquished by men who, however well-meaning and sincere, find themselves powerless to cope with the problem created by a world that is falling to pieces?

That there will be such men, strong and resolute, champions of righteousness and justice, is implicit in Holy Writ. Isaiah, the prophet, in his early vision of the dawning Millennial Age, cried out "*Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem*" (Isa. 2.2.). A rather enigmatic passage in the Book of Micah tells of the Lord raising up shepherds and princes under whose leadership Israel shall become both a destructive force, evidently toward those whose instincts are to do evil, and a benevolent and life-giving force, evidently to those whose impulses and motives are good and right. Perhaps the most positive pointer to the nature of these men who will stand up to direct the policies and practices of the Millennial world is contained in the foresight of the prophet Zechariah, who, having already described the bewilderment of men faced with this phenomenon of a developing righteous nation governing itself in accordance with the laws of God, goes on to say "*the governors of Judah shall say in their hearts, the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the Lord of Hosts their God*" (Zech. 12.5). Where these men come from no man will know, only that they are possessed of a strong grasp and understanding of earth's problems, and the ability to enforce their dictates and execute their plans. When men realise that although firm, they are just, incorruptible and benevolent, there will most assuredly be a reaction in favour of the new order of things. This, however, cannot become real until these same men have led their people Israel in the supreme trial of faith, when the powers of this world make their final effort to withstand the Kingdom of God.

This final effort is what the Book of Revelation calls Armageddon—a word which in popular parlance evokes feelings of dread and apprehension. In Scripture the word is associated with the events of the end of the Age, and because in popular theology that end is visualised in terms of violence and destruction, a "Last Day" in which a wrathful Christ is expected to consign trembling sinners to their doom and destroy the earth and all that is in it in a holocaust of blood and fire, the general reaction at mention of the word is one of fear. For a word which occurs

only once in the whole of the Bible it may be that its import has been exaggerated beyond its reality. Armageddon is the name given to the final battle between good and evil which brings this Age to an end and ushers in the Millennial reign of Christ. Were it a battle between two contending earthly super-powers the resulting carnage may well justify the horrific descriptions of its nature penned by some zealous Christian students, but it is not. It is a conflict between the forces of evil of this world struggling to maintain their supremacy and the heavenly forces of the coming Christ, and because these latter are heavenly forces they will accomplish their object with weapons totally dissimilar to those of earth and without the carnage. Jesus said once that He came not to destroy men's lives but to save them, and there is no conceivable logic in supposing He can only achieve his object of taking over the rulership of the world by wrecking the earth and destroying most of the men upon it.

There is to be a final conflict; let there be no doubt about that. The Scriptures depict it in various ways in the guise of warfare as waged in Bible times, but those are only to illustrate the principles involved. What does emerge from these pen-pictures is that at the last the converted Holy Nation in the Holy Land will take a stand for unreserved faith in the power of God and will prosper in material things on that account—Israel's covenant with God at Sinai provided that such prosperity would always be theirs in such case and that promise still holds—and this prosperity, together with a dawning realisation that there is some mysterious power behind this people and their leaders which is inimical to the evil forces in the world, will lead the world to take action against them. *"Then shall the Lord go forth"* says Zechariah of this event *"and fight against those nations as when he fought in the day of battle"* (Zech. 14.3). And how does He fight? Let Zechariah continue the story (15.12). *"Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their sockets, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth . . . and they shall lay hold every man on the hand of his neighbour, and his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbour . . . and so it shall be with the horse, the mule, the camel, the ass, and all the beasts that shall be in these tents"*. One does not expect to find such assemblage of domestic animals in

the accoutrements of modern warfare; neither should one expect to read verse 12 literally. Applied to the technology of modern warfare, one can see in this description the nature of the weapons of heaven. More potent by far than man's instruments of warfare are those of God, the powers of Nature, always under his control. It only needs an unprecedented fog, spread over a vast area, enduring not for days, but weeks, and not one plane could take off, not one tank move forward, not one warship steer a course—*"their eyes consumed in their sockets"*. It only needs an "electro-magnetic storm" of charged particles emanating from the sun, similar to everyday experience but of unprecedented intensity, to block every form of radio communication and control upon earth—as it does to a much more limited extent now—and everything has to stop; *"their tongue consumed in their mouths"*. It only needs the Lord to send snow, not just a few feet for a few days, but many feet for many weeks or months, and all the armies of men will be lost to each other and immobilised; *"their flesh consumed while they stand upon their feet"*. The whole modern paraphernalia of human warlike power rendered useless like the beasts of burden of ancient warfare described in vs. 15. The entire power of man trusting in material weapons revealed impotent against the all-superior power of God, and that, if God so decrees, without the loss of a single life. It would seem that something like this will be the outcome, for according to Isaiah (66.19) the very next thing to happen will be the sending of missionaries from delivered Israel to those same would-be enemies to convert them to the reverence and worship of God.

This is the beginning of the Millennium. The power of man to resist God will be broken and the fact that Jesus Christ has now the active rulership of the world will be universally recognised and accepted. Whether He in his glory will or will not be perceptible to man's literal sight will be irrelevant; his ambassadors will be in positions of administration upon earth, ruling from Jerusalem. His holy nation of Israel will be active in missionary work—and so will many Christians of all nations who have readily grasped the significance of these events. This is the point in history when it will be literally true that *"the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever"* (Rev. 11.15).

To be continued

I shall pass through this world but once. Any good therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do

it now. Let me not defer it or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.

AFTER THE FLOOD

12. Twilight before Dawn

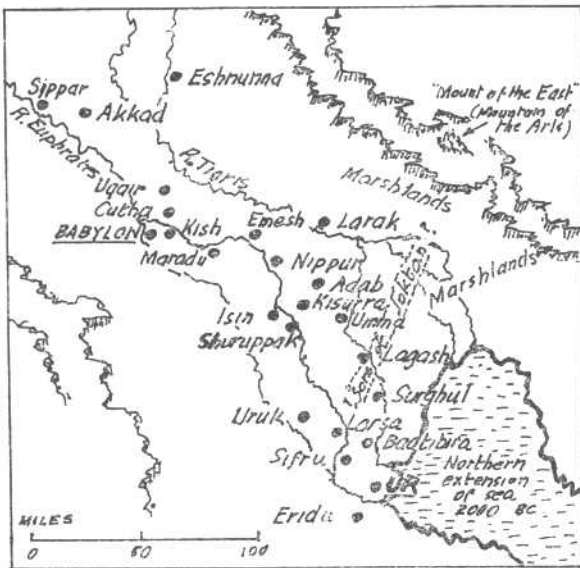
The time had come, round about this twenty-fourth century before Christ, for the world of men to take on its present familiar aspect of war and strife, greed and injustice, idolatry and godlessness, which has been its characteristic ever since. For nearly a thousand years since the Flood mankind had been tolerably free from these evils, and Sumerian poets of six or seven centuries later wove into their poems and legends stories of that long-past "Golden Age". There is no doubt that there was such a Golden Age and it was the onset of idolatry and of war between communities which brought it to an end. The world from now on was destined to witness great changes.

These two centuries, noteworthy for the birth of Nahor and Terah, grandfather and father of Abraham, saw the peak of the civilisation which had been built up from the days of Nimrod something like six centuries earlier. Now, with the death of the military dictator Sargon of Agade and the rise of the famous Third Dynasty of Ur, with its energetic and able ruler Ur-Nammu, the balance of power swung again from the Semitic Akkadians in the North to the Sumerians in the South. Ur, and Lagash, and Uruk, with two new city-states, Isin and Larsa, were the dominant centres of political power and all of them active in the still increasing hubbub of trade and industry consequent upon expanding knowledge of the wider world which the continuing increase of the human race was bringing into view. By this time the sons of Japhet had penetrated most of Siberia and reached the borders of China; those of Cush had set up a second Sumerian civilisation in north-western India and were pressing down that land's western coast, and in the west were spreading over equatorial Africa. Most of central Europe was occupied by Japhetic tribes. The peoples of the Middle East were at the centre of a complex system of world trade which extended over most of Europe and a considerable part of Asia and Africa.

It was probably at this time that the reference to the sons of Joktan in Gen. 10.30 applies. It seems such an irrelevant little remark that one wonders why it was inserted at all. The reason for the genealogy leading from Shem to Peleg is obvious enough; it is to point out the line from which Abraham, the father of the Israel people, was derived. But having arrived at Peleg, five generations before Abraham, the narrator breaks

off to tell us that Peleg's brother Joktan had thirteen sons who dwelt, according to the A.V. "*from Mesha as thou goest to Sephar a mount of the east*". Why such an apparently unnecessary piece of information should be included in the Genesis account is at first sight not at all clear; yet there must have been a purpose. The A.V. rendering is a little bungled—Middle East geography was not the 17th century translators' strong point—and a closer examination of the text reveals what may have been purpose in the plan. The RSV has it "*the territory in which they lived extended from Mesha in the direction of Sephar to the hill country of the east*" which is more lucid but still does not tell us where these places were situated. A literal rendering of the Hebrew is more like "*from Mesha, toward Sephar, to the Mount of the East*". One of these locations is definitely known—the "Mount of the East". As has been said heretofore, this was the mountain on which the Ark landed, sacred to the Sumerians and Semites, now shown on maps as Kuh-i-Anaran, in the Zagros mountains a hundred and fifty miles east of Babylon. Sephar could be either the Semitic city of Sippar in the north or the Sumerian one of Sifru in the south not far from Ur of the Chaldees. Sippar, so far as is known, was not in existence at so early a period and the balance of probability is that Sifru is meant. The location of Mesha is not known. Place-names in the Middle East have a habit of surviving through the ages and there is an area between Ur and the "Mount of the East", still largely marshland, where a number of localities bear names which could well derive from Mesha. If this deduction is justified, this would then define a broad band of territory stretching from Ur and Sifru in the west, across the marsh lands to the "Mount of the East", which, with the progressive drying up of the Gulf, which had been going on since the Flood, would only about this time have become available for settlement. It might well be that these numerous tribes, descended from Joktan, as the years passed and they multiplied, found that the only territory available to them was this Marshland territory revealed by the receding waters. In after times they spread into Arabia and their tribal names have persisted in history as those of Arab peoples to this day. The map of the Sumerian cities here-under indicates where this land of the Joktanites might have been.

With a rapidly increasing population and expanding world trade life began to be more hectic; as with the modern world during the last half-century, there was a great increase in knowledge and invention, in industry and commerce, and everything had to be done more quickly than before. The old pictograph writing which had served the needs of less sophisticated generations in the past gave way to cuneiform (arrow-headed) which simplified the picture-symbols into wedge-shaped signs that could more easily and quickly be impressed on the soft clay tablets which was the writing material of the times. This meant, among other things, that the stories of Eden, and of the Flood, and of the Tower of Babel, which had already existed in written form for several centuries, had to be



translated into the new form—probably the first Bible translation ever made. The sketch below shows what the first five verses of Genesis must have looked like. This was the script in which Abraham, later on, first read those narratives, and, incidentally, the script from which Moses and his fellows translated the early part of Genesis into the Hebrew language, for this cuneiform writing remained the medium of all written records up to the time of the Exodus and the emergence of the Hebrew language. Despite its apparently complicated nature, a surprising amount of information could be compressed into a very small space. A tablet found at Nippur, written in the time of Abraham, measuring only one and a half by two and a half inches, proved to be a library catalogue containing the titles of no less than sixty-two literary works. From this

time onward the legends and history of past generations began to be written down—with embellishments—and these “epics” are now one of the sources of our information regarding those days. But beside the historical tablets, which form only a small proportion of the tens of thousands of clay tablets discovered, there are others which deal with industry, medicine, science and mathematics—for the people of Heber’s and Abraham’s day were superb mathematicians and diligent astronomers. They had calculated the distance from the earth to the sun with an accuracy not equalled until the year 1920; at a somewhat later



date they had recorded observations of the four largest moons of the planet Jupiter, invisible today to the naked eye; no one since then knew that Jupiter had any moons until Galileo invented the telescope in A.D. 1610. Was the eyesight of the ancients so much better than that of moderns or did they invent the telescope first? Correctly made glass magnifying lenses have been found in the ruins of ancient Nineveh. In the field of medicine there is a tablet listing the methods of preparation of five hundred herbal remedies. Sumerian surgeons carried out surgical operations with copper instruments. In the province

of industry there is in the British Museum a tablet giving a process for glazing earthenware inscribed in cipher so that no competitor could understand it. When the Sumerian language died out a few centuries later the secret was lost until Assyrian craftsmen "cracked" the code in the 7th century BC but with the fall of the Assyrian empire the secret was lost again until in the 19th century the tablet was found, translated and submitted to British cipher experts who "cracked" the code once more and so enabled modern industrialists to try out the process, and find it successful. In Ur of the Chaldees coppersmiths had discovered how to temper copper to yield a cutting edge like steel—another secret lost until modern times. Time was measured by means of a water-clock in which one talent of water (about six gallons) ran out of an enclosed vessel and the diminishing water level operated a pointer which registered the complete day, divided into hours and minutes. In the Museum of the Iraqi Department of Antiquities in Baghdad there are earthenware jars with copper rods and traces of chemicals nearly five thousand years old which technical experts today consider could only have been some form of electric battery, which if true would raise the question what kind of electrical device did the battery operate? Had it not been that a century or so after Abraham had migrated to Canaan the whole of this complex and advanced civilisation disintegrated into what their own historians called "the times of confusion" in which they were overrun by invading peoples of lesser culture, the explosion of knowledge and scientific achievement which has characterised this 20th century might have come there and then, and history have been very different. But that was not to be; the Divine Plan included many features of great moment for mankind and not until God's own due time could knowledge be allowed to be increased to the extent it has done today.

By this time there were colonies in distant parts, set up by Sumerian merchants who traded local products with the homeland. Dilmun, four hundred miles down the Gulf where Bahrein is now, was an important staging port for ocean-going merchant vessels. Magan, which is now Oman at the mouth of the Gulf, was a busy copper mining area. Most important of all was Melukkha, on the river Indus in modern Pakistan, a territory larger in extent than the homeland of Sumer itself, stretching from the vicinity of Bombay to the headwaters of the Indus, an area eight hundred by three hundred miles furnished with cities strangely resembling modern ones in facilities and amenities. Built in the style of Ur

and Uruk and Babylon, they had straight streets forty-five feet wide with main drains having branches into every house, separate underground culverts five feet high for carrying off rainwater, evidences of a virile industry in the manufacture of pottery and textiles—the earliest cotton in the world's history was grown and woven here—and brisk trade in all kinds of tropical products carried on by means of ships which unloaded their wares at Ur of the Chaldees. In the other direction Syria and Canaan boasted the cities of Alalykh and Ebla and Catal Huyuk, and Tyre and Sidon on the sea coast, all links in the network of trading centres which by now had knit the far-flung sons of Noah together. Trade was booming, and the world was a very busy place.

But behind all this passion for progress and discovery and achievement there did repose, in the hearts of these early descendants from Shem and Ham, a love of righteousness and justice and the higher values of life. Says Kramer (*"From the tablets of Sumer"*) *"they cherished goodness and truth, love and order, justice and freedom, righteousness and straightforwardness, mercy and compassion. The gods were extolled as good and just"*. After all, they had only recently abandoned the true God of their fathers and commenced to make for themselves false gods, alien gods who were now leading them into war and violence and every kind of villainy; but for the moment there was still the recollection of the Golden Age they had rejected only a couple of centuries ago to keep their standards relatively high. It is probable that when Abraham came on the scene a little later, although he must have shrank from the idolatry and moon-worship of Ur and its citizens, there was still much in their characters and their lives that he would applaud; it might not have been altogether without reluctance that he parted from them in obedience to the Lord's injunction.

Just an example of what have been called the "penitential psalms" which demonstrate the sentiments of the devout Sumerian, whether worshipper of one God or many. Because their paganism always preserved the worship of the Most High God of heaven, superior to all the other gods, there is a kinship of sentiment which reveals that these men and women of four or five thousand years ago were not so very different from we ourselves in our reverence for the Lord.

"I, thy servant, full of sighs, I call to thee. Whoever is beset with sin, his ardent supplication thou acceptest. If thou shalt look on a man with pity, that man liveth. Merciful one, to whom it is good to turn, who dost receive sighs. Beside

thee, there is no deity to lead in righteousness. Look on me, accept my sighs. Speak! How long; and let thine heart be appeased”.

Again “O my god, my transgressions are very great, very great my sins. I transgress, and know it not. I sin, and I know it not. I wander on wrong paths, and I know it not. I feed on transgressions and know it not. The Lord, in the wrath of his heart, has overwhelmed me with confusion. I lie on the ground and none reaches a hand to me. I am silent, and in tears, and none takes me by the hand. I cry out, and there is none that hears me. I am exhausted, oppressed, and none releases me. My God, who knowest the unknown, be merciful. Lord, thou wilt not repulse thy servant. In the midst of the stormy waters, come to my assistance, take me by the hand. I commit sins—turn them into blessedness. I commit transgressions—let the wind sweep them away. My blasphemies are very many—rend them like a garment. God, who knowest I knew not, my sins are seven times seven—forgive my sins!”

“God, who knowest I knew not!” Whether the prayer went up to An the Most High God, or to Enlil or Enki the lesser gods, who could doubt that the cry reached the courts of Heaven and was heard by the One who truly gave life to all men. It may be—it was—that the time was not yet ripe for the answer to come. The once for all offering of our Lord Jesus Christ for the sin of man was still three thousand years in the future, and until that offering was consummated on the Cross, there was nothing that could be done. But

Jesus did say that the men of Sodom and Gomorrah were to stand in the resurrection to find an opportunity for repentance and everlasting life and that is sufficient assurance that these reverent and penitential Sumerians of Sumer, living at the same time some five hundred miles from Sodom, will enjoy the same favourable opportunity. If there was any sincerity at all in those prayers, then surely it can be expected that they will be answered in that coming day.

One man, at least, emerged from that welter of true worship and false worship, of one God and many, of light and darkness. The time was at hand for the Lord to take a hand in the affairs of men and commence the outworking of his purpose. A man was soon to be born in the city of Ur in preparation for the Divine call. Time was ripe, the world was ready; it remained now for the Lord to set the stage for a chain of events which must centre upon one new city in one new land, which should then and for all time become the land and the city upon which the Lord would set his Name. A land as yet unpolluted by idolatry, by war, by commercialism; a land as yet without cities, inhabited only by a few simple pastoral folk, fitting home for the people for his purpose which God planned to call into being. One such land existed, surrounded on all sides by the civilisations which had grown up through the centuries, Egypt to the south, commercial Canaan to the north, Sumer and Elam to the east; one such land lying by some mysterious Divine foresight in the exact geographical centre of the earth. There the Lord determined to build his Holy City. *To be continued.*

The Way He Leads

We have a God who is perfectly acquainted with the most secret thoughts of our hearts, and whose eyes, like a flaming fire, dart through the chambers of our soul, and descend into the most secret recesses of our being. Even before we have opened to him our distress, He is already making arrangements for our help, regarding our very uneasiness as a cry to him, and giving ear to our inward groanings. He always knows exactly, and much better than we do, what is good and necessary for his children; and, in truth, He never leads them otherwise than they would

wish him to lead them, if they were able to see as clearly into their hearts and their necessities, as He does. But we very seldom know what is good for us; and, therefore, the ways by which God leads us are generally mysterious and obscure, just because the *why* and the *wherefore* are concealed from us. But, however severe, painful, and dark the Lord's guidance of us may occasionally appear, it is in reality nothing less than an answer, if not to our express petitions, yet to our wants, and to those necessities of ours with which we may be unacquainted. They are all ways of mercy, and their simple end is salvation and blessing. *(Selected)*

The greatest privilege of the present time is to get into the elect company of God's saints. In order to enter this company, faith and obedience are necessary requisities. That faith must recognise Jesus as the Lamb of God, the Sin-bearer. It must recognise him also as the Pattern and

Exemplar. The reward will be to those who have his spirit, his disposition, and who will walk through the present life in his footsteps. Such will eventually gain with him glory, honour, immortality—the kingdom.

(selected)

Jael and Sisera

*A story from the
days of the Judges*

Jael was the Kenite woman who slew Sisera the Canaanite chieftain after inviting him into the sanctity of her tent, and in so doing gave cause for a controversy over the ethics of her action which is never far from the surface whenever someone wants to decry the Old Testament. The story bears all the marks of an act of treachery but the whole-hearted endorsement of the affair by Deborah the Israelite prophetess has often been taken as indicating Divine approval.

The narrative is found in Judges 4 and 5. The time, the troubled period, a century or so after Israel had entered the promised land, when the "Judges" ruled, and "every man did that which was right in his own eyes". (Judges 21. 25). The scene, the fertile valley of Esdraelon in the north, and Mount Tabor, near which Nazareth was afterwards to stand. Some of the northern tribes, Naphtali, Zebulun, and Issachar, had become tributary to a Canaanite king, Jabin, and they groaned under his oppression. The acknowledged leader of Israel at the time was a woman, Deborah the prophetess, and when Israel "cried unto the Lord" (Jud. 4. 3) for deliverance, indicating contrition and a return to God, Deborah roused herself to action. Summoning Barak of the tribe of Naphtali, apparently the best military leader the nation possessed, she encouraged him to raise a force of ten thousand men to challenge the oppressor. Descending from the slopes of Mount Tabor upon the Canaanite host assembled in the valley, Barak gained a decisive victory and put the enemy to precipitate flight. Sisera, the Canaanite commander, became separated from his men and chariots, and fled in another direction on foot to find sanctuary with a friendly community. The battle had been fierce and long. The Canaanites apparently considerably outnumbered their opponents and had in addition the advantage of nine hundred war chariots. Israel was armed only with bows and spears. Barak, however, was evidently a strategist. He chose to launch his attack from the flank of Mount Tabor two thousand feet high, from whence he could descend upon the enemy arrayed along the river Kishon in the plain at Megiddo, down a relatively narrow valley protected from any out-flanking tactics by the high ground on either side. Thus the Canaanite host met the full force of a closely knit solid body of men striking at the very centre of their rather long drawn out defences. From Deborah's song of triumph after the event it seems the impact of Barak's attack demoralised

the Canaanite army and that many were drowned in attempting to get across the river to safety. The survivors finally took to headlong flight through the plain towards their principal fortress town of Harosheth twenty miles away, with the jubilant Israelites in hot pursuit. By the end of the day the chariots were all in the possession of Israel and the whole of Sisera's vast host had been put to the sword. The victory was complete. Sisera plodded wearily across country the four or five miles that separated him from the encampment of Heber the Kenite, where he hoped to find refuge. And this is where Jael comes into the story.

Jael was Heber's wife. She was not an Israelite. The Kenites were the people of Jethro the father-in-law of Moses, and had thrown in their lot with Israel when Moses led that nation to the Promised Land. Of Midianite extraction, they retained the fierce Bedouin instincts of their ancestors; this fact has to be borne in mind when assessing the later developments in the story. Judges 4. 17-22 is a straightforward narrative of what actually happened, relating sober facts, and this is history. Judges 5. 24-27 is part of Deborah's later song of triumph exulting over the incident, and this is poetry. This also has to be borne in mind, for poetry should not be viewed so literally as history.

So Sisera approached Heber's little settlement. It seems that Heber himself and all his menfolk were away, for it was Jael who went out to greet the fugitive. It could be that they were out in the fields with their flocks; it is not likely that they were in the battle with the Israelites, for ch. 4. 17 says that "there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite". "And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle" (ch. 4. 18). Now this was a very risky proceeding for the Canaanite captain; a man discovered inside a woman's tent in that Bedouin society would meet instant death at the hands of the outraged husband and his relatives. If the woman was found there in his company she would share his fate. It is evident that Sisera took the risk in order to find a place of concealment from his pursuers, but why did Jael put herself in such jeopardy? It has been suggested that he forced his way in but this is neither likely to have served his purpose nor does it agree with Jael's apparent

invitation. Verse 18 can hardly be construed as other than a direct free-will invitation. Dr. Thomson (*"The Land and the Book"*) suggests that the "peace" between Jabin and Heber need only mean that no state of war existed, that the Canaanites almost certainly oppressed this little Semitic colony in their midst and that Heber had no cause to espouse Jabin's side. Jael, he thinks, seeing Sisera approaching in the distance and in the knowledge that her own menfolk were away, faced the alternatives of giving shelter to Sisera and risking the vengeance of the pursuing Israelites if they discovered him, or rejecting his plea for shelter and risking death at his hands. The outcome of the situation was the solution she found to her problem, and this may well explain her apparent later treachery.

At any rate, Sisera laid himself down in her tent and suffered himself to be covered with a "mantle", more properly a rough skin blanket. He asked for a drink of water, "for" said he *"I am thirsty"*. He had been fighting a losing battle all day, had lost his army, had been pursued at least twelve or fifteen miles over rough country, and he was exhausted. Jael gave him, not water, but milk, and thus refreshed, he settled down again under his blanket. Before so doing, however, he gave Jael an instruction. *"Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and enquire of thee and say, is there any man here, that thou shalt say, No"* (ch. 4. 20). The words as they stand would seem to indicate that the menfolk of Jael's own tribe were included in the prohibition—it could well be that Sisera was not prepared to trust any of them—but in any case his request put the woman in a very difficult position. By the code under which she lived she could expect no mercy from her own folk if after such an answer her word was found to be false, and Jael might well have felt at this point that Sisera had betrayed her hospitality and forfeited any claim to protection; that the preservation of her own reputation might now only be secured by the death of her visitor.

Jael's response was immediate. *"Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground, for he was fast asleep, and weary. So he died"* (ch. 4. 21). The Kenites were nomadic tent-dwellers; the "nail" was a sharp-pointed hardwood tentpeg and the "hammer" the wooden mallet used for driving the tentpegs into the ground. It was a cruel and terrible act, and by modern standards a deed of treachery. The man was her invited guest and had gone to sleep in trust that she would protect

him, and she betrayed that trust. It is only the fact that Deborah in ch. 5 invokes the Divine blessing upon her in consequence that makes it desirable perhaps to probe a little into the apparent reason for her act.

Sisera had come in worn out and exhausted from the battle and subsequent pursuit, desiring nothing more than a place in which to sleep in safety. The account says *"he was fast asleep, and weary"*. If the dispassionate, matter of fact narrative in ch. 4 is given preference over the poetic licence of ch. 5 the details of the incident are plain. Jael went in to him *"softly"*, ascertained that he was fast asleep, crouched down over him perhaps with her knees on either side of his recumbent form, the tent peg and mallet in her hands—and the gruesome deed was done.

It would seem then that Jael's treachery was inspired by one of two factors. Either she was in fear for her own life as suggested by Dr. Thomson, or perhaps more likely, she regarded Sisera—and probably with good reason—as an enemy of her own people; that his destruction would justify her violation of the laws of hospitality. Something of her animosity is revealed in her words when, a little later on, Barak arrived at the settlement searching for Sisera; *"Come, and I will show thee the man whom thou seekest"*. It might well have been that there was some unavenged wrong Sisera had done Jael or her people, not hinted at in the story, and that she took advantage of this opportunity for revenge. If so, the entire story is consistent with what could be expected of a fierce Bedouin woman.

What value then is to be placed upon Deborah's impassioned praise *"Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be; blessed shall she be above women in the tent"* (ch. 5. 24). The obvious answer is, none at all. Deborah was a prophetess and obviously a woman stalwart in her allegiance to God but this did not impart infallibility to her utterances and neither was God bound to endorse all her sentiments. She was a woman of her times and from her point of view Jael had done a fine thing and was worthy of all commendation; but Deborah could hardly be considered completely unbiased in the matter. After all, in much later and more enlightened times plenty of quite earnest Christian people with much less excuse than Deborah have claimed the Divine blessing upon victories won in warfare involving acts no less nauseating than that for which Jael was responsible. Deborah's song was exultant, colourful poetry, conceived in the emotion of the moment, and her bestowment of blessing upon Jael need be taken no more

seriously than her words a few verses earlier "*the stars in their courses fought against Sisera*". In literal fact the stars had nothing to do with the battle; it was the irresistible ferocity of the Israelite warriors which brought about the Canaanite defeat. The victory of Israel was a good thing; it helped to replace Canaanite degradation by a better and purer form of communal life in the land, and it can be agreed that in a general way the Divine purpose was being served; but this

does not necessarily set the stamp of Divine approval upon everything that was done. This is one of many Biblical stories which stress the truth that the image men make of God is oft-times far removed from the reality. "*My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, saith the Lord, for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*" (Isa. 55. 8-9).

"HE SHALL GIVE HIS ANGELS CHARGE!"

*An exhortation
to trust*

To the vivid mind of the Apostle Paul the existence of Satan was a very real thing. Nowhere in any of his letters does Paul suggest that the "Prince of the power of the Air" was only an imaginary being. In every reference to Satan Paul conveys the idea, as strongly as words can possibly convey, that he is the great personal Evil Spirit, into whose hands, as the Prince of this world, the rulership of this present evil world has been permitted. He also calls him "the God of this world" (or age) (2 Cor. 4. 4). For many years this clear-cut conception has been losing its sharp distinction among Christian people, and even theologians have been known to state that all evil is impersonal. To the Lord Jesus, and the Apostles, Satan was assuredly no mere impersonation of evil, but an evil personality; as truly personal as the Archangel Michael who called down the Lord's rebuke upon him. (Jude 5. 9).

From the earliest pages of the Divine records Satan is shown as an instigator of evil (John 8. 44), as one employing cunning "wiles" (or stratagems) and as an accuser of righteously-inclined people. God has given him great latitude, even allowing him and his evil co-labourers to slay the saints of God.

Taking full advantage of God's permission, Satan has produced a world-order in which evil is the predominant factor; so much so that Paul describes it as "this present evil world" (Gal. 4. 4). This world-order, passing on from generation to generation, has corrupted, for centuries, the words, thoughts and activities of nearly all the human race. But for the grace of God working in the hearts of the saintly few, this corruption would have been complete. Institutions created under the Satanic influence by one generation become the swaddling-bands to bind and fetter the next and future generations. The strait-jacket of custom is there when we are born,

and it is tightly laced about us from our earliest days.

Both in and out of "Society" strict conventions are rigidly applied from which neither education nor illiteracy afford release. Deeper than any other national trait is the tendency to follow in "father's footsteps" or to do as "mother" did. Life runs in grooves, worn deeper with each succeeding generation. Thus with the first breath, the child comes under the control of a regime behind which is the cunning, seductive mind of the Prince of this world; this world-order—with its many ramifications. It is because men have become accustomed to this general situation, and attribute it to 'heredity' and 'the glorious past' that the recognition of Satan's personality tends to become blurred and indistinct. Too much emphasis is laid upon the 'trend of things,' and not enough upon the design and the designer of this world's affairs. The 'it' of sequence too often displaces the 'him' who designs it. Good indeed would it be for the world if they could realise that the crises of life are produced more by Satanic design than by the drift of circumstances.

It is vitally imperative for the Christian to realise 'what' or 'who' he is 'up against' in his daily warfare. It is no opposition of a mere impersonal principle, but of a cunning highly-placed adversary. There is the mental calibre of a Spirit mind—more comprehensive in its range and more subtle in its operation, than the mind of mere man. And that cunning mind is fortified by many centuries of experience. It has the advantage too, of seeing but of remaining unseen by its earthly opponent. It is a real foe; perilously real; an actual, personal, veritable opponent, bent upon the destruction of every child of God.

No child of God should be afraid to realise this fact. It should not cause fear or terror in even the least of God's saints. No matter how

vividly or realistically the mind can visualise the existence or the nearness or the malignancy of Satan, there is not the slightest need for alarm. It is one of the greatest phases of victory in the Christian life, to be consciously aware of the unseen presence of a malignant foe, and yet know no fear or disquiet of soul thereat. It speaks a courage—a self-control—born of true faith, to realise the perils, and yet to remain unperturbed and undismayed. The Holy Spirit is thus bearing a rich fruitage in the heart.

It has ever been God's desire to produce in his people this rest of soul, by assuring them that He and his heavenly messengers are much more than a match for all Satan's cunning and malignant power. From Psalmist days God has encouraged his people by telling them that his angels (even legions of angels) encamp round about them that reverence him, in order to deliver them. By Apostolic pen, God has assured us that they are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation. And every angelic minister, authorised and equipped with Divine Power is just as real and personal and as veritably present as the hosts of wickedness. Jesus once said "their angels do always behold the face of my Father" (Matt. 18. 10). Their angel! As though every child of God were attended by an unseen body-guard, whose mission is to superintend the details of life's experiences allowing Satan to come near enough to test, but not to injure God's little ones. It is probably because we are not admonished to pray to the Guardian Angels, nor yet to seek contact with them, that we may not be so keenly aware of their presence with us; or it may be, though reading these promises, we forget to apply them, and fail to see, like Gehazi, till the Lord graciously opens our eyes, the chariots of the

Lord, and the horsemen thereof. (2 Kings 6.17) filling the heavens around us. As the difficulties of the way surround our future pathway, and we see indications of unrestrained fury manifested by Satan and his evil hosts, it will be an act of grace toward each other to remind one and all that the invincible armies of heaven are not one whit less personal, nor one bit more distant from our side than the evil forces on the other side. "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. On behalf of each child of God, old or young, weak or strong, these Divinely-sent ministers, who come invisibly near, are equipped with Divine Power, and are commissioned by a loving gracious Father to look after his children, and keep the opposing evil forces at just such distance that they may test, but not injure.

But while it cannot be other than comforting to know of this angelic body-guard, God has provided additional means whereby we may be protected from the subtle snares of the great deceiver. The Devil's weapons are mainly in the form of untruths. To protect against these God has provided an armour of Truth, a full equipment to cover both heart and mind. "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." This is the part we must give attention to, deliberately and consciously; leaving the safety of our person in the hand of God and his messengers. Thus equipped with the Truth within, and protected by the angelic body-guard without, we should be able to look out on the most dangerous crises of life, with great peace of heart, assuring each other in fullest confidence, that though devils rage and men run riot, all things are still working together for good under God's protecting hand.

The Sheikh's Judgement

Neri is a town in Kurdistan, and Sheikh Saddik of Neri had a reputation for wisdom among his fellow Moslems. One day a perplexed true believer presented himself with a problem. He possessed a fine fowl which unfortunately had taken to preaching Christianity. Three times in his hearing it had exclaimed, "The religion is the religion of Jesus!" The bird was produced, and repeated its message, "Din din el Seyidna Isa," or at least what all present unanimously interpreted as being those words. That it was a miracle none doubted; but was it of Allah or Sheitan (God or Satan)? If the latter, the owner could wring the cock's neck, and the incident would be

closed. If the former, ought he, a good Mussulman, to turn Christian?

The Sheikh considered the matter, and gave his answer. The miracle was declared to be from Allah; and the cock must in no wise be slain, but preserved as an honoured and sacred fowl. But there were many sects of Christians, and each one claimed that its particular version of Christianity was "the religion of Jesus". The cock had given no evidence as to which was the true one, so, until all Christians should agree together, or until the bird should give a more explicit oracle, no true believer need do anything.

The Sheikh's judgment is a mild reproof against the intolerance which is unhappily sometimes encountered between "rival" Christian groups.

MAN OF SORROWS

*A study in
Isaiah 53*

3. Despised and Rejected

"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not." (vs. 3).

This is the most bitter prophecy of the Old Testament. From the very beginning, when amid the loveliness of Eden the first guilty pair stood and heard the sad tones of God passing sentence, there had always been the promise of a coming Redeemer. It is fairly evident from Eve's words at the birth of Seth that when Cain was born she had seen in that event the beginning of fulfilment of the Divine promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. That early hope was dashed when Cain became a murderer and was banished from the company of men; but with the coming of Seth the hope revived, and from that time onwards the world was never without those who looked for the Deliverer. The ancient mythologies of Babylon, reaching back to the shadowy times before Abraham, pagan though they were, show unmistakable traces of the belief, persisting even though men's ideas of God had become woefully distorted. When Abraham made his venture of faith and left his country for the land of promise, it was because he believed in the Coming One, and so to him came the promise that in his own seed would deliverance come. Throughout Israel's history the expectation never died down; always were they a people chosen by the Lord to hail and receive the Deliverer when He should appear, and under his leadership become a light to the nations, to declare his salvation to the ends of the earth. That was the hope that kept them separate from the nations around them, that held them, despite their many shortcomings and failures, a people for a purpose, fashioned and developed by virtue of many and varied national experiences for the part they would be called upon to play when Messiah should appear.

And to Isaiah fell the bitterness of proclaiming in advance that it was all to be of no avail, that when the supreme moment of Israel's existence had arrived, they would turn away from the Deliverer and fail at the moment of achievement. He would be despised and rejected of men, and all the glorious things associated with his Advent vanish away like the morning mists. They would fail to recognise the time of their visitation, and the magnificent opportunity pass them by for ever—for even then the Divine sentence was in process of formulation "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation

bringing forth the fruits thereof".

The fulfilment of the prophecy is too well known to need detailed exposition. Jesus was despised and rejected of men, and had the fate of the Kingdom of God rested with the ecclesiastical leaders and the political rulers and the bulk of the ordinary people of the First Advent, then that Kingdom indeed was doomed. But in his infinite wisdom God has entrusted the destinies of his outworking Plan, not to the great and the wise and those chosen by popular acclaim, but to an inconspicuous and unimportant minority who at certain times in earth's history have been called "the Remnant". A remnant they have truly been, on more than one occasion when the earth has been all but in darkness and it has seemed as though the Plan of God was sinking into irretrievable ruin; but always there has been new life springing out from that remnant, a revival of God's work in the midst of the years, an upsurge of spiritual vitality that has carried the Plan of God into another phase and another dispensation. So it was when Jesus was despised and rejected by the many; there were a few who did accept him and did realise that his coming meant salvation for the world, in due time. And from the hearts' loyalty and lives' devotion of those few is born all that we possess or know of Christian faith and hope to-day.

The story is not ended. It is still possible to despise and reject him. Even to-day the worldly wise and great and influential, the leaders and the controllers of this world, like their prototypes of two thousand years ago, do not understand and have no use for the teachings of the Man of Nazareth. The popular voice is no more disposed to consider his claims than it was then. If we would be of those whom God will use to carry the interests of his Kingdom into the next Dispensation, we must reconcile ourselves to being of the "Remnant". But even so we may yet fail to retain the coveted honour.

Those who rejected Jesus at the First Advent, and were in consequence themselves rejected, were not so judged because of lack of knowledge, or unsoundness of theological outlook. On matters of the Law, and of doctrine, and of righteousness before God, the scribes and Pharisees had much in common with Jesus. He certainly condemned them for their narrowness and rigidity in the interpretation of the Mosaic Law but He did not dispute the soundness of the theological ground upon which they stood. It was not their orthodoxy or their beliefs which cost them the

Kingdom; it was their failure to appreciate and manifest and practice the mind of God—which in our day we would call the spirit of Christ—that led to their rejection and thrusting out from the Kingdom. “Go ye, and learn what that means, ‘I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.’” That was the stumbling-stone. They despised and rejected Jesus because He manifested a spirit of love and tolerance and mercy, and with all their doctrinal orthodoxy they could find no room for those virtues. So they rejected him, arrogantly, scornfully, and at the end, maliciously; so He in turn rejected them, sadly, regretfully, but firmly.

So it will be with us. Like Paul, the most intellectually minded of all the apostles, we may understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, but without love it profits us nothing. If we refuse to have our lives guided by love, tolerance, and mercy, and insist instead upon the empty shibboleths of intellectual understanding and a mechanical memorising of Scriptural doctrines, we shall end up where the Pharisees did—outside the Kingdom. Our Lord will be just as sad and regretful as He was in the case of the Pharisees, but He will be just as firm. The Millennial work of the future needs qualifications of a nature that cannot be learned out of a book. Unless we have well learned, and practiced in our own lives, that spirit which pervaded the life of Christ we shall not be fitted for the Church’s future work, and it will become true of us as it was of them “the Kingdom of God is taken from you”. We shall have become of those who “despised and rejected” him.

“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” (vs. 4).

This is the first of three verses each of which affirm most definitely the substitutionary character of our Lord’s sufferings. It was not just that He endured similar sufferings to those of mankind. It was that He did in truth take upon himself the sufferings that men ought to have endured. This is not a popular doctrine nowadays. Men prefer to think of Jesus—if they think of him at all—as an example, a mentor, a Leader who shows the way, One of whom they can speak admiringly or respectfully as pre-eminent, but they do not like to acknowledge that He endured sufferings that are rightfully theirs, that they are under that kind of obligation to him. Men do not care to admit that they are sinners, and especially do they object to admitting that they are helpless sinners, and that only Christ can lift them out of that hopeless state.

One might very properly ask at this point in what way was it that Jesus bore our griefs and carried our sorrows? Men in all ages have had plenty of their own which they have had perforce

to bear and it is self-evident that Jesus did not carry the griefs and sorrows of mankind to the extent that they had none themselves to endure. The cynic might well suggest that if Jesus had never lived the nett difference to any man in this respect would not have been noticeable. The truth of the matter is that all grief and sorrow arises from the presence of sin, and it was a man who sinned and men who continue to sin. Hence that which Jesus undeniably did bear was rightfully the responsibility of men, for Jesus himself knew no sin. As one translator puts it “It was *our* griefs he bore, it was *our* sorrows he carried”. That reflection leads us to the realisation of another fact, that the sin of man has consequences which cannot be confined to the sinning one. The fathers eat sour grapes, but they are the children’s teeth which are set on edge. It is when men comprehend that fundamental truth that they will understand why God has decreed righteousness the law of his creation and has outlawed sin. It is then that they will understand why Jesus bore their griefs and carried their sorrows. He, the sinless One, living in a sinful world, willingly sharing in all its life and all its affairs, could do nothing else but take upon himself that share of the world’s distress. It is when men realise that, that they will come with breaking hearts to acknowledge their own unworthiness and to render their allegiance to him. “*In all things*” says the writer to the Hebrews “*it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest . . . in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.*” “*We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*”

And He still bears our griefs, still carries our sorrows! Does anybody imagine that because He has now been exalted “higher than all heavens”, resplendent in the glory of his spiritual nature, that He no longer feels the woes of men here on earth in the flesh? The parable of the lost sheep should quickly refute any such reasoning. If there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, as Jesus did declare, then surely there must be abiding sorrow over the sinners who have not yet repented. It is true, of course, that Jesus no longer bears the sin of man in a sacrificial sense, for all that was finished at the Cross, but it must be true that He still takes upon himself the burden of our griefs and sorrows and gives us instead, if we will, that strength and consolation which can come only from him. That was his mission from the start and remains his ministry, to bind-up the broken-hearted, to comfort all that mourn, to pour in the oil of joy in exchange for mourning, to give the garment of praise for

the spirit of heaviness. We ought to bear in mind that in taking upon himself the burden of the world's distress our Lord did not assume it merely for the short space of three and a half years whilst He walked as a Man upon earth. He took it for all the time that had and has yet to elapse before sin and the results of sin are forever banished from the earth. Throughout all this present Gospel Age He has carried the griefs and sorrows of all his disciples and been to them a Shepherd and an Elder Brother, guiding and guarding them in times of difficulty and danger, consoling and cheering them in times of distress and tragedy. In the next Age, the Millennial Age, there will be griefs and sorrows, also, as men and women find for themselves that the consequences of their past lives of sin weigh them down like the heavy burden carried by the hero of "Pilgrim's Progress", until, like Christian in that immortal allegory, they cast it down at the foot of the Cross where Jesus stands waiting to bear it on their behalf. How could He be a merciful and sympathetic High Priest in that glorious Age if He did not remove the burden from humanity's shoulders and assume it himself, if He himself is not affected by the effects of sin in the lives of those to whom He has become a Mediator and whom He is trying to lead up the Highway of Holiness to full reconciliation with God? Surely this fourth verse of Isaiah's fifty-third chapter must be in process of fulfilment through all the long centuries, all the time that any of those for whom Christ died are still weighed down with the grief and sorrow that comes because of sin.

These things must be true of the Church also. Those who are the Master's disciples now, consecrated to his service, trusting in his promise that if faithful they will one day share with him in his glory and be manifested with him to raise fallen mankind up to the glorious liberty of the children of God; what of these? They also will bear the griefs and sorrows of mankind in that day. They also will be merciful and sympathetic priests, able to help and guide the willing of earth's unfortunates, able because they themselves have passed this way before. It is a solemn thought, that we cannot be of use to our Lord in that future unless we have in this life been made perfect through suffering as He was. That does not necessarily mean a life of physical suffering, nor yet of mental suffering, although something of both does usually enter into the experience of each disciple. It does mean suffering in the sense that we have shared in the griefs and sorrows of this sin-sick world, that in our own small way we have followed in the footsteps of our Saviour and been as He was in the world. We too must enter into the world's distress and feel deeply for all men in their sorrows if we

are to be of the character needed in that day. Do our hearts ache for the injustice and oppression that comes before our notice every day? Do our minds cry out in protest at some flagrant example of misery or cruelty inflicted perhaps by heartless men or soulless institutions and governments? Do we long for the wisdom and the power to go out into the world bringing happiness and health where now there is sorrow and sickness? These are the things that must possess our inward being like a burning fire if we will be of those who in the next Age will come forth armed with all wisdom and power to do these very things. To-day they are considered by men as signs of weakness, for love and mercy and well-doing are despised and the contrary attributes of selfishness and callousness exalted as desirable standards by which to live. So it is that in this day, as in that of Isaiah, the one who carries the burden of others is despised as one to whom even God is indifferent. Men in Jesus' day could not understand how such an One could enjoy the favour of God whilst bereft of all outward indication of Divine favour. They looked upon his life, spent chiefly among the outcasts and the poor, the uninfluential in earth's affairs, and his death, that of a common criminal, without any kind of spectacular deliverance such as the past heroes of their own history, Daniel, Job, Joseph, had experienced, and they could only esteem him stricken and smitten, deserted by God. They were quite incapable of comprehending how God could possibly be interested in such an one. God was, to them, a militant, war loving God, indulgent to his own people and a relentless foe to his enemies, justifying his worshippers on the basis of correctly performed ritual and sacrifice and condemning all others on account of failure to observe the Law. Temporal welfare and the favour of God went hand in hand, and the manifest disfavour of God could only mean that there was wickedness in the object of disfavour. Small wonder that, looking on the Man of Sorrows and seeing nothing of the spiritual glory, they esteemed him "stricken and afflicted of God".

"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." (vs. 5).

This is the second verse affirming the substitutionary character of our Lord's sufferings. He suffered these things by the hand of man and he endured them on behalf of man. Zechariah, more than two centuries later, must have remembered this passage when he cried "They shall look upon the one whom they pierced and shall mourn for him". The word here rendered "wounded" means "pierced" and has the significance of being thrust

through with a weapon in a manner that inevitably causes death. Psa. 22. 16 uses the same word when in that noble lament that has so often been taken as prophetic of Jesus' sufferings—it certainly does at least refer to the sufferings of Israel as a nation—the Psalmist sings “*the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me; they pierced my hands and feet*”. That prophecy was of course fulfilled literally in the case of Jesus on the Cross, as were so many of the other prophetic declarations of the 22nd Psalm. It is by no means unreasonable therefore to conclude that Isaiah, inspired as he was by the Holy Spirit of God, did have that Psalm in his mind as he uttered, and perhaps wrote, the splendid words of his 53rd chapter. The Lord's servant of Isa. 53, despised and rejected, is the same as the one who cries his solemn lament in Psa. 22. And just as in Psa. 22 the lament changes at the end into a joyful expression of faith in the eventual outcome, a confidence that at the end God will deliver and vindicate his loyal one, so in Isa. 53 the well-nigh hopeless strain turns at the end into a song of praise to God who has set the insignia of royalty upon the despised and rejected one, and vindicated and exalted him at last in the sight of all people. There is a correspondency between Psa. 22 and Isa. 53 that is well worth studying.

When Zechariah spoke of the great mourning that is to sweep regathered Israel in the last days (Zech. 12) consequent upon their looking upon the One Whom they had pierced, it is this final vindication which he sees. Isaiah and the writer of Psalm 22 saw this final glorious outcome from the standpoint of God in heaven; the faithful servant who had endured unto death, innocently, willingly taking the place of the sons of men who

themselves had merited this judgment, exalted at last to the right hand of the majesty on high, as the writer to the Hebrews puts it. Zechariah, on the other hand, is standing on the earth at the Last Day. He sees the regathered and resurrected Israelites of all nations gathered around their King, the once rejected and crucified Saviour, and now they are weeping tears of contrition and repentance. Through that mourning will come cleansing, and ultimately reconciliation with God and a lifting of the burden of all their transgressions and all their sins. It is in that sense that He was pierced for their transgressions and for those of the whole world.

“*Bruised for our iniquities*”. The Hebrew is far more forceful. “*He was crushed*.”! It is the strongest word the Hebrew language has to denote severity of suffering unto death. Isaiah uses the word elsewhere. In 3. 15 he says “What mean ye that ye *beat* my people to *pieces* . . . saith the Lord.” That was a question addressed directly to those who were oppressing the people of the Lord and destroying them by their rapacity. Again, in describing the coming doom of the Egyptians, he says in 19. 10 “they shall be *broken* in the purposes thereof”. Pierced to death for our transgressions; crushed into lifelessness for our iniquities; that was the destiny to which his great love for the world of men which God had made led him, that He might eventually save that world. To say that He died for our sins is a simple truth but a tremendous understatement of the facts. It was in conditions of well-nigh inconceivable suffering that our Lord gave his life in our behalf. He did not merely die for us; He also suffered for us.

To be continued

The Pride of Narcissus

Greek mythology tells of a youth named Narcissus, who was so beautiful that all the young men sought his companionship and all the nymphs desired his love; the wild beasts were tame in his presence, and the very flowers and trees swayed and nodded towards him as he approached. In spite of all, he went on his way in cold arrogance, rejecting every overture until he should find one he deemed beautiful as himself. At last, seeing his own reflection in a woodland pool, he stretched out his arms to embrace whom he took to be a fitting mate, but, despite his every endeavour to clasp the handsome youth he saw before him, he could lay hold on nothing substantial. Overcome by grief at his failure, he pined away on the pool's brink and died.

How many Christians lose much by going a solitary way through life with thoughts turned ever inward upon themselves, arrogant in their own righteousness like the Pharisee who went up

into the Temple to pray, wilfully blind to the friendship and fellowship their fellows would so willingly proffer, and complaining at the end that life has brought them only disillusionment. “*I am among you as one that serveth*,” said Jesus, and good indeed is it for us when we can altogether forget self in the joy of giving our life's best endeavours for the enrichment of other lives, and receiving our gifts back in abundant measure.

We who are the Lord's are not living for the present time. We are expecting great changes to be ushered in when our King shall take to himself his great power and begin his reign. We are not to be struggling for the last inch or the last penny, nor for the extreme of our own rights; but rather, to be so full of rejoicing in the good things coming, and already ours by faith, that it will make us generous as respects the present time in our dealings with the brethren and with others.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The presence of evil in a creation which is claimed to be ultimately controlled by a perfectly moral Supreme Being is a paradox that has exercised the minds of philosophers and theologians alike in all ages. No one has yet found a complete explanation. Faith may rest itself upon the reflection that all God's ways are just and right, and some at least may accept that in the problem there must be factors which are beyond the scope of human intellect to appreciate or understand, but still the thought comes "Why is there evil at all?" If God designed the world and created man to inhabit and use it, why did He allow the admittedly disruptive power of evil to influence and modify what He had made?

Before progress can be made towards even a partial understanding of the problem an underlying question must be answered. What is evil? The word is used very commonly and in various connections, but in general it is equated with principles or practices which produce human disadvantage or unhappiness. There is moral evil and physical evil; evil in a religious sense and evil which has to do with codes of human conduct or the effect of human actions; evil for which man is responsible and evil that he cannot control. Whatever the definition, there is a tacit agreement that evil should not be. Men would prefer to live without it, even although in many of their thoughts and words and actions they contribute to the furtherance of things that are admittedly evil.

Evil is not the same thing as sin, although the two principles are related. Sin, in its turn, is not solely a theological concept, although many people have not thought of it in any other connection. Sin is always evil, but evil is not always or necessarily sin. It is not possible to consider the one without the other because of their close connection and it is not possible to bring the question of evil into proper focus until first there is a clear view of the nature of sin.

Any consideration of the problem of evil and sin must admit the reality of God. If there is no Supreme One, if the universe is not controlled by an omnipotent and perfectly moral personal Being, if all that our physical senses reveal to us is no more than what someone has called "a fortuitous concourse of atoms", and the life that is in us nothing more than a form of chemical reaction between those atoms, then there can be no such thing as sin, and no such thing as evil. If men are but animal creatures that by reason of

superior physical or mental development have crawled a bit higher out of the primeval slime than have other less able living things then the survival of the fittest is the only law of life, and victory in the battle against hostile environment, or competing living forms, the only virtue. There is no reason for any other law and nothing abnormal in the suffering of the innocent if all at the end are to return to their dust again, with neither future prospect nor present purpose in their having lived at all. The very fact that men recognise the reality of evil and the desirability of a moral law which makes for the wellbeing of individuals and the orderly conduct of communal life is itself an evidence that there is an ultimate standard of right and an ultimate goal of attainment which is not derived from the physical creation we know, nor yet from the mental faculties of man, but from a power exterior and superior to this creation and those mental faculties. Man can only believe in evil if, whether he realises it or not, he also believes in God.

It follows that any consideration of the problem of evil must also take into account the implications of the future, of life after human death, of all that is known respecting the purpose of God in creating man. If life as men now know it is only part of the story, only a preface to greater things yet to come, then the apparent hopelessness and injustice of evil not rectified before death is at least relieved by the possibility of eventual emergence from its power and effects after death.

There are certain natural catastrophes which are in themselves great evils when they are destructive of human life. Earthquakes, tornados, great floods; these cannot be controlled or averted by man, and when they occur and bring death and destruction in their train, this is an evil. Until we know more about the processes involved in bringing man's home to the maturity God undoubtedly intends we cannot say why this must be so. Closely allied with this aspect of the subject is the apparent suffering inherent in the animal kingdom, "Nature red in tooth and claw", one creature preying upon another in order to sustain its own life and fulfil its own function in the scheme of Nature. To what extent this also has its place in the ultimate state of creation is likewise unknown; the prophetic pen pictures of the Old Testament insist that in that time "*nothing shall hurt nor destroy*" and picture the carnivorous beasts living in amity with their erstwhile

victims—"the lion shall lay down with the lamb and the leopard shall eat chaff like the bullock". Until we understand much more of the mystery of life in its myriad terrestrial manifestations it is impossible to say why such colossal numbers of living creatures are born only to serve as food for other living creatures, or even to say dogmatically what degree of suffering and therefore evil is involved in the process. The type of sense-perception with which we are familiar in ourselves does not necessarily apply to creatures lower down in the scale of life.

These possible aspects of evil are as nothing, however, compared with evil as it exists among men and is contributed to by the actions of men. "Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn" is a trite but true saying, and not only in respect of deliberate acts of cruelty or oppression. Disease, pestilence, famine and other disasters affecting individuals or communities all have their origin in sin, either of commission or omission on the part of men, of contemporary or perhaps long antecedent generations. It is from this standpoint that the problem of evil has to be approached. Before asking why God did not prevent the happening it is necessary to ask what man has done to prevent it, or even what man did do to cause it. The idea of sin has been associated with disobedience to a code of laws imposed by God, but this is very far from the correct definition. Sin is the violation of any principle which God has set for the orderly conduct of His creation. Whatsoever is against the laws of Nature or the principles of right dealing with one's fellows, that is sin. The laws of Nature are the laws of God; the inward instincts of right and wrong were originally implanted in our ancestors by God. The extent to which we violate either those laws or those instincts, whether knowingly or unknowingly, to that extent we sin, and the result is evil. Evil, affecting not only ourselves, but oft-times others; evil the consequences of which may extend into whole communities or endure through many generations.

The story of Eden and the Fall enshrines the profound truth that the Most High created man sinless at the first and placed him in an environment to which he was completely adapted, with power to live everlastingly providing that he observed the laws of his being and fulfilled the purpose for which he was created. Man failed to keep those laws, and the measure of that failure was the measure of his disobedience to God. That failure introduced death, its logical and inevitable consequence, and every manifestation of evil which now exists amongst men. Alluding to the Genesis story, St. Paul says "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so

death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5. 12). The short answer to the question why evil is present in the world is that man himself introduced it.

This does not offer the solution of the problem. Sin and evil are inherently destructive and God did not create only to destroy. Why did He so make man that he is capable of sin? If the living of life, individual and communal, in accordance with the laws of creation ensures continuing life without inharmony or disorder, injustice or disruption, why not make man so that he could do naught else than follow right ways. A little reflection shews that the bondage of such a constraint would be more than any intelligent mind could endure. To live at all under such a condition would relegate man to the level of the brute beast, or one of those mechanical robots which begin now to figure in modern flights of pseudo-scientific fancy. Man is the head and crowning glory of terrestrial creation, and it is fundamental that he must have complete free will and power to accept or reject for himself his offered place in creation. He must accept his destiny by his own personal choice and of his own volition, and this involves the introduction of evil in the world if man or any section of man does elect to travel the way of sin.

But this does not imply lasting harm to Divine creation. The originator and controller of all things is God, and His is the authority and the power to establish the principles upon which His creation is to operate. The revealed word of God is definite that evil is permitted only temporarily and that for a wise purpose, that the time comes in the history of human development when evil is to be eliminated. It is true that in the meantime the innocent suffer with the guilty and sometimes more than the guilty, but this is inevitable because in the Divine wisdom and order all men are interdependent. "None of us liveth to himself" (Rom. 14. 7). Each man is a member of that unity which is the human race, and the entire race is one component part of that greater physical entity which is this earth with all its variety of sentient life, plant life, and basic substance, all of which are interrelated and must function together to maintain their continued joint existence.

A time feature is therefore introduced into the problem. The present condition of sin and evil will not be for ever. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psa. 30. 5). This general experience with evil which is the lot of all men can in the economy of God be turned to good account as an educational influence. If man, having at the commencement of

human history chosen the way of sin, is allowed to continue in that way until the full consequences of his choice become manifest, in the wreck of his world and the degeneration of his moral character, and is then presented with an experience of the world under Divine mandate with the opposite principles operating, he becomes possessed of a basis upon which he can make an intelligent choice for good or evil, so he may take up his place in the opening vista of the illimitable future, if he takes it at all, as of free will and in full sympathy with the governing principles involved.

This full experience of a world with evil, and one without evil, must of necessity extend beyond the bounds of the present life. Many come to the end of their days without seeing the light; many never have it presented to them and are born and die in helpless ignorance, sometimes prematurely cut off by one of the many manifestations of evil—cruelty, disease, violence—which abound. There has to be a further stage in which the reverse side of the picture is presented. There must be a future life, or a period in future life limited as to time, in which progress towards the Divine ideal can be continued, or initiated if progress has not yet started, under Divinely supervised conditions where the outward environment is one of good rather than evil, and where no individual can be hindered from advance by the evil-doing of another. Such an order of things will obviously not be instituted by man. Neither the past history of the race nor its present condition give any ground for hope that at some future time man will have extinguished all evil, internal and external, and established an era of universal righteousness. Such a system, founded on justice and love and backed by adequate power to render effective its decrees and warfare against every form of evil, must originate from above, from the powers of the celestial. Even if men did achieve measurable success in conflict with the darker side of their natures they could do nothing for the millions who have died under the reign of evil and now lie in the grave. Only God can raise the dead! And the Divine purpose includes all men of all generations, all who have known life, the dead as well as the living. It follows then that there must come a time in human history when the dominion now exercised by the most powerful among men, and exercised all too often for evil ends and to the detriment of those dominated, will be taken from them and vested in One who can be completely trusted to rule in righteousness and equity, and undo all the harm that has been wrought by evil since the world began.

This is an integral feature of the Christian faith. The Lord Christ, in the world's extremity, is to institute such an order of things and administer world affairs through the medium of His own appointees, men and women whose lives' work and experience have fitted them for the task, who are incorruptible, wise and just, inflexibly set for the principles of right doing and determined in the prosecution of their mission to crush all evil. It means a tremendous educational programme, a world-wide evangelistic work, physical and mental as well as spiritual healing and rehabilitation. It means the resurrection of the dead, that none of earth's millions may be deprived of the opportunity of this salvation. It means a great call for conversion and allegiance to Christ the Lord, for only in Him and through Him can life flow to any man. And at the end it means the straight choice between alternatives with no possibility of avoiding the issue. *"I have set before you this day life and death, good and evil: choose life, that ye may live"*.

It is true that this implies a continuance of probation into the future life. This, although not usually embodied in contemporary Christian theology, is held by many to be scripturally sound and the only real answer to the problem of the unevangelised and all who by virtue of present world evil have been hindered or prevented from obtaining a knowledge of the Divine purpose or hearing the call to believe in the Gospel of Christ. There must always be progress and development in the future life; until the irrevocable decision has been taken in the light of full knowledge there must always be the possibility of repentance and conversion. The stories of the Prodigal Son and of Jonah at Nineveh shew that God will accept repentance no matter how late in the day. All these considerations establish in no unmistakable fashion that the probationary stage of man's existence is not completed until the world has experienced one era dominated by evil and another era dominated by good, and every man in the light of that dual experience has exercised his power of freewill and made his choice.

So evil, because it is inherently unstable, must at the last disappear. Men who live, and who live on into timeless eternity, advancing, progressing and achieving without end, do so because they have become spiritually one with the Lord Christ and receive continuing life through Him, the channel of life. The last book of the Bible closes with a pen-picture of the sons of men entering the Holy City free of all defilement and uncleanness, worthy citizens of the land into which noth-

ing can enter that is of evil. *"The nations of them that are saved shall walk in the light of it. . . and there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth . . . but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life"* (Rev. 19. 24-27).

The fact that hardship and suffering, inseparable from a world such as this in which evil subsists, in itself is of value in developing and strengthening character and the finer qualities of the mind, sometimes provokes the suggestion that in some manner beyond our understanding evil is a necessary factor in the development of man toward the ultimate ideal. From this it is argued that God is responsible for evil and that it is in fact an element of His deliberate purpose. Should this hypothesis be a true one it would do no more than deal with the problem of present evil. If there should be nothing more in the Divine mind than the formation of a limited number of creatures on this one planet in all the immensity of creation the idea might not be too objectionable, for even so evil would still one day come to an end. But no sane view of the creative work of God can maintain that there is to be nothing else besides mankind and the earth, that the wonderful potentialities for intelligent life manifested in individual personal beings could be limited to one insignificant speck of dust in all the universe. And if on this account evil is to be thought of as recurring, time after time into all eternity, as successive new communities of intelligent creatures awaken to conscious existence,

in or on other spheres of life, the whole conception of things like sorrow, unhappiness, injustice, cruelty, death, vanishing out of God's creation, has to be abandoned. At any one time, somewhere in the universe, there will be sighing and weeping, strife and bloodshed, disease and death. In a very real sense the mediæval idea of Hell would be restored. The entire principle is illogical, alien to the known character of God and on this account ought to be rejected out of hand.

That evil has intruded itself into God's creation is an indisputable fact to which humanity is witness. That it is more than an intrusion, and that it will eventually be eliminated, is essential to any right conception of the nature and character of God, and of normal order in His dominion. The answer to the question "Why does not God do something about evil" is that He is doing something. He is dealing with men in such fashion that at the end they will see evil for the foul thing that it is, and will willingly and intelligently renounce it and become sons of the Living God. *"I have come"* said Jesus *"to seek and to save that which was lost"*. The triumph of His coming is forthshown in the inspired words of St. Paul *"... the goodwill which God purposed to exhibit in Christ, in view of that Divine Order which was to mark the completion of the Ages, when He should make everything, both in heaven and on earth, centre in Him"* (Eph. 1. 10 Twen. Cen). At the end, God will be universally acknowledged, and evil will be no more.

On the Masoretic Text

It is generally known that the "official" Hebrew Bible upon which the Authorised Version is largely based is known as the Masoretic Text due to it having been the result of the work of Jewish scholars in the early years of the Christian era who took in hand the rationalising of the various and varying Hebrew texts which then existed. The following note was recently observed in the *"Speakers Commentary"*, a standard work of the late 19th century, commenting on Psa. 22. 16, (Vol. 4 page 223), of interest in this connection.

"With regard to the Jewish text, it must be observed that the Jews have suppressed with the greatest care all readings which do not agree with it The Masoretic text as edited by Jacob ben Chaim (Venice, 1526) has been followed both in Jewish and Christian editors without regard to

ancient authorities, Mss, quotations or versions, which undoubtedly preserve or indicate different and, in many cases, preferable readings".

The *"Speakers' Commentary"* is so-called because its compilation was suggested in 1864 by the then Speaker of the House of Commons, a suggestion taken up and promoted by the then Archbishop of York. It still remains a useful mine of information on the text of Scripture.

It is considered that there were at least three variant texts of the O.T. in existence in the centuries just before Christ; The Septuagint gives evidence of readings differing from the present Masoretic, and so does the apocryphal *"Book of Jubilees"*. It is not suggested that anything vital to our knowledge of the Divine Plan and the doctrines of the Faith is thereby lost, but the fact does have relevance to our understanding of minor points of the O.T.

THE MINISTRY OF EVIL

The life of every human being has its lights and shadows, its seasons of joy and its depths of sorrow. These make up the warp and woof of experience, and the web of character that flows from the active loom of life will be fine and beautiful, or coarse and homely, according to the skill and carefulness with which the individual appropriates and weaves into it the thread of experience. In every life, under the present reign of sin and evil, the sombre shades predominate; and to such an extent that the Scriptures aptly describe humanity in its present condition as a "groaning creation". Nor is the Christian exempt from these conditions that are upon the whole world; for "*we also groan within ourselves, waiting for deliverance*". (Rom. 8. 22, 23).

But while we are waiting for the deliverance, the daily experiences of life have a most important mission to us, and the manner in which we receive and use them should be a matter of deepest concern to us; for, according to the use we make of them, each day's prosperity or adversity and trial bears to us a blessing or a curse. Those experiences which we are accustomed to regard as prosperous often have in them subtle dangers. If wealth increase or friends multiply, how almost imperceptibly the heart finds satisfaction in earthly things; but, on the other hand when the keen edge of sorrow and disappointment are felt, when riches fail and friends forsake, and enemies take up a reproach against us, the natural temptation is to despondency and despair.

Just here is an important part of the great battle of Christian life. He must fight the natural tendencies of the old nature and confidently claim and anticipate the victory in the strength of the great Captain of his salvation. He must not succumb to the flattering and deceptive influences of prosperity, nor faint under the burden of adversity. He must not allow the trials of life to sour and harden his disposition, to make him morose, or surly or bitter, or unkind. Nor may he allow pride or ostentation or self-righteousness to grow and feed upon the temporal good things which the Lord's providence has granted him to test his faithfulness as a steward.

Sorrows indeed may, and often will, come in like a flood, but the Lord is our helper in all these things. The soul that has never known the discipline of sorrow and trouble has never yet learned the preciousness of the Lord's love and helpfulness. It is in seasons of overwhelming sorrow, when we draw near to the Lord, that He draws specially near to us. So the Psalmist

found it, when, in deep affliction, he cried to the Lord and reasoned of his righteousness, saying: "*Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.*" Feeling his own shortcomings and longings for full deliverance from every imperfection, and prophesying the bountiful provisions of the Divine plan of salvation through Christ, he adds: "*If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities (imputing them to us), O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared (reverenced).*"

How blessed are such assurances when the soul is painfully conscious of its infirmities and inability to measure up to the perfect law of righteousness. When the heart is true and loyal, God does not mark our infirmities in a record against us. They are not imputed to us, but are freely forgiven through Christ in whose merit we trust and whose righteousness is our glorious dress—arrayed in which we may come with humble boldness, even into the presence of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

If God thus ignores the infirmities of our flesh and receives and communes with us as new creatures in Christ, his children should also regard one another, considering not, and charging not against each other, the infirmities of the flesh, which all humbly confess and by the grace of God strive daily to overcome. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" The case is different, however, when the infirmities of the flesh are cultivated, indulged and justified that the errors may be continued. Then, indeed, they are charged against us, and if we do not speedily "judge ourselves", the Lord will judge and chasten us (1 Cor. N. 31, 32).

"*I wait for the Lord,*" the Psalmist continues, "*my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning.*" How necessary is this patient waiting for the Lord! In the midst of cares, perplexities, difficulties and infirmities we may remember that all the jarring discords of this life are working together for good to them that love the Lord, to the called according to his purpose. But for the consummation of this purpose of God toward us we must "wait," and while waiting patiently, endure hardness as good soldiers. "*Trust in the Lord and wait patiently for him, and He will bring it to pass.*" Time is an important element in all God's plans: we are not, therefore, to be disappointed when the test of

endurance is applied while the blessings we crave tarry long. God took time to frame the world and to fit it for human habitation; time to give the world its necessary experience with evil; time to prepare for the advent of Christ as the world's Redeemer; time for the preparation of the church to share in his glorious reign; and time must be allowed for the shaping and adjusting of the individual affairs of all his people. God has not forgotten when the answers to our prayers seem to tarry long. He who heeds the sparrow's fall and numbers the very hairs of our heads is not indifferent to the faintest call or the smallest necessity of his humblest child.

"My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning — I say more than they that watch for the morning."

The brethren are not in darkness respecting the dawn of the Millennial morning, because taught thereof by the Comforter (see 1 Thess. 5. 4), and because to their eyes of faith the Day Star (the Day-bringer—Christ) has already appeared, and they rejoice in the inspired testimony that, although "weeping may endure for the night (of sin's predominance), joy cometh in the morning" of the great day of the Lord. And as the dawn of the new day, the day of Christ, becomes more and more distinct, many besides the brethren can and do see signs that "the night is far spent and the day is at hand"; and by and by, notwithstanding the dark clouds and terrible storm of trouble that will temporarily hide the signs of morning from them, all the world will awake to the fact that "*the morn at last is breaking*".

THE QUESTION BOX

Q. *What answer can be made to the assertion that the universe is gradually "cooling-off" and that so far from this earth becoming a Millennial Paradise it must one day become too cold to support life?*

A. Perhaps the best answer is the remark with which Sir James Jeans, himself an eminent scientist, closed his book "The Mysterious Universe". "Who knows" he says, "how many more times the stream of knowledge may turn on itself? With this reflection before us, we may well conclude by adding, what might well have been interlined into every paragraph, that everything that has been said, and every conclusion that has been tentatively put forward, is quite frankly speculative and uncertain. We have tried to discuss whether present-day science has anything to say on certain difficult questions, which are perhaps set for ever beyond the reach of human understanding. We cannot claim to have discerned more than a very faint glimmer of light at the best; perhaps it was wholly illusory, for certainly we had to strain our eyes very hard to see anything at all. So that our main contention can hardly be that the science of to-day has a pronouncement to make, perhaps it ought rather to be that science should leave off making pronouncements: the river of knowledge has too often turned back on itself."

In point of fact Twentieth century scientists are divided in opinion as to whether the universe is or is not "running down" as was thought by their predecessors. The nature of the physical

processes going on in the stars is only very imperfectly understood, but it is surmised that the stars are vast chemical laboratories in which the energy necessary to keep the universe going is produced on the one hand as fast as it is dissipated on the other. If this finding proves to be justified there will no longer be any conflict in this respect between science and the Bible.

The visible creation was brought into being, not as a temporary thing, but as a permanent part of God's work. When God viewed what He had made He pronounced it "good". All the stars we see in the sky belong to our own "universe" or "star-city", of which our own sun is but one of the smallest stars; there are many more "star-cities" like ours, far away in space and only very faintly discerned by the world's largest telescopes. It would be a feeble imagination that could not perceive evidence of design in the creation of this vast assemblage of heavenly bodies; to think that God will use only this one planet earth, and for the temporary use only of men as we know them, and then to sweep the whole array into oblivion is almost ludicrous. Perhaps the most fitting comment that can be made on the question is that science tells only of what it can see and understand of the Creator's handiwork; the Bible reveals God's intentions for the future. Because its Author is God himself its statements, even if hard to accept in the light of present human knowledge, can be received as absolutely true. "*Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created*" (Rev. 4. 11).



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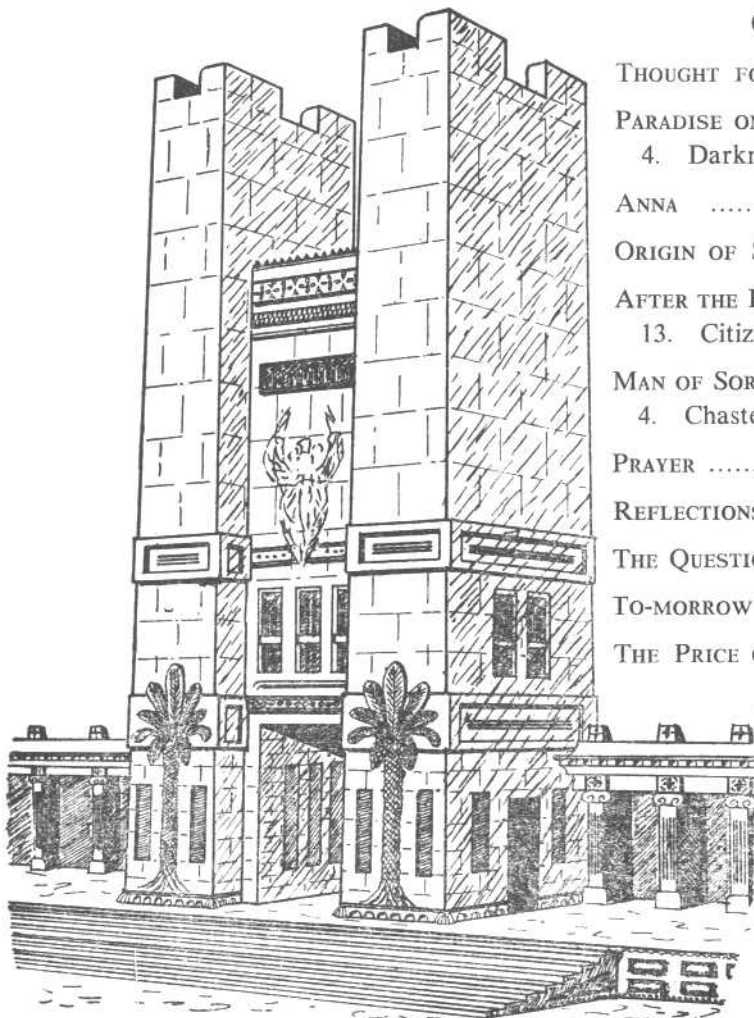
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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

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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." (Gen. 1. 26).

Celebrated scientist Sir George Thomson's book *"The Foreseeable Future"* (1955) threw an interesting light on the possibilities of the Millennial Age when, one fervently hopes, men return to a much closer harmony with Nature and a more natural way of living. Discussing the modern trend towards mechanical operation of so many processes and the supersession of Nature's methods by manmade ones, he said *"Think what a lot of electronics it would take to make a machine capable, for example, of picking an orange from a tree without wrecking the tree. The monkey does it on a daily consumption of a pound of nuts. It seems to me that this combination of hand and eye connected through a moderately intellectual brain is one of the best bargains Nature has to offer us. We ought to make more use of it and I have little doubt that we will."*

There are, of course, current instances of animals assisting the work of men. Horses and oxen have been used in agriculture since the dawn of history. The use of elephants for transporting and piling timber is an example where the active co-operation of the beast requires some moderate degree of intelligence even if short of reason.

Remembering that in that coming Age the benevolent dominion of man over the lower creation is to become an accomplished fact, thus

achieving the ideal of Gen. 1. 26, it is possible to visualise many such applications of animal co-operation in the life of the future, and without any hardship to the creatures concerned, all of whom are created and fitted by Nature for active participation in the orderly conduct of this terrestrial world. With the present curse of commercialism removed there will no longer be need for so-called "efficiency" in the processes of production beyond Nature's own methods and the prospect which Sir George sees may become a commonplace.

Speaking again on the production of synthetic materials, he says *"I venture to predict that plants, moulds and bacteria bred for the purpose will in the long run compete successfully with the chemist in making some of the more complicated compounds"*. There is more than a hint here of the possibility that the factory production of such materials, with all the dirt, squalor and discomfort at present inseparable from such places, will give way to the orderly and cleanly processes of Nature and thus something much more like an up-to-date conception of the Garden of Eden result. Wilfred Branfield, in his work *"Continuous Creation"* (1950) drew a vivid word-picture of the earth and all that is in it being built *"by the labours of the creatures that dwell therein"*. Just as we already know that the energy received every day in sunlight could make all our coal, oil and uranium unnecessary if only we knew how to capture it and divert it to the world's power demands, so it might well be that in the coming day many present mechanical and chemical processes will give place to the production by Nature herself of the material substances that man needs to satisfy his wish for a full and enduring life.

PARADISE ON EARTH

Earth's coming glory

4. Darkness to Light

The kingdoms of this world will have passed away and the Lord Christ is in undisputed control. This is the beginning of the Millennium and the time of final opportunity, for those who have hitherto rejected him, to accept and take their stand on the side of truth and justice, right doing and fair dealing. In a manner incomprehensible to men, Satan the Devil, who has been the "god of this world" (2 Cor. 4.4) for so long, will have been restrained "*that he should deceive the nations no more*" (Rev. 20.2) and with the end of his influence in the hearts of men there will be an immediate lessening of the power of evil in the world. Men will not become righteous overnight; the lion will not lay down with the lamb at once, but there will be a considerable turning of men in the right direction and that of itself will generate a feeling of relief and confidence that the bad old days have passed away.

This Millennium, in which Christ reigns over the world in righteousness, and all sin and evil will be progressively eliminated, is not eternity, but it is the ante-room to eternity. Most Christian people are so accustomed to thinking of Heaven as immediately following death they do not stop to reflect that by far the greater number are by no means fit for Heaven when they die; there is still much more to be done in their hearts and lives before they can stand before God in the eternal state. And there are those, so enmeshed by their own vices and shortcomings, that the pure and righteous society of Heaven would be so alien and distasteful to them that Heaven to them would become Hell, a condition of things not to be endured. A great many of the sons of Adam will need further training and experience before they are ready for admittance into the society of the blessed. Hence this intermediate period of evangelistic approach and full conversion and reconciliation with God for so many is vitally necessary before the Lord is able to say "*Come, ye blessed of my Father, enter into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*" (Matt. 25.34). Whatever the ultimate destiny of this race of intelligent beings which had its origin in Adam so many years ago, there is yet to be a thousand years of earthly experience during which such familiar present things as injustice, cruelty, sorrow, grief, disease and death will be no more, and peace and happiness reign supreme. Only after the exhibition of what human society can be like will God,

regretfully we may be sure, leave those who will not have him to the inevitable consequence of their rejection.

It follows then that the predominant characteristic of the coming Age now so imminent is resurrection, the resurrection of all who have lived to renewed life on earth that they may receive what so many have never had in their former lives, a knowledge of the saving power of Jesus Christ and a full and final opportunity to turn to him and accept him as Saviour and Lord. There is much in the Scriptures to substantiate this.

A problem immediately presents itself. There are four thousand millions of men and women at present living on this planet, of whom three quarters do not get enough to eat. The reason for this is not, as some suppose, that the earth is incapable of producing enough food for so vast a multitude. The reason is that man has failed to devise a system whereby the food that is produced can be put into the hands of those who need it. So we have famine conditions in Africa and grain and butter mountains in Europe. The first consideration must be so to regularise the relation between the production and consumption of food that the living nations can be adequately fed, before there can be any question of raising the dead and adding to the problem. Even under the righteous rule of the Messianic kingdom the metabolism of the human organism must be kept going if life is to be maintained, and that requires an adequate supply of food. There is also the question of restoring the fertility of the earth, despoiled during these latter days by man-induced pollution.

It is this consideration that has given rise to the oft-quoted saying "Restitution begins with the living nations". The "restitution of all things" alluded to by St. Peter in his Pentecost Sermon (Acts 2.20-21) "*He shall send Jesus Christ . . . whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things*", has its first impact upon those living at the time our Lord Jesus Christ asserts his authority and takes control of world affairs. From that moment matters will commence to improve, although there can be no question of raising the dead as yet. What must take place is a tremendous harnessing of human effort toward the rehabilitation and renovation of the earth. The Divine standards will come into their own; the balance of Nature will be restored.

Modern methods of farming aimed at extracting the last moiety of fertility from the soil by the use of chemicals with no heed given to the long term effect — so creating the vast dust bowls which now affect many parts of the earth—will give place to Nature's way, something like the example afforded by the system practised under the Mosaic Law in the early days of Israel when every piece of land had to lie fallow each seventh year in order to regain its potency. There will have to be a great planting of forests to replace those decimated by man through the ages. The work will be intensive and strenuous, but men will realise that it cannot be other than good for them and their fellows, and the marvellous recuperative power of Nature will begin to produce increasingly beneficial results from the very start. Isaiah, the notable prophet of the Millennium, said of this time "*Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the ass. They shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them . . . they shall not plant, and another eat . . . they shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble*" (Isa. 32:20; 65:21-23). When that day comes, says the prophet Joel (3:18) the mountains shall run with fresh wine and the hills flow with milk, the streams shall be full of water and springs break forth in the valleys—exactly what Isaiah said a century or so later (Isa. 35) "*Let the wilderness and thirsty land be glad; let the desert rejoice and burst into flower*". Joel's brother prophet Amos caught the same inspiration; "*a time is coming says the Lord, when the ploughman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed . . . they shall plant their vineyards and drink their wine, make gardens and eat the fruit*" (Amos 9: 13-14). These visionaries of the Old Testament of necessity described the glories of the coming day in terms appropriate to their own contemporary agricultural economy, but the condition they describe is that of an earth rapidly achieving restoration to Edenic conditions by the willing labours of those who dwell therein. No longer will soulless vested interests dictate the use to which the land is put, careless of the effect upon its inhabitants. The new administration headed by the Lord Jesus Christ will see to a full implementation of the Divine principle enunciated so many centuries ago "*the heavens are the Lord's but the earth hath he given to the children of men*" (Psa. 115: 16). That is the real meaning of our Lord's saying "*the meek shall inherit the earth*" (Matt. 5:5).

How long will this initial phase of the Millennial Age last? Nature has immense recuperative powers. Just so soon as the polluting agents have been halted the atmosphere will begin to clear,

the streams and rivers commence to be purified, the land rid itself of the toxic chemicals it has had to endure in modern times, the green grass and the trees begin to clothe the arid wastes, and Isaiah's vision be fulfilled. Nevertheless the transition will not be accomplished overnight. The change from an industrial to an agrarian (food-growing) economy will involve a great deal. Something like two-thirds of the present world population do rely on a predominantly agricultural and stock-keeping life and for these it will be a question of profiting by the advice and help of the Lord's workers who will be sent to them for that purpose; such will probably pass from their present semi-starved condition by degrees to one which they have never known before. Concurrently with this they will hear the gospel of Christ presented to them from a standpoint they had not previously heard even if they had heard anything; many of them will thus hear it for the first time. Evangelism and physical rehabilitation can be expected to proceed concurrently, to the spiritual and material advantage of those who hear. The remaining third and industrialised so-called "civilised" nations, will find the going harder. It is not easy properly to visualise the situation. Obviously the great power stations with their gaseous acid wastes poisoning the atmosphere for miles around and blotting out the sun's energy which alone can make the crops grow, the giant chemical works with their noxious effluents which pollute the sea, the nuclear plants with their radio-active waste, must all go, but what is to replace them and how quickly can that be done? It is perhaps probable that the kind of lifestyle envisaged in the Scriptures as that which redeemed men will find entirely satisfactory in the distant future will be possible with a considerably reduced necessity for the amenities these things at present afford. The existing world economy is built upon energy produced from the consumption of fossil fuels—coal, oil, natural gas—and the supply of these in the earth has limits and must one day be exhausted. Men have long ago realised that the source of all energy reaching the earth is the sun, and that all the earth's needs could be met by solar energy if it can be satisfactorily tapped. Much of the technique is already known—Israel leads the world in the exploitation and use of such energy, followed, some distance behind, by both America and Russia. The principal reason why it is not more widely used is not because the technique is not known, but because if adopted on a wholesale scale the cost of the necessary equipment is so low that there would be little profit for manufacturing interests, whereas with nuclear plants and the like the profits are large.

Under the kingship of Christ this kind of argument will have no validity, and the needs of men will be met by the direct use of the powers of Nature in a manner which will be neither harmful to men or to the environment.

The ancients realised the vital part the sun plays in sustaining life on earth more than do the moderns; that is why the worship of the sun occupied the central position in ancient paganism. Unlike earth's store of coal, oil and natural gas, the sun's energy is inexhaustible. It is claimed in some quarters today that the sun in its onward-journey through space sweeps up hydrogen atoms to replace those which it burns up, and so can be everlasting. So far as possibilities on earth are concerned the amount of solar energy falling on the land surface of the earth in one year is more than twice that obtainable from all the known uranium deposits, and sixty times that from all coal deposits. When men devote as much time and thought to investigating and designing means of taking energy direct from the sun and its concomitants, wind and water, as they do at present exploiting nuclear energy, all problems will be solved and the uranium and coal and gas, what remains of it, can be left where it is. Nature will provide energy, silently, cleanly and efficiently. Ten years ago the U.S.A. Energy Sources investigators considered that by the year 2000 the United States will get 6% of its total energy from the sun, and by 2020 the proportion will rise to 55%. They may well be right; by then the Millennium could be well advanced and this kind of thing be commonplace.

Another factor has to be considered. Entry of the living nations into the Millennium involves another and vital matter, the abolition of death. *"There shall be no more death"* is the promise when the "new heaven and new earth" is established (Rev. 21.1 & 4). God *"will destroy the covering that is cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces"* (Isa. 25. 7-8). He says, through the prophet Hosea *"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death, O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction"* (Hos. 13.14). When the peoples of the earth pass from this Age into the next, from this world into the next, they will find themselves unexpectedly and most inexplicably freed from the curse of death. A time in which some are being resurrected from the dead and others are still going into death would be illogical in the extreme. But how is this transition, from a life on earth in which death is a certainty to one on the same earth in which that

certainty has been removed, to be accomplished? What will be the effect on world society?

We touch here upon a subject which is only casually alluded to in the Scriptures—a few words here and there but no detailed description of the process which must be involved in the immutable law laid down by St. Paul in 1 Cor. 15.22. *"As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive"*. The context up to verse 28 shows clearly that he is talking about the Millennial reign of Christ, its work with and effect upon man. A certain amount of basic theology must be brought into the argument here and a certain amount of reasoning based upon that theology. The whole fabric of Christian belief in the redemptive office and work of Christ is built upon the doctrine of the Fall. At the first, as Genesis tells us, man was created perfect and sinless, his life inbreathed by the Spirit of God, so capable of living for ever. Man sinned—the details of the sin are not relevant here—and in so doing severed the life-line through which he drew his continuously sustained life from God. From that moment he was a dying creature, and in the course of time, when what might be termed his residue of physical life was exhausted, he died. *"All the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; AND HE DIED!"* (Gen. 5.5). All his posterity did the same, and the reason for that was his inability to transmit other than his sub-normal, dying life to his offspring. Had he remained loyal to God, sinless, he would have transmitted the original God-given life to them, but he missed the opportunity; *"wherefore"* says St. Paul in Rom. 5.10 *"as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"*; all have been involved in the consequences of that sin. But Christ on the Cross redeemed man from those consequences, and as the "Second Adam" gives to all men that life which they lost through Adam's transgression. *"If by one man's offence death reigned by one, much more they which receive abundance of grace shall reign in life by one. Jesus Christ. As by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life"* (Rom. 5.17-18). This means that at the precise end of this present Age, called by Peter "this present evil world", and the precise moment at which our Lord takes over the active rulership of the world and so initiates the Millennium, the "world to come, wherein dwelleth righteousness", the Adamic death sentence resting on the human race is abrogated and reversed, and new life, life through Christ and not through Adam, begins to permeate the being

of everyone living. From this moment the death processes inherent in the human frame come to a stop, and life processes commence, processes which can culminate, if the subject so wills, in complete reconciliation to God and full entry into eternal life.

So, just as the death processes commenced immediately after the Fall, the flow of continuing life from God, the only source of true life, was cut off, only "animal life" remaining, so that men could only continue "under his own steam" so to speak, now, life processes commence immediately upon the Restoration, life from God mediated through Christ the channel of life, leading to reversal of death processes until the man stands in the same position as was the first man before the Fall. As Elihu the devout and far-seeing man of God, of three thousand years ago said, looking forward to this momentous time "*his flesh shall be fresher than a child's; he shall return to the days of his youth*" (Job. 33.25). That will be the literal effect of the change which will take place in human physique and mentality as soon as the Kingdom of Christ is established. It will be a time of "reverse aging" in which old people, instead of degenerating further until they descend into the grave, will become progressively younger until they re-attain normal human maturity.

It follows, of course, that at that same time babes and children will develop normally—much more so than at present — until maturity is reached and there they remain. The Divine ideal of a mature community of human creatures will, as far as the nations living at this time are concerned, be realised.

There must now be considered the parallel question; what about the continuing increase of the race? Are children still to be born, increasing

world population perhaps to unmanageable proportions long before the end of the thousand years? Again, in the absence of anything more than the occasional casual allusion in Scripture, the problem has to be viewed against the background of the overall Divine purpose. At the beginning, Adam was told to "*be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish (make replete, fill) the earth*" (Gen. 1.23). This implies that had Adam not sinned, when the earth was adequately "filled" the powers of procreation inherent in man would lapse and no further births ensue. The Divine purpose so far as this planet is concerned would have been met. In ordinary human life today exactly the same position obtains. The powers of reproduction become operative as maturity approaches; then at a later time they lapse and disappear, although life goes on for an appreciable time thereafter. Quite often a family is considered complete when an agreed number of children have been born; what is thus true in the individual life may well be just as true in the Divine economy with respect to humanity as a community. It may well be that the foresight of God has ordained the time of the end of this Age and the commencement of the next to coincide with the attainment of a sufficient population adequately to people the earth when all the dead have been raised. Of that more will be said later.

Something like the first half century of the Millennium, perhaps, should be sufficient for this growing up of the children, and "growing down" of the aged, carried over from this present Age, and some decided progress made in the cleansing and renovation of the earth, preparatory to the next great step in the programme, the resurrection of the dead.

To be continued.

Abomination of Desolation

Judea fell into the hands of the Arab Moslems in A.D. 634 but it was not until A.D. 638 that Jerusalem, at the time a Christian city, was captured. Caliph Omar (A.D. 634-644) comrade of Mahomet and the second Caliph to succeed him, visited Jerusalem to inspect his new conquest. Here is a comment by a recent author.

"When Jerusalem fell it too was visited by Umar (Omar). As the patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronius, styled the "honey tongued defender of the Church", was showing the aged caliph round the holy places he was so impressed by the uncouth mien and shabby raiment of his Arabian visitor that he is said to have turned to an attend-

ant and remarked in Greek 'Truly this is the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the Prophet as standing in the holy place.'" (History of the Arabs: Sitti: 1960).

(A point not always realised by students of prophecy is that Palestine was under Christian, not Jewish, control, at the time of the Arab conquest, and was ruled by the Emperor Heraclius of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire with capital at what is now Istanbul. Jewish control of the land ended in A.D. 135 in the days of the Emperor Hadrian and was not restored until 1948).

ANNA

"And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser; she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity. And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she, coming in at that instant, gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for deliverance in Jerusalem." (Luke 2. 36-38).

So short a passage! So little said! But how eloquent! She comes in without having been previously introduced to the reader of sacred story. She goes out—and is never heard of again. But within that short space of a few minutes during which she occupies the Scripture stage, she does something that makes her brief appearance immortal for evermore.

Anna is the only one of that name in the New Testament. One in the Old Testament, Hannah, the mother of Samuel, has the same name, its Hebrew, as the other is its Greek form. In both languages the word means graciousness. Both women "spoke of him". Hannah was the first in all the Scriptures to use the name "Messiah" to describe the one that should come. Abraham and others in earlier days had rejoiced to see his day and Moses had spoken of the Prophet that should arise, like unto himself but greater. No one before Hannah applied the word "Messiah" to him and that is significant. Hannah was as truly a prophetess as was Anna a thousand years later. *"The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth"* she sang *"and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his Messiah"*. (1 Sam. 2. 10). Now the later Anna stood in the temple courts holding in her arms the tiny babe that was the fulfilment of the prophecy. Messiah had come, and Anna knew it!

How did she know? By what process of reasoning did this aged saint connect that helpless child with the Messiah of prophecy, the One coming from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, travelling in the greatness of his strength, proclaiming his mightiness to save? What convinced her that here in this little family group lay, not only the doom of the mighty empire of Rome, but also of all the "kingdoms of this world" and all the forces of wickedness and powers of evil everywhere? In what way did that small innocent face show her the lineaments of a King?

It could only have been, as it was with Simeon on the same occasion, a direct revelation of the

Holy Spirit. God had answered her long-continued prayers and fasting, her patience and expectation, with a word from himself. It had been revealed to Simeon by the Spirit that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord Christ—the Messiah. He came "by the Spirit"—by the direct leading of the Holy Spirit—into the Temple just at the time Mary and Joseph were there with her first-born child. In that moment, as Simeon's old eyes fell upon the little group, there came an inward word, and his heart overflowed with reverent joy as he realised the dream of a lifetime fulfilled. So it must have been with Anna; coming in just as Simeon was pouring out his heart in his wonderful praise-prayer-prophecy, the Spirit spoke to Anna and she too knew that the consolation of Israel had come. The time was fulfilled; the hope for which the twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, waited to come, was realised. God at last had visited his people.

Anna had spent a long life waiting. Eighty-four years a widow, seven years a wife before that—for such is the meaning of the Greek expression; not that she was merely eighty-four years old—so that even had she been married at the age of sixteen, a common age for Jewish girls to be married at that time, Anna must have been one hundred and seven years old at the time of this incident. It is not stated, but it is implied and may reasonably be accepted as a fact, that she had served God in the Temple and waited for the promised Messiah for at least the major portion of that time. What had she seen in all those years?

Anna was born when Judea was very different from its condition at the birth of Jesus. Rome had not yet appeared on the scene. Judea was an independent State under the rule of John Hyrcanus, the son of Simon, one of the Maccabean patriots who delivered the country from its foreign oppressors. She was perhaps five years of age when Aristobulus succeeded John, and then, in the following year, Alexander Jannaeus succeeded Aristobulus. That part of Jewish history, lying as it does between the Old and New Testaments, is not so well known to many of us as the days before Malachi or after Jesus, but in the reign of Alexander the boundaries of Judea were extended, by means of conquest or treaty, to the limits that had been reached by David and Solomon in olden times. In Alexander a Jewish king reigned from Sinai to the Euphrates, and Judea was the most powerful State in the Middle

East. So influential was she, in fact, that the Roman Empire entered into treaty alliance with her—the text of the treaty, still preserved, is curiously like modern ones, both nations binding themselves not to make war upon the other and to help each other with military assistance should one be attacked by a third party—and Jewish ambassadors were in residence at Rome. It was a time of high hopes on the part of all true Jews that the Kingdom of God and the day of Israel's triumph was at hand. It only needed the appearance of Messiah to take over the reins of government. The Land of Promise as defined to Abraham — from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates—was under their control. Greek power was declining, and Rome, the only other great Empire, treated with Judea as an equal. Surely it could not be long now before the great Senate of Rome would listen with dignified respect to the orders of King Messiah, transmitted by the Jewish ambassador in the city, and Jerusalem replace both Athens and Rome as the world's seat of government. In those stirring days, ninety years or so before the angels sang at Bethlehem, men went about in daily expectation of the revelation of Messiah.

Some there were—as some there have been in every age—who knew from their deeper understanding of the things of God that the coming of the Kingdom could not be thus. History reveals the fact that behind the pomp and glitter of the rapidly growing State, the marching and shouting of armed men, the glowing speeches and lavish promises of Judea's politicians, there was a nucleus of devout souls, chiefly the poor of this world, looking for a Messiah who would be first of all a Teacher of righteousness. They knew that all was not well with their homeland and its people. They knew that sin covered them with its heavy hand, and that not until sin was removed could the glowing promises of the prophets be fulfilled. So they studied the old prophecies and told each other of the golden time that would come when God arose to shake terribly the earth and reveal to all men the King who would reign in righteousness, even although with their limited vision they could hardly begin to see how these things could be. But they would have nothing to do with the politicians, nor yet—very much — with the established forms of religion, insincere and corrupt as they had become with the nation's rise to temporal prosperity. Zadokites, these faithful few were called in their day, and they found a substantial following among the ordinary people in that time, a century before the Messiah in whom they believed was to manifest himself.

It is very possible that Anna came of a family

that adhered to this faith and expectation. Her steadfastness through the years might very well have been due to parental influence and training. Phanuel might possibly have been an early leader among the Zadokites. And if so, if she grew up into early womanhood, married and widowed before she was twenty-four, neither she nor her fellows would have been unduly distressed or cast down at the rapid change of fortune which befell the triumphant State when Alexander Jannaeus died in B.C. 75 and war, disruption and anarchy set in. The enemies of the nation were not laid low after all; they had only been quiescent. Men who had so fondly imagined their victorious military Messiah soon coming to place himself at the headship of the nations saw their territories invaded, their conquests wrested from them, and the ever growing threat of foreign oppression looming over them more menacingly every day.

In another eight years, when Anna was in her early forties, the crash came. The death of Queen Alexandra of Judea was followed by the submission of her sons to Pompey, the victorious Roman. From that time Judea became a Roman province, and hopes of the Messianic Kingdom were rudely dashed. But the Zadokites still believed, for their faith was not founded on the fortunes of war or the virtue of political arrangements. As Anna quietly went about her duties in the Temple she prayed and fasted and waited still for "He that should come", not knowing how much longer He would tarry.

Another ten or twelve years went by with Judea helpless in the grasp of her Roman master. Away in the far north-west Julius Cæsar was invading Britain, and our own ancestors in these islands were undergoing their first experience of the power which already held Judea in a grip of iron. Anna, past fifty years of age now, endured the horror of seeing the Temple itself, the centre of all her hopes and those of her countrymen, desecrated and plundered by Crassus the Roman general. Would Messiah never come? Had God forgotten to be gracious? The question must at times have come to her mind but she put it from her knowing that the word of the Lord could not return to him void, but must at the end prosper in the thing whereto it was sent.

So through the years, until Herod the Edomite came, to rule the country under title from Rome, a would-be king even although a tributary king. Perhaps at that the hopes of some began to rise again. When, eighteen years before the birth of Jesus, Herod announced his intention of pulling down the decaying fabric of Nehemiah's Temple, which had stood on Mount Moriah for five hundred years ever since the return from Babylon,

and erect a magnificent new Temple in its place, many must have wondered if this was indeed a preparation for Messiah. Anna and her friends must often have talked about it. There would be Simeon, like herself, well in the eighties; a middle-aged couple, Zachariah and Elisabeth, hoping against hope for the child that never seemed to come, but with greater intensity for the coming of Messiah; Jacob and his small son Joseph, and another Joseph, a wealthy young man from Arimathea, all waiting for his appearing and his Kingdom. As the splendid structure of the Temple grew under the industry of Herod's builders and stone-masons their hearts would swell with anticipation and they would say one to another "Surely He will come soon!"

Then one day, coming into the Temple court, Anna saw a little group standing. Simeon, the friend and counsellor of many years, was holding a little child in his arms. His face was upturned to heaven as if in thanksgiving and praise. Anna recognised the parents in an instant; Joseph the son of Jacob, grown to manhood now, and his

seventeen year old wife Mary, both of them zealous and devout believers in the coming of the Lord, both of them brought up from childhood to look and wait for his coming. Anna had known them both since they were born — it seemed only yesterday. She had known their parents, too. She had known their grandparents. Her tired old mind travelled back over the years and she thought of her own friends of youth, long since laid aside to sleep in the hope of a promise of which they had never seen the realisation. She saw the new generation before her, the young people who were destined to carry the hope of Messiah onward into the coming years, years which she knew she herself would not live to see. A thought flashed into her mind; she looked more closely at the little group, at the rapt expression on Simeon's countenance, the sweet, eager face of the young mother, the grave, reverently proud features of Joseph; and she looked at the Babe.

And in that moment she knew that the Messiah had come.

THE ORIGIN OF SUPERSTITION

Words have been called "the indestructible vesture of thought". The original thought may have become corrupt, obscured, or obsolete; but the word remains "indestructible" and by it we may recover the thought. "Superstition" is such a word. It originally meant something standing over or above—something that remains or has taken the place of something else. It is, therefore, akin to supersede and superimposed. So the tree stands over or above the root out of which it has grown; so other subsequent cities have stood over and buried out of sight the genuine Homeric Troy. But as the something to which the word refers is always false or delusive in distinction from the true, so (we may say) does the fungus "stand over" the fallen and decayed tree in whose substance it is rooted. Nature and the world, like wheat and the corn field as well as religion, are full of such false parasitic outgrowths, bred from the decay of higher organisms which only exist in lower and degraded forms—superstition.

The word "superstition" thus gives an important thought of which it is the "indestructible vesture". Something previous, and in a purer and better form, was before superstition. What was it? A comparative history of the oldest religions, such as those of Egypt and Persia and India and China, surprises us with many likenesses to the Bible faith. Archbishop Trench beautifully illus-

trated this idea in his Hulsean lectures. "*The Unconscious Prophecies of Heathendom*" under such headings as these: "*The Vanquisher of Hades*", "*The Son of God*", "*The Perfect Sacrifice*", "*The Redeemer from Sin*" etc. These things were in the oldest religions, anticipations of the true and obscured by myth and superstition; but how did they get there? The idea of a suffering God was not unfamiliar to the Eastern mythologies—one who, like the Egyptian Osiris, also descended into Hades and there judged the dead righteously. And in their worship these religions were all originally monotheistic. The inference was, of course, the one suggested by the word superstition. It is an independent peep into the Eastern world, far up under the dawn. Outside the Jewish nation and uninfluenced by it, before Abraham's day, before the evolution of superstition, there was among the scattered nations a purer religion, and one received, apparently from the same general reservoir of truth. Nor, if Moses was inspired to record for us the true history, need this surprise us. And Christ must in some way be got rid of, before the sceptics can get rid of "Moses and the prophets".

This fact of an earlier religion, however soon and widely it may have become corrupted, explains some things which the brevity of Scripture has left obscure. When Abraham, himself a monotheist from the Euphrates in the East, was

in the vale of the Jordan in the far West, there came to him and blessed him, Melchisedec "Priest of the Most High God"; whilst not far off there was Abimelech and his people, with whom still dwelt the "fear of the Lord". This in Canaan itself, and in the very neighbourhood of Sodom! But beyond that same distant Euphrates, four hundred and seventy years later than Abraham's time, came Balaam to confront Moses and Israel, a man who worshipped the same God with Moses, and by the same name. "*I cannot go beyond the word of my God*", the man who, when the king of Moab in his terrible extremity, proposed to sacrifice his first born, uttered these sublime words, recorded only by Micah: "*He hath shown me, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God!*" "Hath showed me"—where, how, in what early record known to both Balaam and the king as the word of the "Lord"? Moreover, of this Balaam from the far Euphrates it is said, that he "*knew the knowledge of the Most High*"—the very word used for God by Melchisedec in the valley of the Jordan. Except once in Deuteronomy, we do not meet it again till the history gets back to the Euphrates, to Daniel, to the Chaldeans, to Nebuchadnezzar, and to Cyrus the Persian. They all use it, as evidently the earliest and descended term for the one God. It brought Cyrus, as belonging to a common monotheistic worship, into sympathy with the Jews. It is known today among the mountains of Tibet; and in the form of "Shang-Ti" is the one missionaries in China have adopted to express the idea of God.

This word, (in its different forms), Most High, the Highest, the Lord God of Heaven, is, indeed, itself pregnant with thought. It indicates a process of thought and a conviction in the earliest men as they looked up to heaven, a conviction of a One God who was above all in power and glory, and to be worshipped. It was a source of conviction independent of any other source of knowledge, as for instance, Noah and Shem; and how strongly it impressed them is crystallised in the word they used and handed down to indicate God. David felt precisely the same when he exclaimed: "*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork*". And this has an intimate bearing upon some present discussions about the heathen. Paul declared them "without excuse". Why, upon what ground? Upon the ground that "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made". Their lapses into idolatry and super-

stition, with the consequences, were purely wilful—they "did not like to retain God in their knowledge". Up the stream of universal history there was that knowledge "clearly" to be derived in all ages, from the same overspreading testimony in the heavens. The power of that testimony and its effect upon the earlier men lives in many languages, in that "indestructible" word, the Most High God.

A realisation of these things is valuable, considered in connection with Paul's inspired account of how ignorance and superstition came to be so widespread throughout the world, as detailed in Romans 1.18 to 3.23. Deplorable and dense as is the ignorance and superstition of the world, it is well that all should see that it is not because God made men degraded and vile. It is necessary that this be fully recognised as an offset to the growing idea that God did a very imperfect work in the creation of man, and that present progress from darkness and superstition, to light and reason and civilisation, is merely human development—evolution.

Be it noted, that the Scriptures everywhere give one harmonious account of the origin and cause of evil and ignorance in the world, and show that God is not guilty; they tell that "*God hath made men upright but they have sought out many inventions* (Eccles. 7.29); that it was when and because man was not desirous of retaining a knowledge of God in his heart that God gave them over to a reprobate mind (Rom. 1.28). Thus sin, which entered at Eden (Rom. 5.12) manifested its tendency to be continually downward, except as God introduced "the salt of the earth" (those exercised by his truth, led of his Spirit) whose influence has been to keep the social mass from utter corruption. Thank God for the blessed assurances of his word that though the world has been left largely to its own course, that both angels and men may see the real tendencies of sin, yet, when this severe lesson has been well illustrated and deeply impressed, He will through his anointed ones, Christ Jesus and his Bride the overcoming Church, arrest the sway of ignorance, and sin, and superstition, and cause the knowledge of the Lord and his perfect plans to fill the earth. Thank God that his promised kingdom shall re-establish righteousness and give to the billions of earth (who, as inheritors of sin and weakness, have never known or been able to appreciate righteousness, purity, and their attendant joys), an opportunity to taste and see that the Lord is gracious and that wisdom's righteous ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

AFTER THE FLOOD

13. Citizen of Ur

Twelve centuries had passed from the day that Noah and his family stepped out of the Ark, twelve long centuries since that little family had grown into an assembly of nations which now was spreading far over the earth. From Western Europe to China, from Britain to Equatorial Africa and India, the children of Noah were to be found living under varied circumstances and already differentiated by colour into white, yellow, brown and black, some leading a settled industrial life in built-up cities, some as nomads roaming the wide pastures of their native plains, some advancing in knowledge and achievement to a high state of civilisation, some degenerating into barbarism and savagery. The world was fast taking on the complexion it has worn ever since, although there were as yet still vast areas unknown to and untouched by man.

At the centre of this teeming world lay the land of Sumer, where it all began. Here was the beginning of all that had been achieved, and here still was the repository of knowledge and science, of trade and industry. Here, at the then head of the Persian Gulf, leading up from the Indian Ocean, lay the busy city of Uri-ki, Ur of the Chaldees, a place of twenty-four thousand inhabitants, mostly engaged in merchant shipping and trade or in manufacturing industry. The city was wealthy and prosperous, the houses ornate in appearance and luxuriously appointed, the citizens sleek and well fed, and apart from occasional military raids by the Elamites from the distant mountains, and the enmity of the neighbouring city-states of Isin and Larsa, life was good and seemed likely to remain so. The lofty temple-tower, surmounted by its sanctuary to the patron god of Ur, Nannar the Moon-god, rose into the skies, and ships in the harbour rode quietly at anchor as industrious labourers unloaded rare metals and timber, exotic goods, animals and birds, brought from far-away India and Africa. In the schools the children sat at their lessons, carefully copying on soft clay tablets the examples set them by the master, committing to memory the five hundred different cuneiform symbols which made up their "alphabet", and learning the intricacies of mathematics and geometry which they were going to have to use in later life in a society in which these arts occupied so prominent a place. The school—*e-dubba*, literally "tablet-house"—was the most important institution in Sumer and the pupils,

from early youth to late teenage, were compelled to attend from sunrise to sunset, a twelve hours per day inculcation of lessons. Woe betide the inattentive. One tablet discovered is evidently part of the rule-book. It runs "*If the student at the e-dubba has not recited his task correctly, the senior student and the teacher will beat him*". No nonsense about the evils of corporal punishment in the schools of ancient Sumer. One is reminded of the maxim inculcated by Solomon a thousand years later in Prov. 23. 13-14 "*Withhold not correction from the child; for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell*". The beneficent effect of the education they did receive is shown by the vast array of school exercises, some showing correction marks by the tutor, which have been discovered. Many of them are lists of equivalent words in two or even three languages and have been of incalculable value in modern times as aids to the decipherment of those languages. Dictionaries, lexicons, grammars, painstakingly impressed on clay tablets by the schoolchildren of Ur and other towns, have been of enormous help to modern scholars.

In the Temple precincts the scribes were busy composing the great epics which enshrined all that history and legend had to tell them about the days and lives of their ancestors who had founded this land—and in the process got legendary and historical events so thoroughly mixed up that these epics have been the despair of modern scholars trying to piece together a coherent story of the times. And so, on the whole, life was good for those citizens of Ur, way back two thousand years before Christ.

Abu-Ramu was one of those citizens (He is referred to in the Book of Genesis as Abram). Abu-Ramu was not a Sumerian; he was a Semite, descended from Shem through Arphaxad, but his family had lived in Ur for probably three or four generations. He was married to his niece Sarratu, daughter of his brother Harannu, sixty years older than himself and now dead. His remaining brother, Nakhur, about twenty years his senior, was married to Sarratu's sister Malkatu. Together with the sisters' younger brother Lu-utu they all lived together in a house of Abu-Ramu's father Tarakhu.

This was a common practice in Sumerian cities. The general procedure was to add rooms as the

demand arose, and the ruins of some of the dwellings excavated by Woolley in 1930 have as many as twenty or thirty rooms. They were not like modern houses. The exterior presented the appearance of a blank wall, unpierced by windows. The visitor, passing through the entrance, found himself in a kind of reception hall, a door on the farther side giving access to a patio open to the sky, around which was grouped a number of rooms, perhaps eight or ten, in the form of a square. Each one had its own doorway opening from the patio, and in some cases communicating doors between. A gallery, approached by a staircase, ran round the sides of the square at first floor level and from this gallery the first floor doors opened. The roof, which projected over the gallery, was made of reeds and sun-dried clay made watertight with bitumen, and the centre of the patio was open to the sky so that daylight penetrated into all the rooms. Doors and windows faced the patio and the outside walls had no breaks save the main entrance. The residential parts of the city must have presented a rather drab vista of sheer brick walls. But as if to make up for the sameness of brick-work in the streets, the public buildings of Ur were ornate and magnificent, often decorated with brightly coloured tiles and enamelled bricks, and coloured representations of lions, bulls and dragons, or flowers and date-palms, in relief. Statues of gold and copper, representing the gods, or commemorating some military victory, stood here and there, and in the centre of the city the imposing edifice that was the pride of Ur, the Temple of the Moon-God.

This imposing building, the "ziggurat" of Ur—the best preserved of any of the hundreds of such in Iraq today—was first excavated in the late 19th century but much more thoroughly and scientifically in 1930 by C. Leonard Woolley. Sacred to the Moon-God, it consisted of a series of seven stages surmounted at the top by the idol sanctuary. Abram and Sarai, in their walks through the city, or as they went about their business or met their friends, must often have stopped to gaze upon its magnificence. If, as is probable, they were followers of the true God, it is not likely they set foot in its precincts. But its worship and its ceremonial must have been very familiar to them, and on the great feast days they might have watched their friends and neighbours setting out to join in the services and climb the great Tower that dominated the Temple area. They might have stood and watched the people thronging the Sacred Road that led up to the double gateway straddling the outer walls and passing into the outer court. Through that gateway they might perchance catch glimpses of the two sanc-

tuary buildings, both built to the honour of Nannar, the Moon-god, both closed, their inward mysteries concealed from the public gaze. On the feast-days the people were not concerned with the priestly ritual and temple service; they pressed through the portals of *Dublal-makh*, the Great Gate, gaining access to the elevated terrace on which stood the "Hill of Heaven", the great brick "tower", two hundred and fifty feet square and seventy feet high, planted on all its terraces with trees and flowers, and at its top, the gleaming gold and silver of the holiest shrine of all.

The internal appointments of the residents' houses were in keeping with the prosperity of the city. From relics found by Woolley, lying where the owners left them when the city was deserted and buried in sand millenniums ago, it is evident that luxury was the keynote. The furniture in Terah's house might well have been made from tropical woods — sandal wood and teak from India and mahogany from Africa. He would possess chairs and tables, strikingly like our modern ones, elaborately carved and ornamented, the work of craftsmen. At night the family took its repose on beds formed of cord networks stretched across wooden frames, covered with cushions and having raised ends decorated with pictures or designs. Specially shaped receptacles of earthenware held clothing and household linen; weaving was a well understood art and was employed for the making of clothes as well as carpets and cushions further to advance the comfort of the home. The majority of household utensils were of pottery or copper; if Terah was a reasonably wealthy man, tableware such as forks and spoons would be of silver or gold. Knives were made of copper, for the people of Ur, like all the ancients, held the secret, lost for thousands of years afterwards and only rediscovered during this twentieth century, of so tempering copper that it could be used for cutting edges as today we use steel. Elaborate musical instruments, libraries of clay tablets containing literary works, religious exercises, commercial documents, even medical treatises and school lessons, all betoken a civilised and knowledgeable people replete in this world's goods and loyal in their devotion to their Deity.

It was in this city and in this kind of house, and in this way of life, that Terah and his family lived. And they were all idolaters.

That this was the case is demonstrated by the names of the members of the family. They are all idolatrous names connected with one or other of the many gods of Sumer. There is also the testimony of Joshua, speaking to the people of

Israel at the time of the Entry to the Land, when he told them "*Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood (river) in old time, even Terah the father of Abraham and of Nachor, and they served other gods*" (Josh. 24.2). In addition there is a passage in the Apocryphal Book of Jubilees (150 BC) which declares that Terah, his father and his grandfather were all idolators (Jub. 11. 4-16). But the real evidence lies in the names, all of which are recorded in their Hebrew form in Genesis, although it has to be remembered that they were actually Sumerian names.

"Abram" is the Hebrew form of the Sumerian "Abu-Ramu", meaning "Ramu, my father". (The Hebrew language normally omitted the final "u" when translating Sumerian words, or else replaced it with "a" or "i") Ramu or Adad was the storm-god. "Sarai" is "Sarratu", a name current in the country of Haran for the wife of Nannar the Moon-God. Her sister "Milcah" is "Malkatu", also a name in Haran for the goddess Inanna or Ishtar (Venus). "Nahor" is "Nakhur", Nannar the Moon-god; "Haran" is "Hurranu". "An my mountain" probably "An (the supreme god) is my strength"; "Terah" is "Tarakhu", the sacred gazelle of the Moon-god, and "Lot" son of Haran, is "Lu-utu", "man of the sun-god". The names are mingled Sumerian and Semitic and most of them resemble the local names of the gods current in the northern town of Haran (also dedicated to the Moon-god) rather than the purely Sumerian town of Ur, from which fact it has been suggested that the family originated several generations earlier from Haran.

From all this it is clear that Joshua was correct; Abraham's father Terah was an idolator and named his family accordingly. (At a later date in Canaan God changed the names of Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah to remove the pagan stigma). Terah's father and grandfather must have been idolators also, but that is as far back as the apostasy would have gone, for the grandfather, Serug, lived at the time when paganism had its rise. It follows therefore that the true faith was preserved in the family to within two centuries of the birth of Abraham so that quite reasonably the old writings, the stories of Eden, the Flood, and Babel, as we have them in Genesis—and probably much more—were preserved and handed down until they came into the possession of Abraham himself: so the early Bible history was saved. Jewish tradition has it that Terah was in business as a manufacturer of *teraphim*, the miniature idols used in private homes to protect the inhabitants; it may be remembered that in later years Rachel his great-graunddaughter was involved in some

rather shady business concerning the theft of her father Laban's *teraphim*, to the displeasure of her husband Jacob (Gen. 31.30-35), so the legend may well rest on a basis of fact.

The conversion of Abram and Sarai to the true faith and renunciation of idolatry must have been at an early stage of their lives. There is some evidence that his brother Nahor shared in that conversion (Gen. 31.53). Various legends existed in later times purporting to tell the story of that conversion but they are but legends. In practice it is tolerably certain that the line leading from Shem to Abraham was faithful to the true God for the major part of its existence; the preservation of the early Bible stories is evidence of that. It is probable that Abraham, accustomed from youth to those stories, saw more in them than did his father and grandfather, and glimpsed something in them of an outworking Divine purpose which led him to realise that this was indeed the very Word of God, and set himself to follow the light he thus received. So the Lord looked down and saw the man who would be the man of his choice, and in the fulness of time revealed himself.

It was about this time the name of a new god began to be made known among the people. Marduk the god of Babylon had not been one of much consequence in past times but Ur was now becoming increasingly dominated by Babylon and the claims of Babylon's god were being pressed. Marduk was not like the other gods, a personification of one or another attributes of the Most High God; he was a personification of a famous man of nearly a thousand years earlier, Nimrod, the celebrated hero who had taken the lead among their ancestors of early days. Now the priests and scribes got busy extolling his praises and writing epic poems about his mighty deeds. At first he was claimed to be the son of Nannar the Moon-god; later they gave out that he was the son of Enlil the son of the Most High and then they went further and made him the son of An the Most High himself, and wove wondrous legends about his becoming man's redeemer by dying and going into the grave and then rising from the dead and returning to the earth with gifts for men, all of which causes one to wonder how much early man, in the days of Eden and the Flood, did have revealed to them something of the Divine Plan of salvation, for that is where it must have come from at the first. An elaborate ceremony lasting a week was held every year in Babylon in the month Nisan to picture this legend. Eventually Marduk came to supersede all the other gods, as the hero of the people. The cult of Marduk became a kind of national obsession; the poets and scribes began

to weave his personality into their epic poems and he became the symbol of all that was great and spectacular in the national life. More than any of the other gods Marduk was the most prominent God of Sumerian paganism and set the pattern for all paganism in all the world since. Under his Semitic name of Bel he became Baal to the Canaanitish nations and so was worshipped by Israel in her more decadent days. The greatest of all Sumerian epics, the "Enuma Elish" written two centuries or more after Abram left Ur, is a long recapitulation of all his alleged mighty deeds, among the gods and among men. In the end the identity of Utu, the sun-god, be-

came absorbed into that of Marduk. It might well have been the rising power of this cult which led Abram to welcome the opportunity the Lord gave him to abandon Ur with its paganism and go to the new land which He promised to show him.

So, at last, the word of the Lord came to Abram "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation" (Gen. 12. 1-2) And Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him.

To be concluded.

RIGHTEOUSNESS AND LIFE

"As righteousness tendeth to life, so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death." (Prov. 11. 19).

Here is a statement of principle the correct understanding of which will help anyone to a better understanding of God. All too often are the two ways, the way of good and the way of evil, with their respective climaxes, set forth as something based on the arbitrary decrees of a rather capricious Deity. In the most extreme case, that of believers in predestination, the eternal fate of each individual was unalterably fixed before he came into the world. A rather more modern and somewhat toned down version of this belief insists that whilst acceptance of the Divine call rests with the individual, God calls only a selection from amongst mankind; once called and accepted, the called one must of necessity be ushered into eternal salvation or the will of God has been thwarted, so that in practice it becomes a case of "once saved, always saved". Orthodox Christian theology, whilst allowing the freedom of holding this view to those who are so convinced, does not make it an element of normal faith; nevertheless the orthodox theology does depict heaven in the guise of a reward for rightdoing and some state of "conscious misery, eternal in duration" to use the old definition, as punishment for evil doing. The emphasis is rather upon pleasing or displeasing God and reaping commendation or condemnation accordingly, so that good and evil are reduced largely to a question of obeying or disobeying God's expressed commands.

The Wise Man in the Book of Proverbs knew better than that. Righteousness is a power, a force, which is inherently conducive to life—obviously to continuing life. Evil, on the other hand, contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction; it is inherently conducive to death—and death in this connection is the antithesis

of life, the complete absence and negation of life. Since all life stems in the first place from God, and moreover can only be sustained by God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, it follows that righteousness is that condition of things which allows the perpetuation of that flow of life from Creator to creature which imparts the quality of everlastingness to the creature. Conversely evil is that opposing force which tends to hinder or destroy the orderly conduct of God's work, and because it is thus at variance with the laws on which Divine creation is founded and by which it continues, must eventually destroy itself. So the life which is governed or influenced by evil will become less and less capable of recovery and maintaining that inflow of life from God which alone can guarantee continuance, and will at last end in death. The idea that there can be any kind of life, any kind of conscious state of being, existing eternally in a state of sin or of disharmony with God, is both unscriptural and against all that is revealed concerning the principles of Divine creation. A man to whom God has given life and the power of living must either come, eventually, willingly into alignment with the arrangements God has made for the eternal continuance of Creation—and this implies coming into a state of eternal righteousness—or he must reap the wages of sin in the loss of even that measure of life he possessed for a limited period, and be reduced to what is in effect the condition obtaining before he knew conscious existence.

The channel of that life is Jesus Christ. It is through him, through faith in him and acceptance of him, and ultimately complete dedication to him, that men receive life which is eternal, timeless, everlasting. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

MAN OF SORROWS

A study in
Isaiah 53

4. Chastened of God.

"The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed". Here we begin to enter a new realm, the consequences of these things to us. This word, the chastisement of our peace, means literally the chastisement by which our peace is effected. The word does mean to chastise as with whips and is so used in the memorable passage where Rehoboam promised his subjects that where his father Solomon had chastised them with whips he would do so with scorpions. The expression really does refer therefore to a scourging inflicted if not by way of punishment at least in order to coerce into submission. But the word is derived from a root which means "to instruct"; the dividing line between chastening and instruction is very thin in the Bible. "Spare the rod and spoil the child" is a maxim that has support in the Old Testament. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth". We might therefore, without wresting the meaning of this verse, take it to give some indication at least that the chastisement laid upon our Lord was in some sense a means of chastening or instructing the sons of men in the way that leads to peace. That brings us very near again to the doctrine of the Sin-Offering. "He hath made him to be sin (a sin-offering, this word means) for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him". (2 Cor. 5. 21). Once again we have to remember that it is by means of the "Ransom for All", our Lord's actual death on the Cross, that all men without exception are released from the death imposed on them through Adamic transgression, and restored to conscious life in the resurrection to receive the opportunity of reconciliation and lasting life guaranteed them by that Ransom; but it is by the Sin-Offering, pictured in the Levitical sacrifice in our Lord's conscious pouring out of his life unto death (Isa. 53. 12) that men will receive the power and inspiration necessary to reap the benefit of the Ransom and walk up the Highway of Holiness to perfection of life. That is why, here in verse 5, Isaiah tells us that both the suffering and the discipline which alike are included in the word "chastisement" is laid upon him that we might eventually attain peace. In those stripes which fell upon him we shall at the end be healed. The Book of Hebrews declares this same thing. "It became him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." "Though he were a

Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 2. 10; 5. 8-9). There is much in the mystic power for righteousness set free by the Sin-Offering that we do not as yet understand, but one of its most obvious aspects is the moral appeal to men's better nature engendered by the realisation that He did indeed willingly bear our griefs and carry our sorrows and accept our chastisement. It is that more than anything else which will lead men to cry out rapturously "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation". (Isa. 24.9).

There is a cryptic word in the Book of Proverbs which has some connection with this theme. "The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise." (Prov. 15. 31). That word "reproof" is the same that is here rendered "chastisement", and it has the same underlying meaning. The "reproof of life" is that stern discipline, chastening, which leads the subject of the "reproof" to life. The following verse declares that the one who refuses instruction is a despiser of his own soul. The one who willingly becomes subject to the reproof of life, the discipline, chastening, which is necessary to eternal life, shall abide among the wise—a clear reference to those who at the consummation of the Divine Plan in the end of the Millennial Age will be adjudged worthy. So we can look upon our Lord as one who willingly took upon himself the obligations and duties, the humiliation and suffering, of those who must receive chastening at God's hand that they be reconciled to him and fitted for their eternal inheritance. He stooped down to us and became as one of us, that we might be lifted up to him and become like him, sons of the living God.

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (vs. 6).

Irresistibly we are reminded here of the good Shepherd, the One who gave his life for the sheep. It is because they have strayed, strayed away from the safety of the fold, and strayed into danger, that He is called upon to give his life in their defence and for their recovery. One of the most revealing discourses of Jesus, penetrating into the very centre of fundamental doctrine truth, is that which is recorded in the fifteenth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel. The re-

claiming power and love of God, manifested in Christ, toward unregenerate man is shown forth in three illustrations of everyday. The one hundred sheep, of which one was lost—and found; the ten pieces of silver, of which one was lost—and found; the two sons, of which one was lost—and found; these three witness to the one great and indisputable truth, that none will be lost for want of the selfless love of God, reaching out into the dark recesses of sin to draw the wanderer back to himself. The old orthodox theology made it a hard thing to evade the stern barrier of Divine Justice and enter at last through the golden door into the bliss of heaven; the plain teaching of Jesus as revealed in the Gospels is that it will be, on the contrary, a very hard thing to escape from the encirclement of Divine Love and fail to inherit the green fields and sparkling streams of Paradise. The Son of Man, like the Good Shepherd of Luke 15, has come forth into the world to seek and save that which was lost, and resolute indeed must be the man who wills so to steep his heart in sin and steel himself against every form of righteousness that the love of the Redeemer has no effect upon him. We must hold very rigidly to the Divine declaration that nothing unclean or defiled by sin shall enter the Kingdom of God; none save those reconciled to God by faith in Jesus Christ and acceptance of him as Saviour shall ever be admitted to the glory of God's favour and attain everlasting life. Nevertheless we do not have to conclude that on this account the number of the redeemed is to be few. The "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" has to be reckoned with. He has decreed that the whole earth shall one day be full of his glory. He has declared that his word does not return to him void, but prospers in the thing whereto it is sent. It is when we ponder Scriptures like these that we realise what tremendous force and power for good is let loose in the world when God sets himself to recover his lost creatures, and how hard it is going to be for any man to remain wilfully and incorrigibly obdurate in the face of that outreaching love.

That some will be thus wedded to their sin, despite all the efforts made on their behalf and opportunities put in their path, seems possible from the general tenor of the Scriptures. Some there can be, it would appear, who will fulfil the dark words of Rev. 21. 8 and meet their end in the utter destruction which is the reality behind the lurid symbol of the fiery lake. We can only hope, and we have good reason to believe, that the number will be small compared with the vast numbers of redeemed and reconciled mankind. The parable of the sheep and goats related in Matt. 25 gives no hint as to the relative numbers

of the two classes, the ultimately saved and the ultimately lost but we are on reasonably safe ground when we conclude that there will be a great number of sheep and relatively few goats.

But meanwhile the sheep are lost; they wander still in this world, waiting for the shepherd to find them and lead them home, and not even conscious, for the most part, that they are lost and need a Shepherd. "*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way.*" How like the bitter words of Rom. 1. 28 "*And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a rebobate mind, to do those things . . .*" and so it goes on until the dreadful climax in 3. 23 "*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*". There are the lost sheep, far from the warmth and light of the Father's home, and here is the Shepherd, making his way through this dark world to find the wandering ones and bring them safely back.

But it is not just a question of picking up the straying sheep and carrying it back and putting it down in the sheepfold just as if nothing had happened. Sin and the effects of sin are not dealt with so easily and casually as that. Lest anyone, reading without considering, should think that is all that there is in the Luke 15 story, the Lord adds an epilogue. The sheep has been restored, safe and sound, and there is rejoicing. "*Likewise*" said Jesus, "*joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth*". Of little use is it bringing home the straying sheep if next day it is going to get lost again; or finding the lost piece of silver only to mislay it again; or greeting the returning prodigal if a week later, refreshed and revitalised, he sets out once more on a fresh career of dissipation and debauchery. There has to be repentance for past sin and there has to be atonement for past sin. The insult to God's holiness is not lightly to be set aside, and the damage to the sinner's character is not easily rectified. So the Saviour not only carries the exhausted frame of the sinner back to God; He also bears the burden of his sin. That is what this verse says. "*The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*" The literal meaning of the Hebrew phrase is that "the Lord hath caused to meet him, the iniquity". Iniquity has met him in the road and blocks his way. The word really refers to such things as the old-time avenger of blood meeting the man for whom he is searching and whom he means to slay in satisfaction for the murder of a kinsman. The custom is alluded to in Num. 35. 19. "*The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer; when he meeteth him, he shall slay him.*" That word "meeteth him" is the same as "laid to him" in Isa. 53. And in Isa. 53, the implication

behind the expression is very clear. The One who goes forth to seek and save the sinner is met in the way by the sinner's own sin, and that sin overcomes and slays him. "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." (1 Pet. 3. 18). "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree . . . by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop (*episkopos*—guardian or overseer) of your souls." (1 Pet. 2. 24-25).

Sin met him in the way—and He went forth, calm and resolute, to meet it. He knew that it would encompass his death, but He knew also that only thus could He defeat sin and break its power. We think too often of Jesus the bearer of sin in the sense that Divine Justice demands a sin-bearer before the sentence on a guilty race can be lifted. We think not often enough of the fact that Jesus must bear the sin of the world in order to break the power of sin over the individual. Divine forgiveness of sins is ineffective until the sinner repents; and after repentance Divine Justice has no further claim. There is no reopening old scores once the repentant one has entered into a condition of reconciliation with God, only the inevitable working out of retribution for the deeds done in the body, which none can escape. So it is of the more importance that we consider the bearing of sin by Jesus as it affects the repentant sinners rather than as it affects God. We want to know just how it is that this amazing manifestation of Jesus' love for mankind can result in the reconciliation of man to God and the renunciation by man of all evil.

There is a story, said to be true, of a missionary some century or more ago who devoted his life to teaching a primitive tribe of head-hunters in Eastern Asia. Slowly he weaned them from their savage practices and by his love and kindness endeared himself to all their hearts. Suspicious of strangers they remained, but for their pastor and shepherd they had nothing but the tenderest feelings of love, and they listened patiently and attentively as he talked to them of the love of Christ and attended their ailments and helped them in their troubles.

Before his coming the tribe had an annual ceremony at which a human victim was sacrificed, in the belief that by this means the weather would be propitious and the crops successful. The missionary had persuaded them to abandon that savage practice, not without considerable reluctance on their part, for they could not be sure that the orderly succession of sowing and reaping would go on uninterruptedly without the customary offering to the powers of Nature. When the harvests were good, all was well, but in years of

drought and failing crops the men of the tribe were restive and it took all their teacher's influence to keep them from a relapse into the old bad ways.

Years passed by, and then one day a deputation waited on the missionary. The old urge was back, and they insisted that they must be permitted to hold their ceremony and sacrifice a victim. In their reverence and respect for the one who had devoted his whole life to their welfare they had come to him for permission, but his permission they must have and they would not be gainsaid. The old man realised that this time he would not be able to resist them and turn them from their purpose; their hearts were set upon sacrifice and a sacrifice they must have. He bent his head in silent prayer, and turned then to face the waiting deputation. "You shall have your request," he told them sadly, "but on condition that you follow my instructions to the letter." Overjoyed at having achieved their purpose, they assented gladly. "Tomorrow," said the old man, "you will go at the appointed time to your usual place of sacrifice. There you will see a man standing clothed in a scarlet cloak and his head covered with a scarlet hood. Do not attempt to look upon his features, but without delay do you accomplish your design. Now go, my children."

At the set time next day the tribesmen went up to the place of sacrifice. There stood the victim, just as the missionary had told them. With shouts and cries of exultation they surged forward. The man appointed for the purpose swung his great sword, and with one stroke cut off the head of the motionless figure before him . . . the scarlet hood rolled off and the horror-stricken natives looked upon the features of their beloved pastor.

It is said that never after that day did the people crave after sacrifice and idolatrous ceremonies. Through all their generations they cherished the memory of a man who, when he could save them from themselves in no other way, did it by laying down his life, a willing sacrifice.

In all our philosophising about the Atonement and the meaning of our Lord's death for man, it may be that we are never so near the truth as we are when we read that little story. Had there been another way of saving mankind, surely God would have taken it. Maybe it was because there was no other way, because only by giving his life as the supreme sacrifice, that Jesus came out into the world to find lost mankind, and, coming out, met sin in the way, and gave himself to be overcome by sin and return to his Father's house bringing the lost ones with him. All we, like sheep, have gone astray—but the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

(To be continued)

PRAYER

Reprinted from the
"Herald of Christ's Kingdom"

*"With one accord!" The day had brought
Its vexing cares, its anxious thoughts;
With labour worn, with doubts perplexed,
With toils and troubles sorely vexed;
When evening brought its hour of prayer,
With sweet accord we gathered there.
"The door was shut!" "With one accord"
We kneeled before our risen Lord;
Some needed strength, some needed peace,
Some prayed that wrongs and woes might
cease;*

All needed Christ, and Christ was there.

*"Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh
to you."—Jas. 4. 8.*

*"Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and
shew thee great and mighty things, which thou
knowest not."—Jer. 33. 3.*

*"Evening and morning, and at noon, will I
pray and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice."
—Psa. 55. 17.*

Now, if we are to grow in our prayer life, there are five things which are necessary:

The first of these is **TIME**. Like everything else, prayer requires time; daily time, like the other essentials, eating and sleeping. It needs to be time enough to forget how much time it is, even though duties call you away. So it must be planned for, sometimes well ahead, so no duty is slighted. One must *take* time. No one worth while has time for all that comes crowding to his door. Something must be left out, so time must be taken from something else, yet less important. Prayer does need time.

The second thing prayer needs is a **PLACE**. You can pray anywhere—on a train, walking down the street, measuring gingham, operating a typewriter, cutting out a dress, in kitchen or parlour or shop. But you are not likely to, *unless you've been shut off in some quiet place with the door shut*. Christ said: "Enter into thine inner chamber and shut the door"—the world shut out—but you are shut in with some One unseen. It does not matter where the place is. The corner of a kitchen is as good as the cloistered corner of a cathedral. Indeed, some kitchens I have known are better than some cathedrals. It is the recognised presence of our blessed Lord that makes holy ground, whether kitchen or cathedral. And the real rare blessing of the daily quiet place is not only that you actually pray, though you will; not only that you read the Book, though you will. It is this: There is some One else there. And to sit quiet in his presence, thank him that He is there, and that He died for you in the love

of his heart; maybe to sing him a soft hymn of praise; this is the real blessedness of that bit of quiet time in the shut-away corner. Prayer needs a place, and prayer hallows the place—any place.

Third—prayer needs a book. **THE BOOK**. The Book is the basis of prayer. Bible reading is the listening side of prayer. In the Book God speaks to us. In prayer we speak to God. What He says to us radically affects what we say to him. Prayer needs three organs of the head—an ear, a tongue and an eye. The ear to hear what God says, the tongue to repeat his promises as our petitions, and the eye to look out expectantly until the result comes. Thoughtful Bible reading is giving God our ears. What goes in at the ear, warmed up as it goes through the heart, comes out at the tongue in simple, expectant, warm prayer, communion and petition and intercession.

Yes, give this Book a place in your prayers. What God says here will change what you say, and so wholly change the results. The Book will shape and mould your praying. Let it!

The fourth is particularly important — **LET THE TEACHER TEACH YOU**. There is One who is peculiarly the prayer Teacher It is He who puts the desire to pray in our hearts. He will direct all our praying (through the Holy Spirit) as a wise father directs his son.

Where is the Holy Spirit? . . . In every one whose heart has opened to the Lord Jesus—not because we are good or deserving or saintly, but because He is faithful to his promise.

Yes, let the Holy Spirit teach you When you go into the quiet schoolroom, with the school Book open, ask this Teacher to teach you. And He will. You may be a bit slow and stupid—most of us are. But He is very gentle and patient.

You will likely find your praying changed some. It will become simpler—more confident, and personal, and practical. Some things you will *stop* asking for—they will slip out of your thoughts in that Presence. Other things will come in—certain things you will pray for more boldly and confidently and expectantly.

The fifth need is to cultivate an **OPENNESS OF SPIRIT**—I mean that habitual openness of mind that opens up more and more as clearer light breaks in. It begins with that first surrender to Christ as Master, but must continue to be a habitual surrender in the actual practice of daily life. As clearer light comes in on this habit, that line of conduct, that problem, you yield and actually live the surrender you made in the initial act.

Stubbornness, sifted down, is simply refusing

to yield to the new bit of light that comes. Openness to light is the one doorway to growth. Yes, we will welcome the light by obedience, we will pore thoughtfully over the Book, to get its meaning clear. We will cultivate sane, thoughtful, brooding meditating, to get things clear and clearer.

Here they are—a praying TIME, a prayer PLACE, the prayer BOOK, the prayer TEACHER, the Holy Spirit, the HABITUAL

OPENNESS to more light. Let us all start into school afresh.

Lord Jesus, teach us to pray. Help us to learn how. Thou knowest both ends of prayer, the praying end down here, and the answering end up yonder. We would be good students in thy school, punctual in attendance, keeping the door shut, and the Book open, and the knee bent, and the will too. Teach us—in Jesus' name. Amen.

REFLECTIONS ON HELL

Although in this modern world there is not the same unquestioning belief in the traditional Hell of fire and brimstone as was the position in mediæval times, it is a fact that an appreciable portion of sincere Christian believers do still hold to it and interpret the Scriptures quite literally to declare that men and women dying in a state of unbelief will definitely spend eternity in a "state of conscious misery, eternal in duration" as the old dogma has it. Neither is the conviction confined to what may be termed the more simple-minded and lesser educated among believers; there are found some in all walks of life, including eminent ministers, who believe in, and preach, that the destiny of the unrepentant at death is an eternity of conscious suffering and separation from God. A well-known British minister not many years ago, writing about the function of Satan, the Devil, as Prince of Hell, said "*the full venom of his hatred will be personally experienced to all eternity by every Christ-rejector, in the next life, in hell*". Many a Gospel tract distributed widely with the object of converting men and women to Christ stresses the terrors of Hell with insistence upon the literal reality of its burning fires. It has to be admitted that some Scripture texts do speak of sinners being cast into everlasting fires, which is why the following warning was some years ago given widespread publicity "*The Lord spoke of eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, and He also spoke of commanding the wicked to depart from him into eternal fire . . . this is no mythical place of fire and torment but a place of unspeakable woe. No scoffing at its dread reality will alter the verity of it. . . . How infinitely horrible must it be to awake, after a life of luxury and sin, to the awfulness of eternal punishment in eternal fire! No human mind on earth can conceive what it will mean*".

The final comment is probably true. It is in reaction against the fearful implication of this conception of Hell that a more modern view is

promulgated to the effect that the fires of Hell are not literal, but are fires of remorse; as though to excuse this departure from the traditional view the qualification is sometimes added "which is much worse"! It does not seem to occur to protagonists of this variation that if there is remorse surely God will forgive, since repentance is always the keynote of reconciliation with God, as in the story of the Prodigal Son. If a man is to be kept in Hell eternally it must follow that he is unrepentant eternally.

The natural implication of this position is that to all eternity there will be one part of God's creation tenanted by intelligent creatures made in his own image and likeness who remain in a state of rebellion and sin which will never end. This, in face of definite Scripture statements to the effect that when the work of Christ with man is complete "*every knee will bow, and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*", "*that God shall be all in all*". (Phil. 2. 9-10; Eph. 1. 9-10; I Cor. 15. 24-28)! If Hell torment is to subsist for ever, the question arises, how can this promise be fulfilled?

The one logical bulwark for the doctrine of Hell is the old pagan belief, inherited from Greek mythology, of the immortality of the soul. If God, having once created man "a living soul" (Gen. 2.7) is unable ever to deprive him of that gift of life, so that man, whether righteous or evil, in harmony with or in rebellion against God, must live on into all eternity, then obviously there has to be a place or condition in the sphere of Divine creation where such rebellious and sinful souls must be confined to avoid their disrupting the harmony and orderliness of the creation at large. Hell can be such a place although it should be agreed that God does not necessarily have to torture by perpetual fire the prisoners He has thus incarcerated. Mere imprisonment would suffice. Even so, it could not then be true that every knee has bowed and every tongue confessed, so that the Scripture is falsified. And how many truly

sincere Christians, sharing with their Master his concern for the salvation of even one erring sheep out of ninety-nine, could ever truthfully enjoy the joys of the heavenly state in the ever-present knowledge of the suffering of so many of their fellow-men in the "other place". No man is a true Christian in this present life unless he has a deep-seated longing for the conversion and reconciliation of those around him who know not the Lord; how much greater must be that longing in the after-life if some there are who still live in a state of separation from God?

Fortunately for the solution of this element in the problem, Christian belief in the immortality of the soul is now virtually non-existent. It is widely recognised that it is not taught in, or supported by, the Scriptures, that the Creator of us all holds the issues of life or death for each one of us in his own hands, and that immortality is a prize to be won under certain stipulated conditions, only attained by the believer who has met those conditions at the time of death of the human frame. "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. . . . this mortal must put on immortality. So when this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written 'Death is swallowed up in victory'" (I Cor. 15. 40-54) St. Paul speaks of those "who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality" (Rom. 2.7); something not yet possessed but possible of attainment.

If then it can be accepted that at all times the Creator of us all holds the power of continuing or withdrawing life, at least until in his wisdom He knows that the individual concerned can be, so to speak, entrusted with the quality of immortality, what need exists for Hell to be a place of conscious life? Can it not logically be the eternal grave of those who have, because of implacable and irrevocable hostility toward God and his righteousness, lost the power of life which He gave them, and, because all life comes from God and is sustained by God, must therefore pass out of existence? That at least allows for the fulfilment of all those Scriptures which picture the final outcome as a creation in which there is no evil and no sin and no rebellion; all things are "at one" in Christ.

In which case the texts that speak of the everlasting fires which will burn up the sinners and their sin are metaphors expressive of the destruction of such so that they can never again defile God's creation. It has been said that the "everlasting fires" are everlasting only until they have consumed everything that can be burned. Jude

talks about the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" but the fires which destroyed the cities of the plain went out four thousand years ago.

Such reflections can lead to the serious conclusion of Christian ministers and others who have pondered over the principles which must underlie the Divine attitude to the incorrigible sinner. Prebendary Row, of St. Paul's Cathedral in the late 19th century, has a forceful comment on this in his book "Future Retribution" (1880). He says "The disease of moral evil, wilfully persisted in, for aught we know to the contrary, may be capable of destroying man as a personal conscious being. No being that has been brought into existence by the will of another can have endless existence inherent in itself. Inasmuch therefore as man is destitute of self-existence, the length of the period during which he will continue to exist must be dependent on the good pleasure of him who by his all-powerful energy maintains him in being every moment. . . . Evil beings will cease to exist whenever it pleases the All-merciful to cease to exert that energy which alone maintains in existence the evil and the good". A later leading theologian, Canon R. H. Charles in "A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life" (1913) wrote "The Pauline eschatology points obviously, in its ultimate issues, either to the final redemption of all created personal beings, or—and this seems the true alternative — to the destruction of the finally impenitent. But this destruction would not be of the nature of an external punishment, but subjective and self-inflicted". Some years ago, Prof. J. Alexander Findlay, writing in the "British Weekly", said "If a life depends upon fellowship with God, the possibility must remain that the time may come when a man, no longer being capable of fellowship with God, shall die and become extinct, simply because there is no life left in him, because his soul is dead". Likewise Dr. Paterson Smyth in "The Gospel of the Hereafter" (1911); "What we dread is that the man may not want, and so may have rendered himself incapable of turning to God. We dread, not God's will, but the man's own will. Character tends to permanence. Free-will is a glorious but a dangerous prerogative. All experience leads towards the belief that a human will may so distort itself as to grow incapable of good".

This directs the mind towards the reception of one fixed principle upon which the entire Plan of Redemption is based. God is the only source and sustainer of life. We do not understand the nature of life, how it commences in a living thing, how it continues, why it ends in death. Only in the Bible do we have any guidance. All

life is of God; life in the plant world, life in the animal world, of angels; their life is also of God. Life in the plant and animal worlds is limited in time and in the case of each individual comes to an end. *"Thou didst hide thy face, they are troubled; thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created, and thou renewest the face of the earth"* (Psa. 104. 28, 29). Things are different with man. *"There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding"* (Job. 32.8). The life of man can continue everlastingly, all the time that he remains in the bond of communion with God. But without that link man cannot continue to live; the life-line has been severed. *"In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die"* (Gen.

2. 17) was the intimation at the beginning. Sin severed the life-line, and from that moment the life energy in the man's mortal frame began to run down until at last there was no life left in the body, *"and Adam died"*. This is the basic principle; the disruptive effect of sin forbids the continued flow of life from the only source of life, and death must ensue. If this is indeed the position, it is easy to see how it is that at the last every knee shall bow and every tongue confess, for it is impossible that any whose heart is fully set in them to do evil can continue to receive life from God; such must therefore pass into death. *"For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be"* (Psa. 37.10).

THE QUESTION BOX

Q. *"When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return unto my house from whence I came out . . ."* (Matt. 12. 43). *What is the meaning of our Lord's allusion to "dry places"? Why should the dispossessed demon apparently desire to avoid the vicinity of water?*

* * *

A. Jesus had in mind a very popular idea, prevalent in the days of the First Advent, to the effect that evil spirits shunned the crossing of water, and were, in fact, unable to negotiate the passage of rivers or streams. This idea, so obviously absurd to us, who understand something of the nature and powers of both holy and evil spirit beings, was a tradition coming down from earlier ages, but very real to the people of our Lord's own day. This verse is an interesting example of the fact that Jesus habitually spoke to the people within the framework of the common thought of their own day—not that He himself necessarily endorsed these old fables and legends, but as using them in illustration of the truths He wished to inculcate. In referring to this popular idea of the evil spirit walking about seeking a place of rest remote from the imaginary dangers of running water, He brought before the minds of his hearers the obvious sequel—that if the cleansed man's mind has been left empty and not occupied by a holier spirit, the Spirit of God, then the dispossessed demon would return from his uneasy wanderings, and settle down in the safety of his former home; and the last state of that man, said Jesus, would then be worse than the first.

A homely illustration, built upon a Rabbinical fable having no basis in fact, but capable of teaching a vital spiritual truth. When the evil spirit is cast out, let the mind be filled with that which will prevent such a calamity as demon obsession ever befalling the man again.

Q. *How does one harmonise Heb. 9. 6, where the High Priest is said to enter into the Most Holy once in every year, with Exod. 25. 22 and Num. 7. 89, where Moses at least is said to have entered into the Most Holy and talked with God?*

* * *

A. Moses entered the Most Holy only once in his life, when the Tabernacle had been completed and erected but before Aaron and his sons had been constituted to minister the sacred things. Moses, as the Mediator of the Covenant between God and Israel, was at that time the only one who could properly approach God on their behalf, and as indicated in Exod. 25. 22 which states that God would meet with Moses in the Most Holy in order to give him his instructions, he went into the Most Holy, alone, and heard the voice of God from between the cherubim giving him instructions about the priesthood. The command regarding the reservation to the High Priest of the right of entry into the Most Holy did not come into effect until after Moses had retired from the Divine presence and had instituted all things as he had been commanded. That reservation applied only to the annual Day of Atonement ceremonies. In addition, Aaron the High Priest and his sons were to enter the Most Holy, when the Tabernacle was being taken down for journeying, to cover the sacred Ark with the Veil, and wrap that in turn in a

blue cloth. Then it fell to the sons of Kohath to carry the Ark to the next stopping place in the wanderings. Not until it was safely covered were they permitted to come forward lest their eyes

should fall upon the sacred emblem. In this manner God sought to teach the importance of reverence and respect for those things which have to do with his great Plan of redemption.

TOMORROW

To-morrow! Oh, the bogey of to-morrow, and the unrest it brings into our little day! It needed all the persuasive powers of our beloved Lord to dispel the spirit of disquiet from his disciples' minds and set their hearts at rest. Of course there seemed to be every reason in the world why they should think of their future days—were they not leaving everything to follow him; to go without purse or scrip or other entangling impediment, with nothing more than a questionable hospitality awaiting them? If an hospitable host accepted them and welcomed them, then let them call down the blessing of the peace of God upon that house, but if no hospitable host awaited them—yes, that was just it! Supposing there was no such host in the whole city or country-side?

Assuring them that all their needs were known, and that He who clothed the lilies could find them clothes, and He who fed the sparrows find them food, the Lord advised them to leave their to-morrows alone. Oh yes! to-morrow would most certainly have its cares and perplexities; its refusals and rejections, but He would have them let to-morrow be anxious for itself. Then (in the lovely words of the New Revised Version) Jesus said "*Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day*". (Mat. 6. 34). There was not always an overflowing purse for those first pioneers of our faith; sometimes they would have enough to "abound", at other times they knew what it was to be in "want". Contentment in every state was a lesson that needed to be learnt.

It is a perquisite of man's superior mind that he alone of the whole mundane creation can visualise to-morrow and its needs. The squirrel by inborn instinct may hoard up its nuts—a supply for a later day; but it is not within its power to wonder what will happen when the store is gone. Strange to say, it is the thrifty careful man who is likely to look through the bars of the morrow. The spendthrift, careless, easy-come-easy-go type of man will often say "to-morrow never comes", or "let us eat and drink to-day, to-morrow we may die"!

Naturally the Christian believer will be of the thrifty rather than the spend-thrift type, and finds

the natural propensities a handicap if not a hindrance to his rest of soul. And while there is no prohibition against a "proper thought" for coming days, it is so easy to exceed the range of "proper thought", and expand it into anxious care. The dividing line between pleasure and pain is very thin; what may have been intended as a love-tap may reach its billet as a hurtful blow. It is all a question of degree. So with the exercise of "proper thought".

With a big D.V. (*Deo Volente*) controlling it, the exercise of "proper thought" enables one to stand up to life's opportunities—and this is as true of Christian work as of the daily round. But without that submission to the "*If God Will*", even the common round of this very day can abound with anxious care, while to-morrow will be full of ghosts and fearsome shapes. "One day at a time" is the Saviour's rule of life; it is still a "lesson" that must be learned. It reduces itself to a question of "faith" or "little faith"—of "trust" or "little trust", of the childlike dependence (or lack of it) in a loving Father's care. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" Jesus said. Over against that "Sufficient" we should learn to place another: "My grace is sufficient for thee". Sufficient Grace will then cancel out "sufficient" evil.

Perhaps the poet was right when he said,
*You're groaning to-day 'neath a burden of care,
 'Tis more than your sad fainting spirit can bear,
 Don't seek from the future new trouble to
 borrow
 But leave in Christ's hands the keys of tomorrow.
 Your way may be clouded, your future concealed,
 And scarcely the present is clearly revealed;
 'Twill strengthen in weakness and comfort in
 sorrow
 To leave in Christ's hands the keys of to-morrow.*

It is a big step forward in the Christian life when we have learned to sing,

*God holds the key of all unknown.
 And I am glad.
 If other hands should hold the key,
 Or if He trusted it to me,
 I might be sad.*

THE PRICE OF PERFECTION

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matt. 5. 48). Jesus spoke these words to his disciples nearly two thousand years ago and those gracious words of life come to us with the same sweetness and power as when He spoke them. To us now comes the same inspiring exhortation urging us to draw near to God, to keep near, and above all to be like him. He points to God, the High and Lofty One, enthroned in Heaven, and says to us, "There is your Father, perfect,—be ye therefore perfect even as He is perfect." These words awake in us a strong desire to attain to some likeness to God.

The very name of God conveys to us such a sense of purity that we are cleaner and better for the thought of him, and He is our Father if so be we have received his Spirit in our hearts. He is nearer, closer, dearer than the fondest earthly parent could ever be. Jesus says, "Be ye perfect even as YOUR FATHER;" What a glorious thought! The supreme Sovereign of the universe is OUR FATHER!

Try to consider the perfection of our Father in Heaven. Our finite minds can but dimly comprehend the might, the majesty and the power of God. Surely it is not to perfection in these things that we are exhorted to attain. Yet all these things are at work on our behalf assisting our weakness that we may attain to that which is attainable.

What is attainable? *"Be ye holy for I am holy."* That is the word of God to us, or as Weymouth translates Matt. 5. 48, *"You however are to be complete in goodness as your Heavenly Father is complete."* "Attain unto holiness," says the writer to the Hebrews, for just as it is impossible to please God without faith so it is impossible to see him without holiness. Holiness carries the thought of purity; heart purity, beauty in its most radiant form, the loveliest of all loveliness and this loveliness inspires us to devotion, to gratitude and imitation when we consider the love of God that prompted the giving of his Son for the life of the world; the mercy that forgives, the compassion with the weak, the infinite tenderness that heals and assists the feeble in faith and the forbearing comforting love *"as one whom his mother comforteth"* (Isa. 66. 13). It is this perfection that our Lord exhibited throughout his earthly life and we are to consider this perfection

in the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus. What we need to imitate is the love of God, his compassion, his forbearing mercy and his understanding love as we see them manifested in his dealings with mankind through the ages and as we see them revealed in Jesus. We need to absorb them into our natures by daily contact with him in meditation and prayer, to think of the love of God as we have known it, admired it and adored it in Jesus and to realise that this is perfection; the God-like heart, the lovely life, the very end and crown of being, the standard we are exhorted to attain in Eph. 4. 10.

So a cry arises in the depths of our hearts, *"O for a heart more like my God."* "How can I attain perfection? Lord, show me the way!" If we truly aspire to the perfection of Heaven we must needs consider the greatest exponent of perfection who ever lived; we must take Jesus as pattern and example, teacher and guide. We must not be content with a few cursory glances or to take a lesson now and again. We must apply ourselves diligently to the task. No day should be allowed to pass without meditation upon the life of the Master. It involves earnest consideration, earnest prayer for grace to copy and attain the perfect heart and the loving life. No man has seen God to note and study his perfection, but Divine wisdom and love sent his Son who said, *"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father"* and we can look upon him and learn. We can have our Master before us, beside us, within us, about us, giving us counsel, instruction, assistance and strength. Without him we must fail; with him we can do everything but fail!

All the great men and women who have devoted their lives to the cause of Christ are a splendid source of help and inspiration. When we think of Paul and read of his struggles and conquests, his noble faith and lofty purpose we are inspired to follow him as he followed Christ, to join in his great quest for perfection and by grace win the crown as he. We can help and inspire each other. Our faith and noble determination can assist others who might faint. The light of our own enthusiasm can light a lamp in another heart. Be up and doing if we are seeking perfection with sincerity and have a deep rooted longing to be like Christ and be found in him. So shall we by grace and Almighty Power receive the crown of life — faultless, glorious, perfection.

That perfection is attainable is proved by the word of our Master. He never exhorted us to strive after something beyond and not easy of attainment. We must not only long to possess the treasure, we must sell ALL to buy it, give all of this life in exchange for it. Are we prepared to do this?

If one can say "I know what it is to struggle, to weep, to be crucified with Christ, to rejoice with him is selfless service, then the crown is near; we are attaining, claiming and possessing, slowly but surely, the perfection of our Father in Heaven. If on the other hand we are knowing little of the pain of striving, if we are not being daily impoverished in self esteem, then the crown of perfection is but a mirage, a phantom, a mental myth. Jesus, who walked this way to show us the path to God and the ultimate glory of holiness was a Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. The road of suffering was the way He took. The quest of perfection is a hazardous, costly quest. It calls for courage, zeal, determination, ardent devotion, generous love and simple faith. It does not need temporal wealth, learning or natural abilities, for the most humble and ignoble may set out to win the prize and gain it providing he will pay perfection's costly price.

The secret of perfection lies in the passionate ardour for God and Christ that leads to a full self surrender; a giving of all in a full unquestioning faith and trust into the hand of God. The worldly critic looking on has counted such ardent souls fools, and indeed they are fools for Christ's sake in giving up ambitions, friends, talents and treasures that they might obtain the pearl of great price. It is a glorious folly and a splendid unreasonableness that urges a consecrated heart to lay its all upon the altar of sacrifice and to suffer itself to be stripped of all selfwill that God may be glorified and the beauty of his Spirit may shine forth from the heart and life dedicated to do his will. It was the Holy Spirit of God abiding in Jesus that enabled him to manifest the perfection of God, for God gave not the Spirit by measure unto him. He gives to us according as we are able to receive, according to the measure of our faith. It is better to give him all at the beginning with happy generosity, accounting it as nothing, than to have him take it from us by many painful separations over many years of tardy spiritual growth. When we have reached this point his Spirit can fill our hearts and we can enjoy the sweetness of his presence, but his Spirit cannot dwell in any odd corner that we wish to

spare, side by side with selfwill. The cry of all who aspire to the Father's perfection should be—

*"Come and possess me whole, nor hence again remove,
Settle and fix my wavering soul with all thy weight of love.*

*My one desire be this, thy love to fully know
Nor seek I longer other, bliss, nor other good below.*

*My life, my portion thou, thou all sufficient art,
My hope, my heavenly treasure thou, enter and keep my heart."*

Our lives, our all, every moment is sanctified to him and "the daily round, the common task, can furnish all we need to ask. Room to deny ourselves, a road to bring us daily nearer God". Is it not worth all, to be nothing in this life that we might know the transcendent joy of being transformed by the power of God into radiant perfection, fitted for eternal life in heaven and companionship with God and Christ?

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

*"A thousand swords might cut you down
Fierce hunger may devour you
But nought shall rob you of your crown
And none shall overpower you.
Arise, No longer let the things of groping
sense confuse you
Race on ahead on time torn wings and let
God fully use you
What matter love of home or friend
The agony, the dying,
If in the end you've won your crown,
And at God's feet you're lying."*



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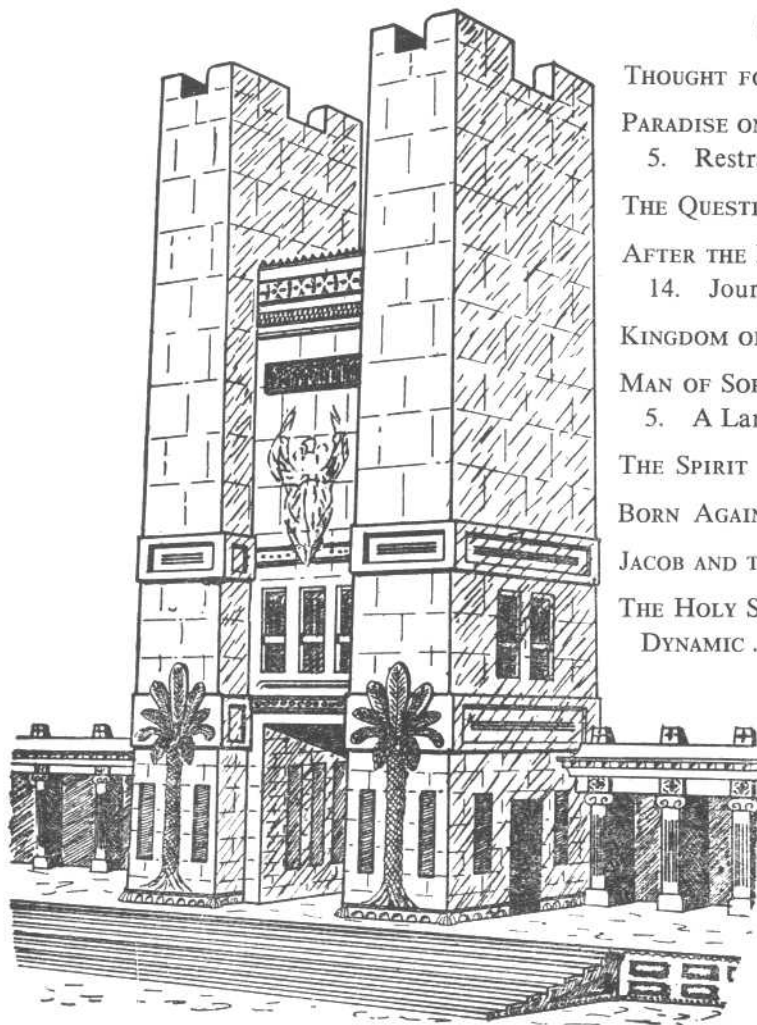
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Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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

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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

An old man has died in Japan, Shigechijo Izmi, aged 120, claimed to be the oldest man who has ever lived—so say the Press and the B.B.C. An example of modern cursory treatment of data without regard to available facts! Plenty of authenticated records exist of considerably longer age spans—in the Russian Caucasus at the present time, 140-160, the record being held by Shirali Muslimov who was 166 in 1967; in Vilcabanda, Equador, people still live to ages up to 142. In 15th-16th century England, up to 150, with a record of 177, on the basis of Church records and tombstones. Ludovic du Varthena in 1503 found people in Yemen Arabia exceeding 125. Pliny in the 1st century found ages up to 150 verified by successive censuses. Sir Arthur Keith, in "*Al Ubaid*", found that the Sumerians of 5000 years ago lived lives of "*fantastic length*". And, of course, Bible history—not that modern wisdom takes much notice of that.

Eliphaz the Temanite, in the immortal drama of Job, dismisses the wisecracks who think their knowledge is the only knowledge, and all that has gone before is irrelevant, with the scathing words "*were you born first of all mankind, or usurp wisdom to yourself alone?*". Add to this the burning sarcasm of Job, "*no doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you*". The greater the intellectual achievement of man the more his ignorance and rejection of the past

This is a failing of this present Age, and not confined to the wider world; it is also a failing of some in the Christian community. "*Other men laboured*" said Jesus "*and ye are entered into their labours*", but there is a marked tendency today to ignore and reject the labours of past Christian teaching in favour of shallow and ephemeral themes dreamed up by enthusiasts who know little and care less about the past. We should always remember that the Church is "*built upon the foundation of the holy apostles and prophets*," that what they had to say was based

upon the Word of God, "*which liveth and abideth for ever*". That Word preserves an accurate record of much that took place in the ancient world—for the first half of human history it is the only record, for outside its pages known history goes back only to two thousand years before Christ. That Word, and such other records as have survived, and such discoveries as historians and archæologists have made, tell us the men of olden time knew much more and achieved much more than modern man gives them credit for. We do well to look into the past before we proclaim confidently to the world that our knowledge is superior to all knowledge possessed by our predecessors.

NOTICES

Three interesting booklets

"*Samuel—Greatest of the Judges*". 40 pp. From boyhood to old age. His leadership of Israel.

"*The Tragedy of Samson*". 52 pp. His failure and success. His repentance at the last.

"*The Mission of Jonah*". 80 pp. His voyage, the whale, his success, with historical confirmation.

The set of three booklets, free for postage and packing. UK 48p (stamps accepted). U.S.A. Canada and Australia, one dollar.

Coming Convention

Southport, Orleans Christian Hotel, 7th—12th October. Full details and accommodation from Mr. N. Wood, 26 Duffy Place, Hillmorton, Rugby, CV21 4EF. Phone 0788 77074.

Gone from us

— ❁ —
Bro. S. H. Goodwin (*Salisbury, late London*)
Sis. F. Harvey (*Southampton*)
Sis. A. Holliday (*Guildford*)
Sis. F. Stinson (*Portrush*)

— ❁ —
"*Till the day break, and the shadows flee away.*"

PARADISE ON EARTH

Earth's coming glory

5. The Restraint of evil

Two very striking factors in human society which will become evident at the very beginning of the Millennium are the cessation of death and the restraint of evil. This second factor is one the import of which will only slowly begin to dawn upon men's minds. There will become manifest the fact that much of the old incitement to evil thinking and evil doing, much of the old urge to speak words and commit deeds which are demonstrably immoral and hurtful, that incitement which in the old world that has passed away was called "temptation to sin", has gone. The external influence upon the mind which formerly led the man into realms of thought and conduct which he knew to be wrong but nevertheless willingly accepted is no longer there, and the more thoughtful among men will begin to ask themselves "Why is this? What has happened?"

The answer to the question, using Scriptural language, is that "Satan has been restrained, that he should deceive the nations no more". The allusion is taken from one of the visions of the Book of Revelation (ch. 20), in which a mighty angel is said to descend from heaven at the dawn of the Millennium with a great chain in his hand, to lay hold upon Satan the Devil, to bind him with the chain and consign him to "the abyss" for the duration of that Age in order that he no longer exercise power over the nations, seducing them to sin. The interpretation of the picture is that our Lord Jesus Christ, the "mighty angel", at his Second Advent and assumption of kingly power over the earth, uses that power to restrain the Devil and destroy every vestige of his influence. The purpose, of course, is obvious. It is that men will no longer be handicapped in their endeavours to learn and practice right ways by the seductions and deceptions of the Evil One. No one who in this present time knows the power of evil suggestions coming in from outside will be other than immensely encouraged by the thought that in that Age such power will be there no longer.

It is true that the literal existence of an evil spiritual being, arch-enemy of God and man, is increasingly called in question nowadays, it being considered more rational to view Biblical references to Satan as alluding to the abstract principle of evil. To be tempted by the Devil, some think, is simply the natural human propensity to sin; to overcome the Devil, the suppression of that propensity. This suits the temper of a society which tends more and more to reject the super-

natural and explain all things from the standpoint of human reasoning, but it does ignore the fact that most Bible references to Satan can only be read as denoting an intelligent super-human creature whose nature is subordinated to evil and who is in a state of continuing rebellion against God. Moral responsibility cannot be attributed to an abstract principle of evil, only to an intelligent creature capable of both moral and immoral conduct. It is important to realise that evil was not inherent in man's nature at the beginning; it was not even indwelling. The old mediæval dogma that the flesh is basically corrupt and unclean is not true. When God introduced the first intelligent creatures upon earth he looked upon what he had made and pronounced it "very good". Man was perfect and sinless, capable of everlasting life whilst he so remained. The Eden story shows that sin was introduced from outside at the instance of an exterior agent in whom sin already resided. The kind of condemnation God passed upon that agent can only be understood logically if passed upon an intelligent being.

This "binding of Satan", to use the expression in the 20th chapter of Revelation, presupposes that he has possessed and exercised the power to deceive man and instil evil thoughts and influences into their minds during human history. This supposition is confirmed by our Lord's reference to him as the "prince of this world" and Paul's "the god of this world" (Jno. 14.30; 2 Cor. 4.4). It is this power and freedom which will be taken from Satan throughout the Millennium. His personal freedom of movement, so to speak, may not be limited any more than will be the personal freedom of evilly disposed men on earth during that Age, but he will be powerless to reach men's minds in any way.

One may begin to wonder at this point just what is the attitude of Satan himself to all this. How does he regard this well-publicised foreview of his approaching restraint? After a very successful career of crime, what preparations, if any, is he likely to make to resist this threat to the continuance of his activities? The fact that the powers of evil have greater control and scope than they have ever had, except, perhaps, in the days before the Flood, may be held to indicate that he is more active than ever before. Many of the devices and acts of some men to-day are characterised by a cold-blooded ferocity and disregard for human suffering which can be said quite literally to be Devil-inspired. The condition

of human society in these closing days of the Age are evidences that the archangel of evil is still the "god of this world" and that his subjects still render him service. Does this mean that he expects that he can yet outwit God, though all the powers of Heaven be arrayed against him?

It may be so. It may be that Satan, a fallen being, separated from God by millenniums of sin, does not really believe that the threatened fate will materialise. The position is much the same with many among mankind. Men today, in general, do not really believe in God. They have lost the knowledge of him, and with that any vital belief in his power or his interest in them. "If there is a God, he either does not care, or has no power to put right things that are wrong." That expresses the judgment of the natural man who has been separated from God by sin. Yet in the beginning men knew God, walked with God, talked with God. That is clear from the Genesis story. The same principle holds good in the case of Satan. Would it be surprising, therefore, if Satan, blinded by his own sin, considers that after all this time God is unable to accomplish his designs, and that sin can continue indefinitely on its apparently successful course.

If this hypothesis be well-founded, the great enemy of man will continue with his plans, waging war against all that is holy and true and lovely upon earth, unbelieving until the hour has struck. In the heyday of his dominion, attendant angels carrying out his dark orders, the cry of his suffering prisoners going up to heaven, his power will vanish as one snaps off the electric light. Suddenly, he will find himself bereft of power, of influence, of an empire—alone! Too late, he will realise that the omnipotence of God has waited for this moment, and that his long course of rebellion against his Creator, with all its terrible consequences for mankind, has ended.

This, which takes place at the very beginning of the Millennium, the moment when Christ commences his reign over the earth and calls the living nations to yield him their allegiance, does not of itself abolish all evil. There is still in men's hearts much that has to be cleansed away; that will be done under the Messianic reign. But this "binding of Satan" will be a major factor in the restraint of evil. This, more than anything else, will result in that awareness among men that something has happened which creates an entirely new attitude to wrong-doing and injustice and sin. The minds of men will no longer be assailed by inducements to wrong-doing and to that extent they will be the more susceptible and responsive to inducements to right-doing.

It is worth while to pause for a moment to consider this effect on the minds and the hearts

of men at this time. The fact that a great deal of the injustice and cruelty and barbarity inflicted upon men by men is due to the direct instigation of Satan is not always realised, nor yet that the complete removal of his influence over men will of itself effect a drastic change in men's thinking and actions in this respect. This realisation was clouded in older times by the doctrine that men were inherently sinful and that in their flesh dwelt no good thing; in modern times that belief has been replaced by the pseudo-scientific assertion that crime and evil-doing generally is not a vice but a disease, one that could be cured by some medical treatment if such treatment could be discovered. It has to be admitted that when one looks on the world today the fact is evident that the necessary treatment has not been discovered. Both theorems are fallacious; man was not created sinful and sin is not a disease. A great part of the evil in the world today is directly due to the influence of the Devil over the minds of men and this fact is abundantly supported by Scripture.

Perhaps the classical instance is that afforded by the words of Jesus. In the well-known parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. 13), in which the Son of Man is the one who sowed the good seed which eventually produced the good harvest, "his enemy came and sowed tares (darnel, a pernicious weed) and went his way". Eventually the tares had to be rooted up and burned. Here is seen the active intrusion of a malignant intelligence attempting to disrupt the work of Christ. In another word-picture, that of the Sower (Mark 4), Jesus spoke of the good seed being sown in the hearts of men, and "Satan cometh immediately and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts". It does seem, too, that there is a more intense sense in which Satan can enter into and take possession of the heart of a man who is willing, and so can use him for evil. At the time of the Last Supper it is related of Judas the betrayer that after having received the piece of bread from the hand of Jesus, "Satan entered into him" (Jno. 13.27); this follows the plain statement that "The Devil put into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray him" (Jno. 13.2). Similarly Jesus said to Peter by way of warning "Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat" (Luke 27.31). Maybe something of this stirred Peter's memory when at a later date he taxed the guilty Ananias with the solemn accusation "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" (Acts 3.3). In all these cases it is evident that the great Enemy can and does infiltrate the human heart for evil.

There will then, in these dawning years of the

Millennium, when the living nations carried over from the old world are becoming accustomed to the new order of things, be a tremendous feeling of relief that the inducements to evil so powerful in that old world have passed away. Men will still have enemies in their own hearts, enemies to right doing born of the degradation of their own characters while in this life, the faults and failings they have developed and nurtured in bygone years, but they will become conscious that there is no outside force trading upon those faults forcing them to greater depths. Instead, they will be conscious of a new, a beneficent influence, helping them to overcome those same faults and leading them to new heights of which formerly they had no conception. The prophet Isaiah (35) speaks of a "Highway of Holiness" along which the ransomed of the Lord will travel toward the Holy City, "with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away". It is in this spirit and with this incentive that men will apply themselves assiduously to the rehabilitation and renovation of the earth, restoring the waste places and rebuilding the desolate heritages, as Isaiah again puts it, that it might be the fitting home for ever-living man that God has intended from the first.

Of course evil will not be completely eliminated at once. The effects of a lifetime cannot be eradicated in a moment of time. Repentance, conversion, submission to Christ and finally dedication of life to him is a process and there are steps in that process which must needs be taken in sequence. Habits die hard, and even though Satanic influence and temptation is restrained what is sometimes called "the old Adam" will be sure to break out now and again even though the individual is beginning to make progress away from such things to a better relation with his fellows. Scripture says of that time "Nothing shall hurt nor destroy" (Isa. 63.25) but how is that going to work out in the beginning of the blessed day? How prevent a man taking hasty action, action which he may sincerely regret the moment after, but which nevertheless could have a hurtful effect upon another?

One of the characteristic features of the Bible is the manner in which questions relating to the operation of Divine power in the earth are sometimes answered, not by direct explanation, but by the recapitulation of historic incidents which illustrate the principles involved. Consideration

of the relevant incident yields the answer. This is a case in point and it takes us back to the days of Jeroboam the first king of the Ten-Tribe nation of Israel after the death of Solomon (I Kin. 13). Jeroboam had set up an idol altar for his people and was setting the example by ministering before it himself. To him came a prophet of the Lord who pronounced Divine judgment upon the apostate. Enraged, the king stretched out his arm toward the prophet and commanded his men to apprehend him . . . the arm remained immovable, rigid as a rock, and the frightened king besought the prophet that he might be released and receive back the use of his arm.

What God has done once He can do again. It is quite on the cards that violence and wrongdoing toward others in that day will be non-existent purely by the expedient of rendering the would-be aggressor powerless in the moment of the effort. It should not be long, in such circumstances, for the most violently inclined of violent men to "get the message".

All this means that perhaps by the end of that possibly half a century during which the nations carried over from this present Age are getting used to the new order of things, there will be such a reaction in favour of right living and such a visible diminution of the power of evil in the world that the earth will already have become a much better place in which to live. Nature will have clothed the barren places, the deserts will be blossoming, the slums of the cities will have disappeared and men be living in healthier surroundings. Above all, the Christian gospel will be increasingly proclaimed with power. It will not only be the adherents of non-Christian faiths whose distorted ideas of God will be progressively brought into line with a true knowledge of God and the saving power which is in Christ; much of the so-called Christian world has almost as much a distorted idea of God and his ways, in other directions. The time will have come for the fulfilment of the Apostle's words "God will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth".

With Satan bound, the practice of evil restrained, the earth beginning to yield its increase, and men increasingly turning to listen to the Voice that speaketh from heaven, the stage is fully set for that great event which of all events in the Millennium is the most spectacular, the return of the dead.

To be continued

We sometimes think we could bear another's cross more easily than our own but we cannot change crosses with our brethren.

The individual who tries to live without God—and the majority, unhappily, are like that to-day—is less than human.

THE QUESTION BOX

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

A. In plain English, heavenly and earthly. "Celestial" comes from the Latin "caelestis", meaning heavenly, and "terrestrial" from the Latin "terra", the earth. It would seem that the translators of the Authorised Version used Latin words as rather more appropriate to the loftiness of the Apostle's theme. In Greek the words are *epourania* (belonging to the heavens) and *epigeia* (belonging to the earth), so that in "celestial" and "terrestrial" we really have very correct Latin translations of the Greek. With our own understanding of the distinction between human and spiritual natures it may be that these words are more descriptive than the every-day "heavenly" and "earthly". To speak of a heavenly being may easily call to mind the picture of a glorified man descending from the skies, somewhat along the lines of the old idea that the spiritual body is merely a glorified physical body. The terms "celestial being" and "terrestrial being" may better fit the fact that there are two separate and distinct planes of being, each having its own characteristic inhabitants, fitted and adapted to their own environment and ordained by God to be for ever the glory of those environments—angels, "celestial beings" in heaven, and men, "terrestrial beings" on earth. But in reading the passage, we are certainly literally correct if we use the every-day English words, and read: "There are also heavenly bodies, and bodies of earth; but the glory of the heavenlies is one, and the glory of the earthlies is another".

* * *

Q. *What is the meaning behind Jesus' words to Mary Magdalene "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father" (John 20. 17)?*

A. The understanding of some concerning our Lord's resurrection body has given rise to a somewhat superstitious view that He could not or should not be physically touched, hence this word which, they think, was in the nature of a prohibition. Now we know that our Lord, who was raised from the dead in the glory of his

Divine spiritual Being must needs assume a body of flesh for the purpose of appearing to and conversing with his disciples, and on this occasion He appeared to Mary in the guise of a gardener. Directly Mary realised that it was indeed the Lord, and loving him as she did, her first impulse would certainly be to embrace and cling to him in happiness, as though she would never let him go. Nothing less could be expected from this warm-hearted, devoted woman after the events of the previous few days. The verb rendered "touch" is Greek "*hupto*", which means to cling closely and tenaciously, especially of two persons embracing each other. The scene should be easy to reconstruct—Mary in an ecstasy of happiness holding close to her Lord, so wonderfully restored from the dead, and Jesus saying gently to her, "Do not be clinging to Me now, for I have not yet ascended to My Father, but go and tell My disciples..." etc. He was not going away just yet; Mary would see him again, but now He wanted her to haste away and tell the others the glorious news.

* * *

Q. *At the Council of Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15 there was "much disputing", Had the apostles and elders so soon fallen from the high ideals of John 17?*

A. By no means. The usage of the word "dispute" has changed during the four hundred years since the A.V. was prepared. We associate the term to-day with wrangling and acrimony. The Greek word "*suzeteo*" used in Acts 15 has no such significance. It implies a mutual or co-operative seeking or discussion together. Our own word "discussion" would be a good equivalent. The same word is used in Acts 28. 29, where the Roman Jews, after hearing Paul's witness, departed and "had great reasoning among themselves". The Council where "the apostles and elders came together for to consider this matter" was evidently an assembly of grave and sober men who discussed the problem before them in the spirit of Christ and under the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit—and their decision, as shown by history, was blessed accordingly. Would that in all our own discussions on debatable matters we could manifest the same disposition!

AFTER THE FLOOD

14. Journey to Haran

And now the time had come for a great step to be taken in the active development of the Divine Plan for human salvation. This world of sorrow and death was already nearly half-way through its long history; it was time for the downward trend to be reversed and man to be shown the way upward. As a means of pointing that way God purposed first to develop a people, a nation, that would exemplify his standards and be his witness to all the world. That nation must needs have a progenitor, one man who would be a worthy ancestor of such a people, one who could become known in after times as the "father of the faithful", celebrated for his sterling faith and inflexible loyalty to the Most High God, in the midst of a world given over to idolatry. So the Lord looked down upon the earth, and he found his man.

Abu-Ramu (Abram), youngest son of Tarakhu (Terah) was of Semitic stock in lineal descent from Shem, son of Noah. Married to his eldest brother's daughter Sarai (a common thing in those days and in that culture), ten years younger than himself, he was a citizen of the Sumerian city of Ur at the then head of the Persian Gulf. His vocation in life is unknown, but since Ur was a thriving seaport and industrial centre he is almost certain to have been in industry or commerce. Born and brought up in the world's most advanced civilisation, he would have been well educated and probably reasonably wealthy. From the everyday point of view there would seem to be no reason why he should not expect to continue through life in the manner of his fellows and eventually die, respected by all who knew him, in the fulness of days, which at that time was in the region of two centuries. But God had other plans.

Abram worshipped and served the true God, probably one of very few in Ur of the Chaldees who did so. According to Jewish tradition his father was an idolator, carrying on a profitable business in the manufacture of idols and images of the gods—with sixty-one major gods and a vast number of minor deities his business could not have lacked variety and most certainly would have been brisk. How Abram came to separate himself from the worship of the land and yield his allegiance to the One God is also not known—some streak of intelligent piety transmitted from earlier ancestors of four or five generations back who never had wavered in their own loyalty might well have risen to the surface in his case.

The Talmud has a legend—probably purely imaginery—of the manner in which he first came to God. *"When quite a child, beholding the brilliant splendour of the noonday sun and the reflected glory which it cast upon all objects around, he said 'Surely this brilliant light must be a god; to him will I render worship'. And he worshipped the sun and prayed to it. But as the day lengthened the sun's brightness faded, the radiance which it cast upon the earth was lost in the lowering clouds of night; as the twilight deepened the youth ceased his supplications saying 'No, this cannot be a god. Where then can I find the Creator, He who made the heavens and the earth?' He looked towards the west, the south, the north and the east. The sun had disappeared from view, nature became enveloped in the pall of a past day. The moon rose, and when Abram saw it shining in the heavens surrounded by its myriads of stars, he said 'Perhaps these are the gods who have created all things' and he uttered prayer to them. But the morning dawned, the stars paled, the moon faded into silvery whiteness and was lost in the returning glory of the sun. Then Abram knew God, and said 'There is a higher Power, a Supreme Being; these luminaries are but his servants, the work of his hands'. From that day, even until the day of his death, Abram knew the Lord and walked in his ways."*

It was very likely not at all like this. Without any doubt he had access to—probably possessed—written records dating from five centuries earlier, stories of the days when men knew only one God and worshipped him alone, stories not only of Eden and the Flood and the Tower of Babel more or less as we have them now in the Book of Genesis, but other stories of ancient times which have not survived and are unknown to us. Relics of these other stories passed into the legends of Israel and reappear in apocryphal books such as the Book of Enoch and the Book of Jubilees. The days of Abram were days of intense literary activity and every Sumerian city had its library to which its citizens could repair and consult the writings of past times. The student could, if he wished, take the tablet of his choice from the shelf, impress its number and his personal seal on a clay tablet to acknowledge receipt, leaving that with the librarian to ensure the tablet's return, and take his selection home to read at leisure precisely as do readers in a public library today; for there is nothing new under the sun. The likelihood is that Abram, of studious mind, had read

those ancient stories and looked behind the idolatry of his father and grandfather and great-grandfather, and took as his heroes his forebears of earlier time such as Peleg and Eber and Salah, men who served and revered the Most High God in the days before idolatry came into the world. He might well have been fully aware of the promise that was made right at the beginning, that the Seed of a woman would one day undo the work of the serpent, and wondered in a vague sort of way how that would come about, and who was the man by whom it would be fulfilled. He might not have been altogether surprised when, one day, in the quietness of his room, alone in communion with God, he became conscious of a Voice, a Voice impressing itself upon his mind even although he could not be sure it was sounding in his ears.

"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee; and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great . . . and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed".

Long and earnestly must Abram have pondered that Call. Where would the Lord send him? In what other land would he be able to serve the Lord better than in Ur? They were all equally idolatrous lands, all serving the Sumerian gods. Would it be Dilmun, halfway down the coast of the Gulf, or Magan, at its exit to the Indian Ocean, or far-away Melukha where Pakistan is now? Or would it be northward to Mari, the land of his own ancestors the Semites, sons of Shem, or to Aram, where stood Harran the other city of the Moon-God, a kind of twin-city to Ur? There was no clue, no intimation, no revelation; only the realisation that God was calling him, Abram the Hebrew, to play a part, a great part, in the outworking of his Plan of Salvation. Perhaps it was at this point that Abram realised idolatry would not subsist for ever, that one day God would restore the ancient Golden Age of which the old stories had spoken, and all men worship God in spirit and in truth. Much later on Jesus was to say to his contemporaries *"your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad"*. The more that Abram thought about it, the more he must have realised that this was a turning-point in his life. God had spoken to him; God had called him; God wanted him for an, as yet, unrevealed purpose, a purpose which would culminate in the blessing of all families of the earth. What should he say? What could he do? There was no other possible reply!

"Here am I Lord. Send me".

And so Abram left Ur of the Chaldees to fol-

low the Lord's leading, not knowing whither he went.

* * * *

Abram did not go alone. His wife Sarai accompanied him, and his nephew Lot, and his father, Terah. In fact the implication of the narrative is that it was Terah who took the initiative. *"And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot, the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his grand-daughter, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees to go into the land of Canaan, and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there"* (Gen. 11.31). One might ask why Terah, the idolator, already probably well and comfortably settled in Ur, should be inclined to join his son Abram in what must have seemed to him a particularly foolhardy enterprise. The answer probably lies in the political situation of the times. The independence of Ur was being seriously threatened by the power of Elam in the east and Babylon in the north. Terah's father had known Ur at the peak of its power and magnificence at the time of the famous Third Dynasty, but other powerful states had been rising during Terah's lifetime to challenge the power of Ur. Isin, Larsa, Eshnunna and particularly Elam and Babylon, became serious threats. It is very possible that Terah saw the "writing on the wall" and decided to get out while the going was good. In such case Harran in the north, well away from the conflicts of the Euphrates valley, was the obvious choice. A city very much like Ur, where he could still carry on his business manufacturing idols, a mixed Sumerian-Semite population much like that of Ur, and what Abram did with himself after they got there could be left in the laps of the gods. So Terah decided to go to Harran with Abram and Sarai. Nahor, his other son, stayed behind in Ur—although he did follow later on.

Terah's instinct was right. Almost immediately Ur passed under the domination of Elam, and then a little later, together with Elam and the other city-states, under that of Babylon. The migrants got out just in time.

So it came about one day, as dawn was breaking over the cornfields surrounding the city and the sunlight glinted on the blue waters of the Euphrates, the north gate opened to allow the egress of the usual caravan of merchants and traders setting out on their customary thousand miles journey to the northern lands and eventually to the Phoenician cities on the Mediterranean sea-coast, a journey which would take them many months. Among them were travellers, men whose business took them to other cities of the empire, government officials on various political missions, migrants seeking their fortunes in far-

away places. There could have been a hundred or more men and women in that company, with camels, asses, mules and lumbering four-wheeled wagons, all loaded with merchandise and food for the journey. Progress was slow; about fifteen miles or less a day and an encampment for the night. With them went Terah and his family, with all their worldly possessions, setting out to find a new home in a strange land, for them a journey that would take seven or eight weeks to accomplish.

Three days travel brought the convoy to Uruk, the "Erech" of Gen. 10. 10, one of the cities with which the name of Nimrod was associated, now a powerful city-state like Ur. Three more days and the travellers reached Shuruppak, renowned in the legends of Abram's day as the home of the hero of the Flood and the place where he built the Ark. Abram, in his day, so much closer to the event, may have known much more about that matter than we can hope to know today. He might well have reflected, as the caravan left Shuruppak to continue its journey north, that just as Noah was delivered from a corrupt old world to initiate a new era in a cleansed earth where God could again be worshipped in spirit and in truth, so now he was being delivered from the corruption of an idolatrous land to initiate a new era in the development of the Divine Plan in a land which God would show him, and because God was to lead him to the land He had prepared, it must once again be a land in which God would be worshipped in spirit and in truth. So passed another five days journeying until Abram lifted up his eyes and beheld in the distance the high walls of the greatest city in the land—Babylon.

That must have brought his mind back to the present with a jolt. Even though he was to be led to a land where he and his could worship and serve God without the discordant voices of idolatry around him, paganism and corruption would still be present in the world. Here, in this city Babylon, resided its source and its strength. This, whose first name in the days of its founding was the "Gate of God" was now known as the "Gate of the gods". Marduk, the deified Nimrod, the Sun-god, was the patron deity of this city where once the Most High, the God of heaven, was the sole object of worship. As the caravan passed into the city through the Gate of the Air-god and came to rest in the broad spaces of *Gan ba*, the great market where all the traders were assembled awaiting their coming, Abram could have turned his gaze to the west and there beheld, rising to a vast height above the houses, that great tower which men had built in olden

time, when God came down and scattered them abroad upon the face of the earth. He saw it now, rising stage upon stage, seven stages in all, and at its top, scintillating in the afternoon sun, the ornate temple of Marduk, the god of Babylon, looking eastward directly to the sacred mountain, the "Mount of the East" a hundred and fifty miles away, where once their ancestors had emerged from the Ark which preserved them in the time of the great Flood. Perhaps Abram took heart at that recollection, and realised that what God had done once He could surely do again. In a day yet to come God would cleanse the world of its evil, cleanse it so thoroughly that evil would never rise again.

So, a couple of days later, he and his passed out of Babylon through the Gate of the Moon-god in the northern walls, still heading north. What lay before him he knew not, only that God would be there waiting when he arrived.

Now, for something like a fortnight, the migrants traversed that territory which was the glory of ancient Sumer, the great wheat belt. A flat, treeless plain, watered by innumerable canals and irrigation channels, the river Euphrates meandering through its centre, vast areas of wheat and barley gleaming golden in the sunshine, orchards of figs and olives and peaches and apricots, fields of vegetables, a vast store of foodstuffs which made Sumer the granary of the ancient world. Here, in the area between the Euphrates and the Tigris, their surveyors had discovered and mapped out an extensive natural depression in the land, a huge valley nearly a hundred miles long by thirty-five wide, and had turned it into a vast reservoir, into which by means of an intricate system of canals, weirs, sluice-gates and locks, the winter flood-waters of both rivers could be diverted and stored until the summer, and then released and sent to whatever part of the land needed water. By this means and with the aid of the everlasting sunshine they could produce three crops of grain each year. Abram might well have wondered, as the caravan traversed its leisurely way through the smiling cornfields and the shady orchards, crossing and recrossing the winding river from time to time, what country could possibly be more desirable than this pleasant land, what more suitable place it could be to which the Lord was leading him; and then would come the old realisation that this was after all but a "fair show in the flesh" and that in reality the heart of this people was waxed gross and the sooner he was away from them and in the place where the Lord wanted him to be the better. So he took fresh heart of courage and pressed forward.

Now they were leaving the land of Sumer behind. Before the caravan, as it still wended its way northward, rose the foothills of the mountains of Syria—Aram as it was then called. Here dwelt racial kinsmen of Abram, Semites like himself, descendants of Shem's sons Aram and Arphaxed, but worshippers still of the idol gods of Sumer. Mari, they called their land, and Mari their capital city. The fact that such a people had ever existed was quite unknown until this present century; only now has their city, its palaces and buildings, its inscriptions and writings, been unearthed and deciphered. Under its enterprising kings of the period, Yasmah Adad and Zimri-Lim, Mari had become an important trading centre, and the caravan must have halted here for a few days at least whilst business was transacted, sufficient time for Abram to make some contact with men whom he must have recognised as his own kith and kin. Was it to be here, among the sons of Shem the God-fearing patriarch, that the Lord intended to place him in order to fulfil the promise? After all, the true faith and the records of that faith had been preserved in the line of Shem since the days of that patriarch twelve hundred years earlier. It was perhaps with intense interest that Abram explored the stately buildings and the magnificent temples and royal palace of the city of Mari, wondering if this was indeed the place.

It was not to be. No sign came, no word from the Lord impressed itself on his mind. He was to continue still, *"not knowing whither he went, seeking a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* (Heb. 11. 8-10). Before long the cortege was on its way again, climbing now into the mountains, still following the course of the Euphrates, now no longer a placid meandering river, but a tumultuous stream rushing through defiles and splashing over rocks. And now the way was headed north-westward, well on the way to the sea-coast.

This was the most arduous part of the journey. Day after day, seemingly without end, they climbed a constantly ascending trackway running alongside the river as it foamed and sluiced its way in its channel. On either side rose the mountains; the only way was forward, ascending the narrow valley. The distance traversed each day became less, the halts became longer. The traders and merchants were used to this; they had traversed this way many times before. To Terah and his family it must have been a time of sore trial. As they encountered each little ravine in the mountains, carrying a tributary stream to the river, they had to scramble down the track, ford the stream and climb painfully up again the other side; this repeated itself time and time again with

no alternative way to go. Did Abram think then of his old comfortable home and life in Ur of the Chaldees, and wonder if it was all going to be worth it, and wish he was back again in Ur?

Until, one day, two months or so after leaving Ur they rounded a spur of the mountains and espied before them, in the distance, lying along the hillside at the head of a wide plain, the walls and buildings, towers and pinnacles and temples and palaces, of a city, a magnificent city built in the shape of a vast crescent moon. The afternoon sun glinted on its white buildings and golden pinnacles resplendent in their proud beauty, and the spectators caught their breath as they gazed upon its loveliness.

"What city is that?" asked Terah of one of the muleteers.

The man looked across the valley with a gaze which had in it something of reverence.

"That is Harran, the city of the Moon-god" he said at last, "we lodge there tonight".

"Harran!" repeated Terah. "Twin-city to Ur, sacred, like Ur, to Nannar the Moon-god". He turned to Abram. "This is our destination, my son. Here shall we settle and live on our lives far from the tumult of Sumer?"

Silently, Abram went on his way beside his father. He knew before leaving Ur that this was his father's goal. He knew also that Harran was just as idolatrous a city as Ur and that in no way could he expect this to be the land the Lord would show him. But for the present he was content to go with his father and await an indication from the Lord as to his next step. He did not know where the promised land was but he knew that the Lord would guide him there in his own due time. For the present he would wait.

"And they came unto Haran, and dwelt there" (Gen. 11.31).

The length of the sojourn in Harran is not stated in Genesis, but by comparison of the few relevant facts which are given, coupled with the implications of Gen. 22. 20-24, it would seem to have been about twenty years, long enough for Abram to engage in some kind of business and get a household of his own together.

"And Terah died in Haran" (Gen. 11.32).

* * *

With the death of Terah the post-Flood era which began with Shem at the exit from the Ark came to an end. It began, as did the world before the Flood, with one man and his immediate descendants loyal to God and serving him in sincerity. It ended, as did that world, with the sons of men forsaking the true God and descending into all kinds of idolatry and iniquity. Now, once again, God was to make a new start with one man, Abraham. Once again the torch of

Truth was to be held aloft to enlighten the world. The story of Abram who was renamed Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, and the nation of Israel, is that story. It led eventually to One who became the True Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. **THE END.**

So much of this treatise has been based upon the present state of knowledge concerning the history of those ancient lands—much of it result-

ing from discoveries and conclusions of the past twenty years, discoveries which have invalidated much of what was previously believed and published in this field. Research and discovery still goes on; it is inevitable that future years will modify some of the presentations herein made and present an even more accurate picture of that fascinating but still obscure period of Bible history between Noah and Abraham.

KINGDOM OF HEAVEN—WHEN?

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3. 1-2).

The expression "kingdom of heaven" is a familiar one in the New Testament and it is understandable that several views as to its precise meaning exist. To the Jews at Christ's First Advent it definitely meant the kingship of Messiah upon earth, the period when He would reign on David's throne and exalt Israel to the headship of the nations. The phrase really defines the royal power which is from heaven or comes from the heavens and can quite reasonably be applied to the whole of the Divine sphere of rulership and thus can cover, not only regenerated humanity at the climax of the Divine plan so far as it relates to man, but whatever there may eventually be of intelligent life in any part or aspect of Divine creation. All must be part of the Divine empire and it would be rather short-sighted on our part to conclude that God the infinite Creator will only manifest his creative power in human life here upon earth. But from the point of view of the New Testament the Kingdom of Heaven can only refer to the operation of that Kingdom so far as man is concerned; the mission of John the Baptist, and later, of Jesus of Nazareth, was to mankind and mankind alone.

In this sense the Kingdom of Heaven commenced its sovereignty among mankind at Pentecost, and continues extending its sway until "all that hath breath shall praise the Lord" at the end of the Millennium. But the development of the Kingdom in history is in two phases; one, the formation and completion of the Church, which occupies the present "Gospel" Age, and two, the calling and reconciliation of mankind in general to God, a work which is to have its greatest scope and reach its climax in the still future "Millennial" Age.

There is a tendency to separate the work of these two Ages into virtually watertight compartments and speak as if there is no sense in which

the Kingdom is in operation until the Second Advent of Christ, when the visible Kingdom amongst men on earth is established. St. Paul plainly tells us (Col. 1. 13) that God has (already) translated us into the Kingdom of his Son. This means an actual and factual transfer from the kingdom of darkness, and is a present fact in the experience of every consecrated Christian who has "come into" Christ. The lawyer who "answered discreetly", was "not far" from the Kingdom of God (Mark 12. 34) which means that in his perception of Jesus' message he was almost at the point of entry. To-day, two thousand years later, only the smallest fraction of earth's millions have so much as heard of the Kingdom of Heaven, much less had opportunity to enter in. The key to this apparent paradox is found in St. Paul's words to the Athenians, recorded in Acts 17. Prior to Pentecost, God had not moved actively for the world's redemption, but on and after that historic scene in the upper room in Jerusalem, He "commandeth all men everywhere to repent". From that time and forward, throughout all the Gospel Age and all the Millennial Age, the call to repentance has been going out and will go out. And there is a corollary to the call; "because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17. 31). Men are called to repent because there is to be a final judgment before this three-thousand year day of repentance and conversion is ended, and the sooner any man who at present is unreconciled to God comes into the state of reconciliation with him the better it is for that man.

Nevertheless it must not be assumed that Jesus and the Apostles had no other idea in mind, when they talked about the "gospel of the Kingdom", than this process of coming "into Christ" which is peculiar to this Age and concludes with its termination. Jesus came as the promised Messiah, and a Messiah without a Messianic Kingdom, an earthly dominion of righteousness, is unthinkable. *That* was the only kind of king-

dom the Jews of the First Advent knew of or anticipated, and when John, and Jesus, announced that the Kingdom was at hand *that* was the kind of kingdom they expected. Nor were they mistaken; it was after Pentecost that those who profited most by Jesus' message realised there was a spiritual counterpart to the earthly Kingdom of their dreams, and the spiritual counterpart must be developed first, and hence the earthly Kingdom was still some distance away in the future. The preaching of Jesus was intended to combine the hope of both aspects of the kingdom; He knew, none better, that only a few of those who listened would embrace the spiritual call; the many would come along later in response to the earthly call. Nevertheless it was one command and one invitation, on one basis, and that remains unchanged until the end of the Millennium. *"Repent, and be converted; believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."* What God does with the repentant and converted one depends on what in his wisdom He sees He can do with him; it depends on whether the man comes to God in this Age or the next; whether he is of the clay that can be shaped and fired into a vessel of greater honour or lesser honour (2 Tim. 2. 19-21) and so on.

There is a fallacy in the view propounded by St. Augustine fifteen hundred years ago in his endeavour to refute the doctrine of the Millennium, viz., that the Kingdom of God is here now

in power, and that the conversion of the nations now proceeding is the evidence of this. The Kingdom of God is not here in power; the reign of Christ over the nations has not begun; the Church has not yet received any kind of power over the world. But the Kingdom is here, and has been since Pentecost, as an acknowledgment of God's supremacy in the hearts of believers. *"The Kingdom of God is within you"* said Jesus to some who challenged the fact of its presence (Luke 17. 21). It is not yet here in outward manifestation.

Jesus and his Apostles had all these aspects of the Kingdom in mind as they taught and wrote. There are approximately 124 occurrences of the expression "Kingdom of Heaven" or "Kingdom of God" in the New Testament. A reasonable analysis of these occurrences shows them distributed thus:—

Twenty-six refer to the spiritual kingdom in men's hearts now.

Forty-two refer to the celestial destiny of the Church, beyond the Vail, after the Second Advent.

Twenty-five refer to the visible kingdom to be set up on earth during the Millennium.

Thirty-one are indeterminate and could not dogmatically be placed in any one of the above categories; in a good many cases these examples refer to the entire conception of the Kingdom embracing all three aspects.

Thoughts of the Heart

"As a man thinketh in his heart so is he".
(Prov. 23.7).

*"O for a heart to praise my God
From imperfection free
A heart conformed unto thy word
And pleasing, Lord, to thee."*

Christ referred more than once to the inner moral and spiritual state of man. It is a fundamental teaching of his that the outward appearance of a man is nothing to go by, for the real person is the one inside. "Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh". This is a sure test. Only so long can people pretend to be what they are not. They can be polite, suave, insincere, hypocritical, saying one thing and thinking something else, but not for long. A very small incident can upset the careful pose, revealing the true current of thought, the real nature behind the facial mask. Jesus was never deceived. He not only knew what was going on in the minds of men, He revealed them to themselves, either as men without guile, as women of great faith, or as foolish, or blind, or slow or lazy or patronising or downright hypocrites; wearing all the outward show of respectability and religious devotion,

without their sterling qualities. "Men do not gather figs off thistles". This obvious inability of Nature to produce fruit from the fruitless was a simple but telling picture of the outward polish of sophistication which produces nothing to feed the hungry. Tares may parade as wheat but they produce no bread, neither do thorns produce wine to make glad the heart of man. Stony ground cannot support the corn which gives bread nor will the shallow ground produce that abundance which rejoices the reaper. *"By their fruits ye shall know them"*. The beautiful quality of a noble, well-balanced character, fed and ripened on those elements of experience, watered by faith and sunned in the delight of the Word of the Lord, is the fruit which the great Husbandman seeks and waits for with patience. It is easily recognisable by man. To God it is a certainty.

The image which is projected by the aids of secular education, the tailor, the hair dresser and the beautician, may get by on occasions but it is only the facade of the true person. The Spirit of God looks behind the facade to the heart, probing its every motive. That is wise counsel which says, *"Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."*

MAN OF SORROWS

5. A lamb to the slaughter

*A study in
Isaiah 53*

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." (vs. 7).

In all his sufferings there was never a word of complaint that passed the Saviour's lips. That is the thought behind this declaration that although he was oppressed and afflicted he "opened not his mouth". Jesus said so often and emphatically that He had come to do the will of his Father, and in the carrying out of that will He found no cause for remonstrance or unwillingness with the Father, no shadow of impatience or reluctance, no whisper of complaint or question. His meat was to do the will of the One who had sent him, and to finish his work. Nothing else mattered. That is a lesson we do well to take to ourselves. All too often we accept with gladness and thanksgiving the sunshine and flowers of the Christian way but directly the shadow of adversity falls athwart our pathway we commence to grumble and complain. We do need so to prepare ourselves in the sunny days that if in his providence darker and stormier times are to come upon us we take those seasons of adversity in just the same thankful and loyal spirit in which we formerly received the good things. It is not often—in our own country at any rate—that oppression and affliction comes upon the child of God in consequence of his faith; not real, intense oppression and affliction, anyway. We have not been called upon to suffer for his sake as some of our forbears were called upon, or even as some of our own brethren at this present day in certain other lands. And it behoves us therefore, while being humbly thankful that our Master has seen fit to withhold such experiences from us, so to school ourselves that we shall bear them without complaint, without opening our mouths, if such things should come. In the meantime we do well to remember that in many of the experiences of every-day we do tend to become impatient and quarrelsome, with each other if not with our Lord, and it were good for all of us that we learn well how to endure the harder things of the Christian life without the opening of the mouth.

This prophetic picture of the being brought as a lamb to the slaughter is the basis upon which the entire later picture of Jesus as the "Lamb of God," the Lamb "slain from the foundation of the world" is built. Isaiah's words here are in

turn taken from the Passover sacrifice, the lamb that was slain to become the symbol of deliverance from Egypt. Grammatically the phrase should properly be translated "He is brought as the lamb to the slaughter," and the reference is not to any casual lamb, taken to a slaughter house in everyday life, but to the Passover lamb itself, ready on the fourteenth day to be slaughtered so that Israel could be delivered. Without the blood of that slain lamb on the portals and lintels of their houses there could be no salvation. Without the Divine acceptance of that proffered sacrifice there could be no call to come out of Egypt and meet with God before the holy mount. Without the outward evidence that the Lamb had indeed been slain the destroying angel had no mandate to withdraw his sword. It was supremely important for every Israelite that he not only trusted in the blood of the slain lamb but that he made a public exhibition of the fact on the doorposts and lintels of his house in such fashion that the angel could see it. It was not so important at this moment that the Egyptians see it as that the Divine Messenger see it. And so it is with us; important though it is that we heed well the exhortation to be his witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth and so confess Jesus before men, it is even more important that in the privacy and sanctity of our homes we confess Jesus before God. Our knowledge of the Divine plan will not save us; our wonderful and mighty works will avail us not; our profession of consecration before God will not be accounted of any worth, if we have not accepted and confessed Jesus the Son of God, the Saviour of us all.

That confession needs to be of Jesus the despised and rejected, the oppressed and afflicted. It is not sufficient to own him only when He appears as the chiefest among ten thousand, the One altogether lovely, or when He is seen a King, mighty to save, travelling in the greatness of his strength. These things are true of Jesus, but they belong to an Age yet future, and for the present we have to remember that He is still despised and rejected of men, and the servant is not to be greater than his lord. There is a tendency to-day in some quarters to represent Christianity as something vigorous and militant in the physical, worldly sense, something that is very much akin to this world as it is with its soldiering and its prize-fights and its hail-fellow-well-met, and to put aside the sacrificial and suffering aspect as a regrettable lapse into effeminacy and weakness

not to be tolerated in this modern age. Evangelical campaigns publicise their champions in photographs which represent them something of a cross between a gymnasium instructor off-duty and an advertisement for somebody's toothpaste. We know that a Christian should be healthy and vigorous, self reliant and upstanding. We have an Apostolic admonition to rejoice continually and quite obviously that rejoicing should find outward expression in our features. We should be pleasant and cheerful in our dealings with all men. But these are not the things which necessarily denote the true followers of the Master. There is sorrow and sadness for the sin and misery of mankind which must find its place in the Christian life, and become an evidence of the "filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ" (Col. 1. 24), as well as the brightness and cheer which at the right time and in the right place evidences that inward joy in the Gospel which is the possession of us all. There are shoulders bowed down with other men's burdens, health and vitality freely given in the service of one's fellow-men, evidence of those who are walking "as He walked" and are pouring out their lives unto death as He did. This modern world takes little heed of such and it is a tragedy that the modern professedly Christian world is becoming infected with the same spirit and in the effort to show that Christianity is not the sombre, jaundiced, sanctimonious thing that was so often represented as such a century or more ago, has gone to the other extreme and rejected the inner life for the purely superficial. In our happiest and most cheerful moments we do well to remember that we are followers of the One who went quietly, silently but resolutely, as the lamb to the slaughter.

"He was taken from prison and from judgment; and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken." (vs. 8).

As we come to this eighth verse it begins to be impressed on our minds that we are now reading a description of the trial, death and burial of Christ, written some seven hundred years before the event. It is impossible to read verse 7 to 9 without noting how accurately the prophecy was fulfilled in history. His passive acceptance of arrest and being brought before the judges; his silence before them; the injustice of his so-called trial, they are all here. The sentence of death and its execution, innocent though He was of any crime, and the burial of his body in the tomb of the rich Joseph of Arimathea; all is faithfully forthshown in this remarkable prophecy. No wonder the agnostics and the critics have been hard put to it to explain this chapter away. There

is no way of accounting for its existence but by admitting that the words were framed by one who has the power to see into the future—and only the Most High can do that.

This verse pictures the trial and death of Jesus. The first phrase is more correctly translated "He was taken through oppression and judgment". The word "judgment" here has the meaning of a judicial sentence, as when a Judge of the High Court "delivers judgment" at the end of the case he has been hearing. This verse tells us that Jesus, having been taken by his enemies "as a lamb for the slaughter" was led through the remainder of the bitter proceeding, still unresisting, still silent, through the oppression of the mock trials before the Sanhedrin, before Herod, before Pilate, and finally through the last scene of all, when Pilate "gave sentence that it should be as they required" (Luke 23. 24). He was taken through the oppression of the trials, the mocking, the scourging; hostility of the priests and the clamour of the crowd, but it was his Father Who was taking him by sure and safe guidance through all the pain and shame of his death into the glory beyond. He was taken through the unjust sentence that was passed on him by the Roman governor, a judgment that was dictated not by Roman law nor even by Roman policy, but purely and simply because of the craven fear of Pilate, confronted by a raging mob and ready to do anything to allay the tumult. But it was the Father who was leading him through that, and when Pilate asked "knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" and He replied, "Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above" (John 19. 10) Jesus spoke a true word. The powers of Heaven were in control of all that was being done, and guardian angels led Jesus from scene to scene of the sad story until all that was written had been fulfilled.

This is where the prophet cries out in his own deep distress "Who shall declare his generation?". There is a certain amount of divergence in the meaning claimed to lie in the question. The phrase itself can be interpreted in several ways. Did Isaiah mean that no man could declare the details of his birth and origin, wrapped as it was in mystery? This word "generation" could legitimately bear that meaning; "Who shall declare his birth?" It is not likely that many in Israel remembered the events of thirty-three years before, when certain shepherds claimed to have seen a vision of angels and gone in consequence to worship the newly-born Messiah in a manger, and wise men from the East had appeared in Jerusalem enquiring for the one born King of the Jews. And even though a few, getting on

now in years, could be found to tell of those days, still the mystery of his ultimate origin remained unsolved. Israel had been familiar for centuries with the idea of Divine Wisdom personified into the Logos, a kind of abstract power operating in the world and the affairs of men on behalf of the Deity, who himself could not be conceived as having any possible contact with this world. But even though John declared that this One Who had appeared amongst them was the Logos made flesh, the Wisdom of God identified with personality and standing before them, a visible expression of the glory of God, it was all too much for them and they could not understand it. "The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not" said John, where "comprehendeth" has the sense of receiving into one's self or absorbing and encircling the subject. It was not only that the darkness failed to understand Jesus in a purely intellectual sense; the darkness failed to receive the light in any sense whatever, because the light was of another world and had no point of contact or sympathy with the darkness. So it is very true that no one in the day of Christ could "declare his generation", his origin, or understand anything about it at all. He came from God, but how and in what way they knew not.

Another way of considering the question is to take it as referring to his death without leaving descendants. That, to a Jew, would be a strange and inexplicable thing in regard to one claiming to enjoy the favour of God. This One was cut off in the flower of his age and left none of his own behind him. That, to those whose eyes were never opened to the spiritual calling and the new understanding of God's purposes which Jesus came to bring to light, must have constituted a serious barrier to belief. The more reflective would read the 10th verse of Isaiah's 53rd chapter with its promise "he shall see his seed" and realise in a new light the immensity of the Divine Plan, but for the vast majority it always remained true that in this sense also they could not "declare his generation".

The third and probably correct application of this text is that which sees here a condemnation of the generation that crucified Jesus. Nothing like it had been seen before; no crime had ever been so heinous as this, no people so guilty. "The men of his age who shall describe?" is how one translator renders the question, and there is much to recommend this view. Jesus himself condemned that generation and wept over the doomed city and its heedless citizens. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?" lamented Israel in the sorrowful dirge known as the Lamentations of Jeremiah. "Behold and see if

there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow" (Lam. 1. 12). Those words were first spoken of Israel, rejected and done to death by the ruthless nations who were her neighbours. In later years the words became true of Christ, and Jewry herself became the persecutor and murderer. Through all ages since, the generation which crucified Christ has been held up to despise and contumely. He was unjustly tried and unjustly put to death; who can put into fitting words the contempt and condemnation all future ages shall manifest toward that guilty generation. That seems to be the intention of the words.

So the tragedy proceeded to its ordained climax. "He was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken". So far as man was concerned this was the end. So far as man could tell there was no further hope. "A living dog is better than a dead lion" was their proverb (Eccl. 9. 4). The gates of the land of the shadow of death had closed upon him and there was an end of all the golden promises and hopes of future deliverance. Even the disciples lost faith in that dark, bitter hour. He was cut off out of the land of the living; he had been alive but now he was dead. True, it was for the transgression of the people that he had been stricken, but He was dead now and of what avail had it all been?

Perhaps a few among them, reflective, remembered that after the sacrifices had been all burned on the altar in the yearly ritual, one appeared from the unseen place beyond the Vail of the Tabernacle, arrayed, no longer in linen garments of sacrifice, but in new and dazzling robes of glory and beauty, and brought blessing to the people. Some there might have been who remembered that beside the dying priesthood of Aaron there was also the eternal priesthood of Melchizedek, a royal priest, one who ever liveth. Perhaps here and there a loyal heart, grappling with the problem of this tragedy which had shattered all their hopes, began to wonder if, after all, the story was indeed finished—whether the last three verses of Isaiah 53 yet remained to be fulfilled in some wonderful manner that would reverse the entire position and turn their sorrow into joy.

Whether or no there were such, there remained now only one last prophecy of dark things to be fulfilled before the tide was to turn and the meaning of all things be made plain. He was yet to make his grave with the wicked; but after that the world was to see the salvation of God.

"And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth." (vs.9).

This word was literally fulfilled when Jesus

was crucified in the company of two thieves and afterwards buried in the tomb of the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea. That is a surface interpretation which can be accepted as a very true one since so many of the Old Testament prophecies are declared by the Apostles to have been literally fulfilled in the experiences through which our Lord passed. But we should not be content with this surface explanation. The sublime words of Isa. 53 enfold a deeper and more profound theme than the mere burial of the Lord's body in a particular tomb. The expression is really a continuation of the theme which pervades all the chapter from the first verse. It tells of the apparently inexplicable and yet undeniable fact that He, the Lord of all righteousness, spotless in his unblemished purity, became so identified with sin and sinners as in the end to suffer and die and be buried just like the grossest of sinners. No penalty that men could visit upon evil and evildoers was wanting in his case—who knew no sin. The Old Testament abounds with assurances of Divine favour and watchcare exercised toward the righteous, but none of that was extended towards him. He suffered as though He were the vilest of sinners and He died as though He were one not fit to live. He was cut off from the land of the living. One assigned, or appointed, him a grave with the wicked; that is the literal meaning of the first phrase of the verse. He was appointed to that destiny. In the sight of men He was as the evil king of Isa. 14 who is "*cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch . . . thrust through with a sword, that go down to the sides of the pit; as a carcass trodden under feet*". That was the viewpoint from which the world looked upon Jesus and the people of his day were as little concerned about him after his death as they were over the bodies of criminals thrown into the fires of Gehenna, the burning valley.

The Father took a different view. "The wages of sin is death" says the Divine law and although in the sight of men this one had gone into death like the wicked and with the wicked, He did not remain in death. "*It was not possible that he should be holden of it*" says the Apostle. The Father gave testimony to the righteousness of the Son by raising him from the dead. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, but that grave did not hold him, because He himself is righteous.

Daniel was a man of power, and because he was prayerful he was powerful. His radiant witness made its impression on all around. The threats of men terrified him not, for God was his all in all. His humble heart soared above these

The people had treated him with the same contempt as did their ancestors with Urijah the prophet in the days of Jeremiah, they having "*cast his dead body into the graves of the common people*" (Jer. 26. 23) and thought by that to make an end of Jesus and his inconvenient teachings. So man proposed, and God disposed, and on the third day the stone was rolled back and the Lord of Glory came forth.

The expression "with the rich in his death" looks beyond the literal fact of Joseph of Arimathea's tomb and the costly spices and fine linen in which the Lord's body was enshrouded. That may very well have been the immediate fulfilment but there is something more fundamental. The Scriptures refer several times to the fact that even the rich man—in the riches of this world—must eventually leave everything behind and go down into the land of forgetfulness. "*If his children be multiplied*" says Job "*it is for the sword; and his offspring shall not be satisfied with bread Though he heap up silver as the dust, and prepare raiment as the day; he may prepare it, but the just shall put it on, and the innocent shall divide the silver. The rich man shall lie down . . . he openeth his eyes, and he is not. The east wind carrieth him away, and he departeth, for God shall cast upon him, and not spare.*" (Job 27. 14-22). Despite his riches, he lies down in death and is forgotten. "*They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him . . . that he should still live for ever, and not see corruption.*" (Psa. 49. 6-9). To the world it seemed that the death of Jesus was like that. True, he had not accumulated earthly riches, but it seemed equally true that all he had striven for during his lifetime had been wasted. He died without having achieved his purpose. "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel" said the two disciples sadly on the road to Emmaus. They had expected, but now all hope was gone and his life was as if it had never been spent. In that sense He made his grave with the rich in his death—the fruits of his life's endeavour dissipated to the four winds and He himself, lying, like all men of all preceding generations, lifeless in the grave.

To be concluded

things and he could speak with calm fearlessness to the kings of Babylon, because of the exceeding glory of Jehovah.

(Alfred Mathieson)

THE SPIRIT OF THE COVENANT

In the heat of the day, as Abraham sat within his tent sheltering from the burning sun, three travel-stained men drew near. With true Eastern hospitality Abraham ran forth to greet them, and besought them to rest awhile until he could minister to their needs. *"Let a little water be fetched and wash your feet, and rest yourself under the tree"* (Gen. 17.4). Of his store of the precious fluid he would share enough to cleanse and soothe their sand-fretted feet. Hurriedly he and Sarah set about the task of preparing refreshment—cakes baked on the hearth, and a tender calf, and butter and milk—which food, when ready, was spread before them under the shade of the tree. With deferential respect for his guests, Abraham stood by to minister to their requests. Hereby Abraham reveals the fact that he knew these were no ordinary visitors, and as master of the establishment, it was a token of great regard to stand and serve while they sat and ate.

The repast ended, they called for Sarah, and in an extraordinary manner referred to a long-cherished promise which had been made to Abraham by God. *"I will return to thee the vigour of thy youth, and Sarah shall have a son"* said the spokesman of the little band. Sarah, within earshot, but within the tent, heard the words and "laughed within herself". For many years her maternal desire had been unsatisfied. What wonder then, as she heard these words, that she should smile, half-expectant yet half-incredulous? Had she not waited now too long? That little laugh, half-stifled, and her muttered words, reached the speaker's ears. *"Wherefore did Sarah laugh . . . Is anything too hard for the Lord?"* asks the remarkable guest. And so at long last, after many expectant years, the hopes of her whole life came to pass. Those aged wrinkled arms clasped to her breast flesh of her own flesh, and maternal hopes were satisfied. Several times that "promise of all promises" had been renewed, and here, beneath the shade of Mamre's tree, the messenger of God reaffirmed it by word of mouth. What recompense was that for "entertaining angels unawares" (Heb. 13.2)! Not only was the Covenant re-affirmed but the approximate date was set when the promised child without whom the covenant could never be fulfilled, should arrive.

But this was not the sole reason for their call at Abraham's tent. They had other, sterner business to perform. Refreshment ended, they rose to go, and Abraham, deeply moved, accompanied them some distance on their way. Then

began that most remarkable conversation between the three, the prompting question of which is recorded for our benefit. "Shall I tell Abraham what I am about to do? I think I can trust him with the news!"

To this end spake the principal member of the three. In poetic language, the Lord had "come down" to see if the sin of Sodom was as great as its "cry", and if so, to destroy it with fire. Would it not seem strange to Abraham's ears if He who stood pledged to "bless", was now compelled to destroy some of those families of the earth which dwelt on every hand? Had God not promised several times that in him and in his seed all nations should be blessed? And has God not just re-affirmed his Covenant, and dated the birth of his son? If then the time for the arrival of the Seed were come, could not God defer those punitive measures upon those cities of the plains until the Seed were grown, and had had time to work reform? Thus the question might have presented itself to Abraham had he not been told.

"I know him" said the angel of the Lord *"I know that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him"* (vs.19). Something "bred in the blood" would "come out in the bone" in later days, and though Abraham's earthly seed should grievously fail awhile, something ingrained in the parents' faith-built character would mature in the children's life when the process of development was complete. The "faith of Abraham" (Rom. 4. 12, 16) will become the faith of all his seed and "All Israel shall be saved" when God's due time is come.

What a testimony was that! *"I know him!"* Alone in all the world, in that far day, to hold true faith in God! Alone and childless, yet promises reaching into eternity were centred in this man. The eye of God could see in this lone man those deep responses of faith which led him on, step by step, until he laid the darling of his life upon the altar-wood and raised his hand to strike the sacrificial blow. That substratum of faith has passed from sire to sons, and through it all, when grown mature, "the Lord will bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him". A progeny, numberless as the sands of the seashore, shall yet be blessed for their great father's sake, because he passed to them the ability to believe in God—which means ability to believe in Christ.

Two members of that little band went on their way, and came, at even, to Sodom's gate. Righteous Lot" sat there and invited them beneath his roof. The wickedness of Sodom brake out, because of the angel's presence there, and summary measures were needed to hold the Sodomites in check. Bounteous harvests which brought fulness of bread made pride of heart and carnal sin to grow. The other guest remained behind, and "*Abraham stood yet before the Lord*".

Then began the plea of a mortal man before the Judge of all the Earth! There is no story of those early days to be compared with this. Touched by a feeling for his human kin, this righteous man begged respite again and yet again for Sodom's sinful folk. "*Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?*" asks he. "*Perhaps there may be fifty within the city who are not utterly overcome by sin! Wilt thou spare the city for their sake?*" Will not the Judge of all the earth, who holds the scales of Justice for others' acts, himself do right? Bold, courageous words are these, drawing Divinity to the bar of its own Courts and Laws! Immediate came the response "*I will not destroy the city for the fifty's sake*".

The old man knew the city's guilt and knew his quota was too high. Again he puts his plea. Wilt thou destroy the city perchance forty such be found . . . or thirty . . . or twenty . . . or even ten . . .? With each reduction and renewal of the plea, the heavenly visitor concurred, until at last he said "*I will not destroy the city for ten's sake* (vs.32). Not even ten were found; but only one, and he an alien in their midst! With morning's early dawn he was urged forth, before the blow of Justice fell The Judge of all the Earth did right. In later days God told his people He had seen "good" in taking them thus away. Some vestige still remained of innate good, to which, in resurrection days, appeal can then be made; some broken chords, which, when righteousness prevails, can be repaired and made to vibrate in unison once more.

"Shall mortal man be more just than his Maker?" is a query we must ask as we see the aged pilgrim pleading for his kind. Was Abraham more sympathetic to sinful men than God? Must God be moved by human plea before compassion could be shown? Had God relented of his purpose to bless all the peoples of the earth, or did He exclude these cities of the plain?

That God was compassionate as well as just is true beyond all dispute. The Plan to bless the world is his—it tells of his great love. But how did the justice-loving patriarch stand when fronted by such baleful sin? Would he say Sodom got no more than its deserts when retribution fell? Would he say it served them right? Abra-

ham was not more compassionate than God, though Abraham's compassion was deep and strong. He pleaded that justice might be done, and that the righteous (if there should be) should also have their deserts. But the plea he used asked for mercy in ascending scale. Mercy for a whole city, for fifty's sake, for forty's sake—nay even for ten's sake.

And the Judge of all the Earth agreed—the Judge of all the Earth had Abraham at the bar, to find how far in him tender mercy would temper strict justice. And the Judge found him sympathetic down to the degree of ten men in a city—ten men for a city; ten men to redeem a city from its just fate. This was the spirit of the Covenant itself. Abraham too would see men blessed. Abraham too would see sinners blessed. That was the spirit of his God, who had said that through him and his seed, the nations should be blessed. And Abraham believed it, and let the spirit of the Promise soak in and saturate his soul. And so, while Justice must be satisfied—this he knew quite well—the temper of the soul, catching Divine intent, grew merciful and kind. The outcome of this Divine Spirit led in due time to the gift of God's Son (John 3. 16)—and Calvary! But in those early days, the flow which had become a river of love at Calvary was but a tiny stream. It grew as ages passed; and still it grows; and as it grows it has borne those noble souls along who catch the Spirit of the Lord.

Today we live in an evil world. The cry of the weak and oppressed rises up to heaven. Sin of various kinds stalk the earth. Again, God has come down to make scrutiny for righteous men. How easy it would be for us to say "it serves them right", as tidings come that some other land or people is in distress. It may serve them right indeed, but it ill becomes the children of the Lord to hold that thought. Nations may have slighted and perverted their opportunities—they may have made false choice of leaders; or wrongly applied principles of action but no nation is utterly responsible for that. No nation can have full cent-per-cent responsibility under conditions like these. Measured responsibility they certainly have—and for that they must be called to account. But none save the Judge of all the Earth is competent for that. He can only assess the guilt of man or nation. The safer thing for us to seek is the spirit of Abraham's faith—the spirit which would plead for mercy for ten men's sake, and rest content that He who is the Judge of all the Earth will do no other than what is right.

It will not be an easy thing to remain in proper balance of heart and mind, as evil after evil is committed in the earth, unless the Spirit of the Covenant controls our every thought. The scales

of Justice belong to God—and He will hold the balance true. But God will temper the severities of Judgment with his mercy, what time the guilty one repents, and forsakes his wicked ways. His plighted Covenant with Abraham and his seed speaks blessing and mercy for all the nations of the earth. If, like faithful Abraham, we live within the spirit of this Oath-bound Pledge, allowing it to soak in and saturate our hearts, we too shall think in mercy of Satan's hoodwinked hosts, no matter who they are. It will permeate our thought; it will creep into every blood and bone, and make us more like him who died for all. We speak at times of Christlike character and its development. There is no method so clear and sure to attain that end, as to be caught up in the spirit of the Oath and pledge of Abraham's God, who stands today, as then, sworn to bless all the nations of the earth.

That ancient episode in Abraham's life affords much food for thought. It shows that the Almighty God was working out his plan, was seeking Abraham's help to make his Promise come true. But Abraham could be no source of help unless the spirit of the Covenant and the

spirit of his God directed him through and through. And God made test of Abraham to see if compassion for a sinful city was active in his heart. God chose a time and place to make that test. Where brazen sin had reared aloft its ugly head, Abraham passed his test acceptably. God's confidence in him was well placed.

Sin's ugly head in all its forms is raised again today. The present international situation affords a test, to determine what spirit we are of. The visitation of Divine wrath must certainly come upon the aggressive nations of the world, but that is only a passing phase of the Divine Plan. God is waiting to be gracious, in his own way, to one and all. God's Spirit is still the Spirit of that ancient Covenant. He waits to bless all the nations of the earth. The Spirit of that Covenant must possess and control us too in all we say and do. It may be more easy to "blame" today than "bless", to be "vindictive" than "vindicative", but all who are Abraham's seed must be possessed not only of Abraham's inheritance, but of the Spirit which, if needed, would plead for all the fallen sons of men.

BORN AGAIN

"Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God." (John 3. 3).

At first sight these seem strange words, and that is what the Jewish leader, Nicodemus, thought, to whom they were first addressed. But he has not been the only one to be puzzled by Jesus' curious expression, and many who have claimed to be Christians have not fully realised what is meant by being "born again". Yet leaders in the Early Church, like Peter and Paul, based much of their teaching upon this conversation which Christ had with the "master in Israel".

Other religions point men to a Creator and in this the Hebrew faith of Abraham was foremost. Its basic teachings were crystallised in the Law given through Moses. Further enlightenment came by Israel's prophets. The moral and spiritual commandments which God's ancient people were given did much to sanctify their lives and direct their religious worship toward God. So it has been with many people during the last two thousand years. To them Jesus has been a great moral and social reformer, and inasmuch as his precepts have been observed they have produced better men and women. He did much more than interpret Israel's religion into the life and needs of his own day. He set forth in clear and direct language a way of salvation from sin which was new and distinct from any other of which men

had ever heard. Yet it was not so different from Old Testament teaching that those who were familiar with it should have found it hard to understand Jesus. Unfortunately, their spiritual life had become stagnant and useless. The religious teachers of Jesus' day were more concerned with ritual and observance of their meaningless regulations to care about the important aspects of their faith. Hence the question from the lips of the leader of the people "How can these things be?"

Before anyone can undergo this experience of being "reborn", it is necessary to recognise that men of themselves are incapable of obtaining a release from evil. They have sought remedies by social and moral education, they have endeavoured to explain away sin by theory, they have suggested by scientific ideas that mankind is getting better and better and therefore less sinful. But these suggestions lead men further from God, and result in death, because the only solution to human problems is to be found in the way God has appointed.

And that way is found in the teachings of the New Testament, which begin with the words of Jesus. This rebirth, as Jesus went on to show Nicodemus, is not birth in the natural or physical sense. It is a new life, spiritual life, which begins in the human heart. The seed is the Word of

God, and as it germinates and develops it follows the same pattern as the life of Jesus. The new life, however, cannot grow alongside sin. They who wish to follow Jesus as his disciple must renounce sin, repent and realise that the only way to be saved from sin is through Jesus and his death on the cross. Only then can our old way of life come to an end and we are, in a sense, resurrected into a new life in Christ.

The flagrant sinner is not the only one who is in need of "rebirth". There are many good-living folk, who may or may not claim to be Christians, who do not make a full and whole hearted confession of sin and a need to follow Christ in every aspect of life. They may be self-sufficient, self righteous people. They may have a vague idea that when they die, if they've been good enough they'll go to heaven along with all other good people instead of going to that other place about which they don't like to think too much. Conditions for "being born again" are not likely to be popular since they conflict with natural pride. Old habits of thought, speech and manner of life will have to be more than reformed, for a fresh start is needed. Life in the home, in our place of work, and most important of all, in our place of worship, will assume an entirely new outlook. The driving force of life is no longer our own faulty ability, but as Paul wrote in Galatians 2. 20 "*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave himself for me*". Paul meant by "crucified with Christ" that his old life as Saul of Tarsus had ended for ever. He died as an ordinary man when he saw Christ on the Damascus road, and although there was no physical change, intellectual and spiritual transformation began at once. So with all who accept Jesus as their Saviour and become new men and women in Christ; they become dynamic personalities, full

of the vitality of love which was so apparent in Jesus.

The outward appearance to other people may not seem such a dramatic change as occurred in Paul the apostle. He had wilfully committed the most violent and terrible sins against the Christian church. Then, completely reversing his former life, he became the greatest champion of Christ. Yet the "turning about" which Paul experienced was due to the radical change in his allegiance from Satan to Christ and this must be so for every believer. Ultimately the spiritual and intellectual revolution within the heart will bear a rich fruitage in the life.

Being born again is not some difficult academic problem. It is only hard because human nature is stubborn and selfish, preferring outward pride and respectability rather than being broken and humbled, least of all at the foot of the cross of Christ. To the human heart the cross is nothing more than an obstacle to progress or something too debased to trifle with, yet to those who accept Jesus as their Saviour it is that which brings new light and joy into the life. It brings light because it releases men from their burden of sin, and joy follows as new purpose and hope is discovered. What is sin? That is a wide and important question and not answerable in a few lines. It is anything which is not in harmony with the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. It is anything that will not submit to the will of God and which hinders the new life in Christ from proper development. The uncertainties and doubts of the human mind must be swept away by the realities of Christ's love for mankind. Not just a general love, but a great, far reaching and sympathetic love for every individual sinner. May this new life begin in the lives of all who seek Jesus, and continue until the day dawn when it shall have found its fulness in resurrection glory and reach its ripened fruitage.

The Sacred Name

A note in Sept./Oct. 1982 issue on the 16th century origin of the English word "Jehovah" as a bad transliteration of the Hebrew term for the name of God, in which that name was indicated as YHVH, has elicited the following note from a reader—

"According to the Encyclopedia Americana, Vol. 16 pp. 8-9 (1929 edn) the name "Jehovah"

is found in AD 1270 in the writings of Raymond Martin's "*Pages Fidei*". Regarding the Hebrew YHVH. the third letter "vah" was an archaic Hebrew "waw" which makes the word YHWH. The Yemen Jews today retain this pronunciation, as does Arabic (see "*How the Hebrew language grew*" pp. 29-30 Edwd Horowitz).

JACOB AND THE ANGEL

The somewhat chequered life of Jacob included that period during which, having separated from Laban his father-in-law, he made his way from Haran to his native land of Canaan, three hundred miles distant, with his family and possessions, to rejoin his father and settle down. He had gone to Haran alone and penniless; he was returning with four wives and a large number of children, servants and employees, vast flocks and herds. He was a wealthy and prosperous man. He returned, as he went, in the conviction that the Divine promise of ultimate blessing for all families of the earth was to be fulfilled through his seed; before he died he was to see the beginning of the nation of Israel—a people which has resumed the ancient name in this our day in the land which he was at that time about to enter.

During this journey there occurred the rather obscure incident which is recorded in Gen. 32. 24-32. Jacob wrestled with an angel, and prevailed, receiving as token of his victory the name Israel—"a prince of God". The incident is narrated as history but it takes a little understanding as to its purpose and significance.

Prior to the occurrence, Jacob had made his peace with his pursuing and somewhat irate father-in-law, had sent messengers to his brother Esau in the hill country of Edom, and received intimation that a strong force of Esau's men was on its way to meet him. In some panic, and remembering the manner in which he had tricked Esau many years previously and the latter's vow of revenge, he apprehended the worst, and made hurried preparations for defence. He divided his flocks and possessions into two sections, hoping that if Esau's men captured one half then he might escape with the other. He followed that with an impassioned prayer to God in which he—rather tardily perhaps—acknowledged his shortcomings and pleaded for deliverance from his brother's wrath. As an additional precaution—perhaps he was not, even yet, fully persuaded that his prayers would be effective—he sent rich gifts of flocks and herds in advance to his brother, following these by his wives and family, sending them on in front while he himself stayed in the rear. It does not seem a very gallant or manly course of conduct, but then the character of Jacob as revealed in the O.T. is not that of a straightforward or courageous man. At any rate, when this incident occurred, Jacob was alone in the darkness of the night, with all his companions and possessions miles ahead.

"And Jacob was left alone, and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he (the man) saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he (Jacob) said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me—and he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God, and hast prevailed." That was when Jacob realised that his antagonist was not mere man, but a celestial visitant. He asked the angel's name and his request was refused but he received a blessing. As he loosed his hold and the angel departed he said reverently *"I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved"*. So he called the spot Peniel, meaning "the face of God" and that name it continued to bear throughout the later history of the Israel nation. But Jacob retained a physical effect; he was thereafter, at least for a time, lame on the thigh the angel had touched.

The narrative must have originated from Jacob himself, for there were no witnesses. Whatever the nature of the physical factors, it was obvious that this whole thing was, to Jacob, a profound spiritual experience. It meant something of deep significance and it changed his outlook completely. Before it happened, he had gone in mortal fear of his brother Esau and was doing all he could to put off the moment of meeting him, even to the extent of letting not only his possessions but his wives and children go first to meet the avenger and suffer whatever was in store. After this encounter his attitude completely changed. Overtaking his wives and family (ch. 33. 1-3) he placed himself in front of them and so faced his brother. And, of course, he need not have been afraid, for Esau had long since forgotten the old animosity and received him warmheartedly. Jacob was able to take up residence in Canaan unmolested.

Was this incident, in which Jacob found himself wrestling with, and prevailing over, the powers of heaven, a means of restoring his self-confidence and conviction that if God be with him, who could be against him? According to his own statement while still in Haran, the angel of God had appeared to him in a dream commanding him to return to his native land and assuring him of protection (Gen. 31. 11-13). God had defended him from the quite justifiable wrath

of Laban who admittedly had some cause of complaint; he had survived a three hundred mile journey across a difficult desert terrain without loss either at the hands of Nature or of marauding Bedouin. After all this the mere intimation that Esau's men were on their way to meet him threw him into an unreasoning panic. He did go to God in prayer, confessing his own unworthiness, reminding God of his promises, and asking for deliverance from the wrath of Esau. He evidently had little faith in either the power or intention of God to deliver, for he then made the frantic and somewhat pitiful attempt at mitigating the impact of Esau's enmity on himself even at the risk of losing his possessions and exposing his family to danger whilst keeping in the background himself.

Then came the struggle. There, in the quietness of the night, torn, perhaps, between the desire to go forward after his family and the fear of meeting Esau, he found his way barred by a stranger who attacked him aggressively. Whether at first thought he took the stranger to be one of Esau's men who had found him, so that now he must in fact fight for his life, or realised by means of that strange insight which the ancients appear to have had in greater measure than we today that his assailant was more than human and had come from God, we cannot now determine. Suffice that Jacob, for some reason, knew that now he must fight, fight as he had never fought before. With such good effect did he wrestle that, whilst he could not overcome his opponent, he could at least hold him in a powerful grasp from which the other could not escape. But the angel was equal to the occasion. He touched the "hollow" of Jacob's "thigh" and Jacob was lamed. In plain language that means the socket of the hip joint and the "sinew that shrank" of vs. 32 is the sciatic nerve. Physically, perhaps it was that in the intensity of the struggle Jacob had overstrained the muscle. But he held on still. Something of the meaning of this midnight encounter was beginning to enter his mind. "Let me go, for the day breaketh" commanded the angel. Those who love to find folklore and mythology origins for the Genesis stories hail this as a relic of the old superstitions that night spirits must flee away as soon as dawn breaks. But this was no myth. The angel's meaning was much more likely that with the onset of dawn Esau's arrival was imminent and it was high time for Jacob to

get on the road to rejoin his company. But now Jacob was growing exultant. He had struggled with a celestial messenger of God and had prevailed; why should he now be afraid of a mere man like Esau? He would go out, not in his own strength, but in the strength of God, and God would be with him. He only now needed the blessing of God. "I will not let thee go" he cried exultantly "except thou bless me". And the angel, knowing that Jacob had now come to a right understanding of his position, gave him the blessing. "Thy name shall be Israel, for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." From that day forward the nation which sprang from Jacob has been known as Israel; though its political existence came to an end in A.D. 70 the name was but dormant; in our own time the nation has become politically re-established and the name chosen by the hardy pioneers who established the modern State on the ruins of the British Mandate was the one awarded to their forefather so long ago—Israel.

Jacob wanted to know the angel's name; the angel refused to give it. The affairs of heaven are not the concern of mortal men. He had given Jacob the Divine blessing and his mission was accomplished; he left the patriarch in a different frame of mind to that in which he had encountered him. "I have seen God face to face" said Jacob reverently "and my life is preserved". He knew, of course, that he had not looked on the Most High with his natural eyes but he accepted the one with whom he had wrestled as the manifestation of God. In that way he could see God, and yet still live. And now he knew that within himself there resided a strength which, because it was of God and because he had complete trust in God, would carry him victor through whatever opposition was raised against him. Without further ado he quickened his pace and overtook his wives and children, pressing on then in front of them without qualms to meet his brother Esau.

To Jacob, then, the experience was a demonstration that he could and would triumph by determination, but only when God was with him. His persistence overcame the angel, but the angel showed he could have the last word by touching his hip-joint. The determination of Jacob, added to the power of the angel, made him irresistible, with the Divine blessing he went forward in full assurance of faith that the promise of God would certainly be fulfilled.

Filled with the Spirit, we shall be a blessing to others, and rivers—not a mere stream—of blessing will flow out from us to refresh the dry and thirsty wilderness of this world.

We must leave the earth or heaven will never be ours. Our arms are not long enough to reach heaven while we hold on with one hand to earth.

THE HOLY SPIRIT—THE DIVINE DYNAMIC

The Bible is replete with examples of the power of the Holy Spirit. The first recorded event in history is the moving of the Spirit of God on the face of the waters (Gen. 1. 2) and the last recorded event (one that is yet in the future) is the call of the Spirit and the Bride to "whosoever will" to take of the water of life (Rev. 22. 17). Both of these, rightly understood, betoken marvellous creative activity, one in the realm of the material and the other in the realm of the spiritual. In between there is the record of how God's Holy Spirit has been and continues ceaselessly active in the world, converting the dark and formless waste of human depravity into that glorious orderly city which is God's Kingdom on earth. The Spirit of God is referred to many times in both Old and New Testaments, and always in connection with activity, energy, illumination, creativeness of a beneficent kind. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" said Jesus (John 5. 17) and in many references to his Father He acknowledged the *dunamis*, the power, of the Holy Spirit as a force that operates in the whole of Divine creation to effect that accomplishment of God's purposes.

Our Lord's words to Nicodemus (John 3. 8) convey an analogy which has given us the very word itself. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh . . . so is everyone that is born of the Spirit". That delicate inbreathing of air which is the characteristic of life, that violent wind which is the essence of invisible force, are the symbols of the creative, life-sustaining energy which we call the Spirit. In the Old Testament the word is *ruach*, rendered "spirit" 232 times, "wind" 90 times and "breath" 28 times. It means the breath of the nostrils, air in motion, wind, the vital life principle, the rational mind or spirit, of man, or of God. Gesenius puts it "The Divine power which, like the wind and breath, cannot be perceived, and by which animated beings live". In the New Testament the word is *pneuma*, identical in meaning with "ruach", and so used by classical Greek writers. Thayer defines it, as applied to the Holy Spirit, "God's power and agency—distinguishable from God's essence in itself considered — manifest in the course of affairs".

In the Old Testament the Spirit of God is repeatedly shown to be an influence in the hearts and lives of men. Exod. 31. 3 tells of Bezaleel being filled with the Spirit of God to exercise his

craftsman's art in the skilful workmanship of the Tabernacle furniture. In the times of Israel's struggle to possess the land the Spirit of the Lord inspired, for instance, Gideon (Jud. 6. 34) to deeds of valour and daring. In a very intense sense the Spirit of God came upon the prophets (see Num. 24. 2) and gave them inspiration and strength to deliver their messages. When the exiles, returning from Babylon, found themselves dispirited at the magnitude of the reconstruction task before them, dismayed at the overwhelming superiority of their enemies, the cry was "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4. 6). The forces of materialism are impotent before the dynamic energy of that unseen power which is presented in the Scriptures as the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit.

This same power is manifest in the world of Nature. "By his Spirit he hath garnished the heavens"—i.e. set the stars in their places (Job 26. 13) says Job. Declared Elihu (Job 33. 4), "The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life". Speaking of the brute creation, the Psalmist says (Psa. 104. 30) "Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth".

The Greek "*pneuma*" in the New Testament is rendered "spirit" 150 times, "Spirit" or "Holy Spirit" with the Divine connection about 130 times, and "Holy Ghost" some 90 times. It is also used twice (Matt. 27. 50, John 19. 30) for "ghost", in connection with the moment of Jesus' expiry on the cross. The idea of personality associated with the present usage of the term "ghost" is not warranted in Scriptural usage, this word having changed in meaning since the days when the Authorised Version was prepared. "Ghostly" and "ghastly" (a variant of the same word) come from the Old English "*ghastlic*", meaning 'spiritual'. The corresponding noun '*gast*', later '*gost*' and by Dutch influence eventually modified to 'ghost', meant "life", "spirit", "soul", and by development, "angel". The term "ghostly father" for "spiritual adviser" survived to quite recent times. This English word is the equivalent of the Latin '*spiritus*' (breath, breeze, breath of life, life, soul, mind, energy, courage, pride, arrogance), Greek '*pneuma*', and Hebrew '*ruach*', and so was quite properly used by the New Testament translators. Its modified modern usage, however, does render desirable the adoption of "spirit" consistently throughout the Scriptures,

and in recognition of this fact the term "Holy Spirit" is more and more coming to replace "Holy Ghost".

Apart from its application to the Holy Spirit of God, the word 'ghost' in the Bible is confined to the act of breathing one's last ('giving up the ghost') where the allusion is to the going back to God of that life principle which He implanted at the beginning. It is thus used 11 times in the Old Testament and about 8 times in the New. (See Gen. 25. 8, 17, Job 11. 20, Lam. 1 19, Matt. 27. 50, Acts 5. 5, 10.)

Perhaps the most powerful manifestation of the Holy Spirit is its influence on the minds and hearts of Christians. Our Lord was very definite that there is such a thing as being "born of the Spirit" and it may well be that the sight which it was given to John the Baptist to see, when he beheld the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus in the form of a dove (John 1. 32), and to the apostles in the upper room when there appeared the likeness of leaping fire upon their heads (Acts 2. 1-4) were appearances intended to symbolise the indwelling and characteristics of a new and spiritual influence that henceforward was to possess the lives of Jesus and his apostles. Paul declares that the possession of the Holy Spirit confers an ability to discern spiritual matters which is not possessed by the natural man, (1 Cor. 2. 12-14) and a common exhortation in New Testament epistles is the injunction to be so guided and influenced by the Holy Spirit that the inner life is brought more and more into tune with the spiritual world, "*where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God*" (Col. 3. 1).

In harmony with this are our Lord's own words when about to leave his disciples. "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another '*parakletos*'. . . the Spirit of truth" (John 14. 16-17). '*Parakletos*' is mistranslated 'comforter'; it means primarily one called to one's aid, as an advocate in a court of law (the same word is translated 'advocate' in 1 John 2. 1). Thus it signifies, in the widest sense, a helper in time of need, which in fact is the function of the Holy Spirit since Christ ascended to the Father.

The wise steward will seek always to cultivate along the lines of his natural abilities, and not expect the Lord to work a miracle for his advancement, and so waste valuable time seeking to develop that which he does not by nature possess.

There is, then, in the case of the believer, a definite act of God continuously operative in the mind and heart, enlightening, sustaining and transforming from kinship with earth to kinship with heaven, "*from glory unto glory*" (2 Cor. 3. 18). It is thus that the Holy Spirit is said to be dwelling in us (Rom. 8. 11, 2 Tim. 1. 14), permeating the life with its influence until at length the Spirit-guided individual is prepared for that great change which must come when earthly experiences are ended and he is born into the spiritual world.

Even so, the work of the Holy Spirit as respects humankind is not done. One phase of God's plans, as seen by prophets and apostles alike, deal with that time, yet to come, when the Holy Spirit will be "*poured out upon all flesh*" (Joel 3. 28). The completion of the Christian Church, founded at Pentecost and in process of selection ever since, will be the signal for a fresh effusion of God's creative power upon the still sin-sick world. It is then that there will be realised those words of Isaiah in which he described a king reigning in righteousness over all the earth, the spirit of the Lord resting upon him. (Isa. 11. 1-9). It is then that the nations will be taught the laws by which alone man live, and in the exaltation of that new revelation will cry "*Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us*" (Isa. 25. 9). In that day of world-wide conversion and abolition of evil, sin, pain and death the Holy Spirit will be active in the earth, entering into the minds of men, and carrying out creative and re-creative work until it has become true that "*in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow*" (Phil. 2. 10).

The Holy Spirit of God, the Divine dynamic, constantly working in all creation by a myriad means, profoundly influencing the hearts and minds of men, is a link between the Father and his creatures. Perhaps it was something like this that the Apostle Paul had in mind when he declared to the Athenians upon a certain noteworthy occasion (Acts 17. 28) "*In him we live, and move and have our being*".

Life is too short to spend in bickering and strife; love is too sacred to be for ever lacerated and torn by the ugly briars of sharp temper. Surely we ought to be patient with others since God has to show every day such infinite patience towards us.



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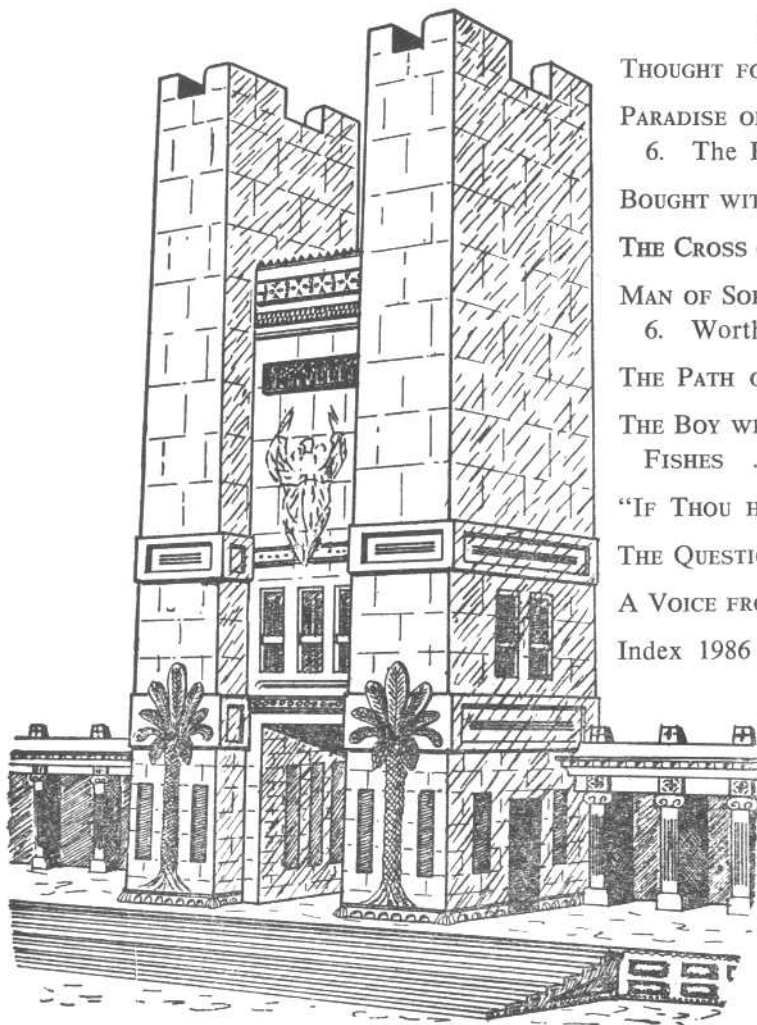
Thou, therefore, endure
hardness as a good
soldier of Jesus Christ

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

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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace" (Jer. 30. 5).

Words that speak of a great obstacle to Christian progress! Fear is a bogey which gibbers in front of every Christian who has not sufficient confidence in his calling to continue in belief that his mistakes and errors of judgment will be used in the Divine economy to effect some good thing in himself or in fellow-members in due course. To be an alert and zealous disciple demands full assurance of faith and confidence in the overruling power of God in our affairs. *"He hath opened mine eyes, and I have seen the Holy One. His angel hath touched my lips with the live coal from the altar; and I have heard his voice saying, 'Whom shall we send, and who will go for us'?"* If in our later days we can summon to our side the same devoted spirit which at the first prompted us to say *"Here am I, send me"*, then indeed the spirit of fear will find no lodgment. In these days, when the lamp is burning low in the Temple of God, there is need not only for clarity of vision and depth of spiritual insight, but also for purpose and determination. That is the antidote to the apathy and lethargy which oft settles upon those who have begun to lose the freshness and zeal of their earlier days. Such times of depression come to all. The toils of the way, strife and schism caused by false brethren, the apparent failure of fond and perhaps long cherished hopes, cause us like Hezekiah to want to go softly all our years. Would that we could be equally appreciative, as was that good king, when a term of years is added to our time, and go forward with face upraised, remembering that we are now and for all time his witnesses, in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Gone from us

Sis. M. Colinese (Purley)

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

BOOK REVIEWS

"Dual Heritage". Norman S. Prescott. Cortney Publications, Luton. 180 pp, 54 plate illustrations, Hardback. £7.95. ISBN 0 904378 31 4.

Subtitled "The Bible and the British Museum", this book is just that. A complete and eminently readable account, with abundant illustrations, of all the exhibits of Biblical interest in the British Museum, with directions for finding them, and with the associated historical facts. The whole becomes quite a compendium of Bible history, and in this field it is refreshing to observe the author's endorsement of 20th century research in this field, such as placing the time of Moses and the Exodus in the 18th Dynasty instead of the traditional 13th B.C. century, Thothmes III as the Pharaoh of the Oppression, primitive monotheism and the rise of paganism only after the Flood, all facts which most University experts and most works of reference have not got round to admitting even yet. Readers of the Bible Study Monthly will appreciate the uncompromising stand this book makes for the historical veracity of the Old Testament and the witness of ancient Mss to the early dates of the Gospels. A book to be kept on the shelf for easy reference.

Obtainable from booksellers but NOT from BFU Hounslow. Overseas readers should give their booksellers the international ISBN book number as quoted above.

NOTICES

"The Millennial Gospel of Jesus"

This is a 32-page booklet commencing with an outline of the Divine Plan up to the teaching of Jesus, and later of his Apostles, on the promised Millennium of his reign over the world at his Second Advent. It offers a reasoned and reasonable explanation of the purpose of God with respect to mankind and the coming Day of peace and happiness for all men. Sent free for cost of postage and packing (UK stamps accepted). In UK, 1 for 12p; 3 for 18p; 8 for 45p. Overseas; 8 for one dollar.

"After the Flood"

This series, which commenced in the July/Aug. 1984 issue, was concluded in our last issue and comprises 14 instalments. Several enquiries have been made as to whether it will be available in booklet form and the answer is, regretfully, no. The possible demand cannot be enough to justify the cost of reprinting. What can be done is to supply a set of the instalments in stiff card cover made up from spare copies of the relevant issues, so long as these last. There would be no charge for such sets beyond the cost of stationery and postage. Copies can be supplied at 50p post free in UK (stamps accepted) and one dollar for overseas readers.

PARADISE ON EARTH

Earth's coming glory

6. The Resurrection

"How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?" asked St. Paul's hypothetical critic in I Cor. 15:35. He answers the question himself "Thou sowest not that body that shall be . . . but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him" (vss. 37-38). The basic principle of the future life is that the one who once lived, and died, and whose physical body has long since resolved itself into its constituent atoms and been distributed worldwide, awakens to conscious life in a new body created by Divine power, a body adapted to the environment in which the one thus resurrected finds himself. If in heaven with the Lord Christ, a celestial body adapted to the celestial world; if on earth, a terrestrial "human" body adapted to this terrestrial earth. "To every seed" says Paul in vss 38-40 "his own body. There are celestial bodies and bodies terrestrial; the glory of the celestial is one and the glory of the terrestrial is another".

In former times it was believed that the body which was consigned to the grave was the one which would re-appear at the Last Day, the Day of Judgment. The ancient Egyptians were persuaded that unless the body was preserved in death there could be no resurrection, hence their care in embalming the dead. The modern objection that the body will have long since disappeared and could not thus rise is met by the assertion that God can and will "reconstitute" the body so that the individual lives and breathes again. This becomes an approximate definition of the truth. "If a man die, shall he live again?" asks Job in ch. 14. 14; then he answers his own question. "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call and I will answer thee; thou shalt have a desire to the work of thine hands". Here is an attested belief in the resurrection of the dead, in a future life even though far distant in time, expressed by a man who lived nearly two thousand years before Christ. More than a thousand years later the same positive conviction was expressed by Isaiah (26. 3) "Thy dead shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust, for . . . the earth shall cast out the dead". This assertion is made in connection with a passage describing the exultation of humanity when they realise that the Millennial Kingdom of Christ has become a reality, and serves to indicate the time that the resurrection takes place. Martha, disconsolate at the death of her brother, Lazarus, hearing the Lord telling her

"thy brother shall rise again" responded with the fixed conviction of every Jew "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the Last Day" (Jno. 11. 23-24); it would be in this sense that she understood the earlier words of Jesus "the hour is coming when all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth" (Jno. 5. 18-19). From the dawn of human history to the present, men have believed in the resurrection of the dead, and it remains now only to consider in what manner this marvellous happening will come about. When Paul addressed the learned philosophers of Athens on "Jesus and Resurrection" most of them scorned him (Acts 17:32); the most fitting response to that rejection was his own later impassioned demand when on trial before Porcius Festus and King Agrippa (Acts 26:8) "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" Why indeed? The very foundation of the Christian faith is the promise of eternal life through Christ by means of resurrection. Death is not the end; there is life to come beyond death. Resurrection is the gateway to that life.

What then is the practical impact of the process of resurrection? Granted that the Scriptures are positive that it will happen, that all who are now dead will re-appear upon earth, how does it take place and what will be the effect upon the existing population, those who at that time will be already living? The increase of the race by means of the birth of children at the present time is so ordinary and familiar a process that everyone takes it for granted and a matter of course—that is how it has always been and no matter how wonderful a process it is no one stops to consider it as anything out of the ordinary. But the sudden and unexplained appearance of full-grown men and women from, apparently, nowhere, is a very different proposition. And when they give concrete evidence of their having been on earth before, to have lived, and died, in some past period of time, the wonder will be greater still. It can be that men will have heard so much of the Plan of God and the purpose of this new Age in which they now find themselves living that they will be expecting something like this happening, but even so, it is going to be a startling occurrence.

In the absence of more concrete details, it is necessary to go back to the only instance in the Bible of anything like this happening before—the story of the creation of the first man, Adam.

Genesis tells us that *"the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul"* (Gen. 2.7). It is known that the human body is composed of the same chemical materials as everything else in the earth around us—mainly carbon, nitrogen and oxygen, with smaller quantities of other elements. These abound in the rocks, the earth, the seas and the air. They form the material out of which every plant and tree is constructed, every insect, fish and animal. A chemist could collect in a container the precise amount of each element which is used in the make-up of a human body, but he would be unable to convert it into a living body. Only God can do that. So God brought together, one would expect in a moment of time, the right proportions of those elements, metamorphosed them into a body with its limbs and organs and bloodstream, infused that body with life, life which only He can give, and Adam awoke to consciousness, a living soul.

It seems reasonable to suppose that the same exercise of Divine power will operate in the case of every subject of resurrection. In a moment of time the elements of the newly-to-be-formed body will coalesce from the abundant supply Nature can provide, take shape and appear in human form, the spirit of life sweep down from above and take possession of the inanimate frame, the heart commence beating, the lungs fill with air, the eyes open, consciousness come into the brain, and the individual sit up as memory begins to return, wondering at first what has happened. A familiar term nowadays is the "memory bank" of a computer, a facility whereby information is stored in an electrical device which can release it at a later date in its precise original form. The function of memory in the human brain is of a somewhat similar nature. The process of remembering something, of going back in the mind to a happening that is past, sets in motion micro-miniature electrical circuits in the nerves of the brain which open and close various "channels", leading at last to the formation in the mind of a picture of that past event. What man can now do with a computer God is well able to do with all his creatures and store up in a heavenly "memory bank" every thought and word and action of each man who has lived so that at the resurrection He has only to impress and record upon the body He has created and the man is, and knows he is, the one who lived, it may be, thousands of years previously. Just as, when one awakes in the morning and consciousness and memory return, the individual knows himself to be the one who was alive yesterday even although consciousness has completely lapsed during the night hours, so the one thus raised will know himself,

not only for what he is, but for what he was.

There is probably something more fundamental in all this which we with our human limitations cannot be expected to understand. Paul told the men of Athens (Acts 17. 28) *"in him we live, and move, and have our being"*. It may be that at the end we shall come to realise that the mystery of our personal identities as individual beings is wrapped up with the relationship that must subsist between the Creator and each one of the creatures to whom He has given life, that in a very real sense our individual identities are bound up with him and cannot be lost the while we are in communal relationship with him, or if separated by sin, any hope remains that we can at the last be reconciled to him. All this belongs to the unrevealed, but that our conscious identity is not lost even though death intervenes is demanded by the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection.

It follows of course that the individual thus resurrected will possess the same character, the same virtues and vices, the same feelings and longings, as at the moment of death. In body and mind he will be complete and whole, as was Adam at his creation, but his character will have been conditioned by his past life and that can only be changed by further experience, the experiences of this new Age into which he has now come. The sinner will not be instantaneously changed into a saint by the fact that he has been given a new body and awakened to consciousness. In this new world in which the secrets of, all men's hearts will be made manifest the sins and shortcomings of the past will be brought out into the open for all men to see. Isaiah, speaking of this day, says (32.5) *"the vile person shall be no more called liberal, nor the churl said to be bountiful"*. That is why Daniel, speaking of the resurrection, said that of the many who sleep in the dust of the earth, some would wake to enduring life and some to shame and enduring contempt (Dan. 12.2). Jesus, elaborating on this, said they that have done good would arise to a resurrection of life but they that have done evil to a resurrection of judgment (Jno. 5.29). This word "judgment" is in the Greek, *krisis*, which means a trial or contest terminated by a verdict. This implies that those thus resurrected are not to be immediately condemned but are subjected first to a process of selection on the basis of their response to the evangelising work of the Millennial Age. Only after that is completed is the final judgment pronounced.

There is a passage in the Book of Isaiah which bears upon this point although as it appears in the A.V. it is imperfectly translated and consequently somewhat obscure. As it stands in the A.V. of Isa. 65.20 it reads *"there shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man*

that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old but the sinner being a hundred years old shall be accursed". The verse as it stands does not make sense, for if there is not going to be an "infant of days" there will obviously not be a "child" there; if the child is to die at a hundred years there will be no old men who do not fill their days. In any case there will be no death in the Millennium for it is the Age which is devoted to an opportunity for all living to accept Christ and be reconciled to God. Only at its end does any question of worthiness or unworthiness of eternal life come up.

The translation is inadequate. The first phrase is understandable. Although at the beginning there will be infants and old men these will quickly attain normal human maturity by growing up in the one case and "growing down" in the other. This applies both to those living and those who are resurrected, for they must needs awaken at that stage of life they had attained at death. The expression "old man that hath not filled his days" has the verb in the future intensive tense and is better rendered "will not abundantly fill those days"; there is a demonstrative pronoun here which refers the days to the days of the Millennium, not "his" days. No man, however old, will fail to see the end of the thousand years. The preposition "for", in "for the child", is incorrect; the Hebrew word is a relative conjunction linking to what has just been said, "that the child" and "child" here is a word denoting youths and young men, so that the entire phrase is better rendered "*from that time there will not be the newborn babe or the old man who will not abundantly fill those days, that he would die as a young man in a hundred years*". In the final phrase the word "*galal*" rendered "accursed", does not mean "cursed" in the sense of an oath or an imprecation, which in the Old Testament is usually "*cherem*". It has the meaning of being despised, disgraced, disesteemed. It does not imply the ultimate fate of the sinner, but that he is in no condition of disgrace or contempt, which is precisely what Daniel has in Daniel 12.2 above quoted. If a man experiences Millennial blessings and the power of the Gospel appeal and after a hundred years still shows no signs of renouncing sin it is to be expected that he will be generally disesteemed by his fellows who are themselves making progress towards the standards of righteousness which are set before all men in that day "*The sinner of a hundred years will be despised*" is a fair translation.

There is a somewhat similar passage in the apocryphal "*Book of Jubilees*" ch. 23. 26-29, which must have been derived from one of the

ancient Hebrew texts from which both "*Jubilees*" and the modern Hebrew texts have their origin. "*And there will be no old man nor one that is not satisfied with his days for all will be as children and youths And all their days they will complete in peace and joy. And there will be no Satan nor any evil destroyer, for all their days will be days of blessing and healing*". This passage occurs in a brief description of the Millennial Age and perhaps affords a more accurate record of the original pre-Christian Hebrew text than is presented by the present A.V. rendering.

The cynic can step in at this point with what at first sight seems a perfectly reasonable objection. If this doctrine be true, he says, and all who have ever lived are to return again to this earth, where is one going to put them. How could there be living room or even standing room for the thousands of millions who must have lived from the beginning of time? And even if there should be standing room, what about food? How can this earth, which at this present time produces barely enough food to meet the needs of the present population, be expected to supply so vast a multitude? Put like that, the idea of a resurrection of all men would seem unrealistic and impossible at the outset.

Put like that, the question is based upon pure assumption. It is not known, and cannot be known, just how many have been born upon earth since the days of the first man. The facile assumption is that there was always a large population but this by no means follows. Such conclusions as ethnologists and anthropologists have been able to draw from the scanty evidence that is available tend to show that only during the last three centuries has the earth possessed a population of any appreciable dimensions. The present number of over four thousand millions (the five thousand million mark is reported to have been reached in July 1986) is fantastically in excess of anything that has been known before. In the year 1900 it was only 1600 million, in 1800 700 million, and in 1700 400 million, a twelve-fold increase in three centuries. Experts such as Putnam, Carr-Saunders and Huxley have calculated that at the beginning of the Christian era only 250 millions existed and in 2000 BC a maximum of 65 millions. All these added up begin to bring the total within manageable proportions.

Since the doctrine and the hope of the resurrection is bound up with the authority of the Bible it is logical — and indeed imperative — to accept the Bible story of the origin of man upon earth. If the one is not authoritative then neither is the other and the entire belief and expectation fails. The Bible declares that the human race

started with one pair—nothing illogical in that; the same thing has happened scores of times since to give rise to primitive tribes on remote islands or in previously uninhabited territory. Then at the time of the Flood the human race had to start all over again with three pairs. It has to be realised also that the present life span of three score and ten, with generations following each other about three times a century, did not obtain in olden times. The Bible accounts, when analysed, show that at the first the generations followed each other at something more like hundred year intervals and this would make a profound difference in the increase of the race. It has been calculated that, taking into account all the relevant Bible indications and allusions relevant to the subject, the probable number of humans who have ever lived if spread over all the earth would create a population density considerably less than that at present existing in Great Britain. This is on the basis that the stories of Eden and the Flood, and the Biblical time periods recorded, are factually correct. The imponderables of this subject are so immense that anything like a definite figure is quite out of the question, but the indications are that the Lord is going to introduce his Millennial reign and halt the continued increase of the human race at just that point when sufficient have been born properly to fill the earth. This incidentally was the commission given to the first man at his creation *"be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth"* (Gen. 1.28) where *"replenish"* is the Hebrew *male*, to fill fully or completely. Man was commissioned to fill the earth and this he has done.

The food question is of lesser importance. There is plenty of available land for growing all

the food so vast a host will require. The Scripture says that in that day the deserts shall become fertile, the dry places irrigated, crops grow where none grew before. In every respect Nature will respond to the willing labours of men and the food will be there in abundance.

How long will all this take? Obviously this host cannot all be restored to life at once. There must be an orderly return to allow for the constantly increasing demand for food, and presumably, clothing and housing. If the rate of increase of population due to the resurrection is taken as equal to the rate of increase during the second half of the twentieth century then a period of something like three hundred years would appear to be indicated. If this estimate is well founded, it can be expected that the resurrection will occupy at least the first three centuries of the Millennium, perhaps in the reverse order of going into death, so that the antediluvians will be the last to come back. Something like this seems to be indicated in some scriptures; thus Daniel in the 6th century BC was told that he would *"stand in his lot at the end of the days"* (Dan. 12.13) and Job, 17th century BC, talking of his faith in the resurrection, asked the Lord to *"appoint a set time, and remember me"* (Job. 14. 13-15) *"All the days of my appointed time will I wait, until my change come"* he says, *"thou shalt call, and I will answer thee"*. Says Paul on the same theme *"every man in his own order"* (I Cor. 15.23) where the word *"order"* is a military term indicating the marching of bodies of men each in their own place, just as one can imagine parties of men and women returning from the grave to renewed life upon earth.

To be continued.

VERSES AND PARAGRAPHS IN THE BIBLE

The division of the Bible text into chapters and verses was a gradual process. The original manuscripts had no divisions. During the Christian era the advantages of sub-division became apparent. Tertullian in the 3rd century refers to reading sections in the New Testament; it appears that division into chapters was first made in the 13th century by Hugo de Sancto Caro, who spent seven years preparing the first Concordance to the Bible and found the necessity of sub-dividing

the text. He numbered his chapters by the letters of the alphabet but did not divide them into verses. In the 15th century Rabbi Nathan did the same for the Hebrew Bible. Verses were introduced by Robert Stephanus at Geneva in 1551 and the Geneva Bible was the first to have chapters and verses; this set the pattern for the future, this same system has persisted unchanged into modern Bibles and has become universal.

No preaching of the truth, however eloquent, reasonable, and logical, is likely to be productive of results to the glory of God, if not backed by the silent yet potent influence of a consistent Christian life.

To follow faithfully one's highest ideals, even when these are at variance with accepted notions and practices, is the way to enter large and true life. There is no other failure comparable with a failure to obey the inner voice.

BOUGHT WITH A PRICE A doctrinal study

"Ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6. 20).

There is a commercial ring in those words which seems alien to the oft-repeated Gospel invitation to come to Jesus of one's own free will and in him find a liberty which cannot be obtained anywhere else. The entire teaching of Scripture on the nature of that process whereby salvation comes to man resounds with words such as bought, purchased and ransomed. The literal implication of 1 Cor. 6. 20—as of some other passages also—is that the "saved" one has attained that state only by becoming the slave of God. He is bought and he belongs to God. Yet the Christian is also described as a freedman in Christ Jesus. There is sufficient apparent difference between these two ideas to warrant closer examination.

1 Cor. 6. 20 is not the only place where this principle of purchase and "belonging to God" is laid down. In the succeeding chapter (7. 23) the Apostle repeats the remark with a different twist at the end; *"Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men"*. St. Peter in 2 Pet. 2. 1 refers to "false teachers" who *"deny the Lord that bought them"*. So basically rooted is this idea of purchase that the heavenly chorus in Revelation makes reference to the fact three times (the word is translated "redeemed" here but it is the same Greek word and means literally "to purchase in the market-place"). The words, addressed to the glorified Lord Christ, are *"thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood"*, *"no man could learn that song but (those) which were redeemed from the earth"*; *"these were redeemed from among men"* (Rev. 5. 9; 14. 3 & 4). The purchase price here is indicated as being the blood of Christ and this is a clear reference to his death as man on the Cross. His death is the price paid for man, and this is the evident meaning of Rom. 14. 9 *"Christ died, and rose, and lived, that he might be lord of the dead and the living"*. This same fact, that the purchase price was the death of Christ, is stressed again in 1 Pet. 1. 18-19 *"Ye were not redeemed (lutro—to set loose by payment of a price) by . . . silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ"*. The most definite expression of this nature is that occurring in Paul's last words to the elders of the Ephesus assembly, when he exhorted them to *"feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood"* (Acts 20. 28). This passage poses no little problem; it is the only one in all the New Testament where the Father

is identified with the Son in the death on the Cross. The shedding of blood pre-supposes and involves death, an unthinkable thing in relation to God Most High, Creator and Giver of all life. On this account it has been suggested by a considerable body of informed opinion that the words should read *"the church of the Lord"* which would remove the difficulty. The testimony of the principal early manuscripts seems more or less equally divided in that the Sinaitic and Vatican give "God" whilst the Alexandrian, Ephraemi and Bezae give "Lord". The "Received Text", with Westcott and Hort, accept "God" but Tischendorf and Tregelles, both acknowledged leading authorities, elect for "Lord". Weymouth and Rotherham both suggest that the word "Son" has dropped out from the end of the sentence (in the Greek the words run *"which he purchased through the blood of the own"*). But whichever of these alternatives is accepted makes no difference to the basic truth. Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Son of God, was put to death, unresistingly, by men who would not have his teaching. The expression "the shed blood" refers to that death, and that alone, and in these Scriptures that death is said to be the purchase price by means of which mankind is bought or redeemed to God.

It is necessary now to associate the thought of freedom, of liberty from restraint or bondage, with this act of purchase. Writing to his fellow-worker Titus, building up the churches in Crete, Paul speaks of *"our Saviour Jesus Christ who gave himself for us that he might redeem"* (lutro again—to set free by payment of a price) *"us from all iniquity"* (Titus 2. 14). Again to the Ephesians he says that in Christ *"we have redemption"* (apolutrosis—a setting free) *"through his blood, the forgiveness of sins"* (Eph. 1. 7) where "forgiveness" means literally a letting go or sending away. The same word is rendered both *"deliverance to the captives"* and *"set at liberty them that are bruised"* in our Lord's reading in the Capernaum synagogue (Luke 4. 18). Again is this same truth stressed in the message to the Colossians. God *"hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins"* (Col. 1. 14). The importance that St. Paul attached to this joint idea of purchase and right of ownership combined with freedom and setting at liberty is demonstrated by the frequency of such allusions in his epistles.

Our Lord added his own word. *"The Son of Man came"* He said *"to give his life a ransom*

for many" (Matt. 20. 28, Mark 10. 45). This is *lutron*, the price paid for redeeming. Again the commercial aspect! Jesus gave his human life as a price to secure the freedom of all men, and in so doing He became the owner, their Lord. St. Paul took up this aspect and used the same word when he said (1 Tim. 2. 6) that Christ Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all" and stressed the element of exchange in the transaction by applying the prefix "anti" to "lutron" thereby implying that the price paid, the life laid down, was in all respects a full and sufficient discharge for the transaction concerned. Whether we understand the philosophy of the matter or not, it remains true that Jesus' willing laying down of his life at the hands of his enemies becomes an adequate price to secure the release of all mankind from the power of sin and therefore of death.

One has to remember in all this that intrinsically it was because "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son" to effect the salvation of "whosoever believeth" and that it is of Divine grace that men are saved. The Scriptural insistence on the process of purchase or redemption of men by the payment of a price must not be stressed beyond its intended scope but there must be a reason why the fact is so clearly stated; in some way it must contain an explanation of the necessity for Christ to die before man can be restored to harmony with God.

The key to this whole matter and the apparently commercial element in the Scriptures concerned lies in the fact that both St. Paul and St. Peter used the then prevailing custom whereby slaves could obtain freedom as the basis of their expositions and exhortations. That custom was called "manumission" and there exists plenty of evidence from which the details of its operation are clearly understood.

Briefly, the slave was brought by his owner to the temple of the god, the purchase price of the slave's freedom having already been paid into the temple treasury by the person interested in gaining him his freedom. In formal fashion the priest handed over the money to the slave's owner and the slave was then considered to have been sold to the god. Thereafter no man might take him into slavery again, and he walked out of the temple a free man, although for the rest of his life he remained technically the property of the god. Severe legal penalties awaited anyone who tried to enslave one who had thus gained his freedom by being sold to the god.

The famous Temple of Apollo at Delphi in Greece, often referred to as the "Delphic Oracle", was one place where this ceremony was

frequently performed, and many tablets dating from the Apostle Paul's day have been discovered bearing the name of the slave and the price paid, the names of the witnesses to the transaction, and always a concluding formula, "for freedom". "Sold to Apollo, the male slave so-and-so, at a price of so-much, for freedom"; that was the magic formula which made the erstwhile slave free for ever. And the Greek words used on the tablets, describing the transaction, are those used in the New Testament for "ransom" and "redeem" and "bought" in the texts which have been considered above. The reason that Jesus used the word "ransom" was to draw a parallel between the effect of his death in procuring freedom from sin for man, and the paying of the freedom price for the slave. 1 Cor. 6. 20 is then an exact replica of what took place in the pagan temple. We, being slaves to the power of sin, have been bought with a price and are become the property of God; nevertheless from that moment we are free men. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" says the Apostle (Gal. 5. 1).

This aspect of the Atonement shows man as in bondage to sin and the evil that is in the world and unable by his own efforts to break free. No matter how high-minded and just he may be as an individual, he cannot but be involved in the sub-normal mode of existence which St. Peter calls "this present evil world" and he cannot escape death. He is thus a slave to this condition of things. Christ Jesus gave his humanity, his life as a man, as an adequate or equivalent price, and by that act acquired the right of possession of all men for himself. This leaves untouched other aspects of the Atonement which are defined by other sets of Scriptural teaching, the manner, for example, in which Jesus bears the sins of the world, takes them upon himself, so to speak, relieving men of their consequences, and the manner in which the death of Jesus becomes an offset to the sin of Adam so that all who die in Adam are made alive in Christ. These have to be considered on their own merits. Suffice now to say that the intrinsic value of this purchase must be connected in some vital way with the response of the slave who is being given his freedom. "The blood of Christ" says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews "who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, shall purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God". Somewhere in that statement lies buried the truest understanding of the doctrine of the Atonement.

THE CROSS OF CHRIST

Thoughts on an obscure text

"They took Jesus therefore; and he went out, bearing the cross for himself . . ." (John 19. 17 R.V.).

Since the 2nd Century A.D. Christians have used the cross as a symbol of faith. Almost universally, it is accepted that the cross upon which Christ died was the *crux immissa*, that is, a long upright pole with a shorter crossbeam fixed horizontally to it. However, in recent times a sizeable number of Christians, including some scholars, have rejected the idea that our Lord died on a cross as we usually imagine, and say instead that he was fixed to a *crux simplex* or upright pole. As is often the case in such matters, unnecessary divisions have arisen between Christians who read spiritual and theological importance into the issue, some suggesting that those who hold to the *crux immissa* are in actuality venerating a pagan image which has no connection with the manner in which our Lord was impaled.

An examination of the arguments put forward by the *crux simplex* proponents, and several relevant passages of Scripture, will prove interesting. The arguments against the *crux immissa* can be summarised as follows:

- (1) The N.T. word *stauros*, usually translated "cross" in most translations, is more accurately translated as "pole", "pale" or stake".
- (2) The *crux immissa* was revered as a religious symbol by many pagan nations long before the birth of Christ, and "apostate" Christians adopted it in an effort to draw Gentile pagans into the church without forcing them to abandon their cherished pagan emblems.

It must be conceded that, in its earliest form, *stauros* did refer to a simple, upright stake or pole, as opposed to a fabricated cross, but it must also be remembered that the word had taken on a much broader application by the time of Christ. By the 1st Century, *stauros* was used to refer to any stake or pole, *whether it had a crossbeam attached to it or not*. By way of an analogy, I can say that I have an oak tree in my garden. If I attach a hammock to it, that does not change the tree into a bedpost. It is still a tree, and I am at perfect liberty to describe it as such. In fact, to describe it as a bedpost would be extremely misleading.

There are several lines of Scriptural reasoning which point strongly to the idea that the cross was in fact the *crux immissa* of ancient tradition.

Firstly, the *simplex* proponents acknowledge that when people were impaled on a simple, upright pole, their wrists were overlapped and *one solitary* nail was driven through both wrists into the pole. However, in John 20. 25 Thomas is recorded as saying that unless he "shall see in his hands the print of the nails" he "will not believe". The word "nails" implies clearly that more than one nail was used, and that, therefore, the hands of Jesus must have been attached separately to the cross, whatever shape it was. There is no evidence that the crucifactors ever used more than one nail to affix someone in the *simplex* position.

Secondly, we have to consider whether other aspects of the Gospel accounts can be harmonised with the *simplex* theory, and we see that this is not always possible. We know that the *titulus*, or proclamation of charges, was hung above Christ's head. (John 19. 19, Luke 23. 38, Mark 15. 26, Matt. 27. 37). Both Matthew and Luke use "*epi*" (Matthew adds "*ano*" meaning "over and above") which more correctly carries the sense of "just above" in this context, as opposed to *ano* on its own which would allow for the *titulus* to be placed *anywhere* (i.e. at any distance or height) above. This, coupled with the fact that the Gospel account says that the *titulus* was placed above his *head*, as opposed to his *hands*, infers that the proclamation hung directly over his head with very little space in between. Now if the *titulus* was directly above Jesus' head, it is almost impossible to imagine that Jesus' arms were raised vertically above his body, overlapping above his head at the wrists. This would leave only a small triangular space in which the proclamation could be nailed, a space that would be even further diminished when one remembers that Christ had a crown of thorns upon his head. For various reasons, the *titulus* would have been just too big to fit into such a small place.

The proclamation was written in three languages, Hebrew, Latin and Greek. (John 19. 20). It had to be clearly visible so that all passers-by could read it. This was a legal requirement. It was customary for the feet of the victim to be placed about four feet from the ground. This caused the calves to be approximately five feet from the ground, or shoulder height, which enabled the soldiers employed to carry out the *crucifragium* to swing the mace horizontally from the shoulder as opposed to an angled swing which was more difficult.

Now if we presume that our Lord was somewhere between 5ft. 6in. and 6ft. 0in. height, then the *titulus* must have been at least 9ft. 6in. from the ground. To be easily readable from the ground, in a society which did not have the benefit of spectacles, we must presume that the figures or characters were at least one inch in height. This would have entailed the penning of a *titulus* much larger than that which would have been able to fit in between the vertically raised arms of our Lord. The conclusion must be that our Lord's arms were NOT raised vertically above his head, but, at least to a fair degree, outstretched horizontally.

Having disposed of the use of the *simplex* within all reasonable doubt, we are left with three main candidates concerning the shape of the cross upon which Christ was crucified. Two of these, the *crux commissa* (St. Anthony's cross, in the shape of a letter T) and the *crux decussata* (St. Andrew's cross, in the shape of a letter X), can be immediately ruled out because no point of these crosses ever found itself "over" the head of the victim after the victim had been secured, and the Gospels clearly indicate that the *titulus* was placed *above and over* Jesus' head.

By a process of elimination, we have to assume that the use of the traditional *crux immissa* is at least a strong possibility. No other type of cross fits all the facts of the crucifixion as presented

in the Gospels. Unless the crucifactors used a highly unusual type of *crux*, and the Gospels give no hint of this, the traditional *crux immissa*, which has been the symbol used since at least the beginning of the 2nd Century, must be the most likely candidate.

But what of the moral objections to the *crux immissa*? True, it bears a close resemblance to the *crux ansata* of Egypt, and other pagan religious symbols, but there is no evidence that the Romans fashioned the *immissa* in the shape that they did because of this. Indeed, all the evidence suggests that the various crosses employed by the Romans were fashioned simply to suit the human anatomy. To suggest that "many pagan nations had religious symbols shaped like crosses, therefore all crosses are pagan religious symbols," is both speculative and mischievous.

Not until the general resurrection takes place during the Millennial judgment day of God, and the eyewitnesses of the crucifixion are able to recount their testimony, will we know for certain the exact details of the death of our Lord. But do we really *need* to know? Surely, it is the death itself, and the enormous implications for mankind's destiny, that should be the focal point of our attention. Whatever the shape of the cross, surely, we can say with Paul, "*far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" (Gal. 6.14).

CHRISTIAN GROWTH

"Let me remind you all, ye faithful believers in Christ, that ye are compared to trees—trees of the Lord's right-hand planting. Seek to grow as the tree grows. Pray that this year ye may grow downward; that ye may know more of your own nothingness; and so be rooted to humility. Pray that your roots may penetrate below the mere topsoil of truth, into the great rocks which underlie the uppermost stratum; that ye may get a good hold of the doctrines of eternal love, of immutable faithfulness, of complete satisfaction, of union to Christ, of the eternal purpose of God, which He purposed in Christ Jesus before the world was. This will be a growth which will not add to your fame, which will not minister to your vanity, but it will be invaluable in the hour of storm; a growth, the value of which no heart can conceive when the hurricane is tearing up the hypocrite. As ye root downward, seek to grow upward. Send out the topshoot of your love towards heaven. As the trees send out their spring shoot and their mid-summer shoot, and as you see upon the top of the fir that new green child of spring, the fresh shoot which lifts its hand

towards the sun, so plan to have more love and greater desires after God, a nearer approach towards him in prayer, a sweeter spirit of adoption, a more intense and intimate fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. This mounting upward will add to your beauty and to your delight. Then pray to grow on either side. Stretch out your branches; let the shadow of your holy influence extend as far as God has given you opportunities. But see to it also that ye grow in faithfulness, for to increase the bough without adding to the fruit is to diminish the beauty of the tree. Labour this year by God's grace to bring forth more fruit unto him than ye have ever done. We would not be as the gleanings of the vintage when there is only here and there a cluster upon the uppermost bough, we would be as the Valley of Eschol, whose presses burst with new wine.

"This is to grow in grace; to root downward, to shoot upward, to extend your influences like far-reaching branches, and to bring forth unto the Lord's glory."

C. H. Spurgeon.

MAN OF SORROWS

6. Worthy is the Lamb

*A study in
Isaiah 53*

"Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief; when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand" (vs. 10).

Here is a prophecy of the dying sufferings of the Messiah. At the very last the Father takes upon himself the ultimate responsibility for all that has happened. "Thou couldst have no power at all against me" said Jesus to Pilate, "except it were given thee from above." The Father, Creator and sustainer of all things, declares his acceptance of responsibility for everything that happens in his creation. God is not the author of sin, and those who claim that He is, and because of that is morally obligated to recover every one of his creatures from the thralldom and power of sin irrespective of their own wishes in the matter, do greatly err. But God takes responsibility for the fact that sin is allowed to remain in the world and evil men are permitted to practice evil deeds. He could end all that in a moment by the exercise of his will, knowing that the eventual outcome will justify the wisdom of the course He has taken. So it is true to say that it pleased the Lord to bruise him in the sense that the Father deliberately allowed that "bruising" to take place, and did not lift a finger to stop it. None would claim that God took pleasure in the harrowing scenes of the trial and crucifixion, but we ought to realise that God did look upon the whole transaction with the serenity of infinite wisdom, knowing that the end of the story would be glory. And in the meantime He gave strength and comfort to the Son as he drank to the bitter end the cup which He had poured for him. Father and Son were in complete harmony and full understanding the one with the other during the whole of that dark time.

This is when Jesus uttered the sad words "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here, and watch with me" (Matt. 26. 38). It is so easy to assume that Jesus was troubled in mind at the thought of the physical sufferings he was so shortly to endure; one wonders if our thinking has not been altogether along wrong lines, unduly influenced by what would undoubtedly have been our own reaction under similar circumstances. Jesus was more than man and He had a wider mental horizon than has been the possession of any man. He lived before the world was; the whole wide creation of God

had been his sphere of action. Even in the bitter moments of the betrayal, the trial, and the crucifixion, that fact must have made an inestimable difference. Men who enter into what they know is to be suffering ended by death cannot visualise, because they do not know, what lies beyond death. Jesus did know, and his knowledge of the other world must have been a wonderful stay and strength in the midst of his physical suffering. But there was another suffering to be endured, one that perhaps was much more crucial to him. How would his disciples behave after he was gone? Would they show themselves men of stamina and courage to continue the work He had begun? He must of necessity leave them to plant the seed of his word in the world after his death, and in the power of his Spirit lay the foundations of the Church, without which the Divine Plan for all mankind could not go into effect. Were they capable of discharging the commission He must now of necessity leave to them? Were these the thoughts which caused Jesus' soul to be "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death?" The men He had chosen were so little conscious of the position in which their Master was placed that they could sleep soundly while He endured his Gethsemane agonies; in a few hours' time one of them was going to deny him in public and they all were going to forsake him and flee for their lives. Was this the cup He had to drink and from which He desired to be saved if it were the Father's will? If so, the expression "he hath put him to grief" takes on a new and a terrible significance. That grief was caused, not by the Master's enemies, not by wicked men, but by his own disciples and companions. He might reasonably have expected to yield up his human life on the Cross fortified and comforted by the presence of the twelve who had continued with him in his trials and difficulties. He might have hoped that the last sight his eyes would behold as the shades of death came down would be the stalwart company of men who were to proclaim and establish his message in the world. But it was not to be. A few women, and the faithful John. That was all. It cannot be held that Jesus lost faith, even for one moment, during that climax to all his sufferings; but that He must have suffered intense grief at the defection of those who should have been his comforters during that time is undeniable.

It was at this moment that Jesus uttered the oft-misunderstood cry "My God, my God, why

hast thou forsaken me?" which H. G. Wells once referred to as "that eternal enigma to the faithful". Granted that many earnest Christians have been puzzled by that cry, it is still true that had H. G. Wells' knowledge of the Bible been anywhere on a par with his undoubted literary abilities, he would not have made that scathing remark. The explanation sometimes offered, that in order fully to take the sinner's place Jesus must experience, if only for a moment, the withdrawal of the Father's favour, and feel himself disowned and deserted by God, is quite untenable and, to a degree, irreverent. It implies that for a moment our Lord's faith failed. It implies that Christian men who have suffered martyrdom for their faith without having any sign of deliverance by God, and yet have remained firm in faith and confident of the Father's smile right up to their dying breath, were superior to our Lord in faith, which is an absurd and impossible conclusion. Whatever Jesus meant by the words, He could not have meant that He harboured any doubt as to his Father's continued favour and strength. To his last moment He knew that God was with him.

The right answer is that Jesus uttered the words not as an indication of lost faith, but as an affirmation in the sight of all spectators that his faith still held. The words Jesus uttered are the opening words of the twenty-second Psalm. Jesus deliberately quoted the opening verse of that psalm. Now that fact is of tremendous significance for the twenty-second psalm is a very special psalm. It is the traditional psalm sung or quoted by the children of Israel when hard pressed by their enemies, when escape seemed hopeless and death stared them in the face. The first eighteen verses of the psalm are eloquent of despair, as though God had deserted his people and left them to their fate. Then verses nineteen to twenty-two express the continued faith of Israel that despite the apparent indifference of God, yet God does care and is mindful of his people's plight, and will eventually deliver. Finally verses twenty-three to thirty-one tell of deliverance accomplished, the enemies of Israel scattered, and the people of God triumphantly exalted. It thus follows that the crying out of the first verse of Psalm 22 at a time of extremity was tantamount to an avowal of faith that, despite the apparent hopelessness of the case, God would surely deliver at the end.

We have the authority of the New Testament for saying that Psalm 22 is also intended to be prophetic of Christ. So when Jesus cried the words, they conveyed to the listeners his implicit faith that although He was going down into the darkness of death, He knew that the Father

would raise him from the dead and exalt him to his own right hand. Like Israel in their battles, his enemies had for the moment gained the upper hand and there was no immediate salvation from their murderous designs; He must inevitably perish at their hands. But that was not the end; as a witness to that sure fact He cried the words which told all Israel of his faith that *"the third day he shall rise again"*.

"He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied. By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many: for he shall bear their iniquities" (vs. 11).

When the Creator of all things stood and viewed all that He had made, He pronounced it "very good". That was at the close of the primary work of creation, when man had been introduced to his Edenic home, but before experience of evil began to have its effect on the moulding of human character to the ideal which God set in the beginning. Even that incomplete work was considered "very good" by the Lord of All. By how much more, therefore, shall our Lord be satisfied when he beholds the glorious consummation of his redemptive work! Tremendous forces, over vast spans of time, brought this universe to the point where our earth was born. After further ages this planet became fitted for human habitation. Man lived, and rejoiced for a brief spell in the innocence and happiness of Eden. Then came sin, and the orderly progress of Divine creative power was rudely interrupted. Death reigned over mankind; no longer was man lord of the lower creation. And God was not satisfied.

That is a most important principle. God, who had looked upon his creation in the days of Adam's sinlessness and perfection, and found it satisfactory, after the Fall was not satisfied. He did not intend to leave matters where they were. Then and there He put into operation the great Plan of redemption of which Jesus is the central figure. The serpent was to bruise the heel of the seed; but the seed was to bruise the head of the serpent—to destroy it. That was the promise given in Eden, and although many years were to roll by before there was any Divine moving to the fulfilment of the promise, God was not indifferent. In the fulness of time the work of deliverance began.

Here in Isa. 53 that work has ended. The Deliverer looks back upon the dark and tragic story of the past, and views the glorious consummation in the reconciliation of "whosoever will" to the Father. All that mankind has achieved during the thousand year day of trial that we call the Millennial Age has been in consequence of the "travail of his soul". All that

ascends to God in praise and worship from the multitudes of redeemed humanity is the direct result of the "travail of his soul". The happiness and the loyalty of all mankind, the beauty and the glory of the restored and everlasting earth, the peace and harmony of a creation ordering its course as God desires it shall be ordered, all has come about because of the "travail of his soul". So when our Redeemer looks upon the human creation made perfect through willing acceptance of his sacrifice on their behalf, He will be satisfied. As He enters into communion with the glorified body of saints, his Church, "changed" to be like him and to be with him where He is, He will be satisfied. All these fruits of the Divine Plan will be sources of satisfaction to the One who suffered and died for us that we might live for ever with him.

The fact that our Lord will only be satisfied by such a sequel to his life and death on earth is only one of the evidences we have in the Scriptures that the Plan of God is going to be a glorious success insofar as the number of the saved is concerned. In the old days it used to be thought that only the very few would be saved; the great majority were doomed to rejection and eternal banishment to Hell. To-day we view matters differently. We know that God would have all men saved and is putting forth every possible inducement to effect that end. If any man is rejected at the last it will only be because he has deliberately and of set intent wilfully resisted every good influence God can bring to bear upon him, and he is determined to continue in his sin. Every indication is that there will not be more than a comparative few of such.

How has this reconciliation, of all who will, been effected? It is by the knowledge possessed by our Lord. Knowledge of God, gained by his presence with the Father "before the world was", when He was at the Father's right hand. Knowledge of man, gained during his earthly life when He was made like man that He might share with men in all their infirmities and sorrows, and be made a merciful and faithful High Priest able to have compassion upon the ignorant and them that are out of the way. Knowledge of the Devil and his wiles, gained both from the times before the fall of Lucifer, when he was a sinless creature in the high courts of Heaven, and in the time when he bore the grim title of prince of this world. It was because of this knowledge that our Lord was able to carry out his mission with inflexible determination and assurance of ultimate triumph. He, the Lord of glory, was of necessity possessed of all knowledge; that is why his personality is presented under the name of "Wisdom" in the early chapters of the Book of Proverbs. In

later days the "Wisdom" of early Jewish thought became the "Logos" or word, thought, mind, of God. The "Logos" in turn became identified with the Man of Nazareth when John, speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, told his listeners that the "Logos" had been made flesh so that the invisible and incomprehensible Son of God might be manifest amongst them and to them. So the One who lived among men, ministering to them, taught them, suffered with them and ultimately suffered for them, was himself the repository of all Divine wisdom and knowledge. Thus it was that by knowledge the One we love and serve justified many.

"For he shall bear their iniquities." "When" he shall bear their iniquities, is the right thought. It is when Jesus has borne the iniquities of the children of men and given himself a Ransom for all, that the basis for justification is laid down. Even then men are not automatically justified, for there is man's part in this matter as well as that of God. No man can be justified by faith until he has exercised faith and become conscious of faith in Jesus Christ. No man can enjoy the state of reconciliation with God until he has first accepted Jesus as his Saviour and trusted in him as the basis of his acceptance before God. And no man can attain that state without repentance—repentance for the sin of the past, repentance for his own share in the undone state of the world, repentance for all that he is that is out of accord with the Divine ideal. And not very many do thus repent in this Age. Even though God has ever since Pentecost extended to all men a call to repentance, few of earth's millions have as yet heard the call and still fewer have heeded it. And meantime the world goes on in its sin and the Redeemer still bears its iniquities, and must do so, until at length those iniquities are for ever removed by the cleansing measures of the Millennial Kingdom. In that day it may truly be said that the Plan of salvation has reached its glorious climax and the fruits of that two-thousand-year-old manifestation of the Divine Lord in human form "for the suffering of death" has "justified many".

"Therefore will I appoint him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death, and he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (vs. 12).

This final verse is something like the "Hallelujah Chorus" in Handel's "Messiah". It is the acclamation of triumph that ends the story. This glorious climax was inevitable from the first; there was no doubt at all of its coming, but none the less it resounds with notes of joy and glad-

ness which could not have been struck before. This is the Father setting the seal of his own satisfaction upon all that has been done. The first two clauses of this verse picture a victorious warrior returning from battle to receive honour and reward from his King. The Lord Jesus Christ is the warrior and He has vanquished death and all its powers and driven sin and evil far away so that they can never return. There are many captives and trophies of the battle; all those things which in any way have opposed the righteousness of God or have flouted his laws or have ravaged his dominion have been subdued and led captive by the conquering Christ. All enemies have been put under his feet. But since He also is to be subject unto God Who did put all things under him, that God may be all in all, it is an entirely appropriate picture here that shows him bringing the trophies and spoils of victory to God his Father, as it were, and receiving back from his Father's hands the honour that is rightfully his. We know what that honour is; in the name of Jesus shall every knee bow, both in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. So when the Father is depicted as declaring "I will appoint him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong" He implies that He himself is the great and the strong one to whom has been rendered the spoils of war and who divides those spoils with the Son, the victor in the conflict. In no better manner could we have shown to us the unity which exists between the Father and the Son in the final triumph over evil. The whole Plan of Redemption is of the Father; its execution is by the Son. The power which overthrows evil is of the Father; that power is wielded by the Son. During the long period while sin subsisted upon the earth but as yet the time for the work of atonement had not come, Father and Son co-existed in the heavens, working in complete unity and oneness of thought and purpose. When in due time Christ Jesus was "born into the world to save sinners" the Father in heaven, dwelling in the indescribable light which no man can approach unto, and the Son on earth, made in the form of a bondman, manifest to men in the likeness of humanity, remained still in the intimacy of unfettered communion and the harmony of perfect unity. When the time of sacrifice and suffering was ended and the way prepared for men to walk the highway back to God, the risen Christ ascended to perfect reunion with his Father, seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. In all of this the relationship

of the Son to the Father is clearly shown; and now in the end of all things the Son receives from the Father excellent honour and glory. God the Father has appointed him a portion with himself the great; He has graciously given that the Son shall divide the spoil with himself the strong, and so the heavenly chorus goes up in jubilation "*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive riches, and power, and honour, and glory, and blessing*".

Because He poured out his life unto death—that is why. For three-and-a-half years He faithfully carried out his earthly commission and the whole of that ministry was a pouring out of his life unto death. Jesus not only died for men; He also lived for them, and that living was in itself a dying, for He died daily, giving and being given, spending and being spent, yielding to all who would partake, his flesh which was to be for the life of the world.

Because He was numbered with the transgressors—that is why. He who was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich. That becoming poor involved his being counted among the transgressors—He who knew no sin. It involved his being condemned as a criminal—He who knew no guile, neither was deceit found in his mouth. He the holy, the sinless one, was put to death as an offender against the holy laws of God, and counted among the criminals of this world. In bearing away the sins of mankind He was himself accounted a sinner. But that is the final note of triumph. By this very means He made intercession for the condemned and dying race before the Throne of God, and established his plea. The fallen sons of men, despairing and dying in the darkness, without hope and without God in the world, all unwittingly saw a great light. Adam's children, sitting unheeding in the land of the shadow of death, found the light streaming upon them. The Light of the world shone at length into their hearts, transforming the fear and gloom and terror into peace and joy and love. The all-powerful wisdom of God had found a way—the only way—whereby the creation of his hands could achieve its fore-ordained destiny despite the invasion of sin. The holy Son of God, looking down from his exalted station in the heavens "shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied", and from all the earth shall arise the joyful chorus "*Lo, this is our God . . . we have waited for him . . . we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation*".
(The end)

THE PATH OF THE JUST

A discussion on the principles of Christian progress

"The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." (Prov. 4. 18).

Admission to the privileges of Christian fellowship is limited by almost every religious community to those who will conform to certain standards of belief. Sometimes the set standard has a wide basis—nothing more than acceptance of Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour and belief that by that acceptance the believer has "received salvation"; has been "born again". Sometimes the standard set is almost inconceivably narrow, demanding rigid adherence to a comprehensive theology which purports to set out a detailed exposition of all God's dealings, past, present and future; a code of conduct which takes no account of the changing world around; insistence upon the absolute necessity of outward symbols, such as baptism, before the prospective believer can be counted as one of "the flock". Between these extremes there is represented in Christendom a varied range of standards, and to those who view their relationship to each other as dependent upon their relationship to the Lord Jesus and who desire to attain a correct perception of his Will, it becomes very necessary to have a clear view of the varied aspects and requirements of Christian discipleship.

Among Christian disciples there are various outlooks and differing understandings of the "call" to follow Christ. In the first place there are those who believe and cultivate the ethics of his teachings, the virtues described by Paul as the "fruits of the Spirit" (Gal. 5. 22), love, joy, peace, and so on, but who go through life without feeling any burning urge to become workers for Christ. The call to ambassadorship finds no responsive chord. The joy of converting the unbeliever, of assisting the first faltering steps of "babes in Christ" is one which is never theirs. The Christian life is to them a placid existence in which the calm enjoyment of saintly virtue is a shield and barrier against the ugly things of this world, and whilst they look up to the Lord Christ with reverence and adoration they do not see at his feet the bending figures of broken-hearted sinners who come to him for healing.

In the second place, there are those, having fully appreciated the essentially missionary spirit of Christ's teaching, who have found on the basis of a complete and whole-hearted surrender to him an outlet for their love and zeal in one of two general directions. They either engage in some form of social service, applying practical

Christianity to the immediate material needs of men's bodies, or they become evangelists and missionaries, seeking to satisfy the cravings of men's minds for a sense of re-union with God. There is not much of an intellectual nature in this, for the majority who will listen to such a missionary need food for the heart and not for the head; hence "bright Gospel services", the preaching of "Jesus Christ, and him crucified", fully satisfies the desire manifested by such for a sense of freedom from the power of sin and the certainty of ultimate salvation. The work of great revivalists like Dwight L. Moody was of this kind. No deep theology, no striking revelation of the purpose of God for man; yet a spiritual revival of such dimensions that without doubt it had much to do with the general ripening of Christian character which made the closing years of the nineteenth century so remarkable a period in the history of the faith.

Thirdly, there are those disciples, generally of a studious, reverent or mystic turn of mind, who seek to know God's plans for the future. Such a desire is a commendable one. *"Surely the Lord will do nothing but He revealeth his secrets to his servants the prophets."* (Amos 3. 7). Here is clear indication that the Father does reveal his purposes to those who are in the proper frame of mind to listen. The constant reiteration of the command to *"Watch—for ye know neither the day nor the hour."* (Matt. 25. 13), to be as watchers on the walls of the city (Hab. 2. 1) and to seek as did Daniel to *"know by books the number of the years"* (Dan. 9. 2), is sufficient to assure every earnest student that the study of Divine laws and purposes is fraught with blessing to the one who seeks.

This third class of disciples is that the members of which will take the most intelligent interest in the whole Plan of God and are prepared to give time and thought and energy to the consideration of the underlying principles of Divine revelation. Such will have the clearest idea of the ultimate purpose of God's creation and can, more than any other, give a reasonable answer to the enquirer. Accused as they are of being "not practical" or of ignoring the opportunities of Christian social service or the winning of unconverted ones to the standard of Christ, it is nevertheless true that the work they are doing is of vital importance in the further development of God's plan. *"God at the first did visit the Gentiles (nations) to take out of them a people for his name"* says James (Acts 15. 14), and much

of the New Testament is occupied with exhortations to this class of believers to give heed to their continued growth in grace and knowledge, that in due time they may become the Divine ambassadors when God "returns" (Acts 15. 16) to convert the nations.

The administrative and uplift work of the Millennial Age will require a Ministry of Reconciliation (2 Cor. 5. 18), the members of which are fitted in every respect for their work. They will have been "perfected through suffering" and in all the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit; will have been made copy likenesses of God's Son. That inward grace and heart harmony with God must be allied with a positive knowledge of God's laws and purposes so that they may be real instructors of the people. "They that be wise" said Daniel (12. 2), "shall shine as the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever". It was so with our Lord, for "by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, when he shall bear away (Heb.) their iniquities" (Isa. 53. 11). Made "like unto his brethren" (Heb. 2. 17) it is by his positive knowledge of the evils of sin and of the beneficence of righteousness that our Lord becomes a "merciful and faithful High Priest", and so shall it be with his followers. It should be readily agreed then that of all the varied kinds of Christian disciples those who consecrate to do the Will of God and endeavour in the course of their consecrated life to attain a fair and true understanding of the Divine Plan are likely to be the best fitted to reign with Christ. This is the purpose of the High Calling of this Gospel Age—to select a consecrated body of disciples to be used in his purposes when the time comes.

This is the reason that study of the Scriptures cannot be separated from the "High Calling" and our Christian life. Some bemoan the fact that so much time is taken up with the study of the Word to the exclusion of more "practical" manifestations of Christianity. It is unfortunately only too true that the "students" are often the least practical of all Christians and sometimes tend to become "mystics" without any practical outlook on the world around them at all. A clear understanding of the Truth should point to a proper balance between mere studiousness, the accumulation of knowledge, and the practical outworking of that knowledge. We need always to remember that the sincerity of our belief in the standards of the Millennial Age will be measured in large degree by our endeavour to put them into practice in this world to-day; and the learning we gather from the fountain of all Truth has failed in its purpose if we do not manifest forth the Word of life to others around in some degree

almost at once.

In order to preserve this proper balance between head and heart it is vital that the Divine way of imparting truth be clearly understood. There are two possible methods which God could have chosen. He could impart the knowledge of his Plan by direct revelation to each individual, in which case there would be no necessity for study and discussion, for thought and meditation, for pastors, teachers, evangelists, helpers. (Eph. 4. 11). On the other hand He could allow his truth to penetrate men's minds gradually as their powers of understanding developed, feeding upon that which had already been made known and had been assimilated. Which method has God adopted?

The laws of Nature point to the latter process as that which characterises all God's creation. Our Lord sketched a word picture when he likened his message to seed which was scattered and lay dormant, and then germinated, a man not knowing how, until at length it made its way through the earth "first the blade, then the ear" (Mark 4. 28). Another eloquent lesson lay concealed in his action when, taking a little child and setting him in the midst, He said to his disciples "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven". The earth itself was not brought into existence in a moment of time. The splendour and variety of trees and plants, of animals and birds, did not appear in all their present glory at one word from the lips of the Almighty. The story of the rocks reveals how creation progressed in a logical and orderly manner. The bare, lifeless earth existed for countless ages before even the humblest form of life appeared on its surface. Mosses and ferns appeared before the trees. Humble denizens of the oceans swarmed and multiplied long before any great air-breathing animal roamed the forests and prairies. Ungainly flying reptiles hovered uncertainly in the air before any of the brilliant chorus of birds made their songs heard above the tree-tops. Man himself, the glory and crown of earthly creation, was the last arrival of all upon our planet. All this is described with unparalleled simplicity and eloquence in the first chapter of Genesis.

So with the development of the promised "seed". At first but a hazy glimmer of hope, the seed of the woman was to bruise the serpent's head (Gen. 3. 15). Then a definite and detailed promise, given to Abraham the friend of God (Gen. 12. 3), a chosen nation, to be the custodian of God's oracles (Rom. 3. 2), and a kingly line of whom should come that Seed (Jer. 23. 5), until finally in the person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus the promise became a reality. Even then a further development came into view, for now we

perceive that Christ has many members, and we, Christian disciples of this age, are those members (1 Cor. 12. 27), and if we be Christ's then we also are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3. 29).

We are often reluctant to admit this progressive and unfolding nature of Divine Truth. Human pride is much more flattered by the desire to believe that God has chosen us as specially favoured individuals to be granted a special and exclusive revelation which no one else can possibly receive, than it is to recognise the fact that our standing in Divine Truth at all is due to the labours of earlier disciples who laid the foundation of our present standing. In our natural reaction from errors of doctrine which we have cast aside in the light of this day we oft times fail to give sufficient credit for the good work done by our predecessors in Christian service and ministry. Our Lord recognised that principle when he said "*I send you forth to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour. Other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours*". (Jno. 4. 38). Many believe that in this day they have seen a harvest work accomplished and perchance have taken a share in the reaping. Do we always realise as much as we should that that harvest was made possible by the labours of earnest Christian men in past centuries—yea, even those whom we sometimes criticise for too great a zeal in their service and not sufficient attention to a deeper doctrinal understanding of the Word of God?

This appreciation of the essentially progressive development of our understanding of Truth is the key to New Testament teaching. Paul's exposition of doctrine contained all the essentials, but he left it to each reader to interpret for himself in the light of his own generation and environment those expressions and figures which Paul adopted to convey his meaning to Christians of the First century. To a Church which had been brought up under the strict discipline of Judaism the message of Christ came expressed in types borrowed from the Tabernacle ceremonies, and much more easily understood therefore by Jews than by Gentiles. We in this day must study the Levitical ritual of Exodus and Leviticus before we can appreciate the deeper spiritual teaching of the Book of Hebrews. Paul expounded the truth regarding the "Ransom for All" in terms taken from Mithraism, a philosophy well known to his Gentile readers but almost unknown to us today. To the illiterate and uneducated masses of Western Europe the "Passion plays" of the Middle Ages were the only effective means of teaching Scripture truth, and so it happened that men and women unable to

read or hear the Bible in their own language, gazed upon the winged and white-robed angels, and horned and tailed devils, of those plays and built their conception of Heaven and Hell around the things which they saw. How deeply those things were impressed is shown by the fact that to-day, several centuries after reading has become almost universal in England, there are still many Christians who think of the spiritual world in those same terms. John Bunyan believed whole-heartedly in the things about which he wrote, yet who could doubt his fervent spirit was truly in tune with that Lord to whom he was given in complete surrender, even although we in this day could by no means endorse his theology.

Present Truth is built upon this foundation, and to remain and continue in Present Truth it is essential to hold that, first, the essential principles of Divine Truth were revealed to the Apostles and laid down by them for all time, and expressed in language fitted to the generation which first heard them; second, that in every age those principles need to be re-expressed in words and terms fitted to that age, that the spiritual truth behind the words may be truly appreciated. Luther believed in transubstantiation, that the bread and wine of the sacrament became in very truth the body and blood of our Lord. Wesley saw a deeper significance in the call to "eat of that bread and drink of that cup" and proclaimed the necessity for personal surrender to Christ. Later Christian leaders elaborated that understanding until in the nineteenth century, personal association with Christ, now and for ever, a complete and utter abandonment of ourselves to the service and instruction of the Good Shepherd, was seen to be the real participation in bread and cup which our Lord had in mind when first He said to the disciples "*This cup is my blood of the new covenant. Drink ye all of it*". And who shall say that there is not an even deeper understanding of this mystic association with Christ, awaiting us when we are ready to receive it, reconciling past perplexities and leading us still farther along the shining pathway of Truth?

Unless we realise and follow this principle there can be no progress in Truth. How true it is that attempts are often made to stop at some point to which Christian believers have attained and to discourage further research and progress. The tendency is always to rest satisfied with progress made and to withdraw from the constant struggle of pioneering. But the very nature of Christian thought is to burst the bonds and grow, and if an outlet is not provided then the result will be that declared by the Master himself in his story of the new wine in the old wine skins (Luke 5. 37). It is not often noticed that He did

not condemn the old wine as bad, nor the old wineskins as useless. What He did say was that *old* wine is the right thing to keep in *old* wineskins, and that both are then preserved. *New* wine should go into *new* wineskins, and then both will adjust themselves to each other peaceably.

Our Lord knew that his teaching would take out from amongst the Jewish system a "remnant" who had already learned all that Judaism could teach them and were reaching out to further advances in the knowledge of God's Plan. He knew also that the vast majority were not yet ready for this further revelation of Divine Truth and in his wisdom left the old wine to the old wineskins. Now be it noted that there were certain essential doctrines which were common both to the old Jewish faith and to the new faith which was to supersede it. That there is one God, and that men are sinners, unreconciled to God; that the Seed of Abraham is to bless all families of the earth and that God has appointed a chosen people through whom He would execute that purpose—all these things were held as truth alike by Jew and Christian. Nevertheless the Christian from his advanced standpoint held beliefs and expectations which the Jew never enjoyed. So with us in our own day. Whilst there is much that is held in common between all Christian believers, there are also things which are the heritage only of those who have been blessed with a deeper and more "up-to-date" knowledge of the Divine Plan.

We must learn therefore to respect the beliefs and convictions of our fellow believers whilst standing quite firmly by our own. More than ever does this become necessary in the case of

those who differ on matters which may at first sight appear to be fundamental. When misunderstandings are cleared up and care taken fully to appreciate each other's point of view, the seemingly irreconcilable opposites are often perceived to be different ways of expressing the same fundamental truth. We must learn to draw a clear distinction between the *truths* of the faith which have never varied and can never vary, and the many methods of expressing those truths which do vary from age to age and between believer and believer. Thus, and thus only, will it be true that "*we all, with open face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*" (2 Cor. 3. 18).

*"The outworn rite, the old abuse,
The pious fraud transparent grown,
The good held captive in the use
Of wrong alone—*

*These wait their doom, from that great law
Which makes the past time serve to-day
And fresher life the world shall draw
From their decay.*

*"But life shall on and upward go;
Th' eternal step of Progress beats
To that great anthem, calm and slow,
Which God repeats*

*God works in all things; all obey
His first propulsion from the night:
Wait thou and watch! the world is grey
With morning light!"*
(Whittier, 1846)

CROSSBEARING

"Whosoever doth not bear his Cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."

"We who follow the Crucified are not here to make a pleasant thing of life; we are called to suffering for the sake of a suffering, sinful world. The Lord forgive us our shameful evasions and hesitations. His brow was crowned with thorns; do we seek rose-buds for our crowning? His hands were pierced with nails; are our hands ringed with jewels? His feet were bare and bound; do our feet walk delicately? What do we know of travail? or tears that scald before they fall? of heart-break? of being scorned? God forgive us our love of ease. God forgive us that so often we turn our faces from a life that is even

remotely like his. Forgive us that we all but worship comfort, the delight of the presence of loved ones, possessions, treasure on earth. Far, far from our prayers too often is any thought of prayer for a love which will lead us to give one whom we love to follow our Lord to Gethsemane, to Calvary—perhaps because we have never been there ourselves.

"Lord we kneel beside thee now, with hands folded between thy hands as a child's are folded in its mother's. We would follow the words of thy prayer, dimly understanding their meaning, but wanting to understand..." "*That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.*" (Selected)

THE BOY WITH THE LOAVES AND FISHES

This is the story of a boy who went out for the day to hear a famous preacher and found himself in front of a crowd of five thousand people. It all goes to show how the most unexpected things can happen and when we have gone out to see or do something in which the Lord Jesus Christ is concerned then the unexpected thing can be a very wonderful thing also. This boy had heard that Jesus was declaring the good tidings of the Kingdom of God up in the hills outside the town, and healing sick people, and that thousands of people were flocking out of town to see and hear him; and he decided he would go too and listen to Jesus. He knew it would be an all-day affair and there were no shops or places to get food away in the hills, and so he took his lunch with him. And up the road he went, out of the town and past all the houses, through the vegetable gardens where the townsmen grew their daily food, until he came to a stretch of grass where were crowds of people gathered together to listen to Jesus.

Right up at the front he could see Jesus with his twelve disciples, moving about as He healed first one and then another sick or crippled man or woman, stopping at times to talk to the people looking on, telling them of the need to repent of their sins because sin is a greater evil even than being sick or crippled, and He wanted to heal them of sin as well as of sickness. Now we do not know what the boy's name was because the Bible does not tell us, so we will call him John; that is a good Bible name and this boy's name is as likely to have been John as anything else.

Well then, John got amongst the crowd and very speedily, as boys do, he pushed to the front where Jesus was, so that he could see and hear all that was going on. We may be sure that he listened very intently to all that Jesus was saying about being honest and straightforward and living a life of helpfulness to other people, and although there must have been many things in what Jesus said that he could not fully understand, seeing that he was only a boy after all, yet he was thrilled to hear of the coming time when the Kingdom of God would come to earth and all men would love and do good to their neighbours instead of doing them harm as they do now. And when some men brought a cripple to Jesus, and Jesus healed the cripple so that he went away leaping into the air and praising God, well, John's eyes nearly popped out of his head with astonishment and excitement, so that he quite forgot to eat his lunch and never even

noticed that he was getting hungry.

Now that is where John really came into the picture, because it was getting on well into the afternoon and Jesus' disciples thought it was time to have something to eat themselves and then they realised that they had nothing with them. So they asked Jesus if they should tell all the people to go home and get their meal because it would soon be sunset and dark. "Oh no" said Jesus "you give them something to eat where they are". "But how can we" answered the disciples. "We haven't got anything here, and if we had a hundred pounds to spend it wouldn't buy enough bread for this great crowd of people". Jesus looked at them in his usual calm way and said "Well, what have you got?" at the very moment John, realising at last he was hungry, was getting his lunch out of his little bag. One of the disciples—Andrew it was—looking around rather helplessly, saw him do it and came over to see what he had got. John showed him—five little flat barley cakes and two small roasted fishes. Andrew went back to Jesus rather disconsolated and said "There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes; but what are they among so many?"

John held his precious loaves tightly, fearing they were going to be taken away from him, but just then a wonderful thing happened. Jesus looked up and smiled at him, smiled so sweetly and understandingly that suddenly John felt he would do anything for Jesus, even to going without his lunch if need be, and straight away he went up and put his precious lunch bag on the ground in front of Jesus.

"Tell everybody to sit down" commanded Jesus, and off went the disciples to see about it. Then something happened which John never forgot to his dying day. Jesus took the little barley cakes out of John's bag and gave thanks to God for the good food, and then began breaking them in half, and dividing the two fishes in half, and putting the pieces on the grass before him; but as fast as he did so he still seemed to have them in his hands unbroken. Before long there was a great pile of broken cakes and fish and John was kept as busy as he knew how, piling up more of them as fast as Jesus was breaking them. He was so busy that he hardly had time to feel astonished, although he had never seen anything like it before. As for the disciples, when they came back from telling everybody to sit down they just couldn't make it out at all; and then Jesus quietly told them to start taking the food

to all the people on the grass waiting for it.

Now the important thing about this story is that if John had not been practical enough to think of his lunch when setting out in the morning nothing of this would have happened. All the older people went out to see and hear Jesus without thinking of the fact that before the day was out they would need food. John went out just as eager to see and hear Jesus but he remembered and made provision for his earthly needs as well. And because of that he became the only one in that great crowd of five thousand people whom Jesus could use for his miracle of making food for all out of five loaves and two small fishes.

In our daily lives we need to be practical while we serve the Lord Jesus and listen to him. We want to remember the needs of those around us and be ready to have the Lord use us in helping other people as well as spend our time praising

him or reading about him. We need to put into practice the things we learn from Jesus so that, as the Scripture puts it, men may take notice that we have been with Jesus and learned of him. We should not get our heads so much in the clouds that we fail to keep our feet on the earth. That does not mean that we should forget the things of God and spend all our time looking after our earthly needs. The Scripture does say that we should not spend all our time looking after our food and clothes and homes, rather we are to seek the Kingdom of God chiefly and these other things will come in their proper place. But we must give them their right amount of attention and the Lord will do the rest. John did not busy himself trying to bring enough food for all the people. He just brought enough for himself and the Lord took it and made it enough for five thousand.

THE BOOK OF JASHER

Twice mentioned in the Old Testament, this book has not survived; nothing more is known about it than can be inferred from these two references. "Jasher" means just, upright, straight; the Vulgate calls it the "*book of the just ones*" and the LXX the "*book of the upright one*". There is just a possibility that the name is derived from a Hebrew word implying that it is a book of songs. The Syriac calls it the "*book of praises*". Less likely, perhaps, is that Jasher was the name of its author.

Josh. 10. 13, after recounting the story of the sun "standing still" until the people had defeated their enemies, says "*Is not this written in the book of Jasher?*" It has been pointed out by scholars that Joshua's words in vs. 12 and the first sentence in vs. 13 are poetry whereas the rest of the chapter is prose, and that this points to these words being a direct quotation from the book of Jasher.

*"Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon
And thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon.
And the sun stood still,
And the moon stayed,
Until the people had avenged themselves
upon their enemies."*

The other reference, in 2 Sam. 1. 18, relates to David's lament over the deaths of Saul and

Jonathan, a poetic composition covering vs. 19-27 of that chapter, and one of the most eloquent passages of the Old Testament. This, it is said in vs. 18, "*is written in the book of Jasher*". On the basis of these examples it is thought that the lost book was a collection of poems or songs dealing with the stirring deeds of Israel's ancient heroes, and that other similar songs preserved in the O.T., such as Miriam's song of triumph following the Red Sea crossing, and that of Deborah after the defeat of Sisera, had the same origin.

The book was probably written in the time of David or Solomon, since the reference in 2 Sam. dates it to David's time at the earliest. The reference in Joshua would then be an editorial insertion supplementary to the original narrative, added in the days of David or later.

Several editions of a book claiming to be the lost book of Jasher appeared between 1827 and 1840 but these all stemmed back to one published at Bristol in 1751 which was almost immediately shown to be a forgery. In fact the book has never been discovered. It is sometimes said that Josephus declared (*Ant.* 5. 1. 17) that a copy was held in the Temple archives of his day but reference to the place shows that he did not mention Jasher and probably referred to the Book of Joshau itself.

All the studying we may do will not make us disciples; only taking up the cross can do this. We can learn a lot from books but following him is the vital thing.

God dwells in perfect peace because of his ability to see the end from the beginning, and because of his power to accomplish that which He designed to perform.

"IF THOU HADST BEEN HERE"

"*Lord, if . . .*" so spake quivering lips in Bethany as Jesus came, at length, to wake "*our friend Lazarus*" out of sleep. "*. . . if Thou hadst been here*" how different the situation would have been! How sorrowfully, yet chidingly, spoken the words "*my brother had not died*"! That the gentle reflective Mary should re-echo Martha's opening words goes most clearly to indicate how frequently, amid paroxysms of grief they had reiterated these sentiments each to each. And very naturally too! Had He not sent by the lips of their messengers the most comforting assurance that "*this sickness is not unto death*"? Yet during his tarrying Lazarus had died! Notwithstanding his word of assurance Lazarus was dead, and had been laid in the tomb! Why had He not taken more seriously the tidings concerning the illness of his friend? Why had He not accompanied, with speed, the return of their messengers? Why . . . ? Why . . . ? Why . . . ? "If . . ." "If . . ." "*If thou hadst been here my brother had not died*"!

It is so easy, and almost inevitable, in times of sorrow or suffering, for puny man to question the ways of Providence, and to assert that if this or that had been done when we thought it should, how different the outcome would have been!

Things had been moving to a climax in Israel. Sign after sign, testifying to the Messiahship of Jesus, had fallen on unseeing eyes. One last witness—a sign of surpassing magnitude—was put into motion by Divine Providence. Lazarus, Martha, Mary, and Jesus had their parts to play therein—Lazarus to die, Mary and Martha to weep, and Jesus to weep, then to restore. A man, four days dead, was to be awakened, revived and returned to his home and place in life, as if decomposition had not laid its destructive hand upon his person.

A like happening had occurred before in Galilee, when Jesus halted the cortege and restored to a widowed mother's care her only son. But that had taken place in Galilee, and malicious tongues could talk it down and rob it of significance. Something must be staged, enacted and exhibited in Jerusalem, for only in Jerusalem were prophets and righteous men fated to perish, and the culminating sequel to this final sign was to be the death, in Jerusalem, of the latest and greatest of God's messengers—his holy and well-beloved Son. The enacted "sign" must therefore be set in old Jerusalem, and forced

home with decisive impact upon the Council of the nation assembled there.

Let us not think of this tragic episode, therefore, as merely casual, or that it "just happened—so". Jesus knew from its very onset that it was intended, in some unmistakable way, to enhance the glory of God, and hence the fuller content of his reply to and through the messengers "*This sickness is not unto death but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby*". Also to Martha Jesus said "*Said I not unto thee that if thou wouldest believe thou shouldst see the glory of God?*" And so she did when the tomb gave up its dead and the semblance of the great resurrection truth which Jesus had previously taught her was bodied forth before her astonished eyes!

Events were moving to a crisis in Jerusalem and Israel. Many former signs had been of no avail to convince the nation of Jesus' claim to Messiahship. In the ordering of a higher Providence one last and vital witness to this heedless people was ordained and the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary selected for its setting. Lazarus in particular was greatly honoured as Heaven's choice of victim for the seeming tragedy, to be compensated later by an unparalleled act of deliverance from death and the tomb. And Jesus, though weeping in sympathy with those that wept, had hither come as the finger of God (see Luke 11. 20) to demonstrate resurrection power and to kindle to a brighter flame a resurrection hope. Mysterious, wonderful oversight in human life. Yet as with Martha and Mary, so little comprehended, so little understood! And why? To draw out faith, to develop trust, to encourage assurance! to persuade that it is better to

*"walk in the dark with God,
Than go alone in the light."*

How often has this mysterious oversight touched down into our little lives to shape our "means" and "ends". That otherwise unaccountably strange first contact with the Truth; that seemingly chance meeting with this brother or that; that fitly spoken word in that address; that presumed loss or bitter disappointment; that enfeebling sickness and tardy restoration; and a hundred other inexplicable incidents of life! How much easier to reproduce the two sisters' chiding words and reiterate their "ifs" and "whys", than bow submissive to the over-ruling Hand. How much easier to chafe and fret than to rest in his Love and trust to his care!

Providence is a great and effective teacher; its lessons are ever new and fresh, based ever on the little episodes of life, but governed always by the great principles. How do we react to it?

Perhaps it may be well to change the terms, for Providence is Omnipotence, Omniscience, Universality—it is high and deep, it is wide and

broad, and we are but frail and weak and small and insignificant. But Providence is my Father and I am his child! My Father is that Providence which rules the world, the sun, the moon, and stars, and all things that exist! Happy child with such a Providence to shape its ends!

THE QUESTION BOX

It is probably realised by all that answers to questions represent the Editor's personal view of the matters discussed and readers will make their own assessment as to the value of the explanations offered.

* * *

Q. "... and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the Church" (Col. 1.24). It has been suggested that this verse associates the Church with the offering of our Lord upon the Cross. Can this be justified?

* * *

A. The term "offering of our Lord upon the Cross" can only signify the Ransom, by which all men are redeemed, and the Church certainly cannot have any part or lot in this. Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2.6) and no child of Adam could possibly share in this. "No man can redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him" (Psa. 49.7). The sphere in which the Church is associated with Jesus is that of the Sin-offering.

It will be recalled by some how in the past it used to be stressed that the Ransom and the Sin-offering must not be confused; the two doctrines are separate and distinct. In past centuries this was not realised and the Day of Atonement sacrifices, from which the term and the doctrine of the Sin-offering is derived, were considered to prefigure the death of Jesus on the Cross. (Andrew Jukes' "The Law of the Offerings", mid-19th century, is probably the classic expression of this view.) Clearer knowledge nowadays of the principles underlying the practice of animal sacrifices, going back to ancient pre-pagan days, reveals that the offering to God of the blood of the bullock and the goat in the levitical ceremonial does not, as formerly supposed, picture the death of Jesus on the Cross,

as a substitute for Adam, "the just for the unjust" (1 Pet. 3.18). What it does picture is the provision of a means for the removal of sin from those already benefiting from the ransom. This is the whole purpose of the Day of Atonement—the removal of sin. As E. O. James has pointed out, in "Comparative Religion" (1933) "the slaying of the victim is only incidental as a means of liberating the life contained in the blood, and therefore, the ritual centres not on the killing but in the disposition of the vital essence". The blood of the sin-offering is offered to God for use in the process of cleansing from sin and imparting new life. Translated into real terms, this means that the effect of the life-long ministry of Jesus, as distinct from his death, is to generate a life-giving and sin-cleansing force for the benefit of mankind in the Millennial Age. Likewise with the Church, who "as he is, so are we, in this world" (1 Jno. 4.17), the effect of their consecrated lives is transmuted into this same force in association with their Lord and for the same purpose. That is why there are two offerings in the ceremonial, a bullock representing the Lord and a goat representing his followers. The outcome of the whole process is that the sins of the people are removed and carried away into "a land not inhabited" (Lev. 16.22) never to return.

The nature of this force we may perhaps never understand whilst we are still in the flesh. It must be that in some wonderful manner all our lives' sacrifices, all our lives' devotion, all our lives' suffering, all that our consecration has involved, will have its effect in the hearts and minds of men in that day, leading to their conversion and reconciliation. In this way Jesus "poured out his life unto death" (Isa. 53.12). In the same manner, following him, we "fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ". This is the sin-offering, in which the church is associated with her Lord.

We often think it enough to remove the greater evils, and leave the lesser; but white ants will eat up a carcass faster than a lion.

Did our Lord say "If any man would be my disciple let him serve me" or was it "If any man would serve me let him follow me"?

A VOICE FROM THE CATACOMBS

The pagans of Rome often remarked on the strange living hope which transformed the lives of those from among their number who became converts to Christianity. Nowhere is this contrast between the living faith that is Christianity, and the dark despair that characterised paganism, more marked than in the epitaphs set up by pagan and Christian over their dead. The Christian sentiments, of which many examples are found in the Catacombs at Rome, breathe a spirit of calm and even joyous confidence for the future. The pagan epitaphs reveal utter hopelessness and resentment against a fate which offered them no recompense for the trials and vicissitudes of life. Here are a few examples, all belonging to times between the year A.D. 74 and the seventh century.

*Petronia, a Deacon's Wife.
The Type of Modesty.
In this place I lay my bones.
Spare your tears, dear
Husband and Daughters, and
Believe that it is forbidden
To Weep for One Who Lives in God.
Buried in Peace on the Third
Before the Nones of October
in the Consulate of Festus.*

Another one, much more brief, but how eloquent

*Victorina,
In Peace,
and in Christ.*

Against this, read a pagan epitaph, brief in its tragedy of a pagan father who has lost a well-beloved daughter, without hope of reunion:

*I, Procope, Lift Up My Hands
Against God, Who Snatched
Me Away Innocent.
She Lived Twenty Years.
Proclus Set Up This.*

Not so the Christians who set this brief word on the stone of a pilgrim who had reached the end of the way,

The Dormitory of Elpis.

To us a dormitory is a sleeping-place. To the early Christians the grave was but a dormitory. Our own word "cemetery" is the Greek "koimeterion", meaning the same as "dormitory", a place of sleep. So two loving Christian parents, many centuries ago, laid their child to rest in a grave far below the streets of Rome

and inscribed upon her stone—

*Here Sleeps Porcella in Peace,
She Lived
3 Years 10 Months 13 Days.*

That peace was denied the sorrowing mother who knew nothing but the hopeless creed of paganism, and poured out her heart's anguish in these bitter words—

*Caius Julius Maximus
Aged 11 Years 5 Months
O Relentless Fortune
Who Delightest in Cruel Death.
Why is Maximus So Suddenly
Snatched From Me?
He Who Used to Lie Joyfully
On My Bosom.
This Stone Now Marks His Tomb.
Behold His Mother.*

How different is the affectionate remembrance and calm submission of these parents, believers in Christ, who inscribed—

*Navarina,
In Peace.
A Sweet Soul,
Who Lived 16 Years and 5 Months.
A Soul As Sweet As Honey.
This Epitaph Was Made by Her Parents.*

Peace, peace: that is the constant refrain of these rejoicing believers as they laid their loved ones to rest. This last example is perhaps the record of a Christian matron, well spoken of for good works and labours of love in the service of the brethren.

*Constantia,
Buried in Peace
On The Lord's Day The Sixth
Before The Kalends of July
In The Fifth Consulate of
Honorius Augustus
To The Well-Deserving,
In Peace.*

How well these brethren of ours must have learned the truth contained in Paul's triumphant words: "So then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Truly, we who follow in their steps are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, men and women, who, in their lives and deaths, manifested the reality of that faith which was in them.

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