

**A WITNESS
AND
A TESTIMONY**

1952



A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

“A Candlestick of Pure Gold:
of Beaten Work”

Exo. lvs 25, 31.

“The Testimony of Jesus”

Rev. 1, 9.

Vol. 30. No. 1.

January, 1952.

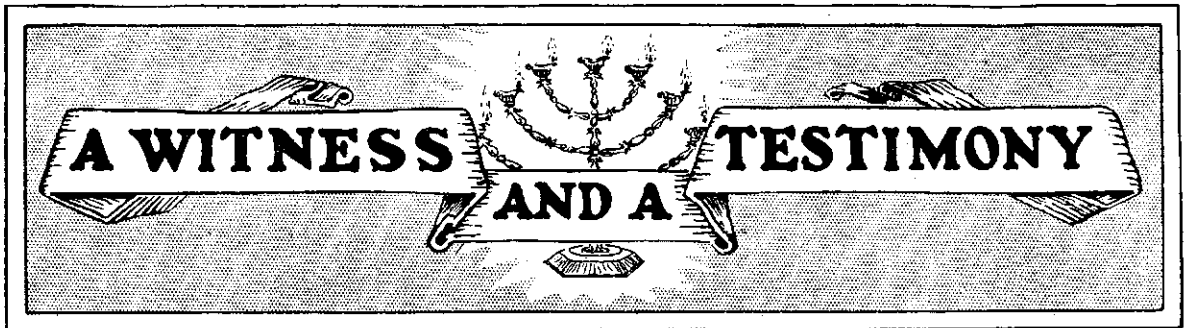
THIS MINISTRY

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

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

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

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



JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1952.

Vol. 30, No. 1.

EDITOR'S LETTER

BELOVED OF GOD,

With this issue of "A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY" another year is entered upon. While we are not children of time, but of eternity, by reason of "the eternal life" which we have received as the gift of God's grace, our connection with his world is at present marked out in years and days. We send you our greetings and prayerful assurances of fellowship, praying that this year may indeed be one of "his increase".

We do rejoice in all the assurances and appreciations which have come from your side through the past years, and are constantly checked from despairing of fruitfulness by the flow of letters telling of help received. It is against our principle to say anything that would look like advertisement, propaganda, or 'glorying in the flesh', but we can—for your own strengthening—say that there are *very* few countries in this world to which this little paper does not go by the personal request of those who declare its helpfulness to their spiritual life and ministry. It is a wonderful story of something that the Lord has been doing for over a quarter of a century, and is still doing in a spontaneous way.

What is its purpose? In this creation the whole natural trend is downward. Nothing is elevated, improved, or developed without a battle and a cost. This is particularly true in the realm of spiritual fulness. The whole battle is against the forces of declension, retrogression and mediocrity. Every Christian knows how true that is, and every special effort and provision for spiritual helpfulness is a witness to it. This ministry is reactionary in the right sense, reactionary against this whole tendency. It is thrown into battle for "the fulness of Christ" against earth-boundness, against nominalism, against spiritual complacency, false contentedness; against all that is less or other than all that Christ represents of God's eternal purpose.

If the forces of evil *can* cause the people of God to accept a position, measure, and occupation less than all the vast fulness eternally intended, they will do so by *any* means, foul or fair. It is therefore essential that the people of God shall have a ministry which keeps them in vision, for "*where there is no vision the people go to pieces*".

Thus, the message on vision in this issue, and those which follow, constitute the real ministry to which we feel called. Everything is related to that, and no one who reads these pages can say that the vision is small or indefinite. It is by vision that inspiration destroys despair; by vision unification destroys disintegration; by vision boldness supplants cowardice; and much more.

We pray that you, through these pages, may see "the heavenly vision", and in seeing be "not

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

disobedient" to it. So, when we have spent our years, and fulfilled our ministry in the light of the ever-growing revelation of "his fulness", may we—"his servants . . . serve him" (yet) and "see his face"; having missed nothing of all His glorious purpose.

The Lord be with you.

Yours in His grace,

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.

FOLLOWERS OF THE LAMB

I. THE COMPANY ON MOUNT ZION

"And I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on the mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty and four thousand, having his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sing as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders: and no man could learn the song save the hundred and forty and four thousand, even they that had been purchased out of the earth. These are they that were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. THESE ARE THEY THAT FOLLOW THE LAMB WHITHERSOEVER HE GOETH. These were purchased from among men, to be the firstfruits unto God and unto the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no lie: they are without blemish. (Rev. xiv. 1-5).

THIS passage goes to the very heart of all the Divine purpose. There is a sense in which it is the key to everything in the history of God's thoughts and ways concerning man. If we understood this passage very many of our problems would be solved and our deep questions answered. So vital is the issue that is centred here, that unusual conflict has arisen about it—and not only spiritual conflict, but unspiritual controversy also. We shall not get far until we have our ground clear, and for that is required real honesty, faithfulness, and courage.

There is a phrase here which conveys a very great deal in that realm of conflict and controversy. It is a phrase which is gravely suspect even among evangelical Christians, and, were it not in the Word of God, I, for one, would avoid it for that reason; but we cannot invest the Apostle John with the suspicions which have arisen from a

phrase which he has used. We must honestly seek to understand what he meant when he used such phrases. I refer to the phrase 'firstfruits'. *"These were purchased . . . to be the firstfruits . . . unto the Lamb"*.

Now perhaps the most helpful and profitable way of coming to an understanding of this phrase would be to seek to identify the hundred and forty-four thousand to whom it refers. You will be patient with me in this which is an essential part of the message, though perhaps not the most pleasant part; but it is necessary. Before we do that, however, that is, before we seek to identify this company, it might be as well if we tackled this adverse attitude, for there may be some justification for it. There is always justification for an adverse attitude when a particular aspect of truth is so enlarged that it becomes regarded as the whole truth, and in this matter that has certainly happened in certain circles. Again, when such an exaggerated emphasis is allowed to divide the Lord's people and to result in an exclusiveness and superiority of mind, then there is justification for suspecting it and taking an opposite attitude, or at least an attitude of opposition. Further, when the emphasis is laid upon the wrong point, resulting inevitably in an unbalanced state, then the matter may rightly be open to question; and in this particular matter that is exactly what has happened. Terms have been coined which at once betray emphasis upon the wrong point; such as the term 'rapture' and with it that other word 'selective'. That is certainly placing the emphasis at the wrong point. When a phrase like that is used, we are off the mark. The conclusion drawn by those who have created it and who use it is that it represents schism in the Body. Well, when the Lord has taken anyone into His presence in the joy and victory of His grace—and He is doing that almost every moment

JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1952.

of our lives—we never charge Him with creating schism in the Body. If we did but know it, at this very moment from numerous places all over the world children of God are being called gloriously into His presence—a whole group is going up at once, so to speak. We never think of the Lord creating schism in the Body by leaving the rest a little longer. The emphasis has been put upon the wrong point. Let us get this thing straightened out, because that is a false premise altogether.

Now let me say at once that I have no intention at all of seeking to give a specific interpretation to this Scripture or to propagate any particular teaching which would have any of these results. I do really want to get to the heart of this matter, because it is borne in upon me that it is of tremendous account to God and to His people at this time—which is the time of the end. Sometimes it is necessary to suspect suspicions. Some of the most vital things in the interests of the Lord have at times been most suspect, and that is itself suspicious, that betrays something else. There is something there, or there may be something there that the enemy is very particularly against. There may be something there of such consequence as to stir up the depths of the human heart, perhaps in fear, or unwillingness, or even resentment, and that sort of thing can easily be passed on under a label, or it may represent the attempt to get out of something of great account to God because of what is involved in it. So I say, sometimes it is necessary to suspect our suspicions, to question our questionings, sift our reactions. Let us remind ourselves that the popular is not necessarily the true. History is full of that. Lord Lister was very unpopular and had to fight a terribly lonely battle over his 'theory' of antiseptics. He has been universally proved true. It has taken time. Florence Nightingale fought a desperate battle with all those in high places. She has been vindicated up to the hilt, although she was practically alone. The popular is not necessarily the true and the right, and these are things which we must remember when we are facing a matter like this, which as I say has become beclouded by suspicion and opposition.

But let us get closer. Surely all of us are prepared to believe, firstly, that to "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth" is something of great and solemn importance, and secondly, that it is not everyone who will do it. Does that not settle the whole matter? It is of primary account to God and to us that this should be true: "*These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth*"; and that is something not to be suspected nor spurned.

THE HEAVENLY ZION

But you see this is said to be true of a particular company. They are distinguished from others by this very characterization. Look at them, identify them, a company purchased out of the earth, not just from the earth or in the earth: it is out of the earth. Purchased to be firstfruits unto the Lamb, standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion, and you note the position is before the commencement of judgment. Well, this company is in heaven, there is no mistaking that, and therefore it means that this is not the earthly but the heavenly Zion, this Zion is in heaven. This is the Zion of Hebrews xii—"Ye are come unto mount Zion . . . the heavenly Jerusalem". That is the Zion here. It is necessary to say that because there is another Zion in the book of the Revelation with another company out of the tribes of Israel. That is in chapter vii and it is not this company. This is a heavenly company and they are singing in heaven before the Throne. Heavenly in signal degree is the character of these people. More than all others and before all others, these embody heavenliness.

OVERCOMERS

Notice—and this is a point of tremendous effect—that the promises to overcomers in the early chapters of this book are found fulfilled in this company. The Lord had said concerning certain who would overcome that He would write upon them the name of His God and His own new name (Rev. iii. 12). Here it is. "*Having his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads*". These are the people who have overcome, and they are distinguished from the rest, even in the churches.

GOVERNMENT IN FULNESS

And then they are mentioned as a specific number, a particular company—one hundred and forty four thousand. This surely is not to be taken any more literally than is the word 'Lamb'. It is a number which carries with it a definition. Twelve multiplied by twelve. It is government, the number of government, and government carried to fulness. But you see again, it distinguishes them. We shall later come on a great multitude which no man can number, but these are numbered. They are a distinct and particular company.

A VIRGIN PEOPLE

Now notice some other particulars about them. "*Purchased out of the earth . . . not defiled with*

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

women: for they are virgins". In that statement we must not read the literal meaning. It cannot mean that at all. It is in keeping with the whole of that particular meaning throughout the Old Testament and the New where God's elect people are regarded as a virgin people. Fornication in Israel was that of having spiritual relationship with other nations, the peoples of this world, and this is what is meant—that there has been created and preserved an absolute separateness from that spiritual system which lies behind this world; there must be no link with it at all. That issue is a very live issue to-day. Go to China and you will see whether it is a live issue, whether you are going to surrender to the great fornication, the great red dragon. It is a life and death issue now, and these are they who have not surrendered, they have kept pure, have not been defiled. They "*follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth*". That is in the present participle, which means they are following the Lamb because they always have been. It has become a habit, it is a disposition which has been born in them, created in them. They did it on the earth and they go on doing it, people who are not spasmodic in following the Lamb, who are not of those who go on one day and go back the next. They are continuously following the Lamb. It is an utterness of devotion to the Lord Jesus. They are the firstfruits unto the Lamb. Note the way it is put—"Firstfruits . . . unto the LAMB". The Lamb has in them the first maturity of His Lamb character and work; in them He first sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied. It is unto the Lamb, His satisfaction.

"UNTO THE LAMB"

Yes, but it means this, that their conception of salvation was not one governed by personal interest, that they would be saved in order to be saved and enjoy salvation for themselves; but their conception was that it was all unto the Lord, it was for Him. That is a higher level altogether, and I beg to suggest that this is a discriminating thing. There are multitudes of people, Christians, who are glad to be saved in order to be saved, because it is a good thing to be saved for themselves; it secures a lot for them and it means heaven and glory; but the primary concern of these others is the glory of the Lamb. "Unto the Lamb". They follow wherever He goes.

"THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS"

Ah yes, it might be easier to follow the King whithersoever He goeth. There were many in the

days of His flesh who pursued Him wherever He went. You would always find them there. Oh, He said, "loaves and fishes": to see His mighty works. But these follow the Lamb, and that means that they have a disposition to respond to the "fellowship of his sufferings", like the Apostle who first used that phrase. For him it was not something to be shunned: "*that I may know him . . . and the fellowship of his sufferings*" (Phil. iii. 10); there was a disposition to share the sufferings of the Lamb. That issues in a specific kind of people, a particular company; and if we look at it in that way surely our suspicions and our fears are dismissed. Identify these people and the other ground gives way.

What all this means becomes clear as we look at it in its relation to all that is said about the Lamb. That is, you have got to comprehend the whole Word of God in connection with the Lamb in order to understand who and what these people are, for undoubtedly they are the people who have embraced, entered into, and become the embodiment of all that that phrase means—the Lamb, His life, His character, His work.

What is here is this—firstly, a company marked out and distinguished by a peculiar fellowship with Christ as the Lamb. Underline the word Lamb, the Name Lamb, with all that that means, and then see here a people who are in a peculiar relationship with Christ as the Lamb, and with what He means as being the Lamb. There is little doubt that there is a special honour given to this company. They are mentioned here with peculiar honour; their position is one of peculiar honour. The very tone in which they are mentioned is that of a people of very sacred and precious meaning to the Lord.

A SONG LEARNED THROUGH SUFFERING

They possess an exclusive secret. They sing a song, and no one could learn that song save the hundred and forty-four thousand. No one else had the faculty. How do they possess this exclusive secret? Oh, the answer goes to the heart of so much in our experience. You know that it is a true principle that you learn secrets through suffering, that you learn in no other way. It is in suffering that we learn those things that no one else knows. We cannot explain them, we cannot teach them, or make others understand. We can only say, 'When you have been through what I have been through you will understand, you will know; until you have, it is all closed to you'. These people have been a way in which capacity for something has been created.

JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1952.

"FIRSTFRUITS"

Again, I say, that goes to the heart of things. They are a people with a capacity, which means something very great for the Lord. That is surely explained or contained in the phrase "firstfruits". A first thing is always a determinative thing, and it is a principle in the Word of God that the first mention of a thing in the Bible always has in it intrinsically all that comes out afterward concerning that thing. These people, this company, have the intrinsic value; the capacity for giving has been created. The figure changes in this book of the Revelation at the end. There is the city, and right out from the Throne there goes that which is for the health of the nations. The nations derive their values from what is at the very heart of things. The intrinsic values are capable of reproduction over and over again to the advantage of many more who have their centre in the "city". Firstfruits—oh yes, they are not the only ones but they have the value in the first place, and they have it for the others. It is the power of impartation through capacity created in suffering.

Is that not true to principle? You know it surely, most of you, in your own experience, that if you have been able to help anybody, it is because you have gone through something to create in you the capacity for helping them. It is not that you are passing on information. It has come out of something that God has deeply done in you through experience, and, moreover, painful experience. That is the way in which these first govern. They govern by capacity and ability to give, to impart. They have an exclusive secret, which no one but these can learn. Well, the implication here is that they have gone a very utter way and are in a very utter position to serve the Lord.

GOD'S SATISFACTION FIRST

We are not told here what they fully represent as to God's purpose, but we are left to view them in the light of His fuller revelation. When we take up the fuller revelation of the meaning of the Lamb, then we shall begin to understand what this Lamb company is, these who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. We may do something of that later, but here we may mention one or two things. These people, in the first place, represent God's satisfaction in a peculiar way—God's satisfaction first. They have given God the inheritance that He seeks in the saints, they have answered to God, and that is something. It is no small thing

that He should have that upon which His heart has been strongly set. God finding His own satisfaction—surely they represent that.

Ah yes, but here is a remarkable thing. They sing—and note how their singing is described. "*As the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder*". What a volume! "*The voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sing as it were a new song before the throne*". What is there remarkable about that? These are people who have known suffering in no ordinary way. These are people who have gone with the Lamb—always meaning suffering and sacrifice—and they are singing their very heart out in such volume, such impressiveness, that the Apostle finds it difficult to discover words to convey this singing. What does it mean? Oh, they have come to see that all the suffering was infinitely worth while. They have come to see that after all the Lord was not against them as they were tempted to think. After all, it was not this and that and the other thing which the enemy tried to make out to be the meaning of their sufferings. No, there was something in this of unspeakable value and significance. I know there are some people who sing to keep their courage up; there are some people who sing, well, perhaps, without any specific purpose—but these people here are not singing without meaning and purpose. They sing now because they are wholly gratified with the ways of the Lord. It must mean that. They follow the Lamb, they have gone the way of the Cross in a very deep way, and the people who have gone most deeply into the Cross and the sufferings of Christ are the people who sing loudest in eternity. They have discovered the love of God through suffering, in a very full way. They sing before the throne. We have often been before the Throne complaining, murmuring, despairing, perhaps in bitterness and rebellion. At the end—for those who will follow *the Lamb* whithersoever He goeth—is a song which is unique, something altogether beyond the knowledge and understanding of others.

After all, there is no room for suspecting this. It is something very precious to the Lord. As we said at the beginning, it would solve so many problems. One of the problems besetting many of us is why it is that the Lord takes us such a peculiarly difficult way. The Lord does not seem to take other Christians that way, and they seem to have an easy time, comparatively. Why should we have such a difficult time? That is one of our problems. Others can do all sorts of things and still be Christians and be saved, but the Lord will not allow

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

that to us. Others can get away with quite a lot and remain happy Christians, but somehow or other the Lord does not allow that with us. He is leading in a very hard way indeed. Here is the explanation. It lies right at the heart of these verses in Rev. xiv, something that the Lord's heart is set upon. If only we could by grace find the right attitude to take toward the peculiar, the unusual, dealings and ways of God with us, sufferings through which the Lord leads us, if we could take the right attitude, that attitude would be this—the Lord is after something of peculiar value to Himself, we should then see some new meaning in Paul's word—"To you it hath been GRANTED in the behalf of

Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer in his behalf". "It has been given to you to suffer". Perhaps it is a trust with which the Lord cannot trust many. It is doubtful whether the Lord could trust many of His own children with suffering beyond a certain measure.

We must leave it there for the moment. If what has been said is true, if the Lord has something of peculiar value represented in these people, will that not explain all the prejudice, all the distortion, all the fear? May that not be the reason? May the Lord give us grace to accept nothing less than that which will most fully satisfy Him.

T. A-S.

CONVINCING EVIDENCE (II)

IN order to deal with the roots of division we must know what and where the roots are. They are only known by their fruits, and are themselves so often unseen or unrecognized. So we must go back to Corinth.

When we look more carefully at that wretched state we find that it resolves itself into divisions over things which really were—and are—meant to constitute a glorious unity, but which things were made evils by the miserable spirit of Christians. That in itself is something to take note of. The Bible is full of paradoxes. Things which are at the same time demanded and forbidden by God, things which are of great use against the devil, being used by the devil against God. It is one of the marks of Satan's triumph at the beginning that grand things have been taken into a realm where they are of evil account and serve the devil's ends. Well, what were these things at Corinth which have grown to such dimensions unto this time? They were

PERSONS — MINISTRIES — FUNCTIONS

"... each one of you saith ... Paul; and ... Apollos; and ... Cephas; and ... Christ" (I Cor. i. 12; iii. 4). "Wherefore let no one glory in men ... whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas" (ch. iii. 21, 22). There was evidently something seriously enough wrong about this personality matter to call forth rebuke and castigation from the Apostle. What was the wrong? It is clear from Paul's own admission that these names belonged to men through whom the Corinthians had believed. It would be very natural and unblameworthy if those who owed everything spiritually under Christ to a certain servant of His had a special and very great

regard for such a one. Indeed, elsewhere, Paul seemed to use this very fact of his being a spiritual 'father' as a ground of appeal for a hearing. So that was not the trouble. The element of human preferences no doubt got near to the cause of rebuke. The preference for a certain kind of man, or his particular ability, style, manner, or matter, has often led to grouping of Christians even in a great convention, and it has not been a far cry to the creating of a group complex from such personalities, nor yet to that forbidden 'glorying in man' mentioned above. But when we have said all that can be said regarding such details we have been trivial compared with the great background of it all. We have to remember the great revelation of Jesus Christ which Paul possessed and which governed all his approaches to situations, so that there was nothing trivial or merely 'human' or 'natural' with him. Paul's mentality was constituted by the one all-overshadowing revelation of the one new-creation Man. While fully recognizing that transformation is a process and conformity to Christ a lifelong business, there were ever present with him—as shown in all his writings—two basic factors; one, that—in Christ—the old disrupted, divided man is wholly put away and has no place, but a wholly new Man—different and corporate—is in being, a new creation in very truth where there *cannot* be anything that belongs to the havoc made in man or the race by the devil. In Christ there cannot be Jew and Greek, etc. (Col. iii. 11), and the principle must be carried to many more classifications than Paul mentions, seeing that the divisiveness has worked out to such a much more numerous progeny than existed then. "In Christ" there is "one new man", only one, and utterly new.

JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1952.

The other thing with Paul was that there is a point at which any merely 'natural' or 'human' features must definitely end, and that period should be a very brief one indeed. He calls it babyhood, and considers its extension beyond a very short time something grotesque and abnormal. The real trouble therefore was the bringing down of otherwise heavenly things to earthly levels, the level of earthly men—"Are ye not men?" and "... walk after the manner of men" (I Cor. iii. 3, 4). Even Christ is taken hold of in this way. It may be that those who said, "I am of Christ" thought that to be a degree above the others, and looked down on them as inferior. But they are classed with the rest in this matter of divisions, for Paul comes back with a sounding slap—"Is Christ divided?" Their use of Christ was after the manner of men to give glory to their spiritual(?) flesh. In his second letter Paul touched this at its core. "Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh: even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more" (II Cor. v. 16). The death-union with Christ just referred to takes this matter of man's place as such back to the very beginning of the Christian life. So then, these divisions are:—

- a. A mark of failure to apprehend the meaning of union with Christ.
- b. Failure to apprehend the significance of Christ Himself.
- c. Failure to emerge from infant conditions.

It is all a matter of still moving on the line of the First Man, Adam; a pulling everything down to that level. "Are ye not men?" means, not humans, but as men in the disintegration of mankind, and not the integration of the "one new man". This is the kind of stuff being put upon the foundation of Christ and its doom is foreshown as going up in the flames and smoke of the final judgment of works. Let it be fully recognized that the "wood, hay and stubble" part of Paul's letter (I Cor. iii. 12) is connected with this whole argument or corrective concerning divisions, and means that to build upon Christ the predilections, preferences, likes, dislikes, natural appraisals, prejudices, partialities, etc. of even Christian people is to "be saved: yet so as by fire". This latter solemn warning has usually been used for Gospel purposes, or for 'worldly Christians' in a general way, but its use by Paul was specifically related to this matter of disunion by partisanship.

Then we come to the question of ministries. There is every reason to believe that ministry and

ministries had a large place in the Corinthian mentality. To read the two letters with this thought uppermost is to be fully convinced of the fact. Indeed, the letters can be said to relate entirely, in the final issue, to the Church's ministry. But here again the painful contradiction is found. The very thing that was provided and intended for building was being used for unbuilding: the means for unifying and consolidating was being turned to divide and disintegrate. We shall touch upon only one aspect of this here.

The root weakness and therefore the expressed evil was not only the personal bias, i.e. the bias to persons, but to ministries. There was distinct failure in the matter of recognition of and rejoicing in the value and importance of every form of God-given ministry. The evangelistic bias and preference would reject and criticise the teaching ministry, and probably say, 'There is no Gospel for the unsaved with him or with them.' The teaching bias would take the attitude toward the evangelistic that it was 'elementary', 'not feeding', etc., and so despise it. Thus you go round the clock to every aspect and emphasis of the whole ministry, and people make ministries the means and ground of divisive groups. This is pernicious in every case! Why do not the Lord's people recognize that, what is true of the Body as being one, yet having many members (I Cor. xii. 12), is also true of the ministry; it is one, yet having many aspects. Why say of any, "I (or we) have no need of you"? Then again, is it so inconceivable that the Lord will raise up specific ministries in a corporate way to be complementary to the other things that He is doing? What is the reason for the suspicion and ostracism existing in relation to ministries that the Lord is undoubtedly blessing and using? Let us ask the all-inclusive question regarding this: Is it really, honestly, transparently, and utterly a jealousy that Christ shall not lose anything, but rather that He shall have all the increase in spiritual life that is absolutely possible? Is it? Let us test ourselves honestly before God!

If any people in whose spiritual welfare we are interested could really find more of Christ and grow spiritually more fully and quickly in another circle of believers or under another ministry, so that there would be a greater measure of Christ in this world as represented by them, are we willing and happy that they should leave *our* 'church', 'mission', 'group', etc., and go there? Are we really ready for the Lord to deal with *all* that limits Him in us or our connection so that *the draw and the hold is Himself?*

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Are we trying to hold up, maintain, and conserve some *thing* that is not clear, free, open, and adjustable for the ever-growing fulness of Christ? It all amounts to a question of whether the Lord really has sovereignly ordained and determined our ministry. If He has, so long as spiritual principles are not violated, it just must be fulfilled, and "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"; but let us be sure that it is the gates of hell against which we are warring and not the come-back of a false conception and mentality as to what the Lord is after!

Can we not rejoice in *anything* that truly ministers Christ, without an inward reservation born of fear as to how it may affect *our* interests? Let us beware of putting *our* hand upon the Ark to preserve it intact. The Lord will only confound us if we do.

When we come to Functions, we are only coming to an extension of ministry. While the *specific* ministries are represented by the specific function (not offices) of Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers, the whole Body is brought

into view as a ministering Body. Every member is an organ and therefore has a function. Inter-relatedness, interdependence are the laws of its ministry, and a vast diversity is in an equally vast unity known as "the unity of the Spirit", "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit". Thus, the Apostle gives much prominence to this great spiritual truth in relation to the impact of the Church upon the world, just as did the Lord in John xvii. All the strong things said by the Apostle about "not discerning the Lord's body", and "destroying the temple of God", etc., are seen to have a corporate aspect, and therefore involve the Church in the question of its world-testimony and -impact. We just cannot say of or to any real member of Christ. 'We can do without you'. Perhaps we would not say that, but do we act that? Is ours a negative or a positive attitude? Surely what Paul meant was—and is—'We just cannot do without you!' 'We must have you!' The need is not to maintain some earthly thing with a Christian title, but for the expression of Christ and His increase.

(To be continued)

T. A-S.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

THE GOSPEL OF THIS HOUSE CALLED "ME"

II. INSIDE THE WALL

IN our last talk we were thinking of the wonderful wall of our skin, and I am sure that many of you must have called to mind the book in the Bible which especially tells of the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem. I mean the book of Nehemiah. You will remember how all the people threw themselves so heartily into that work. The wall, like our skin, meant so much in the way of protection and safety! There were two sides to their work; these two sides were represented by trowels and swords. They were builders and fighters at the same time, and Nehemiah kept a watch everywhere against the enemy. He had a man beside him all the time who had a trumpet, and he told the people that, if ever they heard that trumpet, they were to rush to that spot to prevent an invasion. How like our skin. We have seen that there are always enemies (germs) ready to get in to do us serious harm, and whenever there is an attack all the little 'people' (cells) hear (or feel) the alarm and rush to fortify that spot.

This is one of God's wonderful ways of saying that His people are like a wonderful body or house, and that "if one member suffers all the members suffer with it". There should be a feeling that something is wrong and that there is danger to the

whole body when one member is hurt by the enemy, and something ought to be done about it. So, when next you hurt yourself and the skin is broken, and you find—in a day or two—that all the little 'people' have got to work to mend the break and put something stronger there, remember that you are one of the little people in God's house or Christ's body, and you should rally to strengthen and heal any other little member who has been hurt by sin, or sorrow, or unkindness. We shall find this lesson coming up in many ways as we study this House called 'Me'.

But let us have another look at the house inside the wall. What a wonderful house it is. There is the wall of which we have spoken, with its enormous number of *living* bricks (cells) (see I Peter 2. 5). In this wonderful wall there are doors and windows, you know what they are. Then there is a wonderful lighting and heating system, so that "the whole body shall be full of light" (Matt. 6. 22) and radiate warmth everywhere (Romans 5. 5). There is a kitchen where all the food is cooked; a wonderful system by which the food is carried to every part of the house. There is a wonderful telephone system so that every room—and there

JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1952.

are many rooms—is in touch with the other and can 'call up' every other. This telephone system has a 'central exchange' in the house. There is an office in which all the business is centred. There are repair shops or work rooms. There is a radio or wireless broadcasting and receiving set, and a photographic room and outfit. There are lots of other things, but, you know, in the greatest and most wonderful house that *men* have ever built, there is nothing that cannot be found in a living way in this house that is called 'Me'. But this house is more wonderful than anything that man has ever made, however much you may gape and marvel at some building that men put up, equip, and furnish. The most wonderful thing about it all is this. Men have to think and plan and work with their brains for months or even years to design their buildings. Then they have to send to all kinds of factories and workshops and places often far away in other parts of the world to have all the parts made. Then, oh what a lot of hard work and perhaps worry to prepare the ground, get all the parts together, build the house, decorate it, put all the fittings in—the water, heating, lighting, sanitary-system: the furniture, and all the rest! But in this *much more* wonderful house called 'Me', there is none of that. Our wonderful Builder has a simple way of doing it all. He just puts in something called 'life', and in that life are all the fea-

tures and parts of the wonderful 'house'. If it is 'vegetable life' then all the beautiful flowers just come out of it. If it is 'animal life', then we have a lovely dog, or cat, or lion, just coming out of that life. If it is 'human life', then we have a dear and beautiful little baby, growing up to a fine woman or man.

But then, what next? Is that all? No, there is still another order or kind of life. There is that special and highest of all kinds of being—a child of God, and for such there is a special and different kind of life. It is that life to which our Lord Jesus referred when He said, "I am come that they might have life", and Paul meant it when he said, "the gift of God is eternal life". It is a *kind* of life which has in it all the features of God's nature and likeness. So just as the house which is our body, with all its marvels and wonders, things which have kept the cleverest men guessing and thinking and working for centuries, is just the out-working of that mysterious thing called life, so a child of God is the result of God's Life coming inside and getting to work.

If He who *is* the Life comes into us, Jesus Christ, and we do not disobey His laws of life, all that is like Him—a beautiful and wonderful house that speaks of His love, wisdom, and power, will just come into being: it will just happen!

More about this house later.

'Interpreter'

"HIS GREAT LOVE"

VI. LOVE THE SUPREME TEST OF THE CHURCH

"His great love wherewith he loved us" (Eph. ii. 4).

WE come now to the close of the New Testament, the consummation in the book of the Revelation. A great deal of reading ought to take place at this point for which we have not the time. Will you open the Word at the beginning of the book of the Revelation and glance down through the first, second and third chapters as the first main part of this book, hurriedly recalling what is there, and helping as best you can as we go on by noting details also?

We have said that we are here in the consummation, and I think I shall have no difficulty in having your agreement that, when we come to the book of the Revelation, we do come to the consummation of all that is in the Word of God; that is, it is a gathering up of all at the end to a final settlement. That at least we can say about the book of the Revelation. Whatever may be our ideas of in-

terpretation of the many things here, we are all agreed that here we are at the end and everything is being gathered up to a final settlement. At this point we must just ask a further question. Have we not much to go upon that we are now nearing that final settlement of all things, that we are in the days of the consummation of the ages? Is it necessary for me to gather up all the proofs and evidences and signs to prove that? But I think there again I have your agreement. We certainly are in the end times.

If that is true, then it is a matter of supreme importance that we should recognize what are the primary and ultimate factors with God; and if those factors are at all at issue in our considering them together at this time, then our meditation must take on a significance which is altogether beyond our own. It must be a very solemn and consequential time, and it must demand and receive from us a definite act of putting away every

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

other kind of thought and consideration. There should be an open-hearted seeking of the Lord, with no prejudices, no suspicions, no curiosity, nor anything that is casual or indefinite. We must come, and, with all our hearts, take the attitude that if God is going to say to us that which with Him is of primary and ultimate consequence, we must note that and we must be in it.

I tarry to lay emphasis on one further matter. I am intensely concerned that we should not be just occupied with a lot of Bible matter. This is not just a theme that is being taken up, a subject, with all the subject matter about it being brought out. No, a thousand times no! If this is not God's message to us, well, we had better cut it short and go and do something else.

Well then, let us come to this book of the Revelation. We take chapters i to iii. I have many times made great efforts to resolve these three chapters into one clear meaning, but I have always finished with a sense of defeat. There has been something true and right, but in the thing that I was after I have had a sense of defeat and frustration; and when we come to certain details in these messages to the churches, such as Jezebel, Balaam, the Nicolaitans, somehow we seem to have got into a realm of the technical. The thing has not become a concrete, definite, positive message, it has escaped me. I knew what those things meant in principle, but what I so much wanted to do was to find one resolving thing which gathers them all up and makes of them as a whole a single message for the Lord's people. Until now, as I say, I have felt defeated every time, all through the long years. I am wondering if I have got it now; we shall see.

LOVE THE MASTER-KEY TO THE
WHOLE BIBLE

It seems to me at length that the master-key to the whole Bible is in our hands when we come to this. The master-key to everything is love; and if you will look, I do not think there is any doubt but that you will come to see that all that is here is gathered into that one matter of Divine love. We are in the consummation of love in this book, and it begins and ends with the Church.

LOVE THE KEY TO THE VISION IN
REVELATION I

You take, then, the first chapter, and what is the key? The key to the first chapter and also to the whole book is to be found in the words, "*Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his*

blood; and he made us a kingdom, priests unto his God and Father". You can see love in almost every word of that great sentence.

But alongside of, or following on, that statement, you have the presentation of the risen and glorified Lord, and He is presented at once in that marvelous designation "Son of man", the title of kinship, the redeeming kinsman. "*Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins*"—the title, you see, belongs to One who has come right into our estate, and eventually into our state. That is the theme of love. Oh, how great, how comprehensive, is that Son of man, flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone, to redeem us unto His Father! He is described in that matchless presentation, verse by verse, step by step, and when you have read it all and noted everything that is said about Him, every detail of His person and of His adornment, you find it is the sum total of love.

He is "*girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle*". Every word speaks of Divine love, the breasts, the gold, the girdle. The girdle is the symbol of strength, of energy, of intention, of purpose. You mean business when you gird yourself. The robes are no longer flowing for leisure, loose for reclining. The girdle speaks of preparation for action. Moreover, this girdle is golden, symbolic of the very nature of God who is love. Above the rest that girdle seems to me to include all the other features, give meaning to everything else.

I am not going to mention in detail all the features of this Son of man as given to us here. What I am trying to convey to you is that this inclusive presentation of the risen and glorified Christ is the comprehensive presentation of love. 'But', you say, 'is that true?—because some of the terms used are terrible, awful. John fell at His feet as one dead when he saw Him. Is that the effect of love? Would it not be truer to say that this is the Lord All-terrible, rather than the Lord All-loving?' But think again. It is love, but not our idea of love. We have to reconstitute our conception of Divine love. This One here is described as "the faithful and true". Have you never been in the hands of the Lord in discipline, in breaking, yes, in shattering, being poured out like water on the ground, and afterward have had to say, 'Thou wast right, Lord; it was the only way. It was a terrible experience, but Thou wast faithful with me, faithful to all the highest and deepest principles of heaven. It was not in anger and judgment, but in faithfulness and mercy to my soul that Thou didst do it'. We have to reconstitute our idea of love. Here John says, "*When I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me,*

JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1952.

saying, *Fear not*". This is not judgment, this is not destruction, this is not death and condemnation. The right hand is the token of honour, of favour. "*Fear not; I am the first and the last*". 'Everything is in My hands and in the end it will be all right; I took it up and I am going to finish it; fear not'.

I was saying that John fell at His feet as one dead. There was another man who, travelling on a road with the positive intention of blotting out from this earth, as far as it lay in his power, every remembrance of Jesus of Nazareth, was met by this same Lord of glory. All-terrible? Well, certainly Saul of Tarsus went down, he was broken, the encounter overpowered him and left its mark upon his very physical body to the end of his life. For three days he had no sight, and they had to help him into the city. But do you tell me that was God the All-terrible? Oh, listen to the conversation! "*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*" What is the tone of that? It is not, I am sure, the tone of anger. It is a pleading tone of entreaty, of sorrow, of solicitude. "*Who art thou, Lord?*" 'I am God the All-terrible, and now I have brought you to book?' No—" *I am Jesus whom thou persecutest . . . What shall I do, Lord? . . . Rise, and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do*". The Lord went ahead of him, prepared the way for him (Acts ix. 1-9; xxii. 4-11). Do you tell me that terrible revelation was not love? Well, ask Paul himself what he thought about it, and see in after years what he had to say about it. He did not say, 'He met me, He smote me, He destroyed me, He brought me into such awful judgment that I lost all hope'. He said, "*He loved me and gave himself up for me*" (Gal. ii. 20). That meeting, terrible and devastating as it might be in one sense, was a meeting with the Lover of his soul.

I say again, we have to make over anew our conception of Divine love. It is not that sickly, sentimental thing we call love. It is something tremendous. We have so to reconstruct our conception of Divine love as to see that our highest interests for all eternity demand very faithful dealings with us by God, and the more we really know the heart of God, the more we come to be ready to say, 'Thou art right, Lord; even in what I would call Thy hard handling of me, Thou art right'. God in His love has the end in view, not just the pacifying of some fretful child with a sop. We are called unto His eternal glory and "*our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory*" (II Cor. iv. 17). But we do not always believe it while the affliction is on us. We do not even call it 'light'; but

He knows how transcendently and infinitely the glory outweighs the suffering. He has decided, with the greatness of the end in view, it is worth His while to be faithful with us and let nothing pass that would take from that glorious prize of His glory or work against it. He knows quite well that, when we are with Him afterward, were we to see something that was not taken up by Him and dealt with because of the suffering and the pain it would have caused us, and because we would have murmured and complained, that we would say to Him then, 'Lord, why didst Thou not do that in spite of me?' And so, knowing the end and dealing with us in the light of it, the faithful and the true love is other than our poor sickly conception of love. Love in our thinking so often means just giving way all the time, just having everything we want or giving everything that others want. God deals with us, not as infants, but as sons (Heb. xii. 7). The presentation, you see, is all a comprehensive and detailed consummation of love.

THE CHURCHES CHALLENGED AS TO LOVE

Now you pass to the next two chapters, and you have the churches; and the Lord is here dealing with the churches on the basis of the presentation. That can be seen by noting that every one of the seven messages to the churches takes up some feature of the presentation of Christ in the first chapter. You can look at that and note it. Actual phrases in the presentation of chapter i are used in relation to the churches respectively. So He is dealing with the churches on the basis of Himself as fully presented, and therefore if the presentation is the comprehensive embodiment of love, He is dealing with all the churches on that basis.

Now you note that the messages and the churches are bounded by Ephesus and Laodicea, and not as unrelated but as embracing and covering all the seven. In Ephesus and Laodicea the trouble is defective love. Ephesus, "*thou didst leave thy first love*"; Laodicea, "*thou art neither hot nor cold*". The whole question with these churches is love. Let us hurriedly look at them separately, as far as we can.

FIRST LOVE AS COVERING ALL

Here again is the wonderful thing, that in Ephesus, which marks the beginning of everything, all turns on love. "*Thou didst leave thy first*

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

love". What is first love? Well, first love is all-inclusive in its nature. You will not be able subsequently to find any characteristic or feature of love without finding it in first love. First love covers all the ground of love. We could not tabulate the meaning of first love. It is everything, it is all that you can say about love; utterly selfless, self-forgetting, uncalculating. It is fierce, it is fiery, it is completely hot, strong and faithful. That is where the Lord begins. First love is the basis on which the Lord takes up the whole matter, comprehensive of all love's features. So in relation to the ultimate situation, we see here, through Ephesus, that what the Lord must have in His Church is inclusive love, love in all its features. He must come at the end back to the beginning, and bring His Church likewise back to that basis. Of course, there must have been a first love; you cannot depart from what never was. That will challenge us.

To Israel the Lord said, through a prophet, with a sigh of disappointment and grief. "*I remember concerning thee the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals; how thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown*" (Jer. ii. 2). That is what love will do. Love will go after its lover in a wilderness where there is nothing to live on.

If necessary, it will die of starvation in order to be with its lover. "*I remember concerning thee . . . the love of thine espousals*". Inclusive love is the basis upon which the Lord begins, and in effect He is saying, 'I can be satisfied with nothing less'. Oh, there is love in Ephesus, there is no doubt about that. "*I know thy works, and thy toil and patience*"—and this, that and the other: it is not that they are without love, but that they are without their first love, that utter, inclusive, every-sided love; that is the trouble.

Let this come to our hearts. We all love the Lord; I trust we can say that truly. We love the Lord and we will do much for Him. But is our love of this kind? Is everything in our lives prompted by love, or is much of it lived under a sense of duty, of obligation or necessity, of having to do; or are there other motives, other interests and objects that keep us in the work of God as Christians? Is it the fear that we must not drop out in case of what happens to us? That is all on a lower level of life. Inclusive love is God's starting-point, and He says, 'I can be satisfied with nothing less; even you who labour and are patient and have this, that and the other thing which are very commendable, I cannot let your lampstand remain with a loss of first love'. Testimony is really gone when first love is gone, however much remains.

THE NATURE OF FIRST LOVE

(a) SUFFERING LOVE

We look now at Smyrna, and see that a great suffering has come upon the church there, a period of intense suffering in which it will be necessary to be faithful unto death; and so the Lord, in the inclusiveness of first love, would say, and does say, as I see it here, that first love is suffering love. It is indicated by what you will go through for the Lord's sake and out of love for the Lord, what you will endure, what you will put up with. No, not just to what part of the world you will go to minister to the heathen and lay down your life for your Lord, but what you will put up with at home, what you will put up with in other Christians, what you will put up with of daily martyrdom in love for your Lord without a revengeful spirit, without wanting to see those who cause your suffering and affliction made to suffer themselves for it. Suffering love, that is first love. Are you having to suffer, and suffer wrongfully? Peter says, "*If, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye shall take it patiently, this is acceptable* ('grace'—R. V. margin) *with God*" (1 Peter ii. 20). As we have said, grace is only another name for love. Suffering love—that is first love.

I could illustrate that. You have no need that it should be done, but you know quite well that in a first whole-hearted devotion to any object you are prepared to go through anything for that object. It does not matter what people say, the love is stronger than all hindrances.

(b) DISCERNING LOVE

Next we come to Pergamum. Here we have an awful state of mixture, contamination, compromise, entanglement with evil things. If we seek for the cause, we find that the church in Pergamum has not discriminated between the things that differ, between what is of the Lord and what is not. It has compromised by reason of defective spiritual sight, and so the issue here, the matter of first love, is that first love is a discerning love. There is much about that in the Bible. Paul is rich on the matter of discerning love. "*. . . having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints*" (Eph. i. 18). "*The eyes of your heart enlightened*" discerning love. Love is as far removed from blindness as heaven from earth. 'Love is blind'? No—not true love. The fact is that true love sees everything, but transcends everything. The love of Christ for His disciples was not blind love that did not know His

JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1952.

men, love that was duped, deceived, misled, but eventually found out that they were not the men He thought they were. No, "he . . . knew what was in man" (John ii. 24). His love saw everything, could tell them beforehand exactly what they would do; but love persisted in face of it all. Love is a great seeing thing. If you are consumed with a burning love for the Lord; you will be very quick of scent as to what is doubtful and questionable. You will not need to be frequently and continuously told when a thing is not right. No, love for the Lord will bring you quickly to see and to sense there is something that needs to be adjusted. You may not know what it is at the time, but you have a sense that all is not well. Love will do it. All the instruction in the world will not bring you to it. You may have the Word of God brought to you on all such points, and you might even say, 'All right, because you say so, because it is in the Bible. I will do it, I will be obedient'. Do you think that is good enough? Such a thing has never come to you through the eyes of your heart. But mark you, if this love, this discerning love, has really filled your heart by all the intelligence of the Holy Spirit indwelling you, you will sense it without being told; or if it should be brought to you from the Word, that within you will say, 'Yes, I know that is right, the Lord tells me that is right'. Do you not think that is the kind of Christian that is needed, and what the Lord needs at the end? That is what He has had in mind from the beginning and He calls that first love that is quick of scent to see what needs to be done, what needs to be put right, what needs to be cut off or added, what adjustments are necessary, and does accordingly. You do not have to follow round and say, 'Please do this: have you never taken note that you might be helpful in this way?' You do not have to do that where there is devotion, love watchful all the time, aliveness, alertness, perception, readiness to do without being all the time told to do it. Real devotion to the Lord is something that far outreaches legality. First love is discerning love.

I would like to spend all my time on this matter of discerning love, because there is so much about it. We do not grow by teaching and information, by being filled up with the Bible and its doctrines and its truths, however wonderful and true and great they are. We only grow by love, and we grow by love in terms of spiritual discernment. "Love buildeth up" (1 Cor. viii. 1); but love buildeth up because love gives us spiritual insight, and the simplest child of God, who has never been brought up in profound things, in the midst of a great wealth of teaching, but who loves the Lord, will make far greater strides in spiritual growth than

those who have it all mentally and intellectually and not through the eyes of the heart. It is true. If there is an adequate love there will be no compromise with error, with wrong, no permitting of questionable things, no long-drawn-out shedding of things which, while they may not be altogether wrong, would be better hot there. The Holy Spirit can come along that way. Have we not seen it? Have we not seen people making all kinds of changes in their habits, in their manner, in their very adornments and fashions, as they have grown spiritually, and because of an intense love for the Lord, without anyone having said anything at all? Probably had someone pointed out various things—I had better not mention them—they might have said, 'All right, he says we must not do this'. Is that good enough? Oh no! But without ever mentioning these things, we have seen people gripped by the love of God, some right at the beginning of their Christian life, steadily through following months changing themselves outwardly, becoming different people. Love is the key. You can see, then, why the Lord spoke to the church at Pergamum in the terms in which He did. What was needed there, and therefore what is needed in the consummation, is first love as marked by discernment.

(c) UNCOMPROMISING LOVE

In Thyatira again we come to a bad state, as well as a sad one, a state of spiritual tragedy. Look at the language, the names, the history behind certain names there, and it is the history of the seduction of Israel. They have been seduced, and corrupted through seduction. That is summing it up. What, then, is the requirement, in what way will love express itself? If a state of compromise in Pergamum requires discerning love, in Thyatira seduction and corruption demand an uncompromising love, repudiating Balaam and all the rest of his kind. No compromise, no seduction unto confusion, no mixing things up, no trying to bring together contrary things, no wearing of linen and wool, no ploughing with ox and ass—the symbols, you know, of two realms, of two natures—none of this trying to bring together the life of the flesh and of the Spirit; it cannot be done. No compromise can really be established between the flesh and the Spirit, between the world and Christ. No: here first love to be recovered will mean no compromise, no mixture, no confusing of issues.

(d) DISTINGUISHING LOVE

Sardis—what is the upshot of things in Sardis? "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead".

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

You look at the message to the church at Sardis and try to put it all into one word. What is the word that sums it up? Well, you have to say it is indefiniteness. So we can say again, in the light of the whole standard, that first love, ultimate love, the love of Christ, the love which He is seeking, is a distinguishing love that marks you out as clearly defined for the Lord and all that is of the Lord. Distinguished, different, outstanding, defined, unmistakable by the love that characterises and governs. The thing that distinguishes from all else is this great love, and this great love brings about a distinctiveness of life. You cannot be indefinite if you are mastered by this kind of love. First love does not care one little bit what people think or say. Oh, everybody is saying this and that about the lover in the grip of first love. They may be using all sorts of language—He is a fool, he is mad!—it does not matter. This love is making them clear-cut—one object, one design, one thought, one intent. They are people marked by one thing and not two. There is no doubt about it. We have our humorous ways of speaking of people who are in that state. He is in love, you cannot get away from it, everything goes by the board! There is one thing and one thing only in that life. That is, of course, how it ought to be. You young people, never have any relationships in the beginning that are not like that. First love is like that, and the Lord says, 'I want you where you were at the beginning'. Or shall we say, 'I want you where I have ever been. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end; I am like that from first to last. I want you back there in a distinguishing love.'

(e) STEDFAST LOVE

Philadelphia is very quickly summed up. While the name itself means 'brotherly love', there is one word that sums up this message, and that is patience. "*The word of my patience*". First love is patient love, or, to use the other word that is always in the margin of the New Testament when you

come on patience, steadfast love. That is first love, that is the love of Christ. "*He loved them unto the end*" (unto the uttermost): "*I have loved thee with an everlasting love*"; and oh, what a triumph that kind of love was and is! It needs steadfastness to go on with all that love has to encounter and suffer and endure. It is the quality of the love of God, steadfast love.

(f) FERVENT LOVE

Finally, we have Laodicea. What is the word which sums up Laodicea? It is mediocrity, neither one thing nor the other, nothing outstanding, nothing positive. You cannot say they are not Christians, but yet again you cannot say very much that is good about them as Christians. They are very ordinary. There is no such thing as an ordinary first love. In first love you are a most extraordinary person. What then is first love? It is, as over against Laodicea, fervent love, which means red-hot love, white-hot love, fervent love.

This is the sum of first love—suffering love, discerning, uncompromising, distinguishing, steadfast, fervent. Have we the key to the messages, have we the key to the end time? There may be another, but I have not found it yet. This is the last one I have found. I think we are right this time, and it amounts to this, that the Lord is going to speak to the Church, to His people, to us at the end, and that the thing He will speak about is the matter of love. He will place more emphasis upon that than upon anything else. All other aspects of truth are important, and they will be the directions in which love will work itself out: but the foundation, the spring of all, that which is to impregnate all—whether it be the service of the Lord, the very truth of the Church's eternal calling and vocation, the greatness of the work of the Cross, whatever it may be as a matter of aspects of the one whole truth—beneath and through all must be this Divine love. Have the things in themselves—the truths, if you like to call them that—have them all without love, and they are nothing. May the Lord write this in our hearts.

T. A-S.

THE CHURCH'S PRAYER AND SPIRITUAL INCREASE

Reading: Acts xi. 27 - 30; xii. 1, 5, 24 - 25.

WE may get great help from the incident recorded in Acts xii if we realize the vast implications of it. When verse 24 speaks of the Word of God growing and multiplying it is dealing not

merely with what happened at Jerusalem after the release of Peter, but with the spread of the Gospel into all the earth. Here was a notable turning-point in the affairs of the people of God—"But the word of God grew and multiplied". The explanation of it, however, is surely in the earlier statement

JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1952.

which discloses the secret crisis which brought about this turning of the tide—" *But prayer . . .*" (verse 5).

Everybody knows, of course, that chapter xiii marks a new division of the book of the Acts, and that it introduces a very important development in the life of the Church. From that point there was an amazing and altogether new sending forth into all the earth of the testimony of Jesus Christ ; the Word of God was indeed multiplied. But the narrative runs straight on from chapter xii, and is closely connected with it. We must not imagine that this new development was unrelated to what had gone before, but rather take note of how closely related were the events at Jerusalem with what was initiated from Antioch.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TIME

(1) SPIRITUAL TRIUMPH AT ANTIOCH

" *Now about that time . . .*" What time ? The time of great spiritual victory and blessing at Antioch. The Spirit of God was mightily at work in the city, and for a year Saul and Barnabas had been ministering there among the new converts who were notable for the great grace of God which could be seen in them. Then, in the midst of this happy time of fellowship and instruction, a practical matter arose. By means of a prophet who came down from Jerusalem the Holy Spirit presented them all with a practical challenge. He always does this. And very much depends on how we react at such a time of challenge. The saints at Antioch were told of an impending famine in Judaea, and thus, in a very practical way, they were tested as to how much they had really profited from what they had learned. It was a critical moment. By means of the prophet Agabus they were being proved as to whether the grace of God was really working effectively in them. They stood the test. Their response was immediate and whole-hearted. They set aside any feelings which they might have had as to their remoteness from Jerusalem or their independence of it. Their brethren were in need. That was enough. Love triumphed, as they determined to send help, every man according to his ability.

" *Now about THAT time, Herod the king put forth his hands*". Is not that just like the devil ? Just when there is a new movement of the Lord among His people and a fuller expression of the triumph of His grace in their hearts, Satan reacts with increased hatred and opposition. This is all so true in our own experience.

(2) THE BEGINNING OF AN APOSTOLIC PARTNERSHIP

Another significant feature in the timing of this evil attack was that it also marked the beginning of a very important association of two men—Barnabas and Saul. They had known each other before, indeed it was Barnabas who first brought Saul to Antioch. Now, however, there was coming into being a most vital and significant movement of God, which demanded the joint ministry of the two men. In the providence of God they were found together at Jerusalem at this very time ; it may be that they were present at the special time of prayer for Peter. We must not surmise too much about those movements of the apostles which are not recorded in the Word, but surely the Holy Spirit has a purpose in recording their presence in Jerusalem immediately before and after the story of Peter's deliverance from Herod. Chapter xi ends with the arrival of Barnabas and Saul in Jerusalem. They had come with their gifts for the needy saints of that city. It is true that no further mention of them is made up to chapter xii, 24, but when the narrative is resumed at verse 25 we are told of the fulfilment of their ministration and their return from Jerusalem. This seems to show clearly that the chronicler wishes us to understand that Barnabas and Saul were still in Jerusalem during the intervening period. A further confirmation seems to be found in that the prayer took place in the house of the mother of John Mark (verse 12), who was the very same young man who accompanied Saul and Barnabas back to Antioch. This Jerusalem prayer meeting seems to be taking on an altogether new significance. It is related to issues much larger even than the ministry of Peter and of the local church. It first checks and then reverses the rising tide of spiritual opposition, opening the way for a mighty release of the Spirit's energy through the whole Church. ☞

(3) THE TIME OF THE PASSOVER

There is one more point which should be noted with regard to the time element, and this is that it was the time of the Passover. "*Those were the days of unleavened bread*". It seems that in some general way the saints still kept the Jewish feasts ; indeed in Jerusalem it was impossible for them not to do so. Even if they did not strictly observe the Jewish festivals, at least they would keep the Passover. We cannot fail to take some note of them. There is no doubt that as the Passover was being celebrated they would be vividly reminded of that

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

other Passover, not so many years before, when the Lamb of God was offered up for their redemption. But there is always a danger that our commemoration of spiritual things should become formal and lifeless, instead of expressing up-to-date and living values. The Lord has to take precautions to deliver us from this peril. He may have seen that at Jerusalem they were inclined to celebrate the victory of Calvary as a matter of past history, a deliverance that belonged to a former day, and so permitted Herod to stretch forth his hands in a new attack, in order that the people of God, being forced into fresh conflict, might prove anew in a personal way the present power of Christ's glorious victory. So this was not so much Satan's timing as the timing of God. There was no question as to the ferocity of the assault upon them. "*But prayer . . .*" And we may truly add, "*But God . . .*".

Do not let us be discouraged when the enemy renews his attacks, nor fall into the mistake of imagining that the Lord is against us, just because life is difficult and full of problems. There is a timeliness about what is happening. Great things are afoot. It was precisely when the church at Antioch was responding whole-heartedly to the Lord, when a new day was dawning for the worldwide testimony of Christ, and when God was about to give His people fresh proof of the completeness of Calvary's triumph. "*Now about THAT time Herod the king put forth his hands to vex certain of the church*".

This will help us to appreciate an important fact, namely that our personal difficulties and trials, our local, corporate experiences of spiritual conflict, have a vital relationship with far bigger activities of God than we can imagine. "*But prayer was made earnestly of the church . . .*"; "*But the word of God grew and was multiplied*". These two things are very closely connected.

GOD'S USE OF THE FAMINE

It was the famine which occasioned the presence of Barnabas and Saul in Jerusalem. We know that there was such a famine, and that it was very extensive. Not only are there other authentic accounts of the great dearth in Jerusalem itself, but there are also records of famine conditions in Greece and Rome. It was one of those times when the whole world was in straitness and suffering. While it may be exaggeration to suggest that the world-situation happened in order that God's purposes might be realized among His people in Jeru-

salem and Antioch, there is no question but that world-conditions are used both by the devil and by the Lord for specific activities and interests among God's people.

Now, suppose that the saints at Antioch, who apparently were not themselves affected by the famine, had been unconcerned and unmoved concerning the needs of their Jewish brethren. Barnabas and Saul would not then have gone to Jerusalem at this time: they might have missed some Divine purpose, and there might have been no missionary developments at Antioch, as described in chapter xiii. A great deal may have come out of the sending of relief to Jerusalem. None of us knows how closely inter-related are spiritual issues.

An ordinary Christian, one of those who met for prayer at the house of John Mark's mother, might have thought that he had nothing to do with the great apostolic mission, and the triumphs of the Gospel through Barnabas and Saul. He himself might have thought that he had nothing to do with it. God alone knows what spiritual energy is released to the ends of the earth when even a simple group of saints meet for prayer, and not only meet for prayer but win through in prayer. The conflict may seem to relate to some purely local situation or personal need, but if those who are so beset rise up in the Name of the Lord, claiming the fulness of His victory, the local and personal victory will become the occasion for the release of spiritual forces in a widespread way.

THE TEST OF PERSECUTION

We find that the famine was followed by persecution, by Peter's imprisonment, and by severe testing for all the believers. What was the devil's purpose in this persecution? Was it not to scatter the saints, to divide them, to make them lose heart, and perhaps to compromise, or even to give up altogether? We, too, are affected by world-conditions, as they were by the famine. It may be that some of us are not involved in actual persecution, but we also suffer from Satan's attempts to discourage and divide us. Peter, it is true, was the one actually in prison, but the whole church was on trial: they were all being tested as to whether they would stand firm in the evil day and win through to victory. It is so easy to enjoy meetings, to appreciate Bible teaching and to be loud in our praises to the Lord, and then, when the conflict comes, to go all to pieces. It would not have been difficult for them to lose heart. James had been taken violently from them: Peter was in prison and apparently finished:

JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1952.

everything seemed to deny the reality of their faith. What would be the use of going to a prayer meeting?

And, of course, the human element usually comes in. We may be quite sure that Peter was not a perfect man, and that under such a stress it would be very easy to remember his faults. It might possibly have been argued that if he had behaved differently he might have avoided arrest. Satan's effort was to break into the midst of that flock, to destroy their close fellowship, to get them doubting, questioning and arguing—anything but standing firmly together in faith. They might have felt that this imprisonment was Peter's business and not theirs. They might have let him find his own way out, perhaps putting up a little perfunctory prayer for him, but feeling in general that it was his own personal concern. And we, too, are exposed to these same perils and temptations. We do not have to wait for active persecution, for Satan is always seeking to make us divided in spirit, suspicious and critical of one another, or at best rather coldly independent. The devil focuses his attention on making the church lose faith, lose hope and weaken in love. We are not now treating of whether one should go to a prayer meeting—some of the most important elders could not be present at this one—but remarking on the spiritual principle of resisting every attempt at scattering.

The church in Jerusalem did not succumb to this temptation, but rallied together in earnest prayer and love, not for Peter only but for the will and glory of their Lord.

THE VICTORY IN JERUSALEM

"*But prayer . . .*" Here is the spiritual answer to a spiritual challenge, and very much depended on the outcome. If the victory had not been won at Jerusalem, if the saints had been scattered, disheartened and defeated, what would have happened to the Word of God? The real battle was concerning the release of that Word. The supreme concern was not what should happen to the church in Jerusalem, nor even what should happen to Peter; what really mattered was what should happen to the Word of God. When the saints gathered for prayer at Mary's home, though they probably did not realize it, they were fighting out the battle of world-evangelization, of the growth and multiplication of the Word of Christ. There are two 'buts' in this chapter. The first of them was the responsibility of the church: they refused to be moved. Satan was attempting to overthrow, to scatter, to destroy love and to turn faith into

despair, when he was suddenly checked by a mighty spiritual resistance—" *But prayer . . .*" It was a turning point. The whole course of events was arrested, and there followed a blessed sequence of Divine acts of deliverance. It was straightforward after this, for God had taken matters in hand, and was sweeping aside all opposition, that His people might be led out and onward to new triumphs. In verse 24 we have the great Divine 'but', "*BUT the word of God grew and multiplied*". This was the answer to their prayer; the first responsibility lay with them, then God took things up in a mighty way, and said 'but' by releasing His Word far and wide.

Like the church at Jerusalem, we too, shall be confronted with attacks upon our faith, our patience and our love. If we do not resolutely face up to these personal and local conflicts, pressing through to victory in the Lord's Name, what hope is there of increase and multiplication? On the other hand, if we do take up the challenge as they did, by stemming the onrush of spiritual disaster with our "*But prayer . . .*" God will surely respond with His 'but', and clear the way for increase and new fulness.

THE FAR-REACHING EFFECTS

So it appears that there was a very large background or setting to the prayer battle in Mary's house. The Christians at Jerusalem thought that they were being assaulted on a purely local and personal issue. They felt, and rightly so, that by prayer they could win an immediate and local victory. Thank God they did. But what they did not know, what they could hardly have imagined, was that this was a turning point in Divine strategy, a victory which would produce a great release of the Lord's servants and of His Word. An ordinary rank and file believer in Jerusalem might have questioned whether it really mattered so much whether he was triumphant or defeated, whether after all very much depended on his loyalty and faith. It mattered far more than he could realize. It always does. It matters tremendously. There are far-reaching issues involved in the spiritual victories or reverses of the people of God.

And so when Peter was released, something else was released, the whole situation was released. For a time it seemed as though everything was shut up. The one man, Peter, seemed to be an embodiment of the whole state of affairs. He was shut up, he was in chains, and it seemed as if an end were coming to all the activities of the Spirit through the church. Everything then depended on whether the

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Lord's people would accept what appeared inevitable, whether they would give way to the opposition and be defeated by it. Had they done so, there is no guarantee as to what might have happened. But instead of giving way, they rose up in faith to assert that the Passover was no mere commemoration of a past victory, but the celebration of the ever-present power of Calvary's universal triumph. God responded by releasing Peter, but more than that, He gave new and mighty increase to the whole testimony of the church.

We now move on into Acts xiii, to find that Barnabas and Saul are on the eve of being thrust out by the Holy Spirit into the uttermost parts of the earth. We must remember that they had just come down from Jerusalem in the spiritual good of a great victory, they had come down on a tide of glorious life and power, released in answer to believing prayer. From many points of view, Jerusalem and Antioch may have been different, but there can be no question as to their spiritual relatedness. The organic nature of the church means that we depend very much on one another. It is never the Lord's way to confine His working to limited and localized matters. He takes hold of our trials and conflicts, making them the occasion for the registration of important spiritual victories which will bring great and widespread increase. In actual experience the people of God are bound up together in vital association for the interests and glory of the Lord.

A WORD OF WARNING

There remains just a word of warning concerning the young man who came down with Barnabas and Saul. Mark, of course, had every encouragement to be a missionary. He had been through all these thrilling events. With others he had been plunged into the darkness of battle, he had felt the

sorrow of seeming defeat, he had heard the prayer and he had witnessed the wonderful answer. When Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch, full of the story of God's marvellous deliverance, Mark went down with them, thrilled with a sense of the overwhelming power of God. So enthused and inspired was he that he had no difficulty in offering himself to go to the ends of the earth for Christ. We are therefore informed that when Barnabas and Saul set out "they had also John as their attendant" (xiii. 5). But it did not last long. "John departed from them and returned to Jerusalem" (verse 13). It seems that he was not prepared to travel quietly on into dark and forbidding territory, steadfastly believing that the God who answered prayer at Jerusalem was still with them. Just the outward experience of things does not carry us very far. Saul and Barnabas had something more than that: they had a deep inward knowledge of the triumph of Calvary, and of the ever-present reality of the conquering Lord.

This is a note of warning, lest we should be among those who take up the matter of prayer warfare in a superficial way. We cannot live on thrills and wonders. We shall not always get quick results. The increasing spiritual conflict will call for an ever deeper and inward knowledge of the Lord. Mark's enthusiasm did not carry him very far. Perhaps he did the best thing in returning to Jerusalem. It may be that for the time being it would have been far better for him never to have left it. After all it was there that he had learned something of the power of God. We do not know. But we do know that in a simple home in that city, a gathering of ordinary and unnamed Christians fought a mighty spiritual battle, and won through to a victory which had repercussions in the lands and nations far beyond. And this may be true of us all.

H. F.

(It is hoped that the above article will be available in booklet form shortly)

WHY THE STRANGE WAYS OF GOD ?

"But arise, and stand upon thy feet: for to this end have I appeared unto thee, to appoint thee a minister and a witness both of the things wherein thou hast seen me, and of the things wherein I will appear unto thee" (Acts xxvi, 16).

"But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will show him how many things he

must suffer for my name's sake." ". . . if so be I press on, if so be that I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus" (Phil. iii, 12).

IT is not my intention to speak at length on these passages, but to take out of them some things that are implied or embodied in them as principles.

JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1952.

They resolve themselves into a matter of cause and effect. "For to this end have I appeared unto thee . . ." "I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts ix. 15-16). that I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus." ". . . that for which . . .": ". . . to this end . . ."

SOVEREIGN PURPOSE GOVERNS OUR SALVATION

The first aspect of that is clearly one of sovereign purpose. Purpose is the positive and governing aspect of salvation. It is that unto which we are saved. Of course, it would not be wholly right to say that that from which we are saved is the negative aspect of salvation, but it is the negative aspect compared with this other. It is not the 'from' but the 'unto' or the 'for' which is really the positive thing in salvation. Stagnation had no place even in the unfallen creation. God did not just make everything and put man in charge and set fixed bounds to the possibilities of man and creation. The potentialities were immense; and when Adam failed, he lost not only what was, but also what could have been. It is said that Adam was "a figure of him that was to come" (Rom. v. 14). Figures are always less than that which they represent. Adam was intended for something more than he was. Christ is that something more—ininitely more—and when Christ redeemed, He not only redeemed what was before Adam sinned, but also all that Adam never possessed or inherited but which was intended for him. Purpose governed creation, and we know, as a part of the very gospel itself, that the purpose of God was missed by Adam, and is missed by the Adam race. Moreover, the whole purpose of God is never possessed and entered into in experience the moment we are born again.

I said that stagnation is no feature of God's creation even when it is unfallen; but for any to be born again, and thus to begin to know the good of redemption, and then to fail to recognize that they are saved not only *from* something, but *unto* something immense, means that stagnation sets in and they are always dating everything by the past; whereas those who have apprehended the fact of purpose are always occupied with the future, with something beyond.

Sovereign purpose, we have said, is the positive and the governing factor of salvation. You have heard that many times, but I do want to emphasize it again. Perhaps you have not grasped it. There are still many Christians who are just glad they

are Christians: they know Christ as their Saviour and they are seeking day by day to live as Christians: but they are not conscious of any great, powerful, dominating motive of sovereign purpose in their salvation. They are not drawn on by an enlarging vision and apprehension of that sovereign purpose. Those little statements which we noted earlier, such as ". . . that for which I was apprehended . . .", ". . . to this end have I appeared unto thee", mean little or nothing to them. But to us, as to Paul, the Lord would say, 'Not just to save you, not just to deliver you from perdition, not just for your escape from judgment have I appeared unto you, but I have a great revelation to give you of that unto which I have saved you'. That is the effect of His words to Paul, and they are true for us also, as Paul makes clear in his letters. You need to be sure that you are really gripped in your innermost being by such a consciousness, by this sense of being apprehended by and for sovereign purpose, so that it is dominating your life—something which eliminates the element of time, so that you are not limited by the idea of just living as good a Christian life as you can until you die. This outbounds our life here, and we know it well.

That is all I want to say about the first thing. But I want to be sure that you are really in the grip and control of this that the early Christians felt so much and which the Apostles (especially Paul) took such pains to bring home to the Church. Sovereign purpose governs God's activities in the life of every child of His, and that sense and fact of purpose, as related to our salvation, is after all the main part of our salvation, the positive aspect.

GOD'S WAYS DETERMINED BY HIS PURPOSE

Then, of course, there follow quite naturally the sovereign ways of God with us in relation to His sovereign purpose. The only thing I will say now about that is this, that God's ways with us will be, and must be, consistent with His sovereign purpose. Here is where we need to be really intelligent and alive. We must look to see how our ways correspond to God's purpose under His sovereign control. It is a part of our education, and of our heart gratification when we are able to discern it, to observe how our experience and our history tally with God's object and with the principles which govern His purpose. From time to time it will be well for us if we just stand still and say, 'Now, this is what is revealed as God's purpose, and we are called according to His purpose. Does my spiritual ex-

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

perience and history give me heart-assurance that God is taking the only way by which that purpose can be fulfilled?'

What do we mean by that? Let us cite a point or two that might illustrate it. Here we open up something very vast, and we can only just stand and look at it from the outside.

THE PURPOSE—THE EXPRESSION OF
A TESTIMONY

(a) LIFE IN THE MIDST OF DEATH

"*The testimony of Jesus*" is a phrase that sums up a very great deal in the book of the Revelation. Indeed, it sums up the whole Bible. Now supposing, for arguments's sake, that the object of the Church's calling is a testimony to Divine life. (It is no supposition, though, but a reality. "*In him was life*" (John i. 4): "*I came that they may have life*" (John x. 10): that is the testimony of Jesus.) Supposing then the testimony of Jesus is the testimony of Divine life: what is necessary in order that our experience and history should tally with Divine purpose? It is that we should have a setting in which we are assailed continually by death. Life becomes a very real thing when death is all around and very active. So, if the purpose is the manifestation of Divine life, then those who are called according to that purpose will have to have a history of conflict with death. That is simple and obvious. If, therefore, you and I have such a history and such an experience, are we to stand back and say, 'Oh, this is all wrong! Would that we could get out of this!?' We should rather say, 'This is in accordance with the object in view, there is a consistency about God's ways with us.'

The mystery of life is one of the supreme features, if not the supreme feature, of the whole record in Scripture. I am not attempting to deal with it exhaustively here, but only to bring out the point that immediately concerns us. What is the mystery of Christ? Many men besides Jesus Christ were brought up in Nazareth. Stand them all in a row. Can you discriminate between them other than by purely natural features? No. And yet there is a difference between Jesus and the rest. What is the difference? While outwardly He looks like the rest, there is a mystery about Him, there is something there, He is not the same. People tried to deal with Him as they dealt with other men, but they found

they were dealing with someone unique, in whom there was something different. "*The mystery of Christ*" (Eph. iii. 4), who Christ really was!

The mystery of life. "*Called according to his purpose*." Supposing then that the Church is to be a manifestation of the life, a testimony to Divine life, then the Church will be set all through its history in scenes of death, with the forces of death raging against it.

(b) LIGHT IN THE MIDST OF DARKNESS

The same is true of light. "*I am the light of the world*" (John viii. 12). But there was no glow about Him, no halo round His head, nothing outward that said to men, 'This is the light of the world'. But vital union with Him by the Spirit later meant that those in union had a wonderful illumination in their own spirits. In that way, not physically, they became luminaries for those who were seeking the light. There was a mystery still about it. No one could discern it except in a spiritual way. Supposing then the calling is this—to manifest the light. Then we shall be placed in darkness again and again for the testimony's sake.

"*He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake*". He must suffer in order that the Name may come out in all its glory. The cause of all is to be found in the calling and election, and the effect of the calling is to be seen in suffering, a setting that brings out the reality of this calling. ". . . to this end . . ." Have you yourself a sense of this? Then check up as you go along and see if the ways of the Lord with you are not after all perfectly consistent with the thing that He is after.

(c) HEAVENLINESS IN THE WORLD

You say that a principle of the Church's life is heavenliness, other-worldliness, detachment from this world spiritually. Very well, the Church and the individuals in it will often find themselves in a position where, if heaven does not intervene for them, everything here is at an end, and you will not have this world on your side with its favour and applause. Will you begin to grumble and say you are having a hard time? The truth is, your experience is consistent with the principles of your calling.

JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1952.

It may be helpful to make a suggestion. When you feel you must give up because the way is too hard and too difficult, or you feel tempted to think that everything is wrong and ought not to be like this, just ask the question—'After all, does not this way show God's perfect consistency with

His Divine principles and with the object in view unto which He has chosen us?' And so often we have to say, 'After all, the consistency is patent; He could not do it in any other way: this is the only way.'

T. A-S.

VISION AND VOCATION

THE IMPORTANCE AND VALUE OF GOD-GIVEN VISION

"Come hither, I will shew thee . . ." Rev. xvi. 9.

ONCE again in the course of its history the Church of God is found in a time of serious crisis as to its life and world-testimony. Not once, nor twice, has this occurred, but many times have conditions arisen which have raised the major questions as to its next phase or entire future. At such times there has always been one factor which has been decisive: that was, the presence or absence of God-given vision. Again and again, such vision has been, by its absence, the cause of calamity and disaster; or, by its presence, the turning point for good or ill, according to the attitude taken to it. God has many times reacted to either actual or threatening tragedy by the presentation of a new vision; new, so far as His people were concerned.

We are now entering more and more deeply into a situation which threatens the life and testimony of the Church, and already in large areas of the world it is an actual and desperate reality. It is no hypothetical or imaginary situation, nor one of supposition, but there is a terrific drive from the unseen with a view to the engulfing of all that is of God and of His Christ.

So the need of the hour is once again God-given vision. The value and importance of such vision is found in its various features. In the first place:

GOD-GIVEN VISION IS SOMETHING CONCRETE WITH GOD

It is something which has existed with God in clear-cut definition in the eternal counsels from the beginning. It is not something abstract or nebulous, something that is what people term 'visionary' or mystical. It is quite definite, clear, and real in the mind and intention of God. God-given vision is not something subsequent to eventualities, an afterthought because of things having arisen unexpectedly; a kind of alternative to what God

originally meant. It is not a substitute for His original plan. No, it is not an emergency expedient because of a situation unforeseen. God-given vision has its roots outside of time and circumstance, eventualities, contingencies, emergencies! All those things have been already taken account of, and have—so to speak—been swallowed up in the vision of God.

To be brought into such vision is to be brought on to a ground of confidence and assurance when the sands seem to be sinking and everything giving way. This, surely, is of no little importance and value. Then again:

GOD-GIVEN VISION COMPREHENDS ALL DETAIL

Things, whether they be good or whether they be evil, are not ends in themselves. They are either embodied in or overcome by the vision. Under the sovereign government of the Spirit of God all things are made to serve that purpose which is the substance of God's vision. That is just the significance of the words so familiar and so often used about all things working together for good (Rom. viii. 28). But we so rarely see them in their setting, and stop short of the full import. We just say "All things work together for good . . ." and stop there. The context has two aspects. Lives wholly under the Holy Spirit's government are in view, and "his purpose" is governing. Unless these two things are implicit, all things do *not* work together for good! Given that being "called according to his purpose" we in response are lovers of God, then all things are the sphere of a sovereignty which makes them work *together* for good. Purpose governs all, and the purpose is the substance of God-given vision. It therefore requires a vision of God's purpose in greater fulness, not in part. The purpose comprehends all parts. No phase or part is an end in itself. One wheel of a machine has no adequate meaning in itself. There lacks a real motive if all the other parts are not in view. We must not be too obsessed or taken up with the part or phase. If we are, the whole becomes bound up with

that phase, for us, and we see no more. This may put us completely out of commission if any one phase has served its purpose and God is moving on. Sufficient motive demands sufficient vision, and we must see much more than that which is immediately before our eyes. Then, further still:

GOD-GIVEN VISION IS CONSTANTLY ENLARGING

It is very important to remember that God-given vision is never given in completeness any one time. This is something borne out by an abundance of Scriptural evidence and instances. Such vision is always subject to enlargement. It will always be developed and fulfilled through new phases. This is a law in nature, and nature embodies spiritual principles.

The means employed by God at one time may—and very likely will—pass or be changed. In the sovereign ordering of God one particular phase, method, or means will pass out, though greatly used and blessed so far. This does not involve a *change* of vision (unless it is ours and not God's) but an enlargement of vision. With God all that He uses and blesses, however wonderfully, is only relative and not final or ultimate. Therefore we must not cling to what has been and regard that as the form for all time. So often this has been a most disastrous attitude of mind, and has resulted in God having to go on with His full purpose in other directions and by other means, and leave that fixed thing behind to serve a much lesser purpose than He wanted with it. Eventually it has *spiritually* died, although perhaps carried on by human effort and organization. It just lives on its past and tradition. We go on:

GOD-GIVEN VISION ALWAYS MOVES UPWARD

In its first apprehension it seems to have such immediate, temporal, and earthly significance. The implications of any movement of God are not always recognized at the beginning, but if we go on with Him we shall find that much that is done here and is of time is—and has to be—left behind. The spiritual and the heavenly is pressing for a larger place and becoming absolutely imperative to the very life of the instrumentality and those concerned. It is spontaneous, and just happens. We wake up to realize that we have moved into a new realm or position, and no amount of additional earthly resource can meet the need. It is not only something *more* that is demanded, but something different. This is a crisis, and it will only be safely passed if there is vision of God's ultimate object.

This demands spiritual mindedness, capacity for grasping *heavenly* things. One world may be tumbling to pieces, but the full and final is the explanation.

The great pity is that so many just will cling to the old framework or partial vision. God presents His *heavenly* pattern in greater fulness and demands adjustment. He does it with foreknowledge knowing of a day which is imminent when this vision alone will save. But, because it is 'revolutionary' or not 'what has been in the blessing of God' etc., etc., it is rejected and put aside. Then the foreseen day comes and all sorts of expedients have to be resorted to to save the ship. Paul warned out of his intuitive vision that such would be the case on the journey to Rome, and it proved true the ship eventually foundered and much was lost.

Abraham had a vision of "the city which hath foundations" and he "looked for" it, but never found it on earth. He found it at last in heaven, but it was the climax of a walk which was ever upward. Ezekiel saw "in the visions of God" the glory lifting from the earthly scene, and moving up and on; and this vision related to all his other visions culminating in a spiritual house and river which have their counterpart alone in the revelation given to Paul and John particularly: heavenly, spiritual universal. What a significant phrase that is about the house seen by Ezekiel—"there was an enlarging upward" (Ezek. xli. 7). God-given vision is always "the *heavenly* vision", and always move away from the merely temporal and sentient. If this were apprehended there would be much more vital fruit, and many fewer 'white elephants'.

God is never on the line of reduction, limitation. It may look like that, but it is not so. If we really had His vision, that which looks like trimming and reduction is His way of enlargement, but *spiritual* and *heavenly* enlargement.

It was "the God of *glory*" who appeared to Abraham (Acts vii. 2). It was "the pattern in the *heavenlies*" that was "shewn" to Moses (Heb. viii. 5). It was "... above the firmament ... a throne ... and upon ... the throne ... a man above upon it" that Ezekiel saw. It was "that the *heavens* declare" that Daniel apprehended. These are not only sovereign factors in government, but heavenly conceptions in the *nature* of things.

These two things proceed as one. God in sovereignty will run the risk of shattering, or allow the shattering, of so much that He has used or scaffolded or framework in order to realize the fuller purpose. It is not that it was wrong, but now He wants something more. We thank God for ever that He took Paul away from his travelling ministrations.

and let him be shut up in prison. It was then that the full glorious vision and revelation of the "heavenlies" and the "eternal" was given to eclipse all the earthly and temporal. It was worth it, and was no tragedy! The Holy Spirit is the custodian of the *full* purpose of God, and under His government the Church and the individual believer will move ever on and up.

Satan may have had a lot to do with Paul's imprisonment, and with John's banishment to Patmos, but the Church has gained unspeakably in *heavenly* things.

Once again:

GOD-GIVEN VISION IS THE GROUND OF OUR TRAINING

When God does give vision it is that which becomes the occasion and basis of our testing, our education, and our discipline. This is far more important to God than easy fulfilment and realization; than that kind of facilitation which knows only sovereign power. Look at the prophets. They were men of vision. They stood in the gap between threatening disaster and the survival of God's people. But what discipline they knew because of their vision! It was their vision that brought all the inward as well as outward suffering upon them. Look again at Habakkuk. How he cries to God about the situation and then takes position in relation to the vision. But faith and patience are the great spiritual virtues and values to be perfected. "The just shall *live* by faith". Said John—with all his Patmos visions—"I John . . . your brother. . . in . . . the patience of Jesus" (Rev. i. 9).

So, things may be taking a new and different shape, but the purpose of God is the same. We may be presented with His vision in new and

further-on aspects, but it is only what He originally meant.

Can we adjust? Can we leave "the things that are behind"? Without raising any questions as to the right or wrong of what has been, can we "go on" and "grow up", "attain"?

Finally:

GOD-GIVEN VISION MAKES MEN OF PRAYER

This is almost too obvious when we remember the men of the Bible. It was vision that got them away from the trivial and petty. It requires vision to get prayer on to the major lines and to make it real travail. What a bound and range those prophets had in prayer! But what immense issues were precipitated.

It is not *our* vision for God, but His vision in us that will be dynamic, and that will determine value.

I cannot conclude without pointing out that what could be voluntary with much gain has often to be made compulsory with much loss.

This is because we do not stand back from time to time and in detachment and waiting upon the Lord give Him an opportunity of enlarging vision.

Many a work which has mightily served the Lord and been a great spiritual testimony has lost its former glory, purity, and impact because it has become a 'Work', a 'Movement', an Organization, and its ramifications and responsibilities have become such as to completely rule out any such 'retreat' with God, where *that* work is put back and a real openness to the Lord for anything else, more or other, is enquired after.

The Lord might send prophetic vision by ministry to lead into His fuller meanings if there was a way for it, but *we are too busy*. What tragedy is related to such preoccupation!

T. A-S.

(The above article is available in booklet form price 2d.)²

THE NEXT

SPECIAL GATHERINGS

at HONOR OAK,

will be held, if the Lord wills, on

SATURDAY, JANUARY 5, at 3. 30 & 6. 30 p.m.

LORD'S DAY, JANUARY 6, at 11 a.m., 3. 30 & 6. 30 p.m.

MONDAY, JANUARY 7, (for Christian Workers) at 11 a.m., 3. 30 & 7 p.m.

THIS MINISTRY

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

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

This ministry is maintained by the Lord through the stewardship of those who value it. There is no "subscription", but gifts can be sent to the Editor, "A Witness and A Testimony", 15, Honor Oak Road, Forest Hill, London, S.E. 25, England. All cheques should be made payable to "Witness and Testimony A/c". The paper is sent only to those who personally desire it, and we count on friends to advise us if this is no longer the case, or if they change their address.

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



MARCH — APRIL, 1952.

No. 2. Vol. 30.

“HIS GREAT LOVE”

VII. THE ISSUES OF LOVE

In our previous meditation, we arrived at the consummation in the book of the Revelation, and we were taking note of the wonderful truth that in the first three chapters of the book of the Revelation, the whole question is the question of love, love relating to many things, but all a matter of love.

We now go on to the issues of that love. Here we do really come up against the vital point that, while the Lord is seeking in His people that love—love like His own—there are tremendous things hanging upon it. It is not just an optional matter: everything hangs upon it. That is what arises here when the Lord says, “*To him that overcometh*”. You know that is said to each of the seven churches. Even where the Lord has not to point out any serious delinquency, He still says, ‘I see big issues bound up with this love, and everything hangs upon it’. So we will spend this little time in looking at these great issues found in that final word to each, to all, to us—“*He that overcometh*”; or “*to him that overcometh*”.

LIFE IN FULNESS

Ephesus : and again we remind ourselves that the challenge there relates to the all-inclusiveness of love, the first love, and so, when we touch the matter of love in its fulness, we expect to find an all-inclusive issue. That is to say, we expect to find that the thing which is bound up with an all-inclusive love is an all-inclusive outcome, and we are not wrong in that expectation. Here it is—“*To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree*

of life, which is in the Paradise of God”. Here, with love after this kind—the love of God, the love of Christ, the love of the Spirit—is bound up the whole question of life in its fulness: and what an issue that is ! There is a reference to the tree of life in the Paradise of God. It is a backward look as well as a forward one. It takes us to the beginning and then to the end. We shall find that tree of life right at the end of the book of the Revelation as the ultimate thing. It was the first, it is the last ; therefore it is all-comprehending, this matter of love.

But you have to look back to the beginning to see what a tremendous issue it was and is. God, having first created the heavens and the earth, and all things, then created man and set him in that garden, and in the midst of the garden placed the tree of life : and everything of the creation and everything of man and everything of the Divine heart-purpose was centred in that tree. It was the tree of life. That is more than the animal life, more than the human life, more than the natural life. That kind of life, the animal, the human, the natural, was all there, but there was a life that was not there except as represented by the tree. As constituting a test, symbolically it was there, but its real significance was spiritual and unseen. And when man failed of the purpose of it all and of his own being, failed in this matter of reciprocating the love of God, and doubted and questioned and disbelieved and disobeyed—all of which is the contrary of love—God made it impossible for that man as he was, in that state, to have that other life : and

therefore the creation faded like a fading flower, was disrupted, and man came under the terrible shadow of judgment and death. Says Paul, "Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men" (Rom. v. 12). For the very creation, for man himself, that life was essential for God's purpose. Man never received it, and he lost it on the ground of lost love, failure in love.

Now look at the Lord Jesus. He came in the fullness of times. God sent His own Son, the Son of His love, and when the Son stepped out from His hidden years into the open, to assume definitely His great life work, the heavens were opened and God said, "This is my beloved Son" (Matt. iii. 17). And John said of Him, "In him was life" (John i. 4). Here He is, the embodiment of a new creation, in whom is that life which Adam missed. It is here in Him, "In him was life", that other life, that different life, that Divine life. It is in Him, and God says of Him, as embodying a new creation, "in whom I am well pleased".

He is the Son of God's love, He possesses the life which no man had ever before possessed, He is the answer to all God's heart. God finds His perfect pleasure and satisfaction in Him. But look at Him. What do you see? Well, in this world amongst men. He appeared outwardly no different from any other man. There were repeatedly hints of something unusual about Him, which at times were dimly discerned by others, but these related to His nature and character and not to His outward appearance. Apart from this, men saw nothing different: even those closest to Him saw nothing. But there came a day of which it is written, "And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart; and he was transfigured before them; and his face did shine as the sun, and his garments became white as the light"; and all this was accompanied by the same voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son" (Matt. xvii. 1-8). Not a different Christ, not a different Son, not another, it is the same One. The life had been hidden, and now it blazed out. The life had been a secret thing, and now it was divulged. The life that was in Him was now seen to be what it was. What a transfiguring life!—His whole body transfigured, aglow, agleam with Divine glory. Everything about Him was glory, the glory of heaven, the glory of God, and it was just the nature of the life that was in Him being given an opportunity to express itself. And that is a parable and a prophecy: for does not Paul tell us that the day is coming when this body of our humi-

liation shall be fashioned anew that it may be conformed to the body of His glory (Phil. iii. 21), when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, this mortal put on immortality, and death shall be swallowed up in victory? (1 Cor. xv. 50-55). The life which we have received in Jesus Christ is that kind of life. That is the extra life that Adam never possessed, and you see it is all on the basis of love, Christ's love for the Father. His was a love which was unto death, that would battle through the hordes of evil forces: that, in obedience to the Father's will and for our salvation would cause Him to give Himself into the hands of the evil forces and say, 'I am at your mercy, do your fell work: this is your hour and the power of darkness' (Luke xxii. 53). All this He was ready to do in obedience to the Father's will.

The Cross was right in view, and when on that mount Moses and Elijah appeared, they spake with Him of the exodus that He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. They were speaking with Him about His Cross. He was already under the shadow of the Cross, had already accepted it in principle, already yielded by every test to the will of the Father. Love was triumphant already in Him. He was going all the way, and the Divine love and the glory broke out. This is the inclusive note from Genesis to Revelation. Love is always linked with life and life with love—that kind of life.

Is this to you merely a beautiful theme, a lovely song? Does it matter to you whether you have a body of glory? Or is it just a negative matter with you, that you will be glad when you have done with this one, and that is all there is to it? Have you no concern for the glory that is to be? Are you not interested in that great and marvellous statement that we have been called unto His eternal glory (1 Pet. v. 10), to be glorified together with Christ when everything of death shall be fully and finally quenched and destroyed, and life—that Divine, uncreated life, that unique life of Christ—shall show what it is, manifest its nature, its qualities? The very glory of God is in His life. It is a big issue, the issue of life.

We know something of the glory of this life even now; it is not reserved only for the end. It is not so much in our bodies, perhaps—although sometimes the Lord touches even them with a touch of the powers of the world to come and revitalizes them with His own life—but we do know the whole question of life and death in our spirits, our souls, and what a difference there is between life and death! To sense death, to know something of death inside us, in our spirits, in our souls, to be touched by, or to be in an atmosphere of spiritual

death, is an awful thing. But what a glorious thing it is to be in an atmosphere of Divine life ! It is glory in our spirits now. For those who have to live in a world in which there is nothing of the Lord at all, it is all spiritual death, whether it be secular or religious, and it is a horrible thing. But it is a grand thing when you can escape that and find yourself in the presence of the Lord amongst His people and taste something of life. That is glory of a spiritual kind inside. But think—that is going to be manifested in its fulness for our whole being, including our bodies ! It is the prospect, the calling, of the people of God, and it is all a matter of life.

But that life is based wholly and solely upon this matter of love. If you touch anything that is other than love—if you touch hate, animosity, suspicion, prejudice, criticism, jealousy, envy or any other thing that is contrary to love—you touch death. It is horrible. When you meet somebody who is eyeing you, not sure of you, suspicious of you, oh, how helpless, how hopeless, the situation is ; you cannot get on, you are glad when you have passed, but you are sad. You have met with a touch of death. You touch love in another child of God coming out to you, and oh, what a prospect fills the air, what possibilities arise ! There is a way through, everything is possible where there is love. Love and life go together. Life springs from love. That is the issue which bounds all, and that is why you begin with the tree of life.

You end with the tree of life, but it is in the garden, the garden of Divine love. That tree can only thrive in the soil of love. These are very practical matters with a challenge. Do not forget that while you need people to love you and show you love, so that your spiritual life may grow and you may be released from smallness and pettiness and limitation and be enlarged, other people need your love to the same end ; and you are not going to enlarge other peoples' spiritual life by criticizing them, by eyeing them. You are going to help their spiritual enlargement by loving them with the love of God.

This is inclusive : it includes everything else. We are not surprised, therefore, that when at Ephesus the matter of first love is raised, which is love inclusive of all the features of love, the all-inclusive question and issue arises, namely, that of life.

NO SECOND DEATH

You are able then to pass on to break it up with what is said of the church in Smyrna. The issue of

love triumphant in Smyrna was to be that the overcomer should have part in the first resurrection. "*He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death*". What is the second death ? Briefly, it is that death where there is no recovery. It is the door finally closed, where there is then a distinct and abiding separation between God and man. All goes out in the second death : it is the end. There is no hope beyond that door, no possibility of life. But here in Smyrna, of him who is triumphant in love it is said. "*He . . . shall not be hurt of the second death*". Fulness of death shall be broken and defeated and deprived of its prey. Love means that you will never be allowed to be touched by that ultimate despair of separation from God. That is no small thing. If the end on that dark side is to be without hope, where God is lost and the soul has gone out into the everlasting desolation, never able to find God, it is a big matter that we should never be touched of that. And love triumphant, this kind of love in Smyrna which is suffering love ("*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life*") means that, although it may cost you your earthly life, you shall never be touched of the second death. You may know the first death, in this sense, that you may go into the grave, and that maybe at the hands of murderers ; you may have a martyr's grave, you may die because of the opposition and suffering that is heaped upon you ; but that is only a first kind of death. There is a much deeper and more terrible death than that, and if you are faithful unto that first death, you shall not be touched of the second. You will find you will be amongst those who have completely conquered death. Now, whatever it means to you to have to exercise the love which suffers long, remember there is a big issue bound up with suffering love. You who are putting up with things for Christ's sake, who are enduring, who are suffering in any way in love for the Lord, by that suffering love you are in the way of cheating death in the end. You are undermining the power of death, you are destroying the very touch of death. Perhaps that wants explaining, but there is the fact stated, that by suffering we conquer death.

A DEEP, SECRET LIFE WITH THE LORD

We come now to the issue of love triumphant in Pergamum. It is remarkable that to this church, that had come into a state of compromise from their failure to detect the inroads of evil, because of the low condition of that love for God which should normally be alert and sensitive to things

injurious to God. it is remarkable that to them this word is addressed. " *To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it*". But I can tell you in a word what it amounts to—that there is some inner fellowship with God to be known which is not the common lot of people; some inner knowledge of God which is a secret thing to be possessed, which means a very great deal. It is something to have a personal, inner, secret knowledge of the Lord, a knowledge which other people, not having, do not understand at all; you know the Lord in your own heart and you are enjoying something of the Lord in yourself; but you have to have it to yourself, it is your own secret. Is there not something in that for believers now? " *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him*" (Ps. xlv. 14). There is a mysterious something in the inner life of some children of God and in their walk with the Lord; they have a secret. They can never make other people understand it, it is a mystery to others, but there it is. It is their blessed possession, and oh, what it means to them! And that is what is here. Hidden manna, a white stone, a new name written thereon. His own name; " *I will set him on high, because he hath known my name*" (Ps. xci. 14); and that distinguishes people who know the Lord in some more inward and some deeper way than the majority. It is not the ordinary kind of knowledge of the Lord that is here.

And that is said to the people whose great need was discerning love, and the message, therefore, is that if you have this love, you have a secret with the Lord. If this love is in us, this first love, this complete love, this true love for God, we have a secret life with God, God means something to us in secret that He does not mean to everybody. And we are elected to that; not that we are favourites, but through suffering love we come to discerning love. That is the sequence—suffering love, then discerning love. Those who have the deepest and most inward knowledge of the Lord are those who have suffered most for and with the Lord. They have knowledge others do not possess. So you move from Smyrna to Pergamum; from suffering love to discerning love—through suffering to the hidden manna, the mystery of a love-relationship with the Lord in a knowledge which is not common knowledge.

A POSITION OF POWER AND AUTHORITY

Thyatira—seduced and corrupted, calling for uncompromising love. What is the issue of that

uncompromising love? " *He that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron*". Here we are touching a tremendous principle. Do not materialize that for the moment and picture yourself somewhere as a reigning monarch over the nations of this earth, and that sort of thing. That is not what I am getting at. It is the principle that matters. Here you see, when love triumphs over that state of compromise and mixture and confusion and entangling of contrary things, and comes right out into an uncompromising place of victory, you are in a position of tremendous ascendancy, of power to govern. Test it the other way. You find a compromised life, a mixed-up life, a life with contraries all entangled; some of the world, some true Christianity; some flesh, some Spirit; things which ought never to be brought together. Will you tell me that such a life has any power in it, any authority, any power of ruling and reigning? Not at all! Was it not just in that connection that the devil through Balaam seduced and corrupted Israel, to bring Israel down from their high place as the ruling nation among the nations, to rob them of their spiritual government, to make them broken among the nations, when God had said, " *The Lord will make thee the head, and not the tail*" (Deut. xxviii. 13)? That is the principle here. Love, uncompromising love, brings into a position of power, of authority. You will never pray through so that God comes in and does things if your life is compromised, if there is any kind of double life going on. You may pray until you cannot pray any more, and the Lord will not come in, you will not govern in prayer if the life is mixed up. Love, which brings us out into an absolutely clear, pure, transparent place before God, means we are put into a position of great spiritual power. What that may be afterward we are not going to stop to say. I merely indicate it. The Church is going to rule in the heavenlies in the ages to come, and in the letter to the Ephesians, where the revelation of the Church and of its eternal calling and vocation is presented to us most fully, love is the triumphant note—" . . . *to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled unto all the fulness of God*" (Eph. iii. 18-19). That is set there in relation to the Church.

The Church is to come to that place. There are big issues bound up with this matter of love, both that of spiritual power and ascendancy now, and afterward throughout the ages to come that of governing in the heavenlies, when the Church will take

the place occupied now by the evil principalities and powers, the world rulers of this darkness. That is no small vocation. It depends on first love. Such is the lesson of Ephesus and of Thyatira. Right at the heart is love, first love, full love, and the outcome of that is authority over the nations.

OUR NAME CONFESSED IN HEAVEN

Then comes Sardis; and, because of its indefiniteness, the call for distinguishing love, the love that marks you out; not only that you are marked out by love, but love marks you out. Do you think that is a distinction without a difference? Not so. When you come here to this distinguishing love, what is the word to that church? "*He that overcometh shall thus be arrayed in white garments; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels*". Is this not distinguishing love, love leading to distinction?—white garments, and his name confessed before the Father and the holy angels. Maybe I can help you by a very ordinary illustration. I have a brother who is an engineer, and I went to see him the other day and found him in his office behind his engineering works where some sixty men, all experts, were busy mostly on government work. I talked with him for some time, and, being an opportunist, and remembering that there was something I needed doing to my car, I said, 'I have a little trouble with my car: I wonder if you can do something about it?' He came downstairs to look at the car, and then said to one man, 'Put that on the lift'. He then sent for his chief expert on that side of things, and when he arrived said to him, 'This is my brother: if ever he brings his car in here, see to it, please, and see that the job is done properly'. 'This is my brother'—and the whole sixty men and all the works were at my command! Everything there could be centred in my interest at that moment. "*I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels*". 'I will say, "This is My brother"'—and all heaven will be interested. Love, honour in heaven: our names confessed and honoured in heaven, when love distinguishes us. Oh, we try to curry favour and get service and help and status by being important before men, by putting on airs, by making demands, by being something big. That is the way in which men try to get recognition. But here it says that love is the distinguishing thing in heaven. It is love that makes you a distinguished person there. It is love that will bring you before the Father and the holy angels as one to be taken account of; and that

is an issue for now, not only for hereafter. Oh, if only we have this love, the Father will take account of us. 'This is my beloved'. The holy angels will take account and put themselves at our service as beloved of the Father. It will be because we are not only located in the Son of His love, but in heart-fellowship with what that love means, that we are marked out by heaven.

SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

Philadelphia marks the call for steadfast love, and so you expect in the issue of steadfast love to find something that would correspond. To Philadelphia the word is—"*He that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out thence no more; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and mine own new name*". "*A pillar in the temple of my God*". Again, do not materialize, for later we read, "*And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof*" (Rev. xxi. 22). A pillar in the place where God dwells, a pillar in the house of God, the place of God's abode. A pillar, a strong thing, carrying responsibility in the very house of God. Steadfast love has that issue. "*And I will write upon him . . . the name of the city of my God*". He shall have the franchise of the heavenly Jerusalem. He is a man of substance, a person that counts, he is carrying weight, he is a freeman of the new Jerusalem. "*And mine own new name*"; which means 'I commit myself to that man'. Are these things too big to grasp? They are not exaggerations, but that is what is implicit in this statement, and all who are of the character of Philadelphia, marked by steadfast love, become a strength in the place of God's dwelling and in His interest. They are people that count. Job said of his days before his affliction that when he went out everybody took account of him and bowed down to him and honoured him. To be not self-important, but from heaven's standpoint, with that kind of importance that is humble, meek, altogether without arrogance or pride, to be of great importance to God, in the presence of God, important in the Church which is the new Jerusalem—love is the thing that must characterize us. Do you desire in a right way to carry weight, to signify something, to be really a strength in the things of God, to stand before the Lord as one who counts for something? Do you want that? Do you know the way there? I wonder what you think it is. Do you say, 'Oh well,

if I study, if I get a lot of teaching and Bible knowledge, and am always busy in the Lord's work, I shall become something? No, not at all! In the dealings of God with you, you will find you will be emptied and emptied and brought down to nothingness in yourself, until you reach the place of pure, selfless love for the Lord for His own sake. Oh, there is a difference even in loving the Lord—whether it be for what He can do for us or for His own sake. You do not want to be loved because of what you are able to do. You want to be loved for your own sake. When it is like that, and we get away from all our ambitions, all our craving for recognition and reputation, and we love the Lord for His own sake, we have attained a place of tremendous importance—pillars of strength in the things of God, in the temple of God, in the presence of God. Love is the key to all spiritual significance.

SHARING HIS THRONE

And finally, Laodicea: poor Laodicea, with its mediocre kind of testimony, neither hot nor cold, and the demand, therefore, for fervent love with no mistake about it, burning love, love at white-heat. What is the issue hanging upon love like that? *"To him that overcometh, I will give to him*

to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne". You have reached the highest place now—throne-union with the reigning Lord. All that that may mean we can never describe. Were we to start, we should never be able to tell it; but it must mean something that the Lord should say to people on this earth—'On certain grounds you shall sit with Me in My throne, you shall have the place that I have, you shall share with Me the position to which I have come.' It must mean something tremendous. And He says that is related to victory over mediocrity in the matter of love. When you have this kind of love, fervent, full, strong love, you will come to the place of uppermost ascendancy, the place in the throne.

You may not remember all I have said, the detail may go from you: but remember that in the Revelation the last times and the last things are in view. If you forget all the details, remember this one thing, that the ultimate, the supreme issue of our life and union with God is bound up with this question of love. How great, then, in importance is this question of His love being shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. What a wonderful thing is His great love wherewith He loved us, when it is found in us. It is both toward us and should be in us. The Lord make it so!

T. A-S.

GOD'S VOICE FOR TO-DAY

I. "IS THERE ANY WORD FROM THE LORD?"

"Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth; and the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth; see, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Jeremiah, what seest thou? And I said, I see a rod of an almond tree. Then said the Lord unto me, Thou hast well seen; for I watch over my word to perform it". (Jeremiah i. 9-12).

"When Jeremiah was come into the dungeon-house, and into the cells, and Jeremiah had remained there many days; then Zedekiah the king sent, and fetched him; and the king asked him secretly in his house, and said, IS THERE ANY WORD FROM THE LORD? And Jeremiah said, There is". (Jeremiah xxxvii. 16-17).

IS there any word from the Lord? This is a question which we all do well to ask. Faith can make but little progress if it is fed on generalities; it needs the inspiration of a personal and timely word from the Lord. Is there some message from Him which applies especially to us in our day? It was such an enquiry which the king of Judah made of Jeremiah. Quite apart from his unsatisfactory character, there is no doubt that Zedekiah was in deep earnest when he turned for light to this prophet who was despised and rejected, and who had been so treated for a very long time. He went to Jeremiah in secret, being ashamed for others to know of his action. Unfortunately he was more concerned for his own reputation than for the will of God. There were plenty of prophets in his day, but he turned from their time-serving theories and pious platitudes to the one man whom he felt was really in touch with God about things. His question could not be answered by a mere student or

preacher of the Scriptures ; it demanded a man who walked with God. He knew that only such a man could truly tell him if there was any word from the Lord.

A SPECIFIC MESSAGE

Over thirty years before this, at the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry and in the reign of one of Zedekiah's predecessors, there had been a re-discovery of the book of the law. During the cleansing and restoration of the Temple, this book, which had apparently been hidden away, was brought to light again. Many dreadful things had happened in the reign of the evil Manasseh ; the servants of the Lord were persecuted and slain ; the ark of the covenant seems to have disappeared, and the word of the Lord was driven underground. In Josiah's reign they found the book, a discovery which caused them some dismay, but which also brought them a new revelation of the Lord and of His will for them. Zedekiah, however, was not referring to this when he asked for a word from the Lord. He was not enquiring as to whether Jeremiah had read Deuteronomy, nor was he seeking an exposition of the Scriptures. He wanted something immediate and direct, a personal indication of what God had to say to him in the light of present events.

Surely we are just as much in earnest as was Zedekiah, probably very much more in earnest. We are certainly just as much in need of a word from the Lord to our own hearts. And we must remember that the Jewish king was prepared to go to an unpopular prophet, if needs be, that he might find out the true meaning of things. A modern version renders the question thus: "Has the Lord any message for me?" This should be our attitude as we turn to the Lord's word. We need more than Bible teaching ; we need to hear the voice of God for to-day. The Lord will only speak to us through the Scriptures. And yet it must be very plain that the hour in which we live demands something more than mere Bible study or Scripture exposition. It is indeed a most encouraging sign in these days that there is a greatly increased concern about a thorough study of the Bible, and especially among young people. There seems to be some reaction from the kind of Christianity that is kept going by choruses, isolated texts and favourite promises. People want to know what the Word of God really teaches. This is a very healthy concern, but it should be the beginning and not the end of our quest. What we want to know is what God is seeking to say to us in the world of to-day, with all its present trends and

happenings. Is there any word from the Lord for us, now ?

Jeremiah's reply was, "There is" ! This surely is the proof of a true prophet. Here was the rare blessing of a man who so lived in the presence of the Lord and stood in His council chamber, that he knew just what God wanted to say to His people. Even though he was in prison, even though he was discredited and hated by the popular religious leaders, he knew. When the appeal was made to him, he was able to answer in all humility but in assured confidence, "There is" ! Dear friends, there *must* be. God must have a timely message for His church to-day. The prophet did not tell Zedekiah to go and study his Bible. He did not send him away with generalities. He was dealing with a desperate man. Surely, then, we who seek Him with a far more real and earnest purpose than did Zedekiah, may expect that to our question as to whether there is any word from the Lord, the answer will be given, "There is" !

A KEY TO THE SCRIPTURES

Perhaps the first essential in such a quest is to discover what is the inclusive purpose and message of the Word of God. There is no suggestion that the Lord will speak to us apart from His Word. Nevertheless we need something more than generalizations. "Has the Lord any message for me?" Has He any message for the church of our day? If He has, although it will be found in the Scriptures it will consist of something more than systematic doctrine or isolated promises ; it must be a prophetic utterance for the times in which we live.

The first enquiry which we make is as to whether there is not some means of discovering the whole background or setting of the Word. Is there some key, some spiritual key, to the whole of the Scriptures? This enquiry may be commenced by a consideration of the first and last books, Genesis and Revelation. Although this book is unique, differing from all others because it is God's Book, the Bible has a spiritual arrangement. The beginning is designed to provide an introduction, an outline, or if you like, a synopsis of all that follows. The last book, Revelation, serves as a conclusion, a kind of summary and review of the whole message. We ought, then, to look at Genesis, the book of beginnings, not just of beginnings in the simple sense of making a start, but the book of fundamentals, the book which shows us the character of the whole, bringing out into definition the essential points of the rest of the writings. We also need to consider Revelation, the book of fulfilment, the

setting forth of how everything works out to its just conclusion. This is a most important book for that very reason. Genesis is a solemn book—beginnings are always solemn—but Revelation is even more so, for it is the ultimate outworking which is of supreme importance. It is not only true that themes which were introduced in Genesis terminate in Revelation. Rather is it a solemn recording of the verdict of God upon every matter. It is as though light from heaven focuses down upon everything, exposing its true nature and deciding upon its place in the eternal scheme of things.

THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

One of the most significant, though very simple, declarations of the book is found in Revelation xix. 10—"The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy". What is the Word of God all about? Is there any clear message running right through it? What will be the eternal and fully satisfactory issue of obedience to its message? The answer seems to be closely bound up with this phrase, the testimony of Jesus.

The spirit of prophecy does not here refer directly to the Holy Spirit. It is spirit in the sense in which we often speak of the heart of a matter. The spirit is the essential being which is enshrouded in the body. The body has form, it is easily seen and apprehended by the most superficial contacts; but it is very possible to be well aware of the outward characteristics without having any idea of the true nature which is concealed within. It seems rather like this with regard to the Word of God. The body has many members. The Bible is composed of many parts, teachings, histories and aspects of truth. These are all important, all related and all have a part to play, as have the various members of a body. But there is a spirit to this body, as there is to every other live body. There is that which is essentially and vitally the heart of it all. And we are told that this spirit is the testimony of Jesus. The real purpose of all prophetic teaching is to reveal or express the Lord Jesus. It means this, and it means it in a much fuller way than most of us have realized.

The Jewish canon of the Old Testament gave great prominence to the section devoted to the prophets. This section included not only the books which we call the Major and the Minor Prophets, but also the history of God's people as told in Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. All these were regarded as part of the prophetic word, because they were written not just to record Israel's history, but through that history to give a revelation of the

character and intentions of God. Then again, the New Testament is largely prophetic in character. With few exceptions the Epistles are not systematic, ordered teaching with regard to Divine truths, but timely utterances to deal with immediate and specific needs. Just as the Old Testament prophets stood forth at various periods of Jewish history, dealing with the special conditions and circumstances of their time, and making known in them the reactions of the Lord and His mind and will, so did the apostles write to deal with the peculiar needs of the people of God in their day. We may therefore affirm that a large portion of the Old Testament and again of the New can be included under the description of prophecy. For practical purposes the Word of God in its entirety is God's prophetic message. And there can be no question as to what is the essential pith and purpose of this message, the vital, the true heart of the Word of God. It is the testimony of Jesus.

THE LORD'S SUPREME CONCERN

It is this which matters supremely to the Lord, the testimony of Jesus. He wants this to be set forth, entered into and expressed to the whole universe in a living way—the truth in Jesus. We notice that in Rev. xix. 10 there are no descriptions or titles applied to our Lord. No reference is made to His offices or functions; everything is left aside for the moment that we may realize the supreme dignity and glory of the Man Jesus. Here is God's mind expressed in a human life—the true "Man of God". The angel told John that this represents the end and object of all prophecy, the setting forth of God's eternal purpose as realized in a Man. The destiny and vocation of the redeemed is to be the human vessel in which that glory can be expressed, the means through which the true character of God as known in Christ, can be expressed and ministered to the whole created universe. "Is there any word from the Lord?" There certainly is. It is that the only thing which really matters is the testimony of Jesus.

This has an immediate application to our problems, whatever they may be. This will doubtless prove to be the clue to so much in the Lord's dealings with us. The one purpose which He has in view, in all His ways, is to conform us to the image of His Son. This may explain our perplexities as to the past; it must govern our behaviour in the present; it is to be our guiding star in the future. The chief concern of the Lord is not to instruct us about a multitude of details, nor to explain to us the reason for the trials which we are called upon

to endure. He is seeking to make everything serve His one supreme aim of displaying the character of His Son in His redeemed people. Does this seem too familiar, or too simple? It gets to the heart of the whole message of the Word.

THE EFFECTS OF GOD'S SPEAKING

Now if we turn back to the book of beginnings with this in mind, we may find some basic principles of the way in which God speaks to us. Genesis i shows very clearly that everything depends upon the direct utterances of God. As day succeeded day it was what God said which produced all the results. The sufficient explanation of each phenomenon is that "God said . . ." God spoke and it happened. This, then, is the first great fundamental principle set forth in Genesis, the fact that God's will is produced by His Word. As He speaks, everything takes its character and form. The light, the dividing of the waters, the shaping of the globe, the emergence of life, the ordered rule, the fertility and increase; all this is the direct effect of God's speaking. All these events represent spiritual activities which we long to see and experience. Heavenly light, stability and authority, the triumph of life and fruitfulness, these are the practical expressions of the result of rightly hearing the Word of God. God's Word never finds its true expression in mere ideas or emotions, but in spiritual happenings. It is not good enough for us to go away after a message, saying to ourselves, 'Now it has been explained to me, so I understand all about it', nor that we should be satisfied in feeling comforted, uplifted or thrilled. When God really speaks it is not a question of ideas or emotions. Things happen. Spiritual realities come into being.

ALWAYS RELATED TO A SUPREME PURPOSE

This may provoke many questions, both with regard to others and also to our own lives. Why is the Word of God so often without apparent power? Why is it that so frequently nothing does seem to happen? There are various answers to this question, but one point seems to be clearly indicated in this very first chapter of the Bible. There is clearly a Divine order or progression in God's speaking. Seeing that He is almighty He could have dispensed with the series of utterances day after day, making one inclusive command which would have caused the whole creation to be completed. Why did He speak again and again, on each successive day,

dealing separately with each stage of progress? The spiritual lesson to be concluded from this fact is quite manifest. God said the first thing, and then waited for it to happen before He began to deal with the next. The third stage was only undertaken when the second was completed, and so on. If we dislike God's order and seek to resist it, we nullify the entire course of His speaking and working. We may not like the Lord's Word when it is presented to us. We may choose to ignore or reject some speaking of His. If we then enquire for some further speaking of the Lord can we wonder if there is no response. Day after day the Lord spoke His will, and day after day it came to pass. Not until each matter had been brought truly into practical expression did the Lord undertake any further activity. This seems to be one of the fundamental principles of the Word-of God.

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the word of the Lord. And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run too and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it" (Amos viii. 11-12). Amos makes it quite clear that Israel was not prepared to receive the message which he brought. They threatened him, and also urged him to take his prophecies to where they might be appreciated. When God spoke to the men of Bethel they did not find it acceptable or convenient to hear Him. It was not what they wanted, so they refused to listen. Amos had to warn them that later on they would be desperately anxious to know what God was saying, but would be unable to do so. The heavens would be silent; there would be a frantic search for a reassuring message from God, but it would not be forthcoming. How often is the true answer to our question that the Lord has already spoken on some point, but has met with no response from us. If we will humble our hearts to confess that we have tried to evade some previous making known of His mind, this may well open the way for a new speaking and renewed spiritual progress.

Genesis i seems to represent an unfolding of a Divine pattern, the expression of God's order. Scientists now feel able to agree that the order is fundamentally right. But no man could have guessed the order; indeed there are several points which may appear to the non-scientific mind to be out of order. In any case, in the realm of spiritual progress, God's order is almost invariably different from ours. The Lord will not adapt His ways to us, nor will He allow us to pick and choose in our obedience to His Word. At the beginning

everything happened swiftly and smoothly, moving on towards its consummation, because it was a creation in which there was no rebellion. God only had to say 'Let be', and it was.

GOD'S END IS CONFORMITY TO CHRIST

The Word is not only timely and ordered, it is precise. We observe how God goes into details. We might have thought that some of the matters mentioned were too small and insignificant for the Lord. We read of His attention to the different varieties, the fish, the fowl, the cattle and the creeping things, and even of His special mention of the grass. When God seemed to have such great things on hand, why did He stay to attend to the small details? It is because everything must be just as He wishes it. There is nothing unimportant to God. It is this very feature of God's speaking which is often overlooked by the unspiritual. His insistence on even the smallest matters being made conformable to Christ.

One further point is worthy of notice, and this is the complete absence of strain in it all. God simply said, 'Let it be' and it was. There was no tremendous excitement, no mention of a struggle or an effort. Quietly, smoothly and yet mightily, the work moved on to its goal. "*There was evening and there was morning, one day*". There was no feverish hurry; and there was no delay. Faith's simple obedience to the Lord's Word may bring us many tests, but it will lift us right above the strain and fret of trying to realize a spiritual end by our own wisdom or strength. Spiritual development is brought about by quiet and precise response to the Lord's Word.

This series of Divine activities was leading up to the crowning event of the creation. None of the days represented an end in itself, but were all contributing to the supreme end in view, which was to produce a man—or better, a race of men—in the image of God. Adam, of course, was only a picture, and in fact a faulty picture, of the supreme desire of God which forms the burden of the whole Bible: he was a figure of the unique Man, Jesus, in whom the Father finds all His delight. So the first speaking and working led up to a foreshadowing of the goal of all prophetic ministry, namely, the testimony of Jesus. The new creation in Christ provides for a full manifestation of God's glory in human form. We who are redeemed are in the new creation. Our destiny will be truly fulfilled only if and when we are conformed to Christ in all things. Surely this is a timely word from the Lord to us all, and is the key to all His speaking. In all His utter-

ances God is working to His one end. He is not just dealing with single matters, single days or limited results. Every time He speaks, He is working purposefully and cumulatively to the one glorious end, when He will be able to look upon a human race truly brought to bear His own image, and give the verdict, as He never could have given it concerning Adam, "very good".

AN INWROUGHT TESTIMONY

Adam's failure made no difference to the design of God, for He still sought to find in the human race a seed which could inherit all things, and be of universal blessing to all the nations. Thank God that the desire has been realized in Christ. And it is yet to be realized in us by Christ. This is the testimony of Jesus. It is more than rejoicing over His pardoning love in word and song. It is a message in life, which involves the realization in God's people of the original plan that man should become heir of all things. Only in Christ has this become possible, but in Him it is possible, and is now to be made actual in us. It is with this that the testimony of Jesus is concerned.

This should be of assistance to us in our quest for a word from the Lord. His word to us is a call to new committal, to an appropriation and entering in to His full spiritual intention in redeeming us by His grace. He calls us to keep our eyes on the goal, and to believe that whenever He speaks, even over small matters, He is working steadily onwards to that consummation in glory. Sometimes what He says may be painful; sometimes it may seem impossible; occasionally it may appear to have nothing to do with the end which we have in view. But every time it must meet with faith's response. Faith is not an original cause, it does not begin with us. Faith is response. The origin is with God and in His Word. Faith is our committal to God when He has spoken.

HEAVEN'S CO-OPERATION

In Revelation we see that faith means to hold the testimony of Jesus. This phrase appears a number of times in the book, and on three occasions is part of a double statement—"the word of God and the testimony of Jesus". These are not two items but one, and might read, 'the word of God even the testimony of Jesus'. This is what the Word is all about; this is God's full and final utterance.

And it is a matter which has all heaven's support. Chapter xix shows us Christ, the glorious

Word of God, in His great triumph, and tells us that with Him are the armies of heaven. Then in verse 10 the angel, in speaking to John, did not only say 'Do not worship me, for I am not God', but said 'I am a fellow-servant with thee, and with thy brethren that hold the testimony of Jesus'. What does this mean? It means that in this matter heaven is with us. "I am a fellow-servant with

thee . . ." This is precisely what we have longed for—to have heaven's power on our side. In the testimony of Jesus we can count on mighty co-operation from the heavenly realm.

"Is there any word from the Lord? There is"! It is a call to forsake all earthly and personal interests, in whole-hearted devotion to the testimony of Jesus.

H. F.

UNION WITH CHRIST

I. THE MEANING OF CHRIST

1. HIS GREATNESS IN THE SCRIPTURES

- HE IS (a) The meaning of all things.
 (b) The Heir of all things.
 (c) The Idea or Nature of all things.
 (d) The final test of all things.

2. HIS PLACE—BY THE LOVE OF THE FATHER INFINITE DIVINE LOVE THE MOTIVE AND POWER

- This is revealed
 (a) In all the Scriptures.
 (b) By the opposite of love to all Divine activities.
 (c) By the Father's demand that the Son be honoured.

3. THE GREATNESS OF CHRIST IS SPIRITUAL AND MORAL

- (a) Heaven knows it.
 (b) Man senses it.
 (c) Hell attests it by attempted corruption.

It is implicit in

- (a) His satisfaction to God.
 (b) His redemptive work.
 (c) The Spirit's operations .

"These things spake Jesus; and lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said, Father . . ." (John xvii. 1).

"That they may all be one: even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us" (John xvii. 21).

"I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one" (John xvii. 23).

There are many spokes to that wheel—election, creation, redemption, salvation, sanctification, glorification: and then, like a series of subsidiary spokes—repentance, faith, justification, conversion, regeneration, and so on. These are the spokes of the wheel, but they all centre in Christ and radiate from Christ and reach the rim, which is God. They unite us in Christ with God.

To give all this its true and full value, it is necessary to contemplate or have revealed to us the meaning of Christ, to see what an immense thing has taken place by the Son of God becoming the Son of man, by God becoming incarnate. It is a question of our being taken, not into Godhead or

INTRODUCTORY

UNION with Christ is the heart or centre of all that has been revealed of God's thought concerning man and of man's relationship to God. Union with Christ is like the hub of a mighty wheel.

Deity, but into God's Son incarnate.

Now, the first preachers of the Christian evangel preached Christ. They did not, in the first place, preach salvation or sanctification or forgiveness or judgment or heaven. That does not mean that they did not preach those things: they did; but not in the first place. They preached Christ, and all those things were included in the preaching of Christ. Christ as inclusive of all and as transcending all: for, after all, such things as salvation and sanctification, forgiveness, justification, are subsidiaries, they come afterward. Christ was before them all and Christ will be after them all. They are inside of Christ, but He vastly outstrips them all.

THE MEANING OF CHRIST

We come, then, to consider the meaning of Christ. Understand that we are underlining the title *Christ*. That very title carries the significance of a mission. It is not the title of His essential Godhead. Anointing, which is what the word means, is unto a mission. "*God anointed Jesus of Nazareth*" (*Acts x. 38*). Let that govern all that will be said, otherwise it might be easy, if you were so inclined, to raise your eyebrows at different points and scent, as you might think, false doctrine. In our consideration of union with Christ, we are keeping a very distinct line between His Deity and His Christhood as Son of man. Having said that, let us think now for a little while of His greatness.

I. HIS GREATNESS IN THE SCRIPTURES

His greatness as in the Scriptures is seen in several relationships.

(a) IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Firstly, His greatness is seen in His relationship with God. Here we have only to cite several familiar passages, but always with new inspiration and stirring of heart.

"*Who is the image of the invisible God*" (*Col. i. 15*).

"*The effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance*" (*Heb. i. 3*). Quite remote from our comprehension and understanding, and certainly from our explanation: sharing the Divine glory before the world was. We commenced to read of it. "*Father . . . glorify thy Son*"; and then just a little further on, "*Glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was*" (*John xvii. 5*). I say, we can

never begin to understand or evaluate the meaning of union with Christ until we have sensed something of that stupendous thing which has happened in His coming forth out of such a state and, in the form of man, going the way of the Cross. The most amazing thing that has ever happened in the whole history of the universe is found in the combination of the words which I have just quoted from the Scriptures. And then, that this Man who was the effulgence of God's glory, and the very image of His substance, "the image of the invisible God", sharing the Divine glory before the world was, should be spat upon, mocked, jeered at, and meet all that terrible sin. It is wonderful that we should be called into union with Him; not just to be His friends, not just to be fellow-workers or partners in some Divine business, not just to have some kind of formal relationship with Him which we call a union, but to be one with Him in an utterness which we are going to see later. "*We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones*" (*Eph. v. 30. A.V.*) "*Joined to the Lord . . . one spirit*" (*I Cor. vi. 17*). Something has happened to make that possible, and therein is the whole story and wonder of the infinitude of God's condescending love. Well, the Scriptures, in the first place, set forth His glory, His greatness, in His relationship with God, and many hours could be spent in tracing it out. We pass on.

(b) IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH ALL CREATED THINGS

Next, His greatness is seen in the Scriptures in His relationship with all created things. Our analysis divides this into four heads.

(i) THE MEANING OF ALL THINGS

Christ is the meaning of all things.

"*All things were made through him*" (*John i. 3*).

"*The world was made through him*" (*John i. 10*).

"*One Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things*" (*I Cor. viii. 6*).

"*In him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and unto him*" (*Col. i. 16*).

"*Of the Son he saith . . . Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands*" (*Heb. i. 8. 10*).

"*It became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things . . .*" (*Heb. ii. 10*). The meaning of all things; that is, the 'why' of

all things, the answer to the question, What does it all mean? Go abroad in the earth, plunge down into the ocean, soar into the constellations, compass the created universe, comprehend all celestial intelligences and say, 'What does it all mean?' and the answer will be in a perfected universe showing forth and expressing the glory of the Son of God, Son of man, and so you will know what it all means. That is no flight of imagination. That could easily be tested and proved up to a convincing point. Given that we had the ability and a certain mass of data, with Divine enlightenment resting upon it, that is capable of substantiation now. If we knew the inner meaning of the created things, we should see Divine meanings, eternal, spiritual meanings, all of them finding their explanation in Christ. That, of course, is a universe of inexhaustible wonder, but that whole universe, the Scripture says, is going to be filled with Him and manifest Him eventually, and when this universe, redeemed and perfected, reaches the end for which it was brought into being, it will be one mighty, comprehensive and still inexhaustible expression of God's Son. That is the meaning of it. He is the key to everything that is happening. Oh, that we had eyes to see and understanding to grasp the significance of things that are happening! Christ is the explanation. He is the meaning of all things.

(ii) THE HEIR OF ALL THINGS

Christ is the heir of all things. "*God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things*" (Heb. i. 1, 2). The question immediately arises. When did God appoint Him heir of all things? Well, if all the former passages are right, Christ was appointed heir of all things before ever He made them. If all things were made through Him and unto Him, there was a point at which the Father made Him heir of all things, and it is just on that very matter of His heirship that history turns. Firstly, then there was the marvellous conception of this universe as constituting the inheritance. You do not need that I should strain at trying to say anything about the universe as a conception. Then there is the conception projected, with a view to its being brought into execution, followed by creation, and immediately, or very soon it would seem, the inheritance disputed and marred, but instantly its redemption revealed. Redeemed, reconstituted, perfected, possessed: that is the history of the inheritance, and what a lot that history contains. I said a minute or

two ago that if we understood all that is going on, we should see that it centred in and raged round Christ. Why? Because He is heir of all things, and this disputing of His inheritance is the reason for all that is going on. Oh, how much Scripture could be crowded into that. The destroyers of the earth, what are they doing? Well—blindly, of course—but through their evil inspiration and instigation, they are seeking to destroy the inheritance of God's Son, and because spiritual men and women are the best evidence of that fact, they know the concentration of more than ordinary forces upon them for their destruction; for they are the redeemed of the Lord being reconstituted and perfected unto a presentation to Him as His rightful inheritance at last in glory. We know that this is true, that it is the inheritance of God's Son which has involved us in this long, long story of destructive intention from evil powers.

(iii) THE IDEA OR NATURE OF ALL THINGS

Further, Christ is the Idea or Nature of all things. I think here we only need two brief quotations.

"*Whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son*" (Rom. viii. 29). The Idea or Nature of all things is expressed in those words, "*the image of his Son*". The other passage which is from Ephesians iv. 10, I think bears that out. The object of His ascending up on high was "*that he might fill all things*". Those two complementary statements answer this Idea or Nature of all things. What is the Idea behind, what is the Divinely intended nature of all things? Well, just the image of His Son. Of course, that embraces the whole of that comprehensive teaching of the New Testament of likeness to Christ. It is a far-reaching and all-governing idea in the New Testament, likeness to Christ, or, as it has often been put, Christ-likeness. That is, the Idea of the existence of all things, that is the Nature of the being of all things: to be filled with Him and conformed to His image. You never will be conformed to His image unless you are filled with Him. How much New Testament teaching you can put into that. It is everywhere.

(iv) THE FINAL TEST OF ALL THINGS

Lastly, Christ is the final test of all things. In Acts xvii. 31 we have these words: "*He hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in*

that he hath raised him from the dead". The literal rendering is not, by a man, but "in a man whom he hath ordained". That word 'ordained' means horizoned. God has made His Son the horizon of everything. Everything has to come within the horizon of this man and be judged according to Him. You see the point. Christ is the criterion. Christ is the standard. Christ is the measure of that great judgment of the world which God has fixed, the final test of all things.

That means that the judgment of the world will be according to how it measures up to Christ, its standing in the light of Christ, as to its attitude toward or relationship with Christ. God will not judge on any other ground. That is a very simple formula for judgment. If God had to take us one by one and judge us on the numerous things which belong to us by our inheritance, our birth, our upbringing, by the fortunes or misfortunes of our lives, well, He would have His hands full, speaking after the manner of men, and it would be something that would require a standard of righteousness so infinitesimal, so exhaustive, as to be almost unthinkable. God is not going to judge us upon the number of our sins, whether few or many, or upon our temperaments, or upon anything like that at all that comes down to us in the blood-stream. His one simple solution is, What is your attitude to My Son? What is your relationship to My Son? How do you stand here in the horizon of Christ, not just as a person, but in relationship with Him as a kind, what He means in Himself? What is your attitude, relationship and measure where the Son is concerned? On that all judgment will be based.

And notice, that is a very righteous judgment. It says "he will judge the world in righteousness". Thank God, that takes in the very thing that so many complain of through their lives, the disadvantages of their inheritance, of heredity, of early training and so on. My dear friends, take heart from this, that on none of those matters is God going to judge at all: it would be unrighteous. He brings us all down to the one issue of our relationship to His Son. Where do you stand with Him? What have you done with Him? What are you making of Him? How are you progressing in your conformity to His image? That is the basis of judgment, and the only one. Christ is the criterion, the final test of all things.

CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Well, let us return again to this contemplation of His greatness as seen in the Scriptures. If we

take the Scriptures as a whole, we find that the Old Testament is shot through with expectation and anticipation. From the very beginning someone is demanded, someone is foreshadowed, someone is proclaimed, and someone is manifested in the midst of the nations: for this Someone was manifested in Israel whom God planted in the midst of them.

Let us look at that for a few minutes. Someone is demanded, demanded because of a calamitous failure which has brought the whole creation under arrest, into what the Bible calls vanity. Failure has made of the whole creation an abortion. Someone is demanded by reason of that failure, someone is required to repair it. Someone is demanded by intuition. Man feels intuitively that someone must come sooner or later.

This expectation and this demand can be traced in very remote civilizations. Universally we find the evidence of this waiting for something, this expectation that someone must come to answer the enigma of life and the world. The whole thing is an enigma, a problem, a puzzle. Man is an abiding quandary, everything is a great contradiction. Many of those who have probed the most deeply in order to try to explain the problem have been driven into blank, terrible despair. Yet man *must* solve this problem. The Bible is just full of that.

But by continuous intimations someone is demanded. It seems as though there is a reaching of a certain point, and now there is an intimation that something is going to happen, and then it recedes, and after a time it comes on again like a tide, only to recede once more. These successive tides in history intimate all the time that something will happen, or someone will come: until you reach the day when He did become incarnate, and the spirit of expectation was ripe in just a nucleus, a remnant. They were waiting, expecting. "The HOPE of Israel" (*Acts xxviii, 20*). That hope was not only the hope of Israel, it was the hope of the whole creation. Paul tells us that the creation was subjected in hope (*Rom. viii, 20*): it was there throbbing throughout the centuries. Someone is demanded along every line, and that demand is revealed in the Scripture.

Someone is shadowed forth. The Old Testament is full of the shadowing forth of someone in personal types and in symbols, and, although typology and symbolism and the figurative aspect of the Old Testament has perhaps been a bit overdone and sometimes discredited by exaggerations and straining, there does lie right on the face of things, without any straining at all, a whole system which speaks of something other than itself. It demands that which it signifies, typifies, symbolizes, for men

cannot live for eternity on symbols, on types, on figures, on foreshadowings. Someone must answer to all this !

Someone is therefore proclaimed. The whole of the Old Testament contains the proclaiming of a someone by the Spirit of prophecy. Immediately Adam falls and the tragedy of sin occurs, the seed of the woman, who should put all this right, is brought into view and proclaimed. He is again proclaimed in Abraham—" *In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*" (Gen. xxii. 18). In Jacob: aged and dying, Jacob, in blessing his sons, came to Judah, and proclaimed those beautiful and classic words—" *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh come ; and unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be*" (Gen. xlix. 10) ; a bringer of peace looked for out of Judah. Did He come of Judah, He whose Name is Peace, Shiloh ? All that while ago was He proclaimed. In Moses—" *Jehovah thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me* (Deut. xviii. 15). Ours is an unfortunate translation in its use of the words " like unto me ". It just gives a wrong turn to what Moses actually said. " *Jehovah thy God will raise up unto thee, of thy brethren*", not 'like unto me', but, " *as he raised me up*". You can think about that. How did He raise Moses up ? But here is the prophecy of the coming of this prophet. Then you want to read the whole statement in Deuteronomy xviii and xxxiv. In both those chapters you will see that the reference is to a greater than Moses. Well, we cannot go on. All the prophets prophesy of Christ, they were all proclaiming Him.

We close with what is perhaps the most difficult aspect and most difficult thing to say, but I believe it is here. This someone was manifested personally in the midst of the nations, that is, in Israel. You will recall the many theophanies, Divine appearances in man-form in Israel, and you will recall that in not a few instances it is impossible to discriminate between the one who is called the angel and the Lord Himself. They are interchangeable terms, synonymous words. Of the same person, first the word 'angel' and then the word 'Lord' is used. The angel, as it seemed, took up the conflict with Jacob, and he eventually cried, " *I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved*" (Gen. xxxii. 30). That angel of the Lord appeared to Abraham and was confessed to be the Lord. The Lord said to Israel, " *Behold, I send an angel before thee, to keep thee by the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Take ye heed before him, and hearken unto his voice ;*

provoke him not ; for he will not pardon your transgression : for my name is in him" (Exod. xxiii. 20 - 21). Who is this ? Paul said about the smitten rock, that the rock was Christ (I Cor. x. 4). But do you remember this, and this is the point of the whole incident, that when the Lord was giving commandment to Moses about smiting the rock, He said, " *I will stand before thee there upon the rock*" (Exod. xvii. 6). It was the Lord who was the rock, says Paul ; it was the Lord who was smitten to save the life of His people, and you cannot smite the Lord twice. Once smitten, and, blessed be God, that is enough. Then it is said that the rock followed them (I Cor. x. 4), meaning, I think, that the waters of the rock, the values of the rock, the efficacy of the smitten rock, went with them on their way ; " *and that rock was Christ*", it was the Lord. " *I will stand before . . . the rock*". So I could gather up many other of these instances, where the identifying of the one called the angel of the Lord cannot be made without saying that it was the Lord Himself, and, seeing the connections, you cannot but see the Son of God. If that wants proving, go to the last book of the Old Testament, where mention is made of the messenger of the covenant. " *The Lord, whom ye seek, will suddenly come to his temple*" (Mal. iii. 1). That word translated 'messenger' is the same word translated elsewhere 'angel'. Who is this angel or messenger of the covenant ? " *The Lord, whom ye seek, will suddenly come to his temple . . . But who can abide the day of his coming ?*" It is none other than the Son of God. But there He was manifested in Israel, again and again personally present, not as yet incarnate, but in manifestation none the less.

Well, there is the Scripture. Now, you see, that is the Old Testament. It is shot through, we have said, with expectation, and anticipation. Someone must finally and fully come to answer to it all.

We know that the New Testament, on the other hand, is just brim-full of testimony that all this related to and was fulfilled in Christ. The Bible says, in a word: HE, CHRIST, MUST BE MADE EVERYTHING OF. When we have glimpsed something of His greatness, we are at least in the way of glimpsing the wonder of union with Christ. Oh, what a great thing it is ! Surely we can now confirm that with which we started. It is the hope of everything. Everything centres in Him and radiates from Him to the bounds of God's created universe. Union with Christ is the heart of all the revealed thoughts of God concerning man and man's relationship with God.

T. A-S.

THE NECESSITY OF OVERCOMING

"And a great sign was seen in heaven . . . And there was seen another sign in heaven . . . And there was war in heaven . . . And they prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast down . . . he was cast down to the earth, and his angels were cast down with him. And I heard a great voice in heaven, saying, Now is come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accuseth them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they loved not their life even unto death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe for the earth and for the sea: because the devil is gone down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time." (Rev. xii. 1, 3, 7-12).

GOD'S END IS REACHED BY OVERCOMING

IN this passage we see the end reached for which the whole creation is groaning and for which every one of us is longing; the day when at last the great adversary is cast down because his power has been broken, and the great shout of triumph and relief goes up, "Now is come . . ."! the day of God's vindication, and the vindication of His saints is here at last! But there is an explanation of this end being reached. It has not just come as the inevitable and 'automatic' course of events. It has come as the result of battle. "They overcame him" (verse 11) is the key to the end. The end is only secured by battle, warfare long and sore, and by victory. God's end is going to be reached by *overcoming*. Christ overcame both initially and finally in His Cross, but His triumph has to have a moral and spiritual realization in the saints. Here we see spiritual conflict, issuing in a mighty victory, and that victory is what brings the glorious end, but in that conflict and its outcome we are all involved.

THE NECESSITY OF DIFFICULTY

If God's purpose is going to be realized along the line of a progressive ascendancy over opposing forces, that is by overcoming and not being overcome, then herein lies a principle which explains very much of our personal experience. We know

that the life of every true child of God is beset with trials and difficulties, and that is the very means by which the transforming work is done which is so needful, to conform us to the image of His Son. But there is another fact to be recognized, namely, that whenever anyone of us really means business with the Lord, the difficulties seem to increase. There always seems some fresh obstacle in the path, nothing ever seems straightforward! You fight through one day and with thankfulness come to its end, hoping that 'to-morrow' may be a better day. But no! Day after day may mean facing one thing after another! Why all this? The answer is that real spiritual progress and increase is *not* by a smooth and simple path but by actual victory or ascendancy over each situation that arises, whether within ourselves or without. It is having to *prove* that God is greater than the situation, that Christ is sufficient for every possible eventuality. The solemn fact is that we either 'overcome' or are overcome, and it is continually and at every turn a matter of victory or defeat. The vital nature of this matter is that the end is going to be realised by progressive inner triumph in the saints. The enemy is being worsted in a spiritual and moral way which is leading to his ultimate unseating. The question is: Is he being worsted in your case and in mine or not? The real meaning of our situation is a spiritual one, and each difficulty becomes a great test and a great opportunity.

THE SCENE OR REALM OF THIS BATTLE

The scene of this great conflict is set 'in heaven'. There is in this passage a four-fold repetition of the words 'in heaven'. The two significant and opposing factors in the conflict are both spoken of as 'signs' seen 'in heaven'. Then the warfare is 'in heaven', and its outcome is, 'no more place in heaven' for the Devil and his angels. We are at once reminded of the 'heavenly' and spiritual realm in which our true life is set. Things are as heaven sees them and it is in the unseen realm behind everything that every battle is lost or won! In the case of Job, the earthly situation was that calamity after calamity fell upon him: for him it was simply suffering and difficulty, and what was the point of it? But the explanation lay in another realm, in the sphere of "the heavenlies" where mighty spiritual forces stood in opposition, and Job was but the battleground for great moral and spiritual issues. Would he under this test and

the next, 'go down' or would he 'overcome'? The record is that he stood and prevailed—" *In all this Job sinned not with his mouth* ", and the final testimony was " *My servant Job hath spoken of me the thing that is right* ". All heaven and the Lord Himself were involved in which way that battle in a human life would go. Things which we may call little things matter in heaven, they count tremendously for good or ill. Nothing is 'little' in the life of the saint, which affects the issue of inner triumph or defeat. Here we have spoken of this matter as it affects the personal life and we know that everything begins there: " *Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life* ".

Our whole life and influence depend upon this inner triumph. But from this we move to another matter. Daniel is another example of one whose life was counting tremendously in the unseen. But in his case the battle was beyond himself for the interests of the Lord in His people. There too there is " a great warfare " (Dan. x. 1, R.V.) a prevailing that means the enemy's defeat in situations where the Lord's rights are challenged. A true inner life with the Lord will lead to effectiveness for the Lord in the most vital realm.

THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING OUR SPIRITUAL POSITION

As we look again at our passage in Revelation xii we see repeatedly that the alternative to 'heaven' is spoken of as 'earth'. We read that the Dragon cast to the earth certain of the stars of heaven. Whatever the significance of these stars may be, it points to luminaries or dignitaries of a high and heavenly order who lost their exalted position. They were brought down! When the 'man-child' came to the throne, the Dragon and his angels were cast down to the earth. When that which is of God is 'up'—in the place of ascendancy—then Satan is 'down'. So it is a matter of being spiritually 'up' or 'down': 'in heaven' or 'on earth'; in victory or in defeat—and it matters tremendously which it is. The first secret of spiritual ascendancy is to know what our spiritual position is. It can be summed up in the words of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, "in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus". Christ is in heaven, in absolute final ascendancy over the enemy and all his power, and we are "in him". That is our position in the thought and will of God. The only alternative is to be 'in ourselves', and that is a position of hopeless and inevitable defeat. The heavenly Man is Christ "far above all", the earthly man is Adam and all in him, and it is for us to decide where we are and

where we are going to stay! Defeat is to accept the ground of what we are in ourselves; victory, 'overcoming', is to "glory in Christ Jesus" and stay on that ground!

Have you really once and for all taken your place in Christ by faith, having been united with Him in His death, in His resurrection, and now in His exaltation? Such is God's place and will for you. If you have not done so, will you trust Him that such is your position now?

THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING THE ENEMY'S OBJECTIVE

From this follows the extreme importance of our recognizing that Satan has just one object where we are concerned. It is not just to worry us or even to make us sin, it is simply to get us down, out of our position in Christ. So he uses everything in his power, and he certainly has plenty of material in this fallen creation to work upon, to make us accept defeat. He uses circumstances, feelings, problems, failure or anything else, to make us 'take on' what we feel or see or are in ourselves. There is no need to take on any of it! Paul knew this, so he says, "*Finally, brethren, be strong in the Lord . . . put on the whole armour of God . . . that ye may be able to stand . . . and having done all to STAND*" How important it is to recognize not only what the enemy is trying to do, but to realize that all that is necessary is to stand! There are times when there is just nothing to do, nothing you can do, but in spirit believe God and not drop down. That is victory!

A THREEFOLD PROVISION FOR A THREEFOLD-BATTLE

Though what we have said is the basis of everything, nevertheless there are specific points of possible weakness in our life and these become the points of particular assault of the enemy. To counter these assaults and to overcome, requires a knowledge of, and appropriation of, the full provision made for this very purpose. Here in verse eleven we have this three-fold answer to our three-fold need.

1. "BECAUSE OF THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB"

The first necessity of spiritual triumph is an absolutely clear conscience, and assurance of a present acceptance with God, and an unclouded relationship with Him. Once the conscience becomes defiled, whether for a true or an unreal

reason, and there is a negative element, 'something not right', in the consciousness—we begin to lose ground spiritually. Things must never be left like that; no question of sin or failure must be left unsettled, even if there is uncertainty whether it *has* been sin or failure. All matters relating to sin and failure *have been settled* by the Lord Jesus when He died on the Cross, and every such matter has therefore been accounted for by Him. Actual sin must be confessed and immediate forgiveness is promised (I John i. 9), and further, "If any man sin we HAVE an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world"! The Blood of the Lamb is sufficient to remove all and every sin, and it is for us not to defend ourselves but to put our absolute trust in the efficacy of the Blood as the answer to every darkening thing, whether actual known sin when it has been confessed and put away, or any vague sense of sinfulness that dogs us. Our answer is not self-defence, nor is it self-condemnation, but the Blood of the Lamb! We must get to the point of saying with all our heart: 'Lord, I believe now that all that has been accounted for and cleansed by the Blood and I thank Thee that there the matter is settled.'

When we definitely come to that position we are in fellowship with God, however little we may or may not feel as a result of such a committal. We must go on in faith, for the *fact* is that the Blood avails, and we are in victory!

2. "BECAUSE OF THE WORD OF THEIR TESTIMONY"

When we have come to a position of faith in the Lord, on the sin question, as settled by the Blood of the Lamb, or on any other matter, there can still be a paralysing sense of weakness or fear, which amounts to a spirit of defeat, the enemy is stifling and silencing us, and putting us out of the fight. The answer to this given us, is what we will call 'the constant affirmation of faith'. Here it is called "the word of their testimony" and 'word' means utterance or declaration. If you have taken a position about something, if you believe the Lord, then 'say so!' There is great power in a strong affirmation—all this may be true, but *I believe God!* This 'hitting back' in faith is a very vital and strengthening thing, and can be for us all a most real thing, in different ways, sometimes an utterance aloud, sometimes a strong affirmation within our own heart. But this affirmation of faith means overcoming when defeat may be near so often!

3. "THEY LOVED NOT THEIR LIFE (SOUL) EVEN UNTO DEATH"

Here we come to the point where we are all most severely tested, where none of us can point at another, for this matter, the self-life, is the great battleground in us all. But is there any answer to it—to our natural life re-asserting itself in so many possible forms? What I *am*, which makes so much impossible. What I *feel*, my weakness and unsuitability; or self-strength and self-confidence which cause defeat, or even physical condition, can so easily be an excuse for spiritual weakness and failure. The answer is that we are really to leave that ground altogether, refuse to pander to its pleas and claims, and stand on heavenly ground in Christ, having nothing to do with the other.

POSSIBILITY, PROMISE AND PROVISION FOR OVERCOMING

But is this possible in any real way? The answer is one of great encouragement to us all. Yes it is possible to learn this great lesson little by little, day by day, till it is a very real basis of our life. The provision and possibility lies first in the Word of God which never requires an impossibility. The Lord has said it, as His will, therefore I can trust Him to make it true! Further, the Holy Spirit is in us to make it possible and actual, not by self-effort but by His mighty energy within we can day by day and hour by hour and even moment by moment (Rom. viii. 13).

Finally, what blessed encouragement and promise there is in the very words "they overcame him". They *did* overcome! The life of progressive ascendancy and inner triumph, by which the greatest eternal issues are being realized, is for each one of us, both the will and the provision of the Lord. For all our lack, the Blood avails. Let us "because of the Blood" never have a shadow remaining between us and the Lord. For faith's constant affirmation, His grace is abundantly sufficient, and for the repudiating of all the claims of self, day by day, the mighty power of the indwelling Spirit is present to make it a reality.

Let us then gladly take the full provision made for victory, for they that receive abundance of grace shall reign in life. The power behind everything in the unseen and heavenly realm is being broken in your inner life and mine as we learn the secret of triumph given to us here so freely and so clearly. The Lord comfort our hearts and encourage us to press on.

C. J. B. H.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

THE GOSPEL OF THIS HOUSE CALLED "ME"

III. THE TELEPHONE SYSTEM

WE have said that in this house called 'Me' there is a wonderful telephone system so that every room is in touch with the other and can 'call up' every other. We are going now to have a look at this wonderful arrangement and its general 'exchange'.

Perhaps you have visited a telephone exchange or a great business house where all the departments are linked up by such an exchange. There it is, either a whole country, or a whole business, linked up so that at any moment contact can be made with any part, and information received from, or orders given to all the numerous rooms, or buildings, or places, or people.

In this house of our bodies there is such a system, so that nothing can happen in any part, no matter how far away, without it being known at once all over the house. Then it works the other way also. There is a control room where the manager sits, and he can communicate his wishes, advice, instructions, warnings, and requirements to any part in an instant of time. There is a come-and-go communication system all over our bodies. What is this called, or what is it?

Well, it is what we call the nerve system. It is really two systems in one. There are these cable-like conductive nerve fibres, one going to the central nervous system, the other from the centre to all parts of the body. The exchange room or manager's room is somewhere inside our skull. We put our toe—far away from the head—on a pin or something sharp and instantly our whole body knows it. We do not have to see the pin, but we say, 'I have pricked my toe'. Why do you say it is a 'prick' without seeing the pin? Well, right up there, in the manager's room, sits Mr. Intelligence and he gives you the word or name for it. But more than that; he tells you what to do, and you pull the pin out and put something on the pricked place. You know the difference between a prick, a knock, and a burn because Mr. Intelligence tells you at once which it is, and you give it its name. Then, sometimes Mr. Intelligence warns you before you actually hurt yourself or are hurt. Something is coming for your eye and you put up your hand. It is as though someone shouted 'Look out!' What a busy telephone system this is!

Sometimes the nervous system gets very tired and lots of things go wrong with our bodies or our

minds. We can't eat or enjoy our food. It gives us a pain. You know how, if you get a hard bang on your head it 'knocks you silly'. You mean that you do silly things. You don't walk straight, you don't see straight. It may be you can't talk, or you say silly things. Perhaps you have seen someone trying to walk, but one leg goes in one direction and the other in another. You may have seen a little baby sprawling its legs and arms in all directions, and its eyes crossing each other. Well these, and many other things, are because the 'telephone exchange' is not working properly, and Mr. Intelligence is not in proper control.

'Now', you are asking, 'what has all this to do with a Christian?' Well, do you remember how we started these talks. We said that there is an 'idea' behind all created things, and they are just parables of things still more important. And so it is in this case. When we really make Jesus Lord in our lives, He gives us His Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit in us becomes like this wonderful Mr. Intelligence with his telephone system. He tells us what to do and what to avoid. He would keep us in the way where there is no wasted energy, no contradiction in our lives, no first going one way and then another, no silliness or senseless movements.

But then He is not only in 'our house', but in all who have accepted Jesus as their Lord. This means that He links them all up. If He really does have His way and we do not cut across or disobey Him He will make us all agree and have one mind. He will not make some say one thing and others just the opposite. If this happens, and Christians are divided and against one another: if some just go the way that *they* think, or want to go, instead of ringing up Mr. Intelligence (that is, asking Jesus, praying about it, and waiting for His leading) then it just means that the system is out of order, the lines are crossed or broken. When a burglar wants to break into a house and steal, he usually first cuts the telephone wires so that help cannot be 'phoned for. When our great enemy and thief—Satan—wants to rob us of something that God would have us to have, he usually gets us out of touch with Jesus by interfering with our prayer-life, or makes us so busy that we cannot pay attention to what the Spirit of Jesus would say.

Well if our nervous system is very important and

wonderful, how much more so is the indwelling Spirit of Jesus, and His absolute lordship. No won-

der the New Testament makes such a lot of having the Holy Spirit, and living in close touch with Him.
'Interpreter'

VISION AND VOCATION

II. THE MOUNT OF VISION

WHY the mountain? So often in the Bible God's movements in revelation and purpose were connected with mountains. It was so with Moses and the Law and the Pattern of the Tabernacle. It was so with Elijah at Carmel and Horeb: with David and the Temple site. It was so with Christ and His great kingdom discourse, His transfiguration, etc. And it was so with John and the vision of the New Jerusalem. These are but a few of the mountain-epochs in the Scriptures. What is its significance? for surely it is not just coincidence.

Does it not represent elevation above and ascendancy over the earth and its influences. It involves detachment (in spirit), heaven countering earth, gravity overcome, exercise—deliberate and determined. In a word, it points to another realm and order, a "kingdom of the heavens", to that which is not of this creation. There *is* a place of heavenly vision and revelation, and it has to be taken with the "loins of the mind" girded and with steadfast outreach to God.

The Letter to the Ephesians is the counterpart of Exodus xxiv - xxv. There the position is "in the heavenlies". The object is "that ye may know", the issue is "the eternal purpose". These three things correspond to a position secured, a vision given, an intention grasped and established.

Such a place *must* be found in the life of the individual believer and in that of the Church. Lose your 'mountain' apart with the Lord and you lose your vision and governing purpose, and become bound by mere happenings and activities on the earth. The earth is a very small place compared with the heavens! But remember that such a position of being "seated together with Christ" in the heavenlies is only by way of the Altar or Cross. In Exodus xxiv. 4 - 6 we see the altar and its values—the blood governing the ascension of the mount. This inclusively establishes the position that all is of and for the Lord.

The whole movement begins with *worship*, verse 1, and worship means that there is nothing of man, but all is of the Lord, and back to Him. It results in all that eventuates being wholly out from God. In this case (Exodus xxv) it was the tabernacle.

Now, the majority of evangelical Christians be-

lieve that the Tabernacle was a type of Christ, but there are several defects and weaknesses in this belief. For many it is a beautiful and fascinating typology, full of interest and wonderful truths. Then, so often, only the redemptive aspects are taken up: those factors or features which have to do with redemption, e.g. atonement, justification, sanctification, access, etc. Then again, it has supported an earthly and objective system of outward 'orders', ritual, rites, vestments, ordinances, sacraments, and 'offices'. All this so often means the missing of the basic and supreme meaning of this representation. It resolves itself into Christian 'truth', order and practice as the basis of things, and this—to say the least—is inadequate, it may be harmful. What is really in God's mind and eye is not a *thing*, not a Tabernacle, a system, and not even a 'pattern'. The all-governing matter with God is *a revelation of God in Christ to the heart by the Holy Spirit, a revelation of Jesus Christ*.

The Tabernacle is only meant to be a mirror of Christ. So Paul speaks of "*beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord*"; and, in the same context, "*God . . . hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*".

It is not a matter of our seeing Christian truth, but of seeing Christ by revelation of the Spirit. See Christ *now* first, not the Tabernacle first and then Christ. We live in the day of the full revelation, not of typical foreshadowings. There is so much failure to recognize that the Tabernacle is meant to lead to a recognition of the oneness of Christ and His Church, a corporate representation of Christ. With the majority of Christians the corporate almost goes for nothing as to its practical values. An immense amount is done in evangelism but the results are incommensurate both in measure and calibre. A great percentage of those moved to a 'decision' in an evangelistic effort are subsequently, not only missing but, less approachable than before. The spiritual measure of the majority even years afterward is very meagre, they just become 'church-goers'. The impact of 'the Church' upon the world is exceedingly disappointing. We have no hesitation in saying that all this

is largely, if not mainly, due to a failure to see the difference between a congregation, a 'meeting', a location of a number of unit-Christians, on the one side, and a living corporate organism on the other. The composite and the organic are two different things. One is formed from the outside, the other is formed from within.

There is very great power bound up with such a vision. What no other force on earth could have done was done in a moment when Paul saw Christ and caught what He signified. It completely emancipated him from tradition, earthly systems of religion, and all those things which by inheritance, training, and belief had been his very life—"the things", said he, "which were gain to me". When we want to explain Paul, and account for his influence through twenty centuries, we have to go to his "vision". He had seen Christ, and in seeing Christ had come to see the meaning and nature of the Church as His Body. Such a vision roused hell against him, and provoked the utmost prejudice, ostracism, and conflict. Had the vision not been so tremendously real he would long since have compromised and have taken a less costly line. But he "was not disobedient", and so has become the answer to every crisis in the Church's history.

The vision is for all who mean business with God. But we shall truly be tested as to whether we do. The vision is up there where all the gravity of indecision, passivity, compromise, indifference, cowardice, expediency, policy, unbelief, feeble-mindedness, etc. has been overcome and subjected to "the on high calling". There are no 'funiculars' or 'chair-lifts' to those altitudes, it is a challenge, and often a lonely business.

But to move for ever after in the power and influence of that 'open heaven' is to meet the greatest and deepest need of the Lord's people in relation to their high destiny.

The Christianity of numerous Christians is not big enough. If they are not frequently provided with strong stimulants in the form of conventions,

'revival' meetings, (and more than ninety per cent of the people who attend big gospel campaigns are Christians) 'rallies', etc., they drop into, or go on in, a very lifeless and limited sort of way. Now all this is a false mountain life. So often, after some special 'rally' or 'event', the time is referred to as having 'been on the mountain' and now having to come 'down into the valley'.

While there are real values in the gathering of the Lord's people from far and near, such occasions should not be *the* life of such. Paul was in prison when he wrote most about the heavenlies. Special occasions can give an artificial sense of life and 'vision', which fades when these times pass, so that 'we live for the next' occasion. Paul's "heavenly vision" kept him going through all the dark, drab, and sordid experiences which were associated with his ministry. There is something very much more than being saved and much engaged in 'Christian work'. Without this great plus the essential motive and impetus is lacking, and there is little or no personal spiritual enlargement. This extra is "heavenly vision". It was the inspiration of Peter, Paul, John, Stephen, and of many others.

How could the Prophets have fulfilled their sorry, and in some senses, tragic and hopeless mission but for the dynamic of a God-given vision? 'But', you say, 'they were Prophets and Apostles. We are just ordinary people'. The answer is that the New Testament almost as a whole was given by the Holy Spirit to give and to keep before the whole Church this tremendous objective of the "eternal purpose", and Paul, exhausting all superlatives of language in this very connection, falls to prayer for "all saints" thus:

"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, (note the designation—the Father of GLORY) may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints", etc.

T. A-S.

THE TREASURE AND THE EARTHEN VESSELS

Scripture Reading: II Cor. i. 8, 9, 17; iii. 1, 5; iv 7-10; v. 4, 16; vi. 8-10; vii. 5, 6; x. 1, 8, 10, 11; xi. 5, 6; xii. 7-9, 10b.

AS we read II Corinthians carefully we seem to meet two persons—Paul in himself, and Paul in Christ. Everything Paul speaks of, from the opening chapter of this epistle to its conclusion, is in

one strain. There is one governing principle throughout, which we might summarize in his own words—"We have this treasure in earthen vessels". In the very first chapter we see "this treasure" in an earthen vessel, and right to the last chapter we keep meeting the earthen vessel, yet we keep meeting the treasure too.

II Corinthians is the most personal of the New

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Testament books. Other epistles are full of doctrine; they bring the revelation of God to us; but this epistle shows the kind of man to whom God entrusts His revelation for us. Had we not this epistle, we might still know what work Paul accomplished, but we should not know what kind of man he was who accomplished the work. He was an "earthen vessel".

When I first became a Christian I had my own conception as to what a Christian was, and I tried my utmost to be that kind of Christian. I thought, if only I could attain to the standard I had conceived, then I should have attained Christian perfection. To be perfect was my ambition, but I had my own mentality as to the standard of perfection. I thought a perfect Christian should smile from morning to night; if at any time he shed a tear, he had ceased to be victorious. I thought a perfect Christian must be a very courageous person; if under any circumstances he showed the slightest sign of fear, I said he lacked faith, he could not trust the Lord, he was not perfect. I retained these clearly defined ideas as to what a Christian should be like until, one day, I read II Corinthians and came to the passage where Paul said he was sad. I was arrested. 'Paul sad?' I thought. Then I read that he shed many tears, and I thought, 'Can it actually be that Paul wept?' I read that he was 'pressed', that he was 'perplexed', and I thought, 'Was Paul really pressed? Was Paul really perplexed?' And I read this: "*We were weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power, so that we despaired even of life*"; and I thought, 'Can it be that Paul despaired?' It had never occurred to me that a person like Paul could have experiences such as these; but as I read on I gradually awakened to the fact that Christians are not another order of angelic beings, and that Paul was not so very remote from us. In fact, I discovered that Paul was a man, and the very sort of man I knew.

Numbers of people have their own conceptions of a Christian; but these are just a creation of the human mind; they are not the creation of God. In Paul I meet "*this treasure*", but in Paul I also meet an 'earthen vessel.' And this is the distinctive feature of Christianity, that "*we have this treasure in earthen vessels*". Here is a man who is afraid, and yet he is strong; he is encompassed by foes, and yet he is not bound; he looks as though he is overcome, and yet he is not destroyed. You can see he is weak, and yet he declares that when he is weak he is strong. You can see that he bears in his body the dying of Jesus, yet he says the life of Jesus is also manifested in his body.

You hear his "*evil report*", but you also hear his "*good report*"; he seems to be a "*deceiver*" and yet he is "*true*"; he seems to be "*unknown*" and yet is "*well known*"; he is as one "*dying*", and still he "*lives*": "*as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things*". This is Christianity!

Do you realize what it means to be a Christian? To be a Christian is to be a person in whom there is a fundamental inconsistency. A Christian is one in whose life there is an inherent, mysterious paradox. And this paradox is of God. Some people conceive of Christianity as being all treasure and no earthen vessel. If they meet the earthen vessel anywhere, they feel things are all wrong. But God's conception is totally different from man's; His thought is that "*we have this treasure in earthen vessels*". So it is not a hopeless case if the earthen vessel is in evidence, for God's purpose does not nullify the vessel, it puts the treasure there. It is always in the earthen vessel that the treasure is found.

Paul tells that he had a thorn in the flesh. What the thorn was I do not know, but I do know that it was a weakening factor and that Paul prayed three times for its removal. But God answered: "*My grace is sufficient for thee, for my power is made perfect in weakness*". How can the Lord's power be manifested to perfection in a weak man? Christianity is that very thing. Christianity is not the removal of weakness, nor is Christianity merely the manifestation of Divine power; Christianity is the manifestation of Divine power in human weakness. Let us be clear on this point, that what the Lord is doing is no negative thing, i.e. He is not just removing weakness; nor is He doing this positive thing—bestowing strength anywhere. He is bestowing His strength upon men, but His strength is only manifested in our weakness. All the treasure He gives us is placed in earthen vessels.

Numbers of people have come to me and told of their fears and misgivings even whilst they have sought to trust the Lord. They have made their requests; they have laid hold of the promises of God; and yet doubts continually arise unbidden. Let me tell you, the treasure of true faith appears in an earthen vessel of doubt, and the earthen vessel does not nullify the treasure; rather does the treasure in such an environment shine forth with enhanced beauty. Do not misunderstand me, I am not encouraging doubt; but I do wish to make this clear, that Christianity is not a matter of treasure only, but of treasure in earthen vessels.

I love to recall the prayer of the early church for Peter's deliverance from the hands of wicked men. When Peter came back and knocked at the door, the believers said it was his angel. Do you see? There was faith there, true faith, the kind of faith that could bring an answer from God; but the weakness of man was still present, and that weakness was clearly manifest. To-day the faith many of God's people exercise is greater than that exercised by the believers gathered in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. And they are so positive about it. They are certain God will send an angel, and every door in the prison will swing open before him. If a gust of wind blows: There's Peter knocking at the door! If the rain begins to patter: There's Peter knocking at the door again! Those people are too credulous; their faith is not the genuine article. In Christianity the earthen vessel is always in evidence, though the question is never a question of the earthen vessel, but of the treasure within. In the life of a normal Christian, just when faith rises positively to lay hold of God, a question may simultaneously arise as to whether perhaps he might be mistaken. When he is strongest in the Lord he is often most conscious of inability; when he is most courageous he becomes aware of fear within; when he is most joyful a sense of distress breaks upon him. This paradox is evidence that there is treasure in the earthen vessel.

It is cause for great gratitude to God that no human weakness need limit the Divine power. We are apt to think that where sadness exists, there joy cannot exist: that where there are tears there cannot be praise: that where weakness is present power must be absent: that when we are surrounded by foes we must be hemmed in: that where there is doubt there cannot be faith. But let me proclaim this with a clear voice in your midst to-night, that

God is seeking to bring us to the point where we recognize that everything that is of man is only intended to provide an earthen vessel to contain the Divine treasure. Henceforth when we are conscious of depression let us not give way to depression, but give way to the Lord, and the treasure will shine forth all the more gloriously because of the earthen vessel. I am not theorizing here; I know what I am talking about. Herein lies the glory of Christianity, that God's treasure can be manifest in every earthen vessel. Christianity is a paradox, and it is as we Christians live this paradoxical life that we get to know God. The further we go on in the Christian life, the more paradoxical it becomes. The treasure becomes increasingly manifest, but the earthen vessel is the earthen vessel still. This is very beautiful. See the Divine patience in a man who by nature was impatient, and compare the sight of that with a man whom nothing could ever move. See the Divine humility in one who by nature was haughty, and compare that with one who was always of a retiring disposition. See the strength of God in a person of weak temperament, and compare that with a naturally strong character. The difference is tremendous.

People who are naturally weak are always apt to think that they are no good, because of the very earthen quality of their vessel; but there is no need for dejection since the treasure within the vessel is of such a quality as to shine forth with added splendour from within such a vessel. Brothers and Sisters, let me say once again, the whole question is one of the quality of the treasure, not of the quality of the vessel that contains it. It is folly to stress the negative side; our concern is with the positive. The Lord is able to manifest Himself in the life of every one of us, and when that comes to pass many will behold the treasure.

(translated from the Chinese)

W. N.

THE NEXT SPECIAL GATHERINGS at HONOR OAK

will be held, the Lord willing, on

GOOD FRIDAY, Apl. 11 at 11 a.m., 3.30 & 6.30 p.m.

SATURDAY, Apl. 12 at 3.30 & 6.30 p.m.

LORD'S DAY, Apl. 13 at 11 a.m., 3.30 & 6.30 p.m.

MONDAY, Apl. 14 at 11 a.m., 3.30 & 6.30 p.m.

SUMMER CONFERENCES

will be held, if the Lord wills, at "Heathfield", Kilcreggan, each month from June to September.

Exact dates will be announced later.

SUMMER CONFERENCES will also be held at
KIENTAL, Switzerland (for Young People)
SATURDAY, August 9 to MONDAY, August 25.

KRATTIGEN, Switzerland (General Conference)
SATURDAY, August 30 to MONDAY, September 8.

VILLINGEN, Germany (General Conference)
WEDNESDAY, Sept. 10 to SATURDAY, Sept. 20.

A brochure giving details may be obtained on application to The Conference Secretary, 13 Honor Oak Road, Forest Hill, London, S.E. 23.

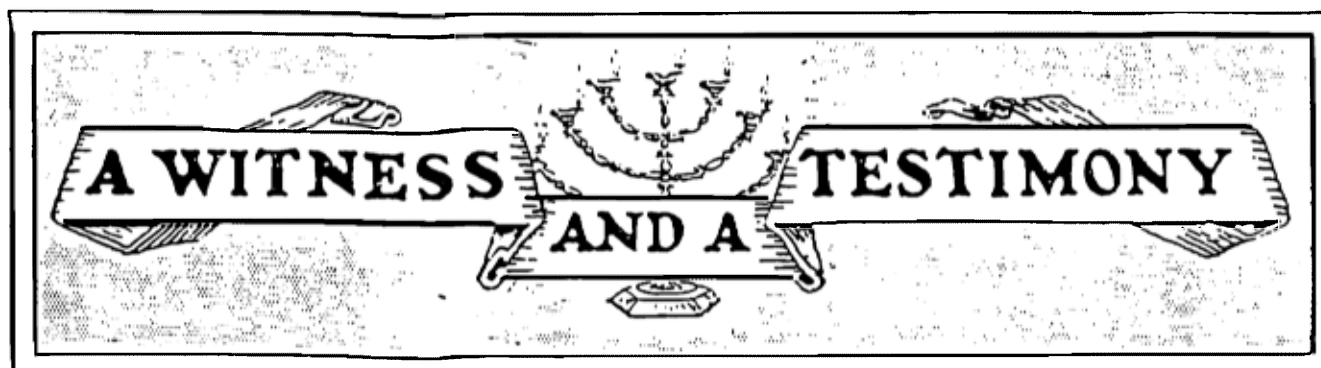
THIS MINISTRY

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

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

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

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



MAY — JUNE, 1952

No. 3. Vol. 30.

EDITOR'S LETTER

Beloved of God,

In order that this ministry should be maintained in life and reality we find ourselves constantly held into the Lord by spiritual pressure and conflict. We have had a very definite transaction with Him long ago that there should never be permitted a resolving or crystallizing into a mere 'teaching' or technique of truth, but that, to the end, it should be fully in life and maintain an immediate and up-to-the-day vital contact with spiritual conditions and need. The cost of this seems to be no release from the "winepress".

Through the years we have seen how the Lord has very really used this ministry as one of interpretation of conditions and indication of the way of fuller life, but we are now coming to see how much more necessary it is than all our past burden indicated. Shall I put it this way—While we have been deeply and painfully alive to a *general* loss of the Lord's full mind for His people, leading to a situation and set of conditions so other than He would have, we are now seeing with greater clearness the more particular need of such a ministry, whether fulfilled through this instrumentality or another (that is only a secondary matter).

Very few Christians will disagree on the matter of our moving into very critical times for the Church of God. The fact that evangelism is being given such a great place is significant. May it not be a last call over the nations, especially the Western nations? But there ought to be a corresponding work with Christians, if indeed, we have reason to believe that the 'great shaking' has already begun. The Apostle Paul recorded in relation to the time of the end—"The Spirit saith expressly that in the latter times some shall fall away from the faith" (1 Tim. iv. 1). We have entered another of those times in which the extreme pressure is resulting in many 'falling away'. While we do thank God for all who have been "faithful unto death" in China and other parts of the world, it is very painful to know of so many who have capitulated and gone over to the other side. This pressure is spreading and coming on like a dark and sinister cloud or wave. Its spirit is already felt even where its system is not established. This, and other things, raise the great and pressing issue of *spiritual stamina*. The Apostles sought, under the Holy Spirit's urge, to lay foundations deep and to build solidly. He knew and they knew what a strain would have to be borne and pressure experienced. Superficiality could not be tolerated and just being Christians by name, profession, or even new birth was no guarantee of 'continuing unto the end'. It is the utmost madness and folly to think that a 'decision' for Christ is adequate. It is the same to despise a ministry for consolidation, or act as though it were a superfluity or unnecessary luxury!

Thank God for all evangelism that brings souls to Christ, but let us beware of the infinite peril

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

of not building them up and not ministering to their "full growth", and of making of the doctrine of 'once in grace always in grace' the occasion of false security, so that we miss the point of the mass of New Testament teaching which has to do with people already saved. Yes, this ministry has its place, and both the present state of believers *generally*, and the growing pressure upon the Lord's people give real point to it. It may not only be a matter of better Christians, but one of the survival of faith, that is involved in anything raised up by the Lord to lead to 'going on'. This may greatly account for the enemy's many-sided effort to destroy, prejudice, and neutralize such ministries. The Lord keep us, beloved, going on.

Yours in His Grace,

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS

UNION WITH CHRIST

(continued)

HAVING, in our last meditation, covered the ground of the greatness of Christ in the Scriptures as the meaning of all things, the idea and nature of all things, and the final test of all things, we now go on to consider

II. HIS PLACE — BY THE LOVE OF
THE FATHER
INFINITE DIVINE LOVE THE MOTIVE
AND POWER

His place is by the love of the Father. Infinite Divine love is the motive and the power which lies back of His appointment to the position which has been given to Him.

This is revealed in several ways. It is revealed

(a) IN ALL THE SCRIPTURES

Many of these Scriptures will immediately spring to mind. Let me give you a small selection.

"Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (John xvii. 24)

"Through whom also he made the worlds" (Heb. i. 2).

"Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands" (Heb. i. 10).

But before He laid the foundation of the world, before the world was, the declaration is that He was the Beloved of the Father.

"The Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth" (John v. 20).

"The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand" (John iii. 35).

"Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again" (John x. 17).

"Even as the Father hath loved me, I also have loved you" (John xv. 9).

"A voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son" (Matt. iii. 17).

"That we should be . . . to the praise of the glory of his grace, which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (Eph. i. 6).

"Who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love" (Col. i. 13).

And so we could go on and on, but we have quoted sufficient to shew very fully that the Scriptures reveal that Christ has His place by the love of the Father.

But not only is this so in direct and definite statements, but everything points to it. Every Old Testament figure of Christ brings out the idea of love with fulness and inheritance in view. I think we often overlook what seems to be the all-too-fleeting and transient glorious morn before Adam fell, but it is a picture of Divine love for the man whom God had created. Love—yes; love planning, love giving, love companioning, love desiring. It is a picture of love, and all with fulness, a great inheritance, in view. And did we but realize it, the rebellion and disobedience were a blow at the heart of God more than anything else, the God who *so loved* the world. Adam, we are told, was a figure of Christ (Rom. v. 14) before the Fall, only a figure, but there is enough there to show the love-relationship between God and man, with desire for man's fullest inheritance. We will just glance at these outstanding personal representations or figures of Christ.

Isaac — it is impossible to be blind to the love element surrounding Isaac. He is the love of the father, a particular and peculiar love, and it was said that "in Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Gen.

MAY — JUNE, 1952

xxi. 12). The inheritance is along the line of the son of his love.

Joseph — there is perhaps no greater figure of Christ in the Old Testament than Joseph, but what a son of the father's love! And how did he come to glory, to fulness? By the jealous love of One greater than his earthly father, because he was a figure of Him that was to come. There is no mistaking the prefiguring of Christ in Joseph. Sold for twenty pieces of silver, to all intents dead and out of sight, cast into the deepest dungeon, tasting the bitterest travail of soul, and raised to glory and power to bring life to his brethren. Well, it is patent that here is a figure of Christ, but the governing feature is love unto fulness.

Or take Israel. Surely, if there is a mystery in history, it is the mystery of God's love for Israel, when viewed in the light of all they proved to be. God spoke of Israel as "My son", "My firstborn", "I remember for thee the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals" (Jer. ii. 2). God is there speaking like a lover concerning Israel. Amazing love, all with the inheritance in view. Is it not strange that the nation which has drawn out the love of God by way of example so utterly, should become the nation to exhibit so utterly the opposite of love for God, and for the Son of God? I could add much more as from the Old Testament to this story of figures of Christ in terms of love with fulness in view.

There is another whole series of symbols and types of Christ which carry the thought of preciousness and glory, preciousness, that is, in the eyes of God. There is a subject for you to study. Glory is according to heaven's standard, and it is all Christ implicit. We leave it there. Is it not revealed in Scripture that He holds His place by the love of the Father, both by direct statements and by numerous figures and symbols and types?

(b) BY THE OPPOSITE OF LOVE TO ALL DIVINE ACTIVITIES

But then this same fact is revealed by the opposite of love to all Divine activities. We always get something confirmatory from the opposite side. One of the strongest confirmations of this very thing comes from the intense antagonism of the adversary to this appointment and position which Christ holds by the love of the Father. Oh, what that has provoked through history, and does still provoke, in an opposite way! All the jealousy that you can see associated with those very figures that we have mentioned, suspicion, hatred, malice, prejudice, pride, murder, is but an expression of it.

All these and much more have broken out against the Son of His love. How do you explain it? We sometimes sing,

Why, what hath my Lord done?
What makes this rage and spite?
He made the lame to run,
He gave the blind their sight.

Even a gross man of this world could say, "I find no crime in him" (John xviii. 38), 'I wash my hands of the blood of this innocent man'. Why this rage and spite? The answer is that it comes from hell below. It is because of this love of the Father and the position in which that love has placed Him. Do not think that this is just a statement of some facts. This lies at the very heart of our union with Christ. "*As the Father hath loved me, I also have loved you*". You see to what union with Christ leads us. Well, that in passing, lest you might think I am just passing on so much data and matter. No, hell has given its own mind on this matter. It is very significant. Anything, no matter what it is, which has the advancement of the interests of Christ in view immediately becomes the object of sinister jealousy, suspicion, hatred, prejudice, and, if possible, murder. This opposition springs up without reason so far as men are concerned, without investigation, without enquiry. It simply, spontaneously comes into being, and is encircled by the most unreasoning and unreasonable of attitudes, many of which collapse on honest enquiry. But there it is. The question still remains as to how men are caught in this kind of thing. But we know full well where it comes from, and it is the opposite of love to all Divine activities in relation to the Son.

(c) BY THE FATHER'S DEMAND THAT THE SON BE HONOURED

This is revealed, thirdly, by the Father's demand that the Son shall be honoured. "This is my beloved Son", came the announcement from heaven, "hear ye him" (Matt. xvii. 5). Here we see the Father's jealousy for the position of the Son. He will not bypass Him, He will not allow even an ardent apostle to step in front of His Son. We see Jesus "crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. ii. 9). Peter, referring to the transfiguration, said many years afterward, "He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there was borne such a voice to him by the Majestic Glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (II Peter i. 17). He received from the Father honour.

In the book of the Revelation this is taken up

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

in the great concourse. " *Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honour, and glory, and blessing*" (Rev. v. 12). The Father honours the Son. I have not quoted from John's Gospel because there it is what the Son Himself says about the Father's honouring of Him. We accept that, but there is much more that confirms it. His place is by the love of the Father, therefore the Father demands that the Son be honoured.

Now that is a very practical thing. Do you think that you will ever bypass Jesus Christ and get to God? The Father's appointments are all with His Son. Now, that is comprehensive and covers the whole creation. In Him, through Him, unto Him, were all things created, therefore God's appointment was with His Son in the whole creation. That is to say, God would meet everything created on the ground of His Son. Now when the creation through its first overlord, Adam, made a breach with the crown rights of God's Son and handed them to the rival, Satan, what did God do? According to Paul's marvellous statement, God acted at once and right at the heart of the whole creation He wrote 'dis-appointment'. His jealousy for His Son's inheritance meant that He would not look outside of His Son to rival or rebellion. Paul says that "the creation was subjected to vanity" (Rom. viii. 20), and from that moment the creation has at its very heart disappointment. That is true about man. Whatever his attainments, his successes, his achievements, his inventions, the last word is disappointment. Whatever there is that is fair and beautiful in creation around us, it goes so far and then fades and dies; everything is subjected to death and corruption. That is dis-appointment. The appointment is broken. The appointment for glory, for fulness, for consummation, is made with His Son, and outside of His Son there is no such appointment, but all is disappointment. Is that true? Why do not men see that? We Christians know it, if no one else knows it; but, blessed be God, we have come back to God's appointment and the dis-appointment has been wiped out. God has come back to us, to appointment in His Son, to union with Christ.

This union is not something official, something legal or formal. It is affectional. It is not obligation that governs here. Love never stops at obligations, but always goes on to the utmost possibilities. Union with Christ is of that character because it is the centre of God's love. You will have, of course, to do quite a lot of quiet meditation on all this and relate all that we are saying about Christ to the Christian life. " *Translated . . . into*

the kingdom of the Son of his love" (Col. i. 13). That aspect alone is amazingly wonderful and full—" *the Son of his love*". Union with Christ brings us on to that ground, into that realm. Oh, do not have comparative ideas of this love, as though the love of God were graded according to the degrees of goodness or of badness which He may find. His love for you and me is the love which He bears for His Son. That is the revelation. To be united with Christ is to be enfolded in all the dimensions of His relationship with the Father as the Son of His love. I have not said 'in all the dimensions of His relationship with the Father as very God', but as Man, as His Son Jesus Christ.

III. THE GREATNESS OF CHRIST IS SPIRITUAL AND MORAL

You may not like that word 'moral', but I am using it in a particular and limited sense. 'Spiritual' looks in a Godward direction, and speaks of His union with the Father. 'Moral' is a word which comes in after the Fall, and relates to a whole system of things which originates with fallen humanity—morals; so that when we speak of moral, we mean that which touches downward, not upward, that which links with evil and not with God. Christ's greatness therefore is spiritual by reason of His life with the Father. His greatness is moral by reason of His perfect separation from that which is from beneath, the realm of the fallen nature with all that it means. That is all I mean at the moment in the use of those words—spiritual and moral, and as you read your Gospels that is what you find to be the background of everything. It is these two things all the time that are the ground of the challenge. Perhaps we shall see more of that as we go on.

But I want to remind you that the whole of the Old Testament is constituted upon the idea of a coming Holy One, or Righteous One, or Righteous Servant. " *Neither wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption*" (Ps. xvi. 10). That is in a Psalm, and is quoted, as you know, by Peter on the day of Pentecost concerning Christ. " *Thy holy one*". That One, by that title, was recognized in the spiritual realm.

Demons knew Him altogether apart from incarnation. " *I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God*" (Mark i. 24). That takes you a long way back in the Old Testament. From a prophet we get Paul's quotation—" *My righteous one*". There was from the beginning, when sin entered through what we call the Fall, a quest for a holy one, for a righteous one. Heaven was in quest and all the

MAY — JUNE, 1952

activities of God in the earth bear on this quest for a righteous one. Where shall a righteous man be found? If he can be found, he is the solution to the whole problem. Countless figures of the righteous One are given us. Abel had witness borne that he was righteous. Because of his faith, Abraham was called righteous. Noah was a preacher of righteousness. You who know the Bible do not need me to follow that further. The figures of the righteous One are there in great numbers. But with all the figures there was failure, leaving the quest for the fully righteous One still unanswered and unmet, and the Old Testament closes still with the cry and sigh for this righteous and this holy One. The creation is left in suspense. Men were still awaiting the realization of a glorious intention, and destiny was hanging upon an essential state, and that an inward state in man; not a ceremonial state, but an inward state, that is, a state of inward righteousness and holiness. Everything was in suspense until that state was found in man. All this great and glorious intention and destiny was impossible of realization without a state. I want you to focus upon that and think much about it. God did His best to help men on, to encourage men on, to get them there, but may I say it reverently, there is a sense in which God's intentions broke down. The situation did not allow of His just getting a people through to glory by a sovereign act. God could not do that. Everything depended upon an inward state. There could be no realization, no answer to God's intention, no possibility of reaching the intended end without an inward state. He got them as far as He could by ceremonial conditions, but we know how that failed. The contrary inward state was far too much for the ceremonial. No, sacraments do not achieve it, there must be an *inward* condition of righteousness.

Ah, well, blessed be God, the inward state of Christ was the state that made everything possible. Yes, the excellence of Christ was His inward state, not His legal status or His official position. Always remember that. He has gone far beyond all ceremonies, all sacraments, all rites, all ordinances, all that system which broke down. He surpassed it all because of what He was inwardly. That is His excellence.

(a) HEAVEN KNOWS IT

Heaven knows it, and that is why He was anointed of the Holy Ghost: for, while you have anointings in the Old Testament, they are partial and transient, there is no fulness and there is no permanence about them. They were for the fulfilment

of a temporary purpose. He was anointed of God in fulness and finality. He evermore is the Anointed, and God gave to Him the Spirit without measure. To anoint, as we have often said, is simply a symbol of God committing Himself. Do you think God would commit Himself like that to any state that did not answer to His requirements? Heaven attested Him: "*Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*".

He triumphed through testing. His inward state was subjected to every form and kind of testing at the defiled hands of the Evil One himself, and He triumphed over every attempt at spiritual defilement, that is, to get something in between Himself and God to spoil that relationship and fellowship and walk with God in purity, in holiness, in truth. He triumphed upward, and He triumphed over every effort to get Him to make a contact with the cursed earth, and so make a link with that which was outside of the blessing of God. That is His excellence. It is inward. Heaven knows it.

(b) MAN SENSES IT

Man senses it, and, having said that, everybody knows what that means. There is an instinctive rising up in man when mention is made of Jesus Christ in any way. It varies from ridicule and the charge of being 'goody-goody' to open hostility, and it is because the conscience of man is touched, and he feels uncomfortable and out of place in the presence of this One; he feels there is something wrong with his being. You know it. Without so much as a word, you are marked, if Christ is in you. Man senses this spiritual and moral excellence, and he resents it. He senses the greatness of Christ and feels poor and mean and despicable and uncomfortable in His presence.

(c) HELL ATTESTS IT BY ATTEMPTED CORRUPTION

Hell attests it. We have said as much—Hell attests it by attempted corruption. Because Christ is the object in view, the heir of all things, and because this inheritance is to be holy and incorruptible as conformed to the image of God's Son, the only way to cheat Him of His inheritance and defeat this Divine purpose, to circumvent the course of the Son of God, is somehow to introduce corruption. That is the history all the way through. Much springs into mind.

HIS GREATNESS IS IMPLICIT IN

(a) HIS SATISFACTION TO GOD

His greatness is implicit in His satisfaction to God. That goes without saying. God, being what

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

He is, infinitely holy, in attesting His Son as well-pleasing to Him and as offering a sacrifice well-pleasing to Him, thereby expresses His utter satisfaction regarding Him. In figures, in types, in symbols, the verdict on all that is of Christ is that God is satisfied. His greatness is implicit in His satisfaction to God.

(b) HIS REDEMPTIVE WORK

It is implicit in His redemptive work, for no sinner can save a sinner. You can profit no one beyond the level of your own life and experience. For Christ to achieve an uttermost, final, consummate redemption and salvation, He must be utterly and consummately sinless. His redemption is based upon that.

(c) THE SPIRIT'S OPERATIONS

Again, it is implicit in the Spirit's operations, which means, firstly, that the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, and secondly, that He is the Holy Spirit. This makes everything subject to experiment, so to speak. The greatness of Christ is not a doctrine, not a declaration of some fact. It is open to practical proof along all lines. Now then, try to get away with known sin in the presence of the Holy Ghost, and see how you get on. Try to grow in the spiritual life without dealing with something upon which the Holy Spirit has put His finger, and see how far you get. There is your proof. The crown of all God's intentions is found in the gift of the Holy Spirit to dwell within, and all His operations are upon the ground of the absolute greatness and glory of Jesus Christ. He is working to the most

minute point. Is that according to Christ? Is that glorifying to Christ? Does that reflect Christ? We are at once arrested in our spiritual life, and we will make no further progress, even were we to live for the next half a century, if the Holy Spirit has said, 'That is contrary to Christ', and we have shut our eyes to it and ignored it and have been rebellious. The Holy Spirit is jealous for Christ. What is the Christian life after all? It is not to conform to a set of doctrines, to obey a set of regulations. Christianity is Christ, and there is nothing else to it, and the Holy Spirit keeps us to that. Everything, therefore, is subject to testing. All that we have said is brought up as a practical issue by the Holy Spirit.

There we must leave it for the time being, but are you just glimpsing now something of what union with Christ means? Oh, blessed be God, union with Christ means that God is utterly satisfied with Him, and therefore with me and you as in Him. Have you got hold of that yet? That is one of the fundamentals of the Christian faith, but how long we take to get hold of it. We are so afraid that we shall not be coming up to standard. You just get a firm faith-hold on Jesus Christ as your answer to God for all your needs, and the Holy Ghost has got His ground. It is Christ, not what I am, but what He is, and that covers all questions. God is satisfied in Him, and that has glory as the issue. "*Christ in you, the hope of glory*" (Col. i. 27). You see, you can go on. He is the answer, and this is all of the grace of God, marvellous grace, boundless and free. Union with Christ answers every question, satisfies God and brings us to glory.

T. A-S.

CONVINCING EVIDENCE (III)

"That the world may believe"

WE have said that Christianity as it now is has set up an entirely false basis—an impossible basis—of Christian unity, and divisions among Christians are viewed and judged from a standpoint which is utterly wrong. That standpoint is the one that views the whole question in the light of the system which Christianity has become. It is no longer the all-dominating *experience* of the absolute sovereign headship of Christ over a living spiritual organism—His Church; but it is now a matter of 'churches', 'missions', movements, enterprises, organizations, with their respective 'memberships', clientèle, officers, 'funds', etc. It is very largely what, in the world, is termed 'vested inter-

ests', in localities, countries, areas; personalities, personal interests, proprietorships, and so on and on. The supreme concern for the *spiritual* measure of Christ is governed by all this, instead of governing it or making it completely subservient, if not unnecessary. Realism and honesty demand that we face facts and do not deceive ourselves with false hopes and expectations.

An expression of Christian unity in any adequate way is absolutely impossible while the present position obtains!

We have got to start all over again. Until we do, the mission and testimony of the Church is going to be increasingly sabotaged by suspicions, prejudices, ostracisms, and factions. This smoke from hell will stifle and paralyse, and bring increasing limitation, so that Christianity—yes, evangelical

MAY — JUNE, 1952

Christianity—paralyses itself. The disagreements on points of doctrine, interpretation, the taking up of one point and enlarging it to eclipse ninety-nine other wholly acceptable points on the one hand, and the wearing of blinkers regarding many unscriptural things to get benefits from a small proportion of what is good, on the other hand, is a case of putting the hand upon the Ark by those who have no spiritual rights for governing the Lord's interests, and by their limited spirituality are both standing in the Lord's way, and ministering to this enemy-action to fill the air with questions as to 'soundness' and 'safety'.

We have said above that a new beginning is the only way to an adequate expression of unity. *What* is that beginning, and *where* is it to take place? This is a much happier line of enquiry and presentation than that wallowing in the morass of the facts, causes and nature of divisions.

THE STARTING PLACE AND BASIS OF UNITY IS THE CROSS

Is it the dark shadow of legalism threatening to strangle, or actually strangling, the life of the Church as in the letters to the Romans and the Galatians? Then see how the Spirit of Life leads the Apostle to bring the Cross into full view as the only, but sure, means of deliverance!

Is it the many-sided carnality, the re-asserting of the "natural man", even unto the realm of "the spirituals" as at Corinth? Again, see how "Christ crucified" is the *exclusive* remedy!

Is it petty jealousies and standing for 'rights' as at Philippi? Then see the humbling of Himself by Christ, and "obedience unto death, yea, the death of the cross" which is presented as the example for victory! So it ever is: a vital union, a union with Christ in His death which has also become a critical experience in believers, in 'ministers', in 'workers', and in 'the work', is the one and only

ground and way to an expression of unity.

We shall have to die, not only to the world and to ourselves, but to our work, our denomination, our 'mission', our enterprise or our movement, *as such*, and in all have only one object which obliterates all other interests and consciousness, that is Christ, His increase and fulness! The "I" of Galatians ii. 20, which is supposed to be crucified with Christ, covers a much larger area than a merely legal death, or the legal aspect of Christ's death. It touches the whole matter of religious and traditional relationships, as the context shows. Paul was really saying that the "no longer I" meant his death to the Law and its ordinances, which meant Judaism as a system which had been transcended by Christ. The Cross not only makes Christ superior to 'Christianity' (as we know it) but completely subjugates it to Him.

The Church—according to Paul's statements—is no combination of nations or nationals, or classes, or denominations; it is not 'inter' in any respect, it is 'uni'; it annihilates *all*, and brings up "*one new man*", only one, and entirely new—as Christ is the *first* of a "new creation".

This has to find its very beginning in a new consciousness of a new-born child. Not this-or-that-conscious, but Christ-conscious, and "all one in Christ" *conscious*, not mere doctrine or slogan. Until this ground is really taken or occupied, and Christ-consciousness just does transcend our religious connection or tradition-consciousness, there will remain inner and outer divisions.

The Cross is a mighty power, and it has to be applied right at the root of our being and of our system of things.

The question is as to whether our measure of Christ is really so much bigger than our particular Christianity-complex that the latter fails to affect us in our attitude toward Christ's own, just because they are His. This is the only way of manifested unity.

T. A-S.

GOD'S VOICE FOR TO-DAY

II. THE WORD OF THE CROSS

Reading: Rev. xix. 11 - 16; Heb. iv. 12; 1 Cor. i. 18.

"Then Zedekiah the king sent, and fetched him: and the king asked him secretly in his house, and said, Is there any word from the Lord? And Jeremiah said, There is. He said also, Thou shalt

be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon" (Jer. xxxvii. 17).

WHEN the king of Judah asked Jeremiah if there was any word from the Lord, he received the answer, "There is . . . thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon". The only mes-

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

sage was a call to Zedekiah to submit without question to the judgments of God. It was no new message, since for a long time it had been the constant burden of Jeremiah's ministry. When Zedekiah called him aside to ask for a word from the Lord, he was really hoping for some escape from the persistently reiterated challenge of God's word. In effect he was pleading for some departure from the extreme severity of the message. He would have liked to have made some bargain with the Lord. He wanted to be spared, to maintain his own personal position, to avoid the need for absolute capitulation. He was seeking a compromise. No doubt he would have promised to go part of the way in meeting the Lord by reforms and improvements, if only the Lord would come part of the way to meet him, and spare him this final humiliation. With some such expectations he enquired anew of Jeremiah as to whether there was any word from the Lord, only to meet with the uncompromising reply, "There is". The Lord still stands by His original decision. "*Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon*". There is no other way.

A FUNDAMENTAL MESSAGE

Is there any word from the Lord for us? There is! It is the word of judgment, the word of the Cross. There is no other word from the Lord until we are quite clear about this matter. It is no use our coming for higher teaching, seeking some new and gratifying prospects of blessing and fruitfulness if we are not prepared to face the fundamental challenge of the word of the Cross. This expression, the word of the Cross, when used by Paul did not mean something distinct from the rest of the Word of God. He did not even mean to say that it is a special aspect or emphasis of the Word of God, as though it were a particular feature of things which might be taken up by those who find themselves interested in it. He meant that the Word of God is the message of the Cross. The Bible offers no alternative: from beginning to end, at every turn, the sharp, two-edged sword meets us, whenever we seek the Lord in His Word. It does not matter who we are. As a matter of fact Zedekiah was not a particularly bad king, not nearly so bad as his immediate predecessor, but this does not affect the case. The Lord does not deal with comparatives, for every expression of the natural man only meets with rejection from Him. There is no way of compromise, no serving of our own interests, nor saving of our own honour. His message to us, the word of the Cross, calls for the absolute

setting aside of all that we are in ourselves.

It may have seemed a dismal reply for Jeremiah to give, but he was by no means the miserable pessimist that he is often thought to have been. His prophecies show that his objective, or rather the Lord's objective through his ministry, was not just captivity, breaking down and emptying: there was a glorious goal in view. It may not have seemed like it. Indeed for us the challenge of the Cross, the insistence that we have been crucified with Christ, may sometimes appear to be a dark and forbidding message. The Cross is not an end. It is the way through to the end. "*I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you hope in your latter end*" (Jer. xxix. 11). God is working for something beyond the immediate; He is working towards the glory.

The Lord has not lost His concern for His people. Even while He urged them to yield to His judgments, to go into captivity, to let go every self interest, to cease from every effort and idea of their own, He assured them through Jeremiah, "*I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee*" (Jer. xxxi. 3). When we consider the history of Jeremiah's times we find that all the chaos and heartbreak, all the devastation and misery, was brought about by this very refusal to accept God's way of judgment. The people hated Jeremiah because the flesh always does hate the message of the Cross. 'Is there not some other word from the Lord?' was what Zedekiah really wished to say. 'Is there not some way of avoiding this drastic demand for absolute surrender?' Although Jeremiah suffered such scorn and cruelty from God's people, he could not compromise over his message, for he knew that the only way through to God's true purpose is the way of the Cross.

THE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST

We may ask what is the purpose of the Cross. Surely it is to establish the absolute headship of Jesus Christ. When we preach the Gospel to penitent sinners, we rightly say that the Crucified Saviour can bring pardon and peace to their hearts. But the Lord Jesus died and rose again for something more than to bring peace into troubled hearts, wonderful as that may be. "*Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living*" (Rom. xiv. 9). Did He have to go to the Cross for that? Yes, for He can only truly be Lord when He has slain that within us which will never yield to His lordship. Think of His disciples

MAY — JUNE, 1952

in the days before Calvary. If we could have asked them what was the sincerest purpose of their hearts, they would have replied most emphatically that it was for Jesus to be truly Lord. But was it true, was He really Head among them? We know only too well the story of their failure, their unruly reactions and their final repudiation of Him. It was not until He had died and risen again that His headship was securely established. This was a most important aspect of His death, the crucifixion in them of the deep-seated and inveterate rebellion of their natural hearts which always withstood His lordship. The prophet did not give Zedekiah any promise of retaining his throne, but he did promise most assuredly that David should "*never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel*" (Jer. xxxiii. 17). Zedekiah must go into captivity, but there shall be a Man upon the throne. This is the Lord's word to us also. We must yield up our throne, must accept God's verdict of judgment on our own corrupt nature, and thus a way will be made for the enthronement of Christ. The message of the identification of the believer with Christ in His Cross means just that. It means not only trusting Christ for forgiveness, but realising that nothing in us, before we were Christians or since, bad things or good things, weakness or strength, nothing at all is accepted by God.

THE ONLY MESSAGE OF HOPE

This may seem drastic, but it is the Gospel, and in it lies the only hope of glory. If Christ crucified does not mean more than forgiveness of sins and peace with God, we cannot be really assured of any better conditions than those which prevailed in the most carnal church. Corinth comes naturally to our minds. There they all trusted in Christ for salvation, and accepted the message of the Cross as it relates to the pardon of sins and peace with God. Yet who would care to live in Corinthian conditions for ever? To be there even for a little while would mean to suffer heartbreak because of the impurities, the bitter quarrels, unhappy rivalries and the tragic absence of love. Is heaven going to be like the church at Corinth? God forbid! Yet all the saints at Corinth knew forgiveness and life, through faith in Christ. It may be argued that heaven will be different because we shall then be on resurrection ground, but how can we get on to that ground except by the Cross? The only way out of the morass and misery of Corinthian conditions is the way of the Cross. We must have a real experience of dying and rising in newness of life if there is to be any hope of glory. Christ died, and took us with Him into death, that by rising again He might bring us into the realm where He is truly

Head. Only the word of the Cross could make that headship actual and experimental at Corinth. What a different atmosphere is found in the letter to the Ephesians, in spite of the fact that human nature is the same, whether at Corinth or at Ephesus. To the Ephesians the apostle was able to write of the Lord Jesus as "Head over all things" (Eph. i. 22) and that as a present experience. Here and now He is "Head over all things to the church . . ." We notice, however, that Paul was writing to people who had an experimental knowledge of death and burial with Christ, to those who were risen and seated in the heavenly places with Him. The headship of Christ depends upon a vital experience of the Cross.

Only on resurrection ground are we in the realm where we can lay claim to the power of Christ's headship. It is no use our trying to enjoy all the benefits of that headship if we are not living in the realm where it obtains. This was what was happening in Jeremiah's day. It was in vain that they appealed to the mighty name of Jehovah and confidently expected the deliverance which was due to them as His people. If we are not prepared to receive the word of the Cross we are in no position to claim the promises. Earlier on we asked why it was that the Word of God seems not to work out effectually. Jeremiah almost puts the words into our mouth, "*Why shouldest thou be as a man af-frighted, as a mighty man that cannot save?*" (Jer. xiv. 9). The people of Jerusalem were not willing to accept God's verdict of judgment; they were therefore not in a state where they could experience the mighty power of His name. And so it is for many Christians, who wonder why the promises of God seem to have no power. They hear of a life of constant and glorious victory through the name of the Lord, and profess that it is theirs, but in actual experience it does not work out. The Word seems to have no power. Is this not because the headship of Christ is conditional upon the Cross? If we ignore this we become like Zedekiah, seeking fresh promises from the Lord, when we have not heeded the challenge already brought to us. We are wanting other words from the Lord, words of blessing, of healing, of guidance and so much more, while the Lord is still insisting that the real message from Him, that which is fundamental to all else, is the word of the Cross.

THE CRUCIFIED MESSENGER

Rev. xix shows us Christ, the Word of God, in His great, final victory. He is King of kings and Lord of lords: before Him enemies, tyrants, empires, Antichrist, Satan himself are swept away in judgment, slain by the sharp sword which proceeds

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

from His mouth. But this mighty Victor is the Crucified. " *He is arrayed in a garment sprinkled with blood*". His power results from His crucifixion. We want the sharp, two-edged sword to proceed from our mouths but we do not want to be identified with Him in His Cross. We want the sharp sword which will penetrate others, but we so seldom realize that it must first wound and slay our own flesh. Jeremiah was a preacher of judgment, but he first knew the working of Divine judgment in his own heart. The word was like a sword in his mouth, because it was first a sword which he allowed to pierce his own breast. It was not that he always found it easy to yield. He was no easy, placid soul, who readily accepted scorn and misunderstanding from his fellows. His prophecies are full of the complaints and arguments which he poured out to the Lord. Again and again he protested that it was too costly, that he could not bear it, and he even went so far as to vow that he would never preach again. But although he spoke thus to the Lord, he always yielded, and in his yielding he found all the mighty power of the Name on his side. The Lord said to him, " *If thou return, then will I bring thee again, that thou mayest stand before me; and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth*" (Jer. xv. 19). This man, truly emptied of self, drastically purged and weakened as to all natural strength and sufficiency, was after all the real ruler—" *set over the nations and over the kingdoms*". The book does not record his triumph. It depicts a man despised and rejected, beaten, imprisoned and cast into the pit. Even those who knew him to be in close touch with God were ashamed to be seen talking with him. But time showed that it was Jeremiah who really knew the power of heaven's throne.

CONFLICT CONCERNING THE MESSAGE

It is just because the absolute headship of Christ is in view that there is so much conflict about the message of the Cross. This message means that not only is Satan robbed of his prey by the salvation of sinners, but that he is also dispossessed of all his authority by the spiritual ascendancy of the saints. This bitter hatred of the message of the Cross is truly satanic, it is the Devil's own confession that vital purposes of God are involved if it is accepted. In our previous article we considered Genesis i, and saw something of the wonders which happen when God speaks. We have only to turn to Gen. iii. 1 and we find the diabolical question, "Hath God said?" The whole scene changes, all the prospect of glory passes, tragedy and frustration ensue; and this is all because

there is antagonism to the Word of God. In Jeremiah's day the Devil had contrived to delude the people once again. Instead of receiving the Lord's word, they were asking, "Hath God said?" They would not receive the word, they did not approve of it; they asked for some other message. Gen. i brought light, progress and glory to God. Gen. iii brought chaos and misery. It is always like this. Even in the time of Jeremiah there was still a prospect of fulfilled purpose and ultimate glory, though now it could only be by way of captivity and yieldedness to judgment. But the people rejected God's prophet, they refused to believe that his message was the word of the Lord for them, and so they passed into darkness and defeat. It is not surprising that the word of the Cross is suspect and unacceptable—Satan devotes all his efforts to making it so.

THE ANTAGONISM OF THE NATURAL HEART

There is also an enemy inside the human heart, as well as the one outside. Our own human nature bitterly disputes the claims of Christ to absolute lordship. Jehovah's lordship was often disputed by the surrounding nations, by Egypt, Assyria and Babylon, but the tragedy of Jeremiah's day was that it was also disputed by Judah, by the very people of God themselves. We need not be misled by the enquiry which so often arises when Old Testament histories are being considered. People are often drawn off into a side issue by the question as to whether these Israelites were really born again. It is objected that they cannot illustrate the behaviour of true Christians, but only of nominal ones, since they could not have been regenerate in the New Testament sense. There is truth in this, of course, but nevertheless it is quite beside the point in this connection. We are not discussing the relative position of Old and New Testament saints. The Old Testament is given to portray spiritual truths, and for this purpose the people of God are always the people of God. Alas, that God's own people still dispute His lordship. It is still true that in the hearts of the Lord's people there is often a repudiation of the full implications of the message of the Cross. As in Jeremiah's time, so today, the bulk of the people of God reject this message as being too extreme, as being dangerous. Make no mistake about it, while we all want to enjoy the blessings of the headship of Christ, none of us likes the severe demands which it makes upon us. The Jews wanted a compromise: they could not bear to face the cost of absolute surrender; but for them, as for us, there is no other

word from the Lord.

THE JUDGMENT OF THE CROSS

Jeremiah makes it clear that most of his fellow Jews were devoted to the temple and its sacrifices, even while they rejected the Lord's messenger. These sacrifices speak firstly of Christ being offered on our behalf, a blessed and most comforting doctrine. But the real significance of the sacrifices goes much deeper than this; it calls for the true identification of the offerer with his offerings, which typically means a very practical experience of being crucified with Christ. It is most noticeable that some who are very enthusiastic about that aspect of the Gospel which proclaims the truth of Christ being offered for us, are most resentful when the Gospel message is pressed to the issue of the need for an inward work of the Cross, setting completely aside all that we are in ourselves. They love hymns and Gospel messages concerning Christ's bearing the judgment for our sins, but are not prepared to accept the need for that judgment to be applied to the flesh within. In this they display something of that spirit which was typified by the people of Jerusalem, who continually offered the sacrifices, without letting their lives be wholly governed by them.

The Cross was not just an exhibition of man's hatred: it was a setting forth of the judgments and wrath of God; which wrath is still as active as ever, not against the Christian but against that part of his nature which cannot and will not be subject to God's will. Those who are on the Lord's side accept His verdict of judgment, which may be painful to their flesh, but which makes it possible for the Lord to get through to His end. Every resistance on the part of the Jews only hindered and delayed that end, for there was no way through for the Lord until His people were brought to the place of absolute surrender. There never is.

THE GLORY WHICH FOLLOWS THE CROSS

God's end is fulness of life and fruitfulness. From the first Jeremiah realized this, and all his ministry was devoted to bringing it about. The

message of the Cross is never an end in itself; it is intended to clear away all self-righteousness and human glory, so that it may be possible for the Lord to bring in His new day of fulness. "*And they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together unto the goodness of the Lord, to the corn, and to the wine, and to the oil, and to the young of the flock and of the herd; and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all. . . . And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the Lord*" (Jer. xxxi. 12, 14).

Jeremiah, the man who accepted the way of judgment, found that a glorious prospect was set before him. Even while Jerusalem was awaiting its final downfall, and while he himself was still in prison, the Lord's word came to him, "*Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and will show thee great things and difficult, which thou knowest not*" (Jer. xxxiii. 3). God's 'afterward' is always incredibly wonderful. The prospect opened up to Jeremiah was so amazing that he found it impossible to understand. He was commanded to buy land, to invest in the future, to see beyond the chaos and ruin to a new era of peace and prosperity. He told the Lord that he could not understand it; for years he had been preaching the utter destruction of the city, and now he was to let everybody know that he banked upon a glorious future. He did as he was told, but confessed that he could find no reasonable explanation for it all. It must be because "there is nothing too hard for the Lord". Yes, that is it. When everything is brought to zero, when the absolute hopelessness of all natural wisdom and strength is truly confessed, then a way is made for God's new covenant mercies, and resurrection power and glory. The Spirit's fulness is not for those who are resisting the Cross; it is not for those who stubbornly hold on to their own position. The word of the Cross pronounces utter judgment on the whole natural man, but to those who receive it with meekness it opens up a wonderful new experience of fulness and fruitfulness.

H. F.

"HIS GREAT LOVE"

VIII. "LOVEST THOU ME?"

Reading: John xxi. 15 - 23.

WE are now nearing the end of our contemplation of "His great love", and we shall conclude with a word on the way of love. It is still through the Apostle John that the message is coming to us.

His writings are the last of the New Testament, and the final and predominant feature is love.

The twenty-first chapter of his Gospel is a kind of appendix: almost like an afterthought. He seems to have concluded at the point marked verse thirty-one of chapter twenty, and then, as

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

though on reflection, he seems to have said to himself, 'I cannot leave it there; there is something yet to be added. I must resolve it all into a personal application, a matter of personal love for the Lord proved by *practical* devotion.' So we have—in the first place—

THE CHALLENGE TO LOVE

"*Lovest thou me more than these?*" The challenge is made very personal and direct: not to *any* Simon, but to "*Simon, son of John*". He is pinned down and is not allowed to be mixed up in a crowd of Simons. Then, it was *this* Simon who had protested that, whatever might be the failures of others, his love would be stronger and more reliable than theirs. "*Lovest thou me MORE THAN THESE?*" Doubtless many who read this, were they asked by the Lord if they loved Him, would be quite emphatic in their answer of 'Yes!' But the Lord was evidently seeking an answer that was more than Simon was giving.

That is why He was so insistent. 'Simon, you have protested that you do love Me; you have even gone as far as to say that you would out-love other people; but, Simon, Simon, really look into your own heart—do you? Why, under trial, when I was withdrawn from you and you were left alone, and everything seemed to have gone wrong and to have broken down and all your personal expectations and ambitions and visions had proved worthless, why did you say, "I go a fishing"? as though you said, 'I am going to find some alternative to this kind of life, it is not satisfactory, it is so uncertain and there are so many difficulties, I cannot see the way, therefore I am going to make a way myself.'

There was another of this group who took the course of despair, passive despair—I refer to Thomas. But Peter put his dilemma into a positive form and said, "I go a fishing". We may adopt different courses in our perplexity, in adversity, under trial. When the Lord hides Himself and we cannot see Him, or hear Him, and we do not feel that He is with us, He seems to be so far away and to have gone right out of our world, all we were expecting seems to have come to an end, and we do not know where we are, then we are prone to go some way that we choose for ourselves, and begin to take alternatives to steadfast love. It is a real challenge, it is a positive challenge, because these are experiences, these are tests, that the Lord allows. It is not a wrong thing to say that there are times when the Lord hides Himself, when the Lord lets us feel that we are left alone, when the Lord seems to close the heavens to us so that there is no

to-and-fro communication, and when everything that we had looked for, expected and preached, seems to have come to an end and to have broken down, we are just left in what seems like the ruins of everything; the Lord just does do that, and peculiarly does He do that sort of thing when He has people in view who are going to count. Take that, brothers, sisters! People who are going to count for Him go through deep experiences like that, and the object is to get them on to a basis which will make it possible for Him to use them. We will never be used unless we can stand on our feet in the storm. We are useless to the Lord if we go to pieces when everything around us, and in our spiritual life, seems to have come to a deadlock. If then we give it up, we are of no use to the Lord. The whole question of future usefulness to the Lord is based upon a love for the Lord which does not give up and say, "I go a fishing", 'I take an alternative to following the Lord, I take an alternative to going on with the Lord because of the situation'.

That is why the Lord came back, once, twice—"Follow me", "follow thou me", 'You went back under trial, under testing—follow thou Me'. And you have got to follow and go on following when you cannot see Him, when you do not know where He is, you have got to go on. These are the kind of people, and these alone, who will be used as Peter was. The basis of everything was that kind of personal love to the Lord Himself, not for what He was doing for Peter at the time, but for Himself. Oh, that is difficult—God only knows how difficult it is—to love Him for Himself when He does not seem to be doing anything for us at all. That is the challenge of love.

Really now, have we got very near to this? Love is something more than being a nominal Christian, bearing the name of Christian and going to meetings and taking up Christian work and all that. Love for the Lord is something very much more than that. The Lord says, "*Lovest thou me?*" I am not stopping with the different words that were used for 'love'. The Lord used one word, Peter used another. We will leave that aside. The challenge is this—"Lovest thou me?" What is the calibre, the quality, the content, of your love? "*Lovest thou me?*"

THE PROOF OF LOVE

Peter answered, "Yea, Lord: thou knowest that I love thee". The Lord came back upon that declaration, imperfect as it was, for He Himself had used another word, the Lord came back and said, 'All right, prove it'. There was the challenge of

MAY — JUNE, 1952

love, and then the proof of love. "Feed my lambs". "Tend my sheep". And where is the emphasis in that? The emphasis is upon 'my'—*My lambs, My sheep*. Love is not for the ministry, love is not for the work in itself. Oh, we can love to preach, we can love to work, to be in the work. We can love the whole system of Christian organization, activity, and all that, and find a great deal of satisfaction in it and place for ourselves, but it is not that at all. It is not love for the ministry, not even for tending and feeding. There is an awful snare in that. The love lies in this, 'Because they are Mine, just because they are Mine, and yours is a love for Me, anything that is Mine becomes the object of your love and your devotion and your activity'. This is really a sifting out. You perhaps like to be in Christian work, you like to teach, to preach, to do things and you would say that it is for the Lord. But let us ask our own hearts, if it is because we really love that which is dear to the Lord, is that really the motive? Just because it is the Lord's, will we pour ourselves out, break our hearts over it, will we really shed tears because of genuine love for our Lord and what matters to Him? Is it like that? Why are you doing what you are doing, whatever it is, in relation to the Lord's things? Sheep and lambs can be very trying and cause us almost to despair, but love for the Lord and because they are His will keep us from giving them up.

Oh, I could break that up to apply it. I do not know what you are doing, but you may be doing various things. Where it is within the company of the Lord's people, you may be looking after the door and bringing the people in. You may be playing the instrument, you may be doing anything that people do in Christian work. Why are you doing it? Is it really out of a heart-love for the Lord, for the Lord *Himself*, because this is the Lord's, or can it be put down to anything less than that—you have been persuaded or appointed to do it. Really are you doing it from the heart as unto the Lord? This is for the Lord consciously and deliberately. He puts everything on that basis. The proof of love is our concern for what is His. It is just His, and that is all there is to it. It is something that counts for Him, that matters to Him, and I need no other persuasion, no other coercion, no other urge or invitation. It is because it is the Lord's, and that is enough.

THE MASTERY OF LOVE

And then the mastery of love. "*When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst*

whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither THOU wouldest not". When thou wast young—in other words—you did as you liked; when you get old, you are going to do what you would not have done then. And love is going to make you do a lot of things you would not have done before. It is something more than 'like': it is love. You are going to be mastered by another master than yourself and your own likes and preferences. You are going to do quite a lot out of love, because you are love-mastered, that you would never do otherwise. When love is the master, you are going ways you would never go otherwise.

Is not this something that discriminates between spiritual infancy and spiritual maturity? In effect, the Lord is saying here, 'In spiritual infancy and immaturity, people always do as they like, as they want to do, as they choose. But when you get to spiritual maturity it is no longer what you want or the way you would go, it is the way the other Master says, the Master who is love. The day comes when you say'

"My Master, lead me to Thy door;
Pierce this now willing ear once more:"
"At length my will is all Thine own,
Glad vassal of a Saviour's throne".

That is a new kind of mastery. There has been service to the Lord, but this is something new, this is maturity. You notice that Paul said the very same thing in another way in I Cor. xiii. "*A more excellent way show I unto you. If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal*", and on he goes with what might be, yet without love, and of it all being nothing, and then he goes on to the positive unfolding of the nature of true love. "*Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own . . .*" and then, without a break, it is not another chapter on another subject, he says, "*When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things*". Oh, love, mature love, true love, this love is not childish in its thoughts and ideas and ways, seeking its own. But mature grown-up love, the love now of the man, as against the child, is a different thing altogether from that. This is the love of the mature man that Paul is talking about, and it is his way, his lovely way. I was going to say—his clever way of just letting the Corinthians see that it was all childishness, this that was going on in Corinth. "*I am of*

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Paul ; and I of Apollos ; and I of Cephas " (1 Cor. i. 12). It is childishness and it is not love, and when you come to mature love, when you grow up, all that sort of thing will go. You will not be selecting your favourites, you will not be doing any of those things the Corinthians were doing.

When thou shalt become a man, thou shalt be under another mastery, and, although you will not like it, your flesh will shrink from it, you will even go to the cross. No man chooses that for his own fleshly comfort, he would shun it : but you will go to the cross. "*Now this he spake, signifying by what manner of death he should glorify God "*. He would be so mastered that he would stretch forth his hands—Peter according to tradition was crucified—he would stretch forth his hands, he would be carried not the way he would like, but another way because of another master, the mastery of love, mature love, grown-up love.

Now this brings me to this point. The Lord does really need men and women to serve *His* ends. In many ways there is a need for more young men to come on in the ministry of feeding and tending. A lot of people have interpreted that "Feed my lambs" as Sunday School work. I do not believe the Lord meant that at all. The lambs in this case are not little children, although that may be your ministry and it may be included. You know, one of the most difficult things is to tend and minister to the immature, the spiritually delayed in their growth. But whatever it is, the Lord does need those who will serve Him in ministering to His own. Young men, He does ! He needs you to preach the Gospel. He needs you to teach His people, to feed His people. There is a great need. Perhaps you have thought about it and perhaps you have desired it. Perhaps that is your will or your hope. But listen—the need is very great in all phases and directions of the Lord's work. He needs you ; but the fact that the Lord needs you does not mean that you can do it, or that He can come now and call you into it and open the way for you. His need may be very great, and yet He may not be able now to open the way for you to come in to serve Him in meeting it. Why ? It might be that you would come in on some other ground—to be a minister, to be a teacher, to be something : to study up the Bible and then pass on the fruits of your study. All sorts of things you might begin to do, and the Lord is waiting until your heart is broken over this whole situation, and it is such a heart-matter that you come to the place where you say, ' Lord, the only justification of my life is that your interests are served '. It must be a matter of heart-love for the Lord and for what is His, and not for the work, the ministry : not for

anything but for your Lord and what is His. When you get there, and you are found upon your face before the Lord breaking your heart because you see He is not getting what He ought to have, when this becomes the travail of your soul, you will find the Lord will begin to do something. This is the necessary basis for the Lord to bring out His servants. That is what is here. You may come in the way to the place where you find it painful and not likeable at all, but that basic grip of the master-love will keep you going when everything would make you run away. When I see young men with ambition to be ministers, I quietly say inside, ' The Lord have mercy upon them '. This is something to be guarded against unless the Lord puts you in and holds you in. Do not have natural ambitions in the Christian realm, but ask the Lord for this love that will hold you in when you would give anything to run away.

You say, It is terrible to talk about Christian work like that ! But, in a true spiritual realm, you meet forces that you would never have imagined existed. You meet hell when you are seeking to build the heavenly kingdom. Well, here again the Lord does need you. The need is there. He wants you. There is work for you to do and plenty of it. Oh, His people are hungry, His sheep need tending and feeding ; they need guiding, counselling, instructing, and to be provided for, and the Lord wants you to be His under-shepherds. I am so glad Peter wrote his letter about the great Shepherd and the under-shepherd. Yes, He wants you. He needs you. Do not be mistaken about that. And if He is keeping you waiting, do not think it is because He does not want you, because there is no need. It is all there, clamant, pressing, but He must have you on this basis, nothing else will do—your own personal heart-love for Him that will not choose your own way or go anywhere because you like it. You will go against yourself altogether under the constraint of His mighty love.

THE CONCENTRATION OF LOVE

If I were to add another word, it would be this—connected with Peter's seemingly superficial reaction to this terrific thing. Suddenly seeing John following on he turned round. The Lord has said, " Follow me ", and he immediately turns round, sees John and says, " Lord, and this man, what ? " What I am going to say about it is not all it contains, but it is this, that you are going to be called, appointed, to your particular ministry. Others will be called to theirs and theirs may be different from yours, theirs may be in another realm altogether from yours. The Lord's servants are often char-

MAY — JUNE, 1952

acterized by a specific ministry. They have to recognize what that is and keep to it.

Effectiveness depends upon concentration and avoidance of either distraction, diversion, or divided interest. There is something in the nature of rebuke in the Lord's rejoinder to Peter—"What is that to thee?" The whole statement seems clearly to mean that the Lord has sovereign rights to dispose of His servants as He wills, and they must not allow themselves to be diverted from what He appoints for them severally.

Love for Him must work out in giving oneself *wholly to the thing to which they have been called*. Superficially turning therefrom to what is not *their calling* is itself contrary to love, it is fickleness.

Well, Peter learned his lesson, did his job, and glorified his Lord. He became a true shepherd. No one can read his letters without feeling his love for his Lord above all dividedness of heart. Love works out in faithfulness to the particular function, and faithfulness thereto unto the end—the long last proves the love.

T. A-S.

WORSHIP—BOWING TO GOD

ONCE it becomes a settled matter with us that we are going to be worshippers of God, then God will lead us to a point where we recognize Him not only as Father, but as God, and where we recognize ourselves not only as His children, but as His subjects. Such a revelation of God will immediately issue in worship. But God's Word teaches us that we must not only know the Person of God, we must also know the ways of God. It is by revelation that we get to know His Person: it is by submission that we get to know His ways.

What are the ways of God? God's ways are His methods of dealing with us—treating one in this manner and another in that manner. That none can accept the ways of God who have not had a revelation of the Person of God is a fact many refuse to acknowledge; but the fact remains that a revelation of His person is a pre-requisite to the acceptance of His ways.

People keep perpetually asking: Why did God love Jacob and hate Esau? They regard the latter as the good man and Jacob as the rogue, and they feel indignant on his account. But God says, "*Jacob I loved, and Esau I hated*". And still they keep asking, 'Why?' 'Why?'. People who ask 'Why?' have never seen God. All who have really met Him simply say, He is God: He does as seems good to Him. God has never been in need of a counsellor: He does as He pleases. And what He pleases to do are called His ways.

As soon as anyone has had a revelation of God, seeing God as God and himself as man, such an one can do no other than bow and worship God. But the matter does not end there. That would be too abstract. When we see Who God is we fall down before Him and acknowledge the rightness of His ways. So we advance step by step. Spiritually we have no future if we cannot bow to the ways of God.

Let us look at those who in the Old Testament

days worshipped God, and see if from them we can learn something of His ways.

We read of Moses in Ex. xxxiv. 8 that he " *bowed his head toward the earth and worshipped*". The occasion was when "*the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the Name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed: The Lord, the Lord, a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin*". If the proclamation had ended there it would not have been astonishing to read that Moses bowed and worshipped, but it was after altogether different words were proclaimed. These are the words that completed the proclamation—"and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children . . . upon the third and upon the fourth generation". It was at this point—when the majesty and severity of God were declared—that we read: "*and Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped*".

I love the 8th and 9th verses. In verse 9 Moses prays: but in verse 8 he worships. He first worships, then prays: he first acknowledges the rightness of the ways of God, and thereafter he seeks the grace of God. We are constantly asking God to change His ways—to remove burdens, to withhold sickness, to save us from domestic difficulties. We make ourselves too big and do not take our proper place in the ways of God. Moses asked for grace, but he recognized the authority of God, so he first accepted the ways of God.

If you visit a home and find a sick child there, as you kneel to pray with the parents you know at once that God is not having His rightful place in the home if, as soon as they open their lips in prayer, they say: 'O God, heal my child!' They are telling God what to do. They are determining

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

the ways of God. You go into another home, and there the parents pray: 'Thy ways are right. We praise Thee for allowing this sickness to come to our child. We praise Thee for Thou canst not err; Thou doest all things well. But if Thou canst shew mercy, we beseech Thee to heal the child'. It is not a question of letting worship rule out prayer, but of giving worship its proper place. Prayer expresses my desire; worship expresses God's desire. When Moses saw the kind of person God was, he saw that his own rightful position was that of a worshipper prostrate before Him. Moses did not reason with God: he did not try to persuade God to alter His ways; Moses worshipped. The most important lesson for us to learn is to recognize the ways of God and to delight in His ways, however they may affect us. There was something in Moses that badly wanted to go into Canaan; but Moses first sought to know what God wanted, and he accepted that. Brothers and sisters, we must not only learn to do God's work; we must learn to love God's ways.

After Moses' death, the burden of leading God's people into Canaan rested upon Joshua. What Moses with his long years of experience could not do, he, a young man, was required to do. The Canaanites were formidable foes: the Israelites were inveterate murmurers. Can we blame him if he trembled? It was in such circumstances that a Man appeared to him with a drawn sword, and Joshua asked: 'Are you on our side, or on the side of our enemies?' That Man's first word was, "Nay"! He was come to help neither the one side nor the other, "but as captain of the host of the Lord". "And Joshua fell on his face and did worship". Here we see another of the ways of God. He does not take sides with one party against another. His is the Captain's place: mine, the worshipper's. In the presence of a host of foes my need is not for God to come to my help: my need is simply to take my place at His feet. If I do that, all will be well. The problem is not whether or not God will come to our aid, but whether or not we will submit to His captaincy. When we fall at His feet all our problems cease to be. When we learn this lesson in the ways of God, that God is in the place of leadership, that He is the Doer of everything, then you will know what it means to fall at His feet in worship; and then you will also know that there is an unsheathed sword stretched out on your behalf.

In I Sam. i we touch the spirit of worship. Hannah had no children and in her distress she cried to God. At length God answered her cry and gave her a son. As soon as the child was weaned Hannah brought him to the House of the Lord in

Shiloh, and she said: "For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him, therefore I also have granted him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he is granted to the Lord. And they worshipped the Lord there". I think these words are very precious—"The Lord hath given me . . . I also have given to the Lord". This was the sum of Hannah's petition—a son. Her one hope was to have a son, and when the son was given what did she do with him? What God had given to her she gave back to God. That is the kind of person that can worship God. There was an outgoing of worship to God with the outgoing to God of the son He had given. Those who do not know what it is to yield their treasure to God do not know what it is to worship God. In the day we yield our all to Him, even our Samuel, in that day we begin to learn the meaning of worship.

I constantly think of Abraham and that precious word he spoke to his servant, "I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship". To offer Isaac was to worship God. Brothers and sisters, I do not believe anyone can know real worship who does not know real surrender. In the day when Samuel, in whom all my hopes are centred, goes out of my hands to God, there goes out from my heart worship to God. Worship is always related to the altar. Whenever there is a letting go of my hold upon anything, there is worship.

God's ways do not always involve the granting of our petitions; they often mean the denial of our petitions. In II Sam. xii we read the sequel to David's sin in connection with Bathsheba. God sends Nathan the prophet to tell David that his child must die. But David loved the child and besought God for the child. And David knew how to pray. You can tell that from the Psalms. And here we read that he not only prayed; he fasted too, and in his urgency he lay on the ground all night in prayer. And the outcome? The child died! Many a one under such circumstances would have had a controversy with God. Many a one would have asked, 'Why?' But not David. There was no trace of rebellion, or even complaint. "David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel; and he came into the House of the Lord, and worshipped". What does it mean to worship? It means to submit to the ways of God. Often God has to deal with us in order to vindicate Himself. He has to deal with us in a way that will make it plain to angels, to demons, to the world and to His own children that He is not a party to the sins of His people. When we have failed in a certain matter, God may have to justify Himself before His creation by showing that He has no share in that

MAY — JUNE, 1952

matter ; so His governmental hand comes down upon us. Have you known God to vindicate Himself upon you ? What have you said to Him then ? Those who know God, those to whom He has really been revealed, will bow before Him at such a time and say : ' If my suffering can vindicate Thy holiness, then I say : Amen ' . May God deliver us from all our controversies !

Finally, let us consider one more instance of those who worshipped God. When from four different messengers he learned that he had lost his all, " *Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped* ". Brothers and sisters, when adversity befalls you, how do you react ? Many people forfeit God's blessing because they kick against the

pricks. They keep asking : ' Why ? ' — ' Why is it that everything I touch goes wrong ? ' ' Why is it that difficulties always come my way ? ' You may have lots of arguments, but one thing you must learn—to accept the ways of God. The way God has ordered your business, your associations, your circumstances, is all good—the bitter and the sweet. Worship leaves no loophole for discontent. There was an obvious reason for God's dealings with David, for he had sinned : but Job's case was different. Job teaches us acceptance of God's ways, good or ill, reasonable or unreasonable. Even when there is no explanation for God's ways, let us still praise Him, and praise Him from the heart. Let us learn to bow to God's ways and say : ' I worship Thee. Whatsoever Thou doest is perfect. ' W. N.

(translated from the Chinese)

FOLLOWERS OF THE LAMB

II. THE LAMB

Reading : Rev. xiv. 1 - 5 ; Acts ii. 23 ; Eph. i. 4 - 11. " These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth " (Rev. xiv. 4).

IN our previous meditation our time was occupied with identifying the one hundred and forty-four thousand followers of the Lamb. Without going over the ground then covered, all I have to say by way of retrospect is that it does seem perfectly clear that that particular company represents something distinct and different from other companies of the Lord's people mentioned in the book of the Revelation, marked out by this characterization, that they " follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth ", and have consequently come to a place of peculiar value and service to the Lord in glory.

CHRIST THE ETERNAL LAMB

Now we pursue that matter in order to try to see what it means, or at least something of what it means, to " follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth ", that is, in unreserved utterness. So we allow the very designation to lead us—" the Lamb ". And when we look into the Scriptures to find where the first glimpse of the Lamb is given—I do not mean of lambs but the Lamb—we find it here in Rev. xiii. 8—" *And all that dwell on the earth shall worship him, every one whose name hath not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain* ". You will see that there is an alternative rendering—" *written in the book of life of the Lamb that*

hath been slain from the foundation of the world ", and I think that is the more correct order. " *The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world* ". That is really the first glimpse that we have of Christ as the Lamb. A remarkable statement—" *slain from the foundation of the world* ". Probably you know that the word ' foundation ' there could be more literally translated ' the laying down ' of the world, that is, the setting out of the whole scheme of creation. We speak of laying down a plan, a scheme, a project, and when God laid down the plan, the scheme, the project of the creation, at that time the Lamb was, in intention, slain, which, of course, in the very first instance means that the Cross is no afterthought. The Cross is not something brought in as an afterthought because of certain emergencies. The Cross was in the foreknowledge of God, as we have read in Acts ii. 23—" *being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God* " : " *delivered up . . . by the foreknowledge of God* " : " *The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world* ".

That takes us back to God's counsels from eternity. A purpose, a purpose framed, a purpose projected, initiated. There we find ourselves once more in the presence of those counsels of the Godhead to which Paul so much refers : wonderful, great, glorious counsels. How full, far-reaching, and glorious were those counsels before times eternal. It is a matter about which we can truly be in contemplation and meditation and consideration all our days and never exhaust it. How many times have we come back to those parts of the Word

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

which speak so much about God's eternal counsels. God's foreknowledge, God's predestinating purpose, and still we feel we have not touched the fringe. There is always something more. Yes, it was all there before, and when God, so to speak, drafted His great, universal, eternal plan and purpose. He at the same time anticipated its disruption. He foresaw what would happen as a mighty spiritual reaction against His intentions. He took the whole situation in, knowing that the very nature of the purpose must leave the door open for voluntary obedience and committal and acceptance. The very essence of it all, which is love, must leave the place for option, and He foresaw the side on which man's option would move. He foreknew the tremendous activity of spiritual forces against His purpose. He foresaw all that has happened since man gave way to the great spiritual foe of God's intentions concerning His Son Jesus Christ. Having projected, and having foreseen, He provided, and redemption was forthwith established.

THE WORK OF THE LAMB

It is eternal redemption (Heb. ix. 12). That is the name of it. It is the timeless Cross because the purpose is eternal. We are brought, then, right into the presence of the timeless Cross and the eternal purpose. This introductory designation, the Lamb, is tremendously impressive when you see that already, before anything has happened. Christ is called the Lamb. Christ is the Lamb; and His being called the Lamb before all that terrible tragedy and havoc had taken place itself indicates the full nature of the work to be done. *The Lamb*—the title is an implication. It implies just what will have to be done. We are in the presence of a tremendous thing, if only it would break upon us. There is that vast purpose of God which, in its realization, is to obtain throughout all the ages of ages to come and to give character to His universe. Then there is this terrible, terrible sin, which is so utterly contrary, the disruption of everything through these present ages: and then you say that it is a Lamb that is going to put all that right—what do you mean? Why, you want something more than a Lamb for that! You must have a very limited grasp of the situation if you say a lamb can put it all right! But that is just what the Bible does say, with a significance beyond our comprehension. Because, you see, as we have said just now, it indicates the nature of the work to be done, which is this—an entire and utter reversing of the nature and constitution of things as they are now.

Will anybody look at the world to-day and man's ideas of running it, and say that it is just like a

lamb? You see how absurd that sounds, how ridiculous. Anything and everything but the Lamb is in the present constitution of things. Everything that is a complete antithesis of the Lamb pervades this order of things, in its very constitution. You see the point. The whole constitution has got to be changed. Another constitution needs to be given to this universe and it must be the constitution of the Lamb. Yes, this universe has got to be reconstituted upon the basis of the Lamb-nature, and the wonderful thing is that all these tremendous forces—these simply terrific forces, in this universe, of iniquity, evil, wickedness, sin, hatred and malice—all these forces are gathered up, and the Bible tells how a Lamb can deal with the whole thing. There is something here which is a mystery.

THE TRIUMPH OF THE LAMB

And so you find this whole set of paradoxes and seeming contradictions. In the book of the Revelation there is the book sealed, and the Apostle says, "*And I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look thereon: and one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not; behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open the book and the seven seals thereof. And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain*" (Rev. v. 4-6). Always remember that in the twenty-nine occurrences of the word 'Lamb' in the book of the Revelation, it is always the diminutive, 'a little Lamb'. "*Behold, a LITTLE LAMB hath prevailed*". Strange contradiction! The Lion, the Lamb—identical! The Lamb is the Lion in strength in prevailing; yet a lamb is the very symbol of weakness. Nothing would speak more of weakness than a little lamb; you would not want to put much weight upon a little lamb.

But look at what it says in this book about the little Lamb. These terrific forces make war with the Lamb and the Lamb shall overcome them (Rev. xvii. 14). You could believe that, perhaps, of the Lion; but the *Lamb* shall overcome them—weakness and might in one object. Yieldedness as a lamb to the slaughter, no resistance; and authority. They flee before the face of the Lamb. Strange contradiction: subjection, submission, and dominion, dominion given to the Lamb—to the *Lamb*.

Meekness: what do you mean by meekness? No standing up for personal rights, no seeking of self-vindication. But what about this wrath of the Lamb? It is terrible. There is a mystic infinite power in the Lamb which is not to be accounted for on any natural ground at all. Take the natural as-

MAY — JUNE, 1952

pect, and you have everything that speaks of weakness and helplessness, submission and meekness. But there is a mystic something about this Lamb that is not natural, it is Divine. All the mighty forces of God's heavenly universe are bound up with, centred in and expressed through this yieldedness, this weakness, this meekness, this submission.

Now, that is not just a statement. That is a fact, a thing that can be put to the test by any Christian, and many of you know quite well that it is a working principle. When you have sought the grace of the Lord Jesus to suffer wrong rather than do wrong, to accept joyfully the spoiling of your goods, to restrain natural heat and wrath and reaction and to hand things over to the Lord, you have seen the Lord do things that none of your wrath and none of your strength could have done. You have known the Lord to come in then, when you have let go and have got out of the way. That is the way. That is not natural. No, our constitution is not the Lamb constitution at all. We know that quite well. But when God reconstitutes according to the Lamb, the ground is prepared and the way is opened for the exercise of infinite power: for something that is not natural, something that can only be said to be the Lord. See this Lamb, led to the slaughter, opening not His mouth. Behold Him in His yieldedness to the will of God and see whether God has vindicated that nature. Has He? God has indeed vindicated that.

THE CROSS THE WAY OF THE LAMB

Now let us go back a little. What we mean by the Lamb is the Cross. The Cross is the way of the Lamb, and the Cross, or the Lamb, links the eternities. One arm, so to speak, of that Cross reaches right back over all the ages and beyond the garden into the eternal counsels, and there takes up all the immensity of those counsels of God, the eternal purpose. The other arm of the Cross touches the ages to come; and by way of that Cross, that from the beginning, which has meantime been challenged and upset, is realized: so that the way of the Lamb is the way of the realization of the eternal purpose of God, and nothing less than that. That is why I have taken pains to stress the immensity of that purpose. Our conception of the Cross is so small. Our hymns about the Cross have such a limited view of that Cross. Oh, yes, 'the burden of my heart rolled away' at the Cross—quite true and good, blessed: but the Cross is infinitely, transcendently more than our conversion. The Cross has come in not just to get people saved from their sin and secured unto heaven and have

the blessings of forgiveness and access to God. No, the Cross has come in to lay right hold of that vast scheme of the Divine intention and purpose and to realize it, and nothing less than it. We ought to see that the Cross is a very much bigger thing than we have ever imagined.

When the Lord begins to work subjectively by His Cross in a life, He does a very utter thing beyond conversion. In many lives it often comes to this: that a fuller apprehension of the meaning of identification with Christ in death and burial and resurrection is a far bigger thing than conversion, and that is significant. You cannot make too much of the Cross, for this very reason—that there is nothing greater and vaster than God's eternal purpose in the creation of this universe, and the Cross has to do with every bit of it, touches it at every point. The things in the heavens are purged by the Blood of that Cross (Heb. ix. 23). The Cross is an immense thing because of the immensity of that with which it has to do. So the Cross is retrospective—but not merely to the fall, not merely to the entrance of sin. The Cross is retrospective to before the world was, from the laying down of the foundation. It is retrospective to the very purpose of God in having a world at all. If you can understand and grasp why God created this universe, what His thoughts were, what His intentions; if you can really comprehend all the immensity of His purpose in making this a heritage for Himself, worthy of Himself and satisfying to Him, then, and only then, will you be able to see the greatness of the Cross, the magnitude of the Cross. Yes, the Cross reaches right back to that.

A COMPANY IN THE GOOD OF THE ETERNAL PURPOSE

Now, what are we to say about these people, these one hundred and forty-four thousand? If what I have said is right and true, surely they must mean this: they are a company standing in the good of the eternal purpose of God, and nothing less. They have 'followed the Lamb whithersoever He goeth', not a bit of the way, not more or less, not with reservations, not just so far as forgiveness of sins and no further. Not just that, on such-and-such a day in such-and-such a year so long ago, 'I gave my heart to Jesus'. These have come into an apprehension of the greatness of God's purpose concerning His Son, and have gone right on with it and are standing in it. Surely that is what it means.

Now, I am not saying that these are an elect of the elect. I am not saying that this is not for all, this is only for a few—not at all. But anyone who

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

has eyes to see knows quite well that very few Christians actually do go this way, comparatively few really do go all the way with God's purpose. Look out on Christianity to-day and tell me if what you see represents all the thought of God ; and then enquire into it, investigate it, and see how many are willing to go farther, and you will be surprised. How many care about anything more ? It is comparatively few who answer to God in His fuller thought as to His eternal purpose. Indeed, I fear that there are multitudes of Christians who do not know what you mean when you talk about the eternal purpose of God. And so God has to find His satisfaction as to this in a representative company.

Here is the position. Who will accept the fuller meaning of the Cross in order to satisfy God as to the fuller expression of His purpose ? That is the issue. And this company has said Yes to the Lord. Not just that I am going to be saved and live a happy Christian life and do a lot of Christian work ; no. But I am going to allow God to entirely reconstitute me, from centre to circumference, according to His own Son, conformably to the image of His Son ; and that takes a profound work of the Cross, a tremendous operation of the Cross to do that. That is following the Lamb. The figures used may seem strange, but that is what it means, the way of the Lamb—He was made perfect through sufferings. That is, He was brought to completeness through sufferings. We shall come there in no other way. That we should be before Him without blemish, before Him in love. That is reconstituting us.

I think the whole matter is clearly before us. Here is a company. (It is clear that, in the book of the Revelation, there are companies of saved people, various and different companies, larger and smaller companies, and here amongst the companies is this one marked out and clearly defined.) It is called the one hundred and forty-four thousand, with symbolic, not literal, meaning, and they stand in a special relationship to the Throne, and, as we said in our previous meditation, they are in the good of a special secret that no one else knows or can learn. They have come into something by their walk with the Lamb, by their sufferings together with Him. What do they mean ?

Once again, the Lamb takes us back to God's purpose in fulness before the world was. He does not just say that He by His Blood will deal with the sin that has come in—that is a part of the whole ; or with the conditions that have resulted from man's disobedience—they are all included. What the Lamb does is right at the point where God lays down His whole ultimate plan for eternity : namely, to sum up all things in Christ, to fill all things with

Christ and to make His people the fulness of Him that filleth all things. It is in order to secure that against the invasion of the disruptive forces—to secure that and nothing less than that. So the Lamb relates to the fulness of God's purpose from eternity, and to 'follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth' likewise relates to the fulness of that purpose, bringing those who so follow not only to heaven but into that particular position that answers to God's thought in fulness from eternity.

Now you are able to see why it is necessary, before you can come to the Church, to have the Cross. You never can have the Church without the Cross. The Church is that in which God's eternal counsels are to be fulfilled, and the Church is based upon the Cross. All that that means just comes back to one thing. Will we 'follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth' ? In other words, will we accept the Cross in all its meaning for the reversing of everything that is contrary to God's purpose, the reversing of the very constitution that is contrary to God's mind ? And the reversing is a very practical thing. It is so practical, it is so terribly practical, that it is most unacceptable to any part of our being. The Lord tells you and me that in opposition and affliction and suffering heaped upon us by other people we are to be perfectly meek, not rising up and reacting in the heat of our own temper and hurt feelings and pride, but in meekness we are to accept it, allow it, commit the whole thing to the Lord and suffer.

That is not our constitution. We have to be reconstituted to do that. But when the Spirit of Jesus Christ, God's Lamb, really does prevail in our hearts and get a victory there, when the Lamb overcomes in us, the ground is provided for God, in His own time and in His own way, to exercise His infinite power in that very situation : so that it might very well be that these people would come back and say, 'Look here, if you had shown resentment, any bad spirit, I should not have thought much of you as a Christian ; but because of the way you took it, somehow or other I have had a miserable time ever since !' God has had His opportunity. How many are won that way ! Yes, the Lamb wins.

THE UNITY OF THE COMPANY

But let us not get some objective mentality about following the Lamb. It is coming right home to us in a new way, any day that we live it is going to find us out all along. Nevertheless at the end there is this company right in touch with the Throne, singing their song in such a oneness that the Apostle said he only heard one voice. " I heard

MAY — JUNE, 1952

a voice . . . and the voice which I heard . . .—singular. One hundred and forty-four thousand singing in unison so that it was like one sound or voice. 'God has done something. How has He done that? How does God bring about an utter unity and oneness, identity, in a disrupted creation? How is God going to deal with all the divisions that the enemy has brought about in this world and even amongst the Lord's people? Only by the way of the Lamb—and He will do it that way, that is His way.

It is a mighty thing. You may try every other

means conceivable to the human mind to bring about absolute oneness between two people, and you find there is always some kind of breaking out. It cannot be done. You think you have nicely patched up some matter, but somehow or other it breaks out again, you can never be sure of it. Yet here is something done where a great company is only heard as one voice, only identified as one person. That has undone the work of the Devil; that has destroyed his works.

How is it done? *The Lamb, the way of the Lamb.* The Lord make us followers of the Lamb.

T. A-S.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

THE GOSPEL OF THIS HOUSE CALLED "ME"

IV. THE RIVER OF LIFE

IT may seem strange to speak of a river in a "house", but there is no better way of describing what we are now going to talk about. In this 'house' or body in which we live there are two wonderful systems by which the *whole* house is reached and made just one body, not so many *separate* parts. We spoke of one of these in our last talk—the telephone, or nerve-system. Now we are going to talk about the blood. I am afraid that you are really going to be put out of your depth in *this* river, but I am sure that you are going to feel how very wonderful it is.

In a full-grown man, say about eleven stone or about 160 pounds, there are about four quarts of blood. If we look through a microscope we shall see a pale yellowish liquid with two kinds of solids called cells. One kind are the reds. There they go tumbling over and over inside their pipes (veins). These pink cells give us our red lips and other red parts—if we are healthy and not spoiling our blood by injury. In a healthy person there is no need for 'makebelieve', putting stuff on the outside to give colour. If this is *necessary* there is something wrong with us. In a drop of blood the size of a pin-head there are five million (5,000,000) of these little red cells (we will again call them little people). They work tremendously hard, never have holidays, and only die when they are worn out. Their hard-working life only lasts about fifteen days, but new ones are always taking their place, so much so that they can produce more in ten minutes than there are people in the whole world.

Through our microscope we can also see white cells: little people in white dresses. There are not

nearly so many of these, but they are terrible fighters, the fiercest, bravest, and most skilful in all the world. There are more than twenty different chemicals in the blood.

What a lot more there is that can be said about the blood, and if I began to give you more figures you would think that I was telling you fancy tales. However, there are these facts that we all know. One is that it is a very serious thing to lose too much blood. We shall certainly die if we do. Then it is extremely important to our life that the blood is kept pure. 'Blood-poisoning' is a very dangerous thing. Then again, there are millions of enemies always attacking and trying to infect the blood. They are in the air, in the dust, in food, and everywhere, and if those brave fighters were to give up because we were not supporting them with proper air, food, exercise, rest, and proper habits, we should fade out and die.

I am going to say more about this later on, but surely we have come to see that in our house or body the blood is our very life, it is the 'river of life'. Well, now we understand something of what the Bible means when it says so much about "eternal life" being given us by "the blood of Jesus". For one thing—only one thing—it means that through dying for our sins—our spiritual diseases—Jesus gives us a life which has no sin, no disease in it, and which never can see corruption, therefore it never dies. "*I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish*" (John x. 28). "*The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*", while the "*wages of sin is death*".

It is because all God's children share this same

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

life that they form "one body", and, no matter what nation they belong to here on earth, they are one people because they all have the one same life

from the one Father. This is what is meant by being "born of God".

'Interpreter'

SPIRITUAL PLOUGHING

"But Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke ix. 62).

I have just had a couple of days at the farm and during that time I saw some ploughing, and afterward when we were back indoors this text came up, and we were told that in its actual terms it is quite out of date, for modern ploughing is not done with the eye looking on. You have to look around, and especially back, in modern ploughing, but the principle is the same. The principle, of course, governs the heart. In the East you must keep your eye ahead to plough a straight furrow, and if you look back you spoil the work. Now you do not do that literally, but I say the principle is the same. If the heart looks back, everything does go wrong and all fitness for the kingdom is spoiled. This is a word which truly gathers up what Paul said about the Scripture—that it is "for reproof, for correction, for instruction" (II Tim. iii. 16). There are all those elements in this—"No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God".

HARD WORK

Let us think for a moment of the work of ploughing as we have seen it in these days. It is by far the most difficult and the heaviest work that anyone might contemplate. For one thing it is at a time of the year when things are most difficult. The elements are far from helpful, everything seems to make this work hard. Ploughing is indeed heavy work. Against everything the plough and the ploughmen have to force their way. Ploughing in Winter is a lonely thing. There is nothing very much to inspire. It is not the time when the birds are singing and the trees are budding and all the signs of new life are in evidence. All that is absent. It is a desolate time, a lonely time, nothing whatever on the outside to inspire. Such is the time of ploughing.

If that is true in the natural world—and much more than that is true—it is true in the spiritual. Ploughing is hard work. Ploughing means the disturbing, and breaking up, of settled conditions.

When things and people have settled down, have accepted a position and become fixed, they do not like being disturbed, heaved up, turned over, and broken open. Ploughing is hard work. It goes against everything that is set and settled, fixed and accepted. Ploughing is the uncovering of what is hidden, and no one likes that. The presence of a Christian has the effect of uncovering the hidden. If it does not, there is something wrong with the Christianity. Our presence and our ministry in this world is to uncover. The Lord Jesus knew what He was talking about when He lighted upon this figure. This simile, the plough and the ploughman. He knew something of what ploughing meant in the disturbing of the settled and comfortable and accepted and fixed state of things. Oh, that is hard work! He knew the loneliness of the plough. He knew what it meant—the 'come-back' when His presence uncovered the hidden, for His presence in this world, if it had one effect at all, had that. Everything was uncovered by His presence. He said "I am come a light into the world" (John xii. 46). The plough uncovers, opens up, discloses, drags out the hidden things, and people do not like that. It is hard work, it is something that has very little inspiration from the outside.

LONELY WORK

It is lonely work. The plough gets deep down beneath the surface, and people love to live on the surface. They do not like their depths cut into. They do not like to be told that the Cross must go deep into their lives, right down deep into the subsoil. No, that is not the thing that we love. There is that which Paul called "the offence of the cross" (Gal. v. 11. A.V.), the Cross cutting deep down into the life and refusing to have anything superficial. We want to be like that, we want to have things in us covered over and pretty and undisturbed and unbroken into, but the plough of the Cross does all these things, and to plough with the Cross is lonely and uninspiring work. You may well return chilled to the bone with the cold blast in your ploughing work. It is like that. That is the work of the plough. Christ knew well what the plough of the Gospel, the Word of God, and the message of the Cross meant.

MAY — JUNE, 1952

THE TEMPTATION TO GIVE UP

And then the ever-present temptation to give up. I think if there is one thing calculated to make a man want to give up and go home and get by the fire it must be plough-work—I mean in our country, at any rate. It must be an ever-present temptation to just give up and go back and, if it is not actually done, very often the heart must be on the brink of it. There is the extent of the work, the ground to be covered. You look over the acres and acres of muddy land and feel the biting wind, and the heart could go out of you. You could say, 'No, it is too much'. And in this world of the work of God, our hearts can so easily be turned back, made to look back by the consciousness of how much there is to be done. Oh, do you not often feel like that? After all, how little has been done, how much remains, what a vast field of unsaved and of spiritual need remains untouched! I think we must confess that sometimes we feel the task is impossible, it is altogether beyond us. Shall we even touch it a little bit? If we begin with our earliest breath and finish with our last, what will there be to show for all, in view of all that there is? The temptation is ever present to say that, because of the greatness, the vastness, of the demand, it is hopeless or beyond us.

THE SETBACKS

And then what setbacks! The constant interruptions, the element of frustration ever present. It is not just all straightforward. It is not as though you get your plough or your tractor and go ahead up and down. There are these constant interruptions, these constant goings-wrong, comings-in of the extra and the unexpected and the element of frustration. Is it not like that in the work of God? If only it was straightforward, if only it were clear-cut, if only there were not all these extras, these unexpected things, all this that constitutes the element of frustration. How we crave for a straightforward way. How we just long that things could be straightforward, and it seems that it is never like that at all. You think you are just going to get on with a fine furrow. Something happens, breaks down, goes wrong somewhere, and it is like that all the day long.

THE WEARINESS

And then the weariness in the way. The Lord Jesus knew something about that. "*Jesus . . . being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well*"

(*John iv. 6*). He spoke of those who were weary, the heavy-laden (*Matt. xi. 28*). He knew about it—that enemy inside. I think there are few greater enemies than the enemy of weariness. It is right inside. You are fighting against something inside.

Now do you think when the Lord Jesus said these words He was saying them harshly, without understanding, without sympathy, without knowledge of all this? Oh, truly not. He knew it all. He was the master ploughman, He was the chief of all the ploughmen of God. He accepted a difficult field, He took on a tremendous task; all the elements were blowing against Him from hell and the world; all the things we have mentioned were true in His case. And yet He will say to His fellow-workers, "*No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*". The heart must not go back. We must not contemplate giving up.

THE PLOUGHMAN'S RESOURCES

Yes, that is all very well, and there would not be much help in that, in just being told that, even if *He* told us, if we did not know of the ploughman's resources. The ploughman must have resources or he will never get through. What are they?

(a) THE LORD'S FOREWARNING AS TO THE COST

Well, first of all—and it does not seem to be, at first glance, very helpful, but the Lord thought it had a place—you see. He told His servants frankly what they were going to meet and what it was going to cost. "*Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple*" (*Luke xiv. 27*). It is going to cost you everything, it is going to be a difficult way. If you are looking for self-gratification, this is not the way for you. If you are looking for popularity, this is not the way for you. Understand from the outset that this is how it is going to be. You will never be able to sow and reap and have the much happier side of life until you know something about ploughing. Plough life comes first. It is the basis of everything, and it is the hard grind with everything against. So that first of all it is necessary for us to be fortified with the realization of this, that we are not going to have an easy time with the Lord and in His matters. Let that be settled. If only it could be settled once and for all, it would undercut a great deal of this heart looking back. We pull ourselves together and say, 'But is this not what we knew it would be, what the Lord told us it would be? Is

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

this not really the way that we expected, the way of the Cross? I say that may not be a very concrete asset, and it does not always bring us a great deal of invigoration, but nevertheless it has to be settled, and the Lord felt that was necessary; that we should not get anywhere until we had counted the cost, settling it beforehand in our hearts, knowing that it would work out in this way—and it does. The Christian must always be in possession of a basic understanding that right to the end there will always be an aspect of the Christian life which is like the plough work.

(b) VISION AND A SENSE OF VOCATION

But then there are the positive assets. There has to be—and without this we shall always be at a discount and loss—there has to be vision which produces a sense of vocation. How could a man go on with that plough work through the blast of Winter with all this that he is up against if he did not see ahead, if he had not got in his eye the result, the long run, if he did not look beyond the present to the future and see what it was unto? He must have vision. It is the great asset creating a sense of vocation. That is, this vision constitutes a call, a draw, a life-purpose, it brings the element of meaning into all. If you cannot see beyond this, there is no meaning in it—turning all this over for its own sake, doing all this just as an end in itself. No, he must see ahead and keep the vision ever before him or he will give up. And that vision must make him feel it is worth it, it is unto something, it is not in vain, there is purpose in it, a sense of vocation, and in the work of the Lord it must be like that. There is a purpose in the most difficult, the most heartbreaking work. There is purpose in it all. We must have that vision which has brought into us a sense of vocation. We are called with destiny, destiny is right at the centre of our being, and we are working under the grip of that sense of destiny, which is only another word for vocation.

(c) THE POWER THAT WORKETH IN US

But then, it is uphill work. Ploughing, though it be on the level naturally, is uphill work always. You are going against something, you have to get over something, everything is against you. It is uphill work, but what a range is in that word in Ephesians—“*raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places,*

far above all . . . (i. 20, 21). “According to the power that worketh in us” (Ephesians iii. 20). I wonder if you have noticed that word in the letter to the Ephesians, how repeatedly it occurs—“according to”, “according to”, and here it is. ‘Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us’”. That is the ploughman’s resource. We may not often be conscious of the exceeding greatness of that power working in us; more often we are totally unconscious of it and only conscious of our own weakness and feebleness and emptiness and foolishness. That has always been true—weak and foolish and empty and useless. How often have our hearts turned back, looked back, with this temptation to give up, to let go, to say we cannot go any further. Oh, we would be ashamed to say how many times, how true that is of our history. But we are still here, and we shall be there at last. As we are here at the end of this year, by the grace of God, because of the power that has worked in us and for no other reason at all, we shall be there at the end of all the years on the same ground—not because we were so sufficient, but because of the power that worked in us. It is hard work and hard going and lonely, and against everything conceivable, but there is the power that worketh in us. It will see the work done if we draw upon that power.

T. A-S.

**SPECIAL GATHERINGS
AT HONOR OAK**

WHITSUN—MAY 31 to JUNE 2 (inclusive)

**CONFERENCES
IN SCOTLAND, SWITZERLAND and
GERMANY**

Write for information to: —

THE CONFERENCE SECRETARY
13, Honor Oak Road,
LONDON, S.E. 23



JULY—AUGUST, 1952.

Vol. 30. No. 4.

UNION WITH CHRIST

(continued)

WE are going to resume our meditations on union with Christ. Having been occupied with Christ Himself, the meaning of Christ, seeking to set the background, lay the foundation, in some little understanding of His greatness and of His place, we now should be able to follow on with the meaning of our union with Him. You will see that the New Testament gives us various conceptions of that union. These are not different unions; that is to say, the similes used of these unions do not apply to different bodies of people. They are only aspects of the one union, but each one has its own particular significance and value.

So we begin with

I. ETERNAL UNION WITH CHRIST

Let us first of all look at the first chapter of the letter to the Ephesians:

"Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world" (verse 4).

"Having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (verse 5).

"In whom also we were made a heritage" (verse 11).

And if you ask, When were we made a heritage? —

"Having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will" (verse 11).

"... to them that are called according to his purpose. For whom he foreknew, he also foreor-

dained to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans viii. 28 - 29).

"Elect . . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Peter i. 1, 2).

"... the men whom thou gavest me . . . thine they were, and thou gavest them to me . . . Keep them in thy name which thou hast given me" (John xvii. 6, 11).

I ought at once to say that we are not embarking upon a theological discussion or argument. This matter of election or foreordination or predestination has passed almost entirely into schools of doctrine and has split the Church into parties through the ages, and it still remains largely an academic subject, to be debated, argued, wrestled with intellectually. For our part we will have none of it. It would be unprofitable, it would get us nowhere and we are not moving in that realm. We are seeking spiritual values, practical values for our own spiritual lives, and so we lift this matter right out of the realm of argument and debate and seek to see it in the light of Christ. It is entirely governed by Christ, for it is only in Christ that it exists.

But, before we go further, I want to say this. *This matter of election relates to the Church and must be confined to the Church.* (I would prefer to call the Church by the name of 'the elect', because the very word 'Church' has become an ecclesiastical conception.) It belongs to the Church, the Church belongs to it, and its real meaning has only been divulged in this dispensation. We are given to understand by the Word of

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

God that all previous dispensations were pointing to, leading to and heading up to this dispensation, as though there were a drive behind them to reach a dispensation of fulness or completeness. They were all partial, imperfect, unsatisfactory, all just reaching a certain point and then fading out and waiting for the next phase. So phase passed to phase, and on to another phase, and still there was the waiting, the hoping, the expecting, the requiring, and then this age or dispensation came. It is called in the New Testament the "dispensation of the fulness of the times" (Eph. i. 10). That is a very significant little phrase. The times are made full, all the times are made full, in this one. All those which lack fulness and finality are filled up in this one. This one gives that which they lacked and needed; this is the dispensation of the fulness, or completeness, of the times. This is what the Apostle calls "the ends of the ages" (1 Cor. x. 11).

Now, it is helpful if you can arrange the ages as segments of a circle rather than in a straight line. If you take the straight line idea, you leave a lot of unfinished ends, one after another, but if you arrange them in a circle, then you find them all meeting at one point. They are not just unfinished ends in themselves, but they find their fulfilment at one point: all the ages gather round and meet at one centre—the age in which all the ages meet. "Upon whom the ends of the ages are come": that does not only refer to past ages. It refers also to future ages: for they come into this, they take their character from this age, they take their meaning from this age, so that ages past and future are centred in this dispensation. And when this dispensation comes in in fulness—for, although it was introduced in a way by the coming of Christ in the flesh, the age did not come in fulness until the day of Pentecost: it would seem that on the day of Pentecost heaven could wait no longer, the Holy Spirit could wait no longer; and immediately they had the signal—the signal being Christ taking His seat at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens—immediately they got that signal, it was as though they all rushed in and brought this marvellous sense of arrival, of having come. There is a lot in that—"When the day of Pentecost was now fully come": it has probably a larger sense than that it was well into the hours of the day. It proved to be as though everything had been waiting for this, everything had been looking for this, everything had been breathless in its suspense for this, and there was such fulness in that day and with the coming of that day that it has overflowed

backward and forward into all the ages—fulness of meaning to the past and fulness of character to the future. It reached back to past eternity and it reached on unto the ages of the ages. What the fiftieth year and day meant in the Jewish economy was far transcended on this "Day of Pentecost".

And what happened on the day of Pentecost? Well, the Church was born; the age of the Church in fulness commenced. We are told distinctly by the Apostle that this whole thing, this mystery, had been "hid for ages and generations; but now hath it been manifested", and that the ministry is "to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which from all ages hath been hid in God" (Col. i. 26; Eph. iii. 9). You see, it is this 'elect' which is the heart of the ages and of the universe.

(a) THE FACT GOVERNED BY THE MEANING OF CHRIST

And why therefore is it so important? Why all this? Why is this age such a great age, and why is it that in this age heaven's fulness has been poured out? Why all this excitement, if we might so put it, on the day of Pentecost and thereafter? Well, that is just the point in our whole meditation. It is all governed by the meaning of Christ. Christ is God's Son and He is called "the firstborn of all creation" (Col. i. 15), God's Firstborn, and everywhere in Divine revelation that designation means the *heir*. He is the "heir of all things" (Heb. i. 2). He must have an inheritance. The idea of the Firstborn is nonsense if there is no inheritance. Its very sense is that He must have an inheritance. "In whom also we were made a heritage" (Eph. i. 11). What is the 'also'? Look at the context. "To sum up all things in Christ . . . in whom also we were made a heritage". 'We'—who is meant by the 'we'? The Church. The Church is a part, the central part, of the vast inheritance of God's Son on which we have been speaking earlier in this series. The Church is the main part, the most important part, of those all things that form the inheritance of God's Son. "In whom also we were made a heritage". Simply, it was this. God determined an inheritance for His Son. God knew what that inheritance would be—we will at least cede Him that. Even an earthly father intending and deciding to give his son an inheritance would have some idea of what it would be. And then he would certainly not leave it to chance: he would secure it, he would see to it that there was an inheritance to have. So God created all things through and unto Jesus Christ His Son. He made

JULY—AUGUST, 1952

His Son the horizon of all things. That is, the whole inheritance was horizoned and circled by His Son; He made "in Christ" to be its sphere.

Now, that is very important, because it is not only a statement of a comprehensive truth. It is a statement of a discriminating truth. The Bible, the New Testament, makes it perfectly clear that there is that which is not in Christ and there are those who are not in Christ. That "in Christ" is quite discriminating. There has been a good deal of playing fast and loose with these fragments. "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (I Cor. xv. 22), and that has been given a comprehensiveness which it will not carry. In Christ you shall be made alive; out of Christ you will not. "He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life" (I John v. 12). "This is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ" (John xvii. 3). "In Christ" is a discriminating sphere as well as a comprehensive inheritance. There is also an "out of Christ".

Well then, allowing God to choose for His Son an inheritance, to define the inheritance, to create the inheritance, to determine that the inheritance should come to Him, we surely will allow that, being God, He foreknew the "in Christ" people. That is as far as I am going to carry the argument side of it.

Of course, there is all the time pressing in and insinuating itself the question, How do we know? That is where we move, if we will, right out of the realm of mere doctrinal discussion. All that argument, discussion, analysis and so on is largely due, either to man's insatiable curiosity or to his unfathomable pride—that streak in man which will not let God know anything unless man knows it. God must not know anything, do anything, unless we can explain it. Now, God's explanations are always practical; they are never theoretical or intellectual. They are always practical and they are always spiritual, and when you recognise that, you realise why it is that you can argue and debate and discuss and analyse, and pursue the whole thing along the line of reason and intellect until you go to the grave, and have never settled the thing finally at all. The reason for this, as you well know, is that God has never intended to explain Himself intellectually at all.

And yet there is a more complete and utter and glorious answer to all the problems and all the questions than the intellectual one. When you come to peace and rest and assurance and satisfaction in heart, that is a better argument than any-

thing else. Someone put the whole matter of predestination and election this way. You come to a door, and that door is Christ, and on the outside of that door is written 'Whosoever will may come'; and you pass through the door, and look on the other side, the inside of the door, and you see, 'Chosen . . . in him before the foundation of the world' (Eph. i. 4). It is inside that you discover the reality of election, never outside. You will never have the answer to that question, Am I of the elect? outside. You have to put away all your questions and come to the Lord Jesus: the answer is experimental, it is spiritual. The question vanishes then; it just disappears. We shall come back to that presently. What we have been saying is that the fact of eternal union is governed by the meaning of Christ, and by that which He inherits, as a Son.

(b) TRANSCENDING THE FALL OF MAN

Eternal union transcends the fall or rebellion of man. Man's rebellion does not cancel God's purpose concerning His Son; his fall does not denote God's defeat—not by any means. God, from His side, though He is revealed as hurt, saddened, grieved, and involved in a new situation, nevertheless, as sovereign God, goes tranquilly on. Man has rebelled, man has fallen. It makes no difference to God's purpose, not a little bit of difference. He continues quietly on the heavenly line and begins to lift man on to the heavenly line again through faith. That is the story of the Old Testament—men being lifted back on to the heavenly line through faith.

Faith has one function. The function of faith is to lift out of the ruin; out of the ruined race, out of the ruined world—out of time back into eternity. It is to lift us out, from here, from ourselves and what we are and what we are involved in, up on to the heavenly level. The Old Testament shows that that is the function of faith all the way through. Every time God called for an exercise of faith it brought a man out of where he was and put him into union with God in heaven. Abraham; Israel, a heavenly people: with that bit of blue on the border of the garment of every man in Israel saying that he did not belong down here, he belonged up there, in heaven; he was walking by faith. Faith's one function is to regain heavenly ground. That has, of course, a multitude of aspects and applications, but do remember that. Every time there is a challenge to faith, that is the issue. Am I going to stay in myself or am I going to stay in God? Am I going to stay in this world

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

or am I going to abide in heaven? That is always the issue with faith, right down to its minute details. Dispensations are only different forms of the operation of faith. Faith is the same in every dispensation. Different forms of faith's operations are represented by different economies from time to time, but faith is the same, faith is timeless, dispensationless. Faith is above all dispensations and yet it embraces them all.

You see what that means. Faith makes a heavenly people in every dispensation. Faith has the same effect all the way through history. It counters that drop into something not of heaven, not of God. It counters that, contradicts, denies, works against it. Faith at once brings you back before the Fall. It transcends man's rebellion and man's fall. That is the argument of Paul in the first chapters of the Roman letter. Faith puts you back somewhere. It is called justification. It makes you right, puts everything right for you and with you, positions you again as though you had never fallen, "in Christ". Faith counters it all. The order of faith commenced immediately man rebelled and sinned, and by faith Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the others were heavenly men. God reacted in that way, and so the eternal union now transcends the Fall, through faith.

(c) ENHANCED BY THE REDEMPTION OF MAN

Eternal union is enhanced by the redemption of man. When man fell, God was not defeated. It only meant that He brought into operation a provisional measure or economy which He had already worked out. Just at that point some terrible things have been said in order to try to support an erroneous teaching. I have heard it dogmatically stated that the Fall was in the Divine intention. God intended man to fall in order to show His grace. If you can accept that man had to fall, that it was in the Divine plan that he should do so in order that grace might be revealed—accept it, if you like; I cannot. What I see is the Fall not being in God's intention or will at all: He would have had it otherwise. But He had foreseen it and had provided for it, and when it took place He brought in His provisional measure of redemption, a measure which He had already worked out, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world—He put that into operation.

Just as the higher qualities of any person come out in an emergency: it is in an emergency that you discover what people's qualities are, and some-

times emergency reveals something you never suspected: just as this is so in the human realm, so transcendentally was it true in the Divine. The emergency brought out something very wonderful in God. It brought out grace, and two words from that time were combined. Before that it was one word: sovereignty. After the Fall it was sovereign grace, sovereignty working through grace, grace the handmaid of sovereignty. No, God did not intend the Fall. At least, that is my conviction. But God is always, always has been, more magnificent in an emergency. We have discovered that. It is the excellence of God that comes out in our emergencies. It was like that with the Fall. Grace came to light.

Perhaps you are still wanting to enter into the argumentative realm. If man had never fallen, look what we should have lost. We should never have known the magnificence of grace. How are you going to answer that? Well, let us look at the human family for a moment. Here is a father and there is a little child. Does it require that all the wonderful, gracious gifts and endowments of the father's love be lavished in order to draw out the love of the child for its father? Not at all. The little child loves the father, and, where it is an ideal case, loves the father without the father having to do all sorts of gracious things to win that love. It loves the father, because, well, it does love the father, and the father could not wish for anything more than that. Translate that into the realm of God and the children. We, if we had gone on, if there had been no Fall, would have gone on in utter love and devotion. That is what the Father wanted—and, mark you, God is always trying to get us on to that plane of loving Him just for Himself and not for what He does for us. That is the highest love. We do not get there, but that is what He is after. Have we said enough on that matter? We must hasten to a close.

THE HOLY SPIRIT THE CUSTODIAN OF THE ETERNAL PURPOSE

The Holy Spirit is eternal: He is related to purpose; He is the link with Christ; and He is the earnest of the inheritance. That is to say, when we receive the Holy Spirit, we are at once joined to Christ: therefore we are joined at once with God's purpose concerning Christ. We are therefore linked with eternity and have left time. Is that too fine a way of arguing? We are linked with eternity, for the Spirit is eternal. The Spirit has not just come to be here with us for the little while of our life here, just a temporary guest staying for a night and departing. The presence of the Holy Spirit within

JULY—AUGUST, 1952

at once links us with timelessness, and in that timelessness with the eternal purpose of God concerning His Son, and in that purpose with the Son Himself as governing all; and when we receive the Spirit we receive the earnest, the token, the security, of the inheritance of Christ. That is wonderful. That is where we come back to what we were saying. We have been secured by the indwelling Spirit as Christ's, as belonging to Christ, and Christ is secured to us for ever. The Spirit is the earnest of the inheritance. This is the inspiring answer of God to all questions about election. Have you received the Spirit? If you have not, you have no answer to any questions. If you have, you have the answer to every question, and particularly to this one. Union with Christ is the answer to all our questions.

Union with Christ is a crisis, a definite act, instantly giving a sense of—This is the answer to everything: all my questions are answered, not in my brain but in my heart; to everything that I have tried to understand and grasp and comprehend I have the answer inside. It is like that. Yet note this. The receiving of the Holy Spirit, while bringing that immediately—“*The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. viii. 16, 17)*”—while that is true at the inception of the Christian life in union with Christ, note this: that a life in the Spirit and with the Spirit is a continuous course, or succession, of proofs of election.

Perhaps you have never thought of that. If we do really walk with the Holy Spirit, we find that He is leading us into things that we never thought of, never intended—but, as He does it, we have to say, This is not something that has just arisen, this is something that was intended by God; I am just coming into a programme; the Lord has not shown me the whole programme, but this is like item after item on the programme. Is that not the story of the book of Acts? The Holy Spirit has a programme. He has not revealed it, but as they move in the Spirit, how the whole thing is a mosaic. How wonderful it is! This thing was ordained from eternity. You could not avoid it. God is working to it and holding us to it. “*We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them*” (Eph. ii. 10).

You look back on your life. You may be disappointed in many ways with your part in the busi-

ness. You may be able to see many falterings and blunderings and mistakes that you on your side made. You may have sometimes felt that you were not the person for that job; God had made a mistake. Some of us have felt like that. And yet, as we look more deeply into God's ways with us and know God's principles, we see a wonderful logic in it all. You and I are called for something, laid hold of by God for something, put by God into something, and we feel, God has made a mistake: I am not the person for this, I ought never to have come into this, I have no qualifications for this, I am altogether the wrong peg here! And yet, somehow or other, God does it. He enables you, He carries you through, He accomplishes the work to your own surprise and wonder. As you lay hold of the Holy Spirit, it is done—that is, if you do not sink down into yourself and give up and draw out because of what you are—but you lay hold of the Holy Spirit and you get through and marvel that you have got through, that the Lord has done this thing through you, through me.

That is very consistent with God's principles, that is no contradiction. It is most consistent with the deepest principles of God. No flesh shall glory in His presence. It is all coming back to Him. God—mark you—elected “the foolish things of the world . . . the weak things . . . the things that are not” (I Cor. i. 27, 28). It is the same word; He has elected. It is quite consistent.

Yes, His ways are past finding out. ‘God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform’, but He is consistent with His principles. A life in the Spirit is one succession of confirmations that God is working out a plan. Only rebellion, stubbornness, self-assertiveness and all forms of self-life will hinder or arrest; but a life in the Spirit will be a constant succession of proofs, of evidences, that you were chosen for something. God is not dealing with you just from hand to mouth, piecemeal. It is all worked out. Good works foreordained, “afore prepared, that we should walk in them”. If we walk in the Spirit, we walk in afore-prepared works; whether we see it or not, it is a fact. But it comes out, wonderfully so, and we have to go down and say, Well, Lord, forgive us for arguing, forgive us for discussing the matter, forgive us for putting over our minds and what we think about it against You: You are wonderful. Lord. And we worship, and that is the proof of election, and you do not want better proof than that. It is all inside of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

T. A-S.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

SUITABILITY FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

"And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. xxi. 14).

"And he called unto him his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of disease and all manner of sickness. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus; Simon the Cananwan, and Judas Iscariot . . . These twelve Jesus sent forth, and charged them . . ." (Matt. x. 1-5).

"And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. xvi. 18).

". . . being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph. ii. 20).

THE WALL OF THE CITY

REVERTING to the 21st chapter of the book of the Revelation, I want to say something about suitability for the glory of God. You notice that, in the vision given to the Apostle, the vision of the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, the city is said to have the glory of God. The foundations of the wall, as a part of the city, bear the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. We understand that this city, as seen in the vision by the apostle John, is a representation of Christ fully manifested in the Church. This is the fulfilment and realization of the words so familiar to us in Paul's letter to the Ephesians—"He put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. i. 22, 23). And again in the third chapter of that letter—"Unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever". That is fulfilled and realized in the city, the fulness of Christ in the Church.

The wall of the city is that which speaks of its character and its strength. You would rightly determine the significance of a walled city by looking at its wall. If the wall were a poor thing, bro-

ken, unrepaired, dilapidated, you would at once pass a poor judgment upon the city behind it. If the wall is a great wall, a mighty wall, a wall which evidently bears marks of care, you would say—"There is something behind that wall that is great". You would say that it betokened the character of the city. And so it is here. This is a wonderful wall, a glorious wall, a mighty wall, and it speaks of the character and the strength of the city—in other words, of the Church, of Christ manifested in His Church at last.

THE TWELVE NAMES ON THE FOUNDATION OF THE WALL

The twelve apostles whose names are on the foundations of the wall are a representative figure. Twelve is always representative. The twelve stones in Jordan and out of Jordan represented all Israel. The twelve stones of Elijah's altar at Carmel represented all Israel. Twelve represents Christ in fulness in His Church. The twelve Apostles represent the Church. And what is here in these foundations is representation of Christ in the Church by those whose names are here. It is the testimony to Christ. You notice Matthew x. He chose twelve, He sent them forth: they were those who testified of Him, who went before Him to bring Him into every place. They spoke of Him; they had the mark of the King; where they went He was portrayed. That, at least, was the thought. So they, the twelve apostles, represent Christ in fulness at last in a full Church. They testify to Him. One, who proved unsuitable, was eventually changed for another who came in after prayer and fasting.

"The twelve apostles of the Lamb". How that name governs everything in this book! Here all that we will say about it, as it comes in finally, is that everything is recovered that was lost. The Lamb has overcome, the Lamb has prevailed, the Lamb has redeemed: the Lamb has done it all, and all is recovered unto God that had been lost to God. And here is the testimony in the Church that all is recovered, there is full recovery. That was the principle in the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem by Nehemiah. The wall had been broken down and destroyed and burnt. The rebuilding of the wall was that in the Old Testament which portrayed the recovery of the full testimony of Jesus. Recovery—and it is all recovered. The Lamb has done it. Throughout this book it is the

JULY — AUGUST, 1952

Lamb in action in a many-sided way recovering everything to God.

So in these fragments of the vision, in representation, we have this whole matter of suitability to the glory of God, suitability to the end which God has in view—that is, the manifestation in fulness of the character of His Son.

Now, most of these twelve apostles have dropped from our view. We know little or nothing about the majority of them. Their names are mentioned here at the beginning. They are mentioned again, with Judas having fallen out, in the first chapter of the book of the Acts; another is incorporated; but we know nothing more. There are traditions, plenty of them, but, so far as Scripture is concerned, the majority of them have just gone out of our vision. Yes, that may be so, but their names are preserved in heaven. What they represent is never lost. They represented Christ, and let the men on the earth pass out and be forgotten, but that which they represented is maintained in heaven and reappears at last in the final manifestation of Christ. Remember that! We may not signify very much in ourselves upon this earth, amongst men, but if there is anything of Christ about us, that will appear again, that is preserved in heaven, it will be found at the last. So you begin with the mention of their names at the beginning of the dispensation, and then for the more part you know little or nothing about them, and then they are all there at the end. That is how it is. Every fragment of Christ, in any part of the Church, preserved eternally, is represented by this representative number.

Peter and James and John, of course, are the most outstanding ones, and they seem to be always representative of the rest. I think we can truly take them as that. You notice in Matthew x—“First . . . Peter”. It is put like that. “The first . . . Peter”. And it does not mean that he just came first in number. Peter always was first. He was given first place by the Lord; that is, he took a position which was a first position. “First . . . Peter”. Well, we hardly need talk much about Peter here. We know very well we could not say much that was new about Peter. He stands there, a full-length portrait; we know him—I mean as he was before Pentecost, in those days when the Master was here. James and John: we do not know so much about them by record of their behaviour. But we know one thing about them—that they were called “Boanerges, the sons of thunder” (Mark iii. 17). I wonder how you have interpreted that? I think that the interpretation which is the true one is that they were men of very strong temper. There are indications of that. Their

reactions were never moderate reactions; they were always very positive, very strong. When they were present there was no mistaking that they were present. “Sons of thunder”.

HOW THE LORD GETS SUITABILITY FOR HIS GLORY

Now then, these men, in some way, have got to be found suitable for the city of God, for the foundations of the wall of the heavenly Jerusalem. Peter has got to be suitable for the glory of God; James and John and all the others have got to go through some handling by the Lord to bring them to this final position: where the city having the glory of God is revealed as the expression of Christ in fulness in the Church, and representatively by these men.

That sets the ground for a great deal of most profitable consideration, far beyond our time and scope at present. But note some things. He chose twelve—their names are given; He sent them forth, gave them power, and said, “As ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of the heavens is at hand”. They were precipitated into something that as yet they did not understand, about which they knew nothing experimentally. They were called upon to move out into something, which had yet in a future day to become a reality to themselves. What did they know about the kingdom of the heavens? Very little indeed! If they had known about the kingdom of the heavens as they later did know, how differently they would have behaved, and how they would have been delivered and saved from the awful subsequent tragedy of their denial, of their forsaking and fleeing and leaving their Master alone. They were precipitated into this—and that is one of the tactical movements of the Lord to get suitability. How often the Lord has to precipitate us into something of which for the moment we know nothing—but by being forced into that position, a very practical basis is laid down for our coming to understanding. You note this movement.

The kingdom of the heavens—what does that mean? Well, to begin with, it surely does mean *heavenly-mindedness*, a heavenly mentality: that is, a heavenly conception of things, a heavenly standard of things, a whole realm of things which is not of this creation: different, utterly different: a mentality which no natural man possesses, which is only created by the operation of the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. *Heavenly-mindedness*. But they were earthly-minded. When He, their Lord, had been crucified, their world was gone, was shattered in pieces. They had had such an earthly, worldly-minded conception of the kingdom that

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

when He was gone they had nothing left. Heavenly-mindedness: it is what we call spirituality; that is, God's thoughts about things, as other than man's thoughts; the mind of the Spirit of God, as differing from the mind of man—the natural mind, to which Paul gives so much attention in his first letter to the Corinthians.

Patience—these were the most impatient of men. They could not wait, they were always urging to some precipitate action to bring in this kingdom. Right up to the end, even after His resurrection, it was "Lord, dost thou *at this time* restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts i. 6). That was their disposition, 'Let us hurry this thing'. They knew little about patience.

What did they know about the heavenly nature of the kingdom as a universal thing? They were Jews, wrapped up in Jewry, and it was a terrific thing that happened when at last heaven broke in and showed them that Israel was not the sum of God's redemptive purposes, that Gentiles also had a place in this city. It represented a tremendous upheaval in their whole mentality and acceptance and tradition—the universality of the city lying four-square, with its gates open in all directions. These twelve here were not like that, not at all!

And what about the great principle of subjection to Christ's absolute Lordship and Headship; complete subjection, as was later brought out so fully and clearly by the Apostle Paul? They knew nothing about that. They were not at all subject, they were assertive. Well, this is not suitable to the glory of God. This will not give them a name upon the foundation of the city. Something has to happen—but, praise God, it happened, and their names are there. It is a great declaration and testimony to the fact that something has happened in these men that they should be there in that capacity as the glory of God. No one listening to Peter denying his Lord with oaths and curses will say that that is for the glory of God. Something had to happen, and it did happen, and they were made suitable. And we are not thinking only of them. As I have said, they are there as representing the whole Church, and what was true of them has to be made true of the whole Church: for it is the whole Church that is here set forth in this city and this wall, and it has to be true of us.

You see, they were made suitable firstly by a very *practical* method. They were not made suitable by just sitting at their Master's feet and hearing His teaching. They heard it all—His long discourse on the mount at the beginning. His ultimate discourse in the upper room, and all between: they heard it all. It did not change them. We can be here; we can listen; we can attend a Bible

School, and get all the teaching and all the theory, and it does not make us any more suitable for the glory of God. It may serve a background purpose of showing us the way, but it does not do the thing. God's methods are *practical*. Do lay hold of this. People do not like to lay hold of it, but we shall not get anywhere unless we do. God's methods of making us suitable are never theoretical, they are always practical, deeply and drastically practical.

And how does He do it? He does it by contrast with ourselves: I mean by contradicting us, putting us into situations and circumstances where what we are naturally just cannot stand up to it. There is something so completely contrasting with ourselves, that we are altogether out of our element in this realm. You see, the kingdom of the heavens is that realm where we have naturally no capacity or functioning power to exist. We are just not fit for it. I often wonder how these men did feel and what they did say privately and in secret. Peter, for instance. I think when the Lord had been speaking about the Cross and Peter had rebuked Him and said, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee" (Matt. xvi. 22), and the Lord turned to him and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan", it must have gone home to Peter badly. I think when he got away quietly, if not on the spot, he must have said, 'Look here, Peter, that was wrong, you were wrong this time'. A little later something else happened, he came up against the Lord, and Peter might have spontaneously said, 'Wrong again. Peter!' On the mount of transfiguration—"Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, I will make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. And there came a voice, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him" (Matt. xvii. 1-8). I can hear Peter saying, 'Wrong again. Peter!'

How often it goes like that, so that we begin to mistrust ourselves altogether. We have constantly to say, 'There you are, you are wrong again, you have put your foot in it again, said the wrong thing again, done the wrong thing again', until in the end we cry, 'Can we ever be right?' *That is the important thing with the Lord.* Peter was so right that it had to be proved that he could not be right at all in the realm of the kingdom of the heavens. Before he could be right, he had to be proved incapable of being right in himself. There is another realm, standard and order of things, and this practical application of the principle of being translated out of one kingdom into another is a very ruthless thing, and it does bring us down, so that we "have no confidence in the flesh". That is Paul's way of putting it (Phil. iii. 3).

These men were self-confident, they thought

JULY —AUGUST, 1952

they knew, that they could do it, that they could go through with it, and again and *again* they had to turn to themselves and say, 'Wrong again!' and in the end I think they despaired of ever being right at all—and the Lord took them up there. Here on the one side is the man who says, 'I will'—"I will lay down my life for thee" (John xiii. 37)—and he has to be shown that he cannot; that is, the 'I will' man has to be translated into another kingdom where his 'I will' is of another order and not his own. It is not the 'I will' of natural strength, but of Divine strength. Peter was no less an 'I will' man after Pentecost, he was a far greater 'I will' man; but he was in another realm, his 'I will' was of a different order.

On the other hand, there is the man who said, "I will not"—Thomas. "*Except I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe*" (John xx. 25). Thomas seems to be the man who is always holding back like that: he will not commit himself. Thomas had to go through exactly the same process in a practical way. He had to become a man who in another realm would say, 'I will not'—but that is of a different order. It is right to put back our own disposition, under the government of Christ and by the Holy Spirit, so that we are not carried by our impulses, our own disposition, our own way at all.

If we are naturally of the 'I will' type, that is brought so completely under the Holy Spirit's government that there is brought about another kind of 'I will' man altogether. We do not become jellyfish without any will at all, under the hands of God, but another kind of 'I will'. On the other hand, if we are naturally of the 'I will not' kind, we are made 'I will-ers' under the Holy

Spirit; but also we become those who are of very great value in the Church, who are not just carried away by any whim, emotion, idea, but who are making very sure of the Lord. That is a good thing, provided it is not my stubbornness, not my pig-headedness, not that I must have a sound argument before I move. That can be in the flesh, it can be nature; it may hold us back, keep us out of much, as it did Thomas. These men went through a practical school. We have to be undone in one realm. We may be all agog, too ready to take hold, to take the lead and be masters of the situation—it may be nature or training. It has to be emptied out in the realm of nature. It will come back in another realm. I believe that Paul was translated, with a great deal that the Lord could use in his make-up, translated into another realm. It came under the power of God, and that is the thing.

So Pentecost saw these men taken up by the kingdom of the heavens, and they understood then the nature of the kingdom of the heavens, and still the work went on, and at last their names are found on the foundations of that which sets forth the glory of God in Christ in the Church. "*Unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever*". The Lord has us in hand in a very practical way, and if sometimes you get to the place where you wonder if any good thing can come out of you, if ever you will be right, and not always wrong, just understand that that is a way to another positiveness, another value. These men did serve positive values in the kingdom of the heavens. But see the way they came to it. The Lord has us in hand, and our bad times are just His practical way of bringing in that which is of Christ to supplant that which is of ourselves.

T. A-S.

GOD'S VOICE FOR TO-DAY

III. THE WORD AND THE SPIRIT

"*Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, from within him shall flow rivers of living water.*" (John vii. 37, 38). "*Is there any word from the Lord? And Jeremiah said, There is.*" (Jeremiah xxxvii. 17).

ANY timely message of the Lord to His people will be closely concerned with the Person of the

Holy Spirit. It is probable that our great concern, as we listen for a message for our day, is for a new experience of the Spirit's fulness. The Lord Jesus made the striking promise to all believers that from them would flow rivers of living water, explaining His assertion by the words, "As the scripture hath said" (John vii. 37). The Bible student may search the Old Testament for this particular Scripture, but he will search in vain. It is typical of the Lord Jesus, and of His dealings with us, that He makes us see things in the Bible which we did not know

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

were there. This promise was there all the time, but it needed the Lord Jesus to bring the truth home to us. It is also typical of all spiritual interpretations to bring into prominence not just an isolated statement but a principle which is to be found throughout the whole of the Word of God. In this case the actual verse may be hard to find, yet there are many indications of the spiritual truth here expressed.

A GREAT SCRIPTURAL TRUTH

Surely what the Lord Jesus meant was that this is one of the great messages of the Word of God, namely that whenever a man is in vital touch with heaven, rivers of life flow out from him. This is a truth everywhere apparent. All the Scriptures agree that this is so. A few outstanding cases will perhaps make the matter clearer. Think of Joseph. He was in touch with heaven, even in the pit and in the dungeon, and he became a great minister of life. Think of Isaiah, the man who saw the Lord high and lifted up. What streams of life have flowed, and are still flowing, as a result of his ministry! To-day, more than ever, his words are bringing refreshment and reviving to parched and stricken hearts. It would be easy to multiply instances. This is a great truth, affirmed and illustrated everywhere in the Scriptures.

THE TRUTH CONFIRMED IN EXPERIENCE

The Lord Jesus Himself was the great embodiment of this truth. He implied that the principle could be verified in His own case, when He pre-faced His words with the invitation, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink" (John vii. 37). The Scriptures had said that it would be so, and He was able to demonstrate the reality of which they spoke. Whenever we speak God's word, we should be able to confirm its veracity in our own experience, and to show that what the Scriptures affirm is being fulfilled in our own lives. The Lord Jesus was in touch with the Father in heaven, and so the rivers flowed.

The occasion was the Feast of Tabernacles, the joyful celebration of heavenly fulness, and it was on the last and greatest day of the feast that Jesus made His offer. There were no rivers flowing at that feast, no life streams were pouring from that temple. One of the striking characteristics of John's Gospel is the way in which he contrasts the various Jewish festivals and religious occasions with the living Christ. Those were dead and powerless, an empty mockery of the spiritual truths which they were meant to represent, while in Jesus

Christ the true fulfilment was to be found. If any man thirst, the Lord Jesus could say, let him come, not to the temple with its empty ritual, but unto Me, from whom the water of life is flowing in abundance. The Scriptures had set forth the truth, and this truth had found its living expression in Christ, that thirsty men will have their deepest need satisfied if only they meet the Man who is in touch with heaven.

The next chapter, John viii, demonstrates the truth in action. The woman was sinful, but she was a very needy and a thirsty soul. She was dragged unwillingly to the Lord, an object of shame and condemnation, but in the end it proved that her contact with Him was as of a parched and thirsty traveller coming to a refreshing stream. From His heart flowed rivers of living water; when she met Him, her thirst was absolutely satisfied; she found life and peace. This is what the Scriptures state, and it was proved true. It worked. And now it may work through us. The Lord Jesus announced that what was so wonderfully true in His case is now possible for all believers. He is now exalted, in heaven; by maintaining vital contact with Him we are to prove that our fellowship with heaven produces, through us, rivers of living water flowing out to a thirsty world around.

THE RIVER OF EDEN

There are, however, two passages of Scripture which may have been particularly referred to by the Lord Jesus. Each of them describes a flowing river, and refers in symbolic terms to the fulness of the Holy Spirit. The first is in Genesis, the book of foundations. Here in a few, simple, bold outlines, we have the whole Divine truth set forth (Genesis ii. 10), for Eden, the garden of God's delight, was watered by a river which then streamed out to the world beyond. Geographers may feel that this is an over-simplification, to describe the globe as consisting of a central garden, the fountain-head of a mighty river whose four branches then flowed out to irrigate the rest of the earth. Well, perhaps things have changed since then! In any case the emphasis of the book is on the spiritual principles illustrated by this geographical setting. These principles have certainly not changed. Spiritually, also, it must have seemed far too simple, this declaration in the temple precincts that the comprehensive provision for world need is the life which flows out spontaneously from believing men, who by faith are united to their heavenly Lord. The implication of Christ's words was that the great ecclesiastical system and structure of Juda-

JULY—AUGUST, 1952

ism had entirely failed to minister life to sinful, thirsty men. It was bound to fail, if it had no vital link with heaven. No religious organization or system, however vast and however zealous, can really affect the spiritual death which everywhere abounds. The answer to the world's need is a Man in touch with heaven. The Lord Jesus is that Man. He is the garden of God's delight, from whom flow the streams of living water.

A WORLD MINISTRY

This ministry of life is now committed to His church. The believer is to be the channel of heavenly life. The four heads of the river remind us that the whole world is in view—four being the number which indicates universal dimensions. Of course the first function of the river was to water the garden. A dry garden would have meant dry surroundings. Only those who are drinking deeply of the river themselves can have such a ministry to others. The well-watered garden released mighty streams to all around.

It is important that we keep the whole world in view. God constitutes the church a garden of His delight in order that it may become a centre of testimony and ministry. The Spirit is not given to make something of us, to give us the satisfaction of feeling important, or to make us prominent or notable in the eyes of men. He is given that He may overflow from us to the blessing and enrichment of others. The church must be a well-watered garden, the place of the flowing river, but its true function is only fulfilled when the four heads of the river carry the life to those beyond. The garden is central because of the great purpose to be realized through it. To this the words of the Lord Jesus agree. He affirmed that the Scripture has promised satisfaction to the thirsty soul, but has also promised much more, "*from within him shall flow rivers of living water*".

The garden was planted eastward (Genesis ii. 8). Why eastward? The Tabernacle faced the East, and so did Solomon's Temple. Ezekiel's Temple is also described as having an eastward aspect, while the river which proceeded from it flowed down toward the eastern region (Ezekiel xlvii. 8). Is not this because the East is the place of the sun-rising, and therefore the direction of hope? The river of the Spirit always flows onwards as well as outwards, leading to new horizons of unfolding purpose. It is a striking fact that when men begin to consider the fulness of the Spirit, they almost invariably tend to revert to the past. Consideration of this great matter; prayers and preaching in this

connection; somehow it always seems to hark back to Pentecost as though the great days of the Spirit were passed. How much thought and desire, yes, and how much prayer is concentrated on the one purpose of recovering the great days of Moody or some other great servant of God, and make a tremendous effort to reproduce conditions of past blessing. Now God's garden is planted eastward; it faces out to the future. When things are at their fulness, when the Spirit is released in power among God's people, it is all with a view to new expressions and a further unfolding of the will of God. We must thank God for every encouragement and inspiration to faith which comes from other ages; we should be willing to learn the spiritual principles which men of the past can teach us; but we need to be made aware of the present activities of the Lord which relate to our own time. God is looking onwards, and He calls us to move on with Him in the life flow of the Spirit.

THE RIVER OF EZEKIEL'S VISION

The second Scripture to which the Lord may have been referring was the far more elaborate description given in Ezekiel xlvii. What a river! Ezekiel was a man of visions. He had seen many heavenly wonders. This, however, was so amazing that he could scarcely believe his eyes. In his youth he had lived in Judæa, and presumably knew well the region which he was now called to describe. He must have gazed with astonishment at the incredible transformation which had taken place. No wonder that the angel asked him, "Son of man, hast thou seen this?" The harsh and barren country from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea had become a picture of wonderful fruitfulness. The inhospitable and forbidding scene was completely changed, as the great and holy river rushed down from the House of God. Everything was fresh and fertile, irrigated by the miraculous streams of water. The language seems to suggest something of Ezekiel's amazement at it all. The abundant life on the banks of the river! The teeming life in the waters! The trees, with their ever-fresh foliage and their luscious fruit! The men, spreading their nets in a fisherman's paradise! The whole atmosphere seemed to throb with a sense of abundant life on every hand. What had happened? Vital contact had been made with the Throne of God. The explanation of the whole matter is that "the waters thereof issue out of the sanctuary".

What may have surprised Ezekiel most of all was to discover the objective of the river. The luxuriance and fruit-bearing, all the signs of life

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

and activity on the banks were, in a sense, incidental; it was just what happened on the way. On the way to what? To the concentrated essence of death, the Sea which had defied, and still does defy, every attempt to conquer it. It was as though this river were set on coming to grips with the Dead Sea in order to swallow up its death in an overwhelming tide of life. This is something that no human energy can accomplish. The best that men can do is to extract the salts. It is a long process, to seek to cure the Dead Sea by taking the death out of it. God's method was quicker and much more effective. He poured in life. The prophet was astounded to see the Dead Sea drowned in a torrent of life from the Throne. What a river!

We need to be very practical. Most of us have a Dead Sea situation, which seems to defy all our efforts to deal with it. We may have worked hard to extract the death, may have prayed that the Lord would remove it, but the process seems long and hopeless. The Lord's answer to such a death condition is a positive one—the bringing in of triumphant life. He that believeth in the Lord Jesus, even though he be surrounded by the Dead Sea, *from within him* shall flow such rivers of living water as shall swallow up the death. The Scripture says so. Does it work in our case? Have we proved God's answer to the challenge of death? For we may be sure that God has the answer. His answer is a man or woman in touch with heaven. There is life enough in the heavenly Christ to swallow up all the death element, if only we can be the channels so that the life may flow through us. We are so apt to be obsessed with the cause of the death, and so ready to struggle with it, or to try to get it removed. We so often blame others who appear to be the cause of it. The real test is whether we are sufficiently in touch with the ascended Lord to counter and overcome it by rivers of life. So long as we are truly under the government of the Holy Spirit, and in the place where the Lord wants us to be, we can lay claim to the promise that from within us shall flow rivers of living water.

THE RIVER THROUGH JEREMIAH

In the last article we considered Jeremiah's message concerning the need for the working of the Cross. In his prophecies the Spirit is not mentioned, but he was truly a man from whom the rivers flowed. The Lord's promise is by no means limited only to preachers. They are included, but the offer is to "*any man*". The adversaries could silence Jeremiah's preaching, but they could never

stem the flow of the river through him. The superficial reader may question whether there was much of a river flowing through Jeremiah. The vision which Ezekiel described will explain this matter. At the actual place from which the water proceeded there was a very small flow indeed, a mere trickle. What mattered was not the immediate and obvious amount of water which came from under the threshold of the house, but the eventual flood in its full development. We must not judge by the beginning, but look beyond. In Jeremiah's case there really was a trickle. It may not have seemed much, but it was very real. Ask Baruch, his friend and helper, if life was ministered to him through Jeremiah. Ask even Zedekiah, the king who was afraid to obey the prophet's word. They would have witnessed to the fact that, even in his rejection and suffering, Jeremiah was a man from whom the Spirit flowed. The life may not have seemed great in its extent, but that was only the beginning. Just as Ezekiel's river increased in depth and power, so did the stream of spiritual life which flowed from Jeremiah's ministry.

Take Ezekiel himself. Is it not reasonable to suppose that he owed much, humanly speaking, to Jeremiah? We know that while the younger man was with the captives in Babylon Jeremiah sent letters to the Lord's faithful people there, encouraging and exhorting them to stand true to the Lord. We must take Jeremiah and Ezekiel together. It is quite wrong to contrast them, considering Jeremiah as the man of judgment, with a dismal and depressing ministry, and thinking of Ezekiel as the cheerful messenger of hope, as though we would choose to be like Ezekiel, the man of the Spirit, and shun Jeremiah with his burden concerning judgment. No, they worked together, even though they lived so far apart. A great deal of the ministry of Ezekiel depended, humanly speaking, on the ministry of Jeremiah.

Then we must consider Daniel and his friends, who were also in Babylon. Through all the long years of the captivity, in spite of the Dead Sea of worldliness, human glory and powerless religion all around them, these men were kept in abundant spiritual life. The river flowed through them. Spiritually it was the same river which was due to Jeremiah's faithful ministry, and it certainly had the same end in view.

The captivity was over. Amid scenes of enthusiasm and rejoicing the remnant were preparing to return to the land. The river of life was flowing on, deepening rapidly now, and growing wider and fuller. God was turning the captivity as the streams

JULY—AUGUST, 1952

in the South. The mountains broke forth into singing, the trees of the field clapped their hands, the thorns turned into fir trees, and the briars were changed into myrtles. What a majestic movement of life flowed on through those desert regions, bringing hope of recovery to the desolated land. It all happened "that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished" (Ezra i. 1). This, then, was the same river which had seemed to trickle so pathetically from Jeremiah, broadened into a great and mighty stream.

And the river flows ever on. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews was at an advanced point, for him there were rivers to swim in, the great dispensation of the Spirit's life and fullness. When he sat down to communicate to the believers of his day (and ours) the great wonder and glory of the heavenly life into which the church has come in Christ, he pondered as to how best this might be expressed. It was just here that the Lord called in Jeremiah, with his heartening message concerning the new covenant. This is the secret of abundant and overflowing blessing, an inward experience of new life, with the laws of God written on the heart and the knowledge of God filling the life. Jeremiah's river had not dried up. On the contrary, the apostle needed Jeremiah in order to present and explain the glories of the dispensation in which we now find ourselves, so that through the Hebrew Letter a prophet who was despised and rejected in his own day is now vindicated by a ministry which ranges the whole world, leading men into ever-deepening experiences of heavenly truth. The whole church is now enriched by Jeremiah's ministry. Yet if ever a man was surrounded by a spiritual Dead Sea, he was, and if ever a man felt personally inadequate to face the continual challenge, that man was Jeremiah. His secret is a very simple one—"because the waters thereof issue out of the sanctuary".

THE RIVER AND THE ALTAR

This brings us to the great difference between the river of Eden and that of Ezekiel's vision. The narrative in Genesis ii describes the time before sin had entered in, the time when the garden was indeed God's delight, for it was the place of unclouded fellowship between Himself and man. From such a garden of communion, blessing could flow freely out to the four corners of the earth. Ezekiel's ministry, however, was concerned with

a people whose fellowship with God had been marred by disobedience and sin, so that the place of communion was no longer a garden, but a temple, and a temple whose outstanding feature was its altar. The temple had no meaning without the altar, for all its values were based upon the sacrifices. The prophet tells us in his vision that the waters flowed from beside the altar, which only means that in spiritual experience the Holy Spirit is closely associated with the Cross of the Lord Jesus.

A study of the dimensions will reveal that this was a very large altar; its importance can hardly be exaggerated. We must not expect the flowing out of the river if we are not prepared to be identified with our Lord in His Cross. The position of the altar, both in the Tabernacle and in the Temples, was most significant. It stood at the very entrance, challenging everyone who wished to go in. Presumption was excluded, and so was every form of self-righteousness or self-sufficiency. Entrance was free enough: all could go in provided that they would do so by way of the altar. Ezekiel seems to lay special stress on this principle. "*But when the people of the land shall come before the Lord in the appointed feasts, he that entereth by the way of the north gate to worship shall go forth by the way of the south gate; and he that entereth by the way of the south gate shall go forth by the way of the north gate: he shall not return by the way of the gate whereby he came in, but shall go forth straight before him*" (Ezekiel xlvi. 9). There must be no drawing back at the altar, no turning away from its challenge and its cost.

Ezekiel could not give his revelation of the House and river until the old, corrupt order at Jerusalem had been thoroughly dealt with in judgment. He was dumb until then. But when the news arrived that the judgment had fallen, that everything which had failed and betrayed the Lord was brought low and utterly devastated, then the Lord opened Ezekiel's mouth to proclaim the new place of God's delight, where everything speaks of His glory. If only the Cross is allowed to do its full work among the people of God, the rivers of living fullness will flow out.

It was this message of the Scriptures which the Lord Jesus took up and applied to believers of the present dispensation. It is surely a timely message for to-day. It is greatly needed. And it is still gloriously true.

H. F.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

FOLLOWERS OF THE LAMB

III. THE PATHWAY OF THE LAMB

Reading: Rev. xiv. 1 - 5; John i. 29, 35 - 37.

THIS is the second actual view of the Lamb personally in the whole revelation. We were seeing in our previous meditation that the first is of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, taking us back to those counsels of God which were secured against all the subsequent eventualities, the breaking in of adverse forces and of sin. Here is the second view of the Lamb personally. In the fulness of the times God sent His Son. Of course there has been typology and prophecy pre-visioning the Lamb. The features of the Lamb have been set forth in numerous symbolic ways in the Old Testament and prophetic utterances. But this is the second view of Him personally and this is marked by a twofold 'Behold!' "*Behold, the Lamb of God!*"

The first is a fuller utterance—"The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world". That seems to have been uttered in public. At that time the multitudes were coming to Jordan to be baptized of John and in a public and general and open way John made his declaration—"Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" This is a world matter.

But the second occasion, where the final clause is not repeated, is apparently to disciples, and now it is John looking upon Jesus as He walks and he says to these disciples, "*Behold, the Lamb of God!*" There is that presentation of the Lamb for the world in relation to sin and sin-bearing, but there is also the presentation of the Lamb to followers as the pattern for their walk—"He looked upon Jesus as he walked, and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God!" It was not only as the sin-bearer; it was "*Behold the Lamb*" as He walked, and I think that takes us right up to Rev. xiv. 4. The hundred and forty-four thousand have, of course, beheld Him as their sin-bearer, but they have also beheld Him as One to follow closely all the way, following the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. Whilst we may be rejoicing in the first beholding, rejoicing in the Lord as our sin-bearer, I trust it can also be said of us all that we are beholding as John beheld on the second day. There was a first day in our experience of the Lamb, there was a first beholding. But there is a second day and a day after for beholding, beholding with a view first of all to seeing how the Lamb

walks, and then to following. The one hundred and forty-four thousand were those who had done both.

GOD'S LAMB

"Behold, the Lamb of God!" We will recall the words of Abraham to Isaac—"God will provide himself the lamb" (Gen. xxii. 8). God's Lamb. He is God's Lamb before He is ours, God's Lamb before He is anything else. God had need of a Lamb, for in His Son, in the great vocation and service, or transaction, of a Lamb, the primary thing was accomplished of God's rights being honoured. God has rights, and those rights are the rights of His eternal conception of what man and the world, the creation and the universe ought to be—seeing that it belongs to God, seeing that it came from God, seeing that it was conceived in the heart of God. He associated certain ideas and ideals, standards and ways, a certain nature, with His creation, and He has a right to all that, and His rights have been taken from Him. He is not having His rights in man's nature and in man's life, in the world and in the creation, since that interference, since that terrible diversion from God. The Lamb of God, God's Lamb, as the very first thing in His work, recovers and establishes the rights of God.

God has the right to absolute, unquestioning submission. That right has been taken from Him, and we know—oh, we know so well; it is the very plague of our hearts—how in our very constitution there is that lack of submission to God. What difficulties, what battles, what agonies, we go through in coming into absolute submission to God. It is our nature—it is not our deliberate, conscious insubordination, rebellion or will against God, but it is there in spite of ourselves, in spite of all our desires; it is there, this unmanageable something that is in the very nature of the creation which does not submit to God. Utter and immediate obedience to God—that is His right; and disobedience is the very nature of man, it is shot through this universe. Selfhood—we call it selfishness; it is selfhood. It would take a long time to try to compass the whole round of Self-aspects. The Lamb—the very designation, the very word, the very idea, is the opposite of all that—it is the very picture of submission, obedience.

JULY—AUGUST, 1952

selflessness. God gets His rights of submission, obedience, selflessness, in the One known as the Lamb.

THE LAMB LAYING DOWN HIS SOUL

In Him as the Lamb, as we have previously said, we can so clearly see the complete reversal of the whole course of fallen nature, the thought of God for man recovered, humanity reconstituted on another principle—that of the Lamb; a changed nature. It is not our nature to lay down our lives. Remember that that very phrase about laying down the life can equally well be translated "we ought to lay down our souls for the brethren" (I John iii. 16). We sometimes use the word 'life' in that connection so that it means what, of course, it is meaning for many to-day on this earth—just dying a martyr's death, laying down our life for the Gospel of Christ in a single act. But laying down our soul is a lifelong act, an every day act, a thing which challenges our very disposition, yes, our constitution, for we are immediately affected and influenced by how men of this world will think. They will say it is meek, weak, namby-pamby—you ought to stand up for your rights, you ought to fight for your ends; that is the way of the world. Take a view of the world to-day and see what that is producing. But the Lamb laid down His soul. When He was reviled, He suffered it, He endured it, He answered nothing. "*As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth*" (Isa. liii. 7). That takes some doing, that represents a strength that is not in you and in me naturally. We have another nature. You say that is weak? I say there is no strength like it. You do not know what strength is until you can stand right up against the whole nature of this world and its judgments and standards and take the opposite view and the opposite course. He did that. That is the Lamb, laying down His soul.

To say to these feelings of ours, these uprisings of our souls, these strong hot feelings, these resentful feelings—to say to them, Now then, you get down, you stay under—that sometimes means a real battle when you are taking everything into account, as to what it is going to involve of cost for the time being, until God vindicates that attitude.

"Behold the Lamb": follow the Lamb. The way of the Lamb may be the way of the Cross and the crucifixion of the natural life continually, but the end of that way is the Throne, and the Throne is not some merely geographical scene or spot. Do not interpret thrones in the Bible literally. It may

not interest you at all to sit upon a literal throne—it does not me—but to come to a place of spiritual ascendancy where there are values, where there is wealth, where there are riches, dignity, strength, honour and glory to be dispensed to others, that is something, that is the Throne—the end of the course of the Lamb, the way of the Cross.

BEHOLDING THE LAMB EVERY DAY

Behold the Lamb walking, to-day and to-morrow and the day after.

So many Christians have stopped with the first day. They have beheld the Lamb, the sin-bearer, and they rejoice, as we ought to rejoice, in Him as the sin-bearer. We have stopped with that view, and to-day and to-morrow and the next day and all the days following we still keep our eyes on day one, forgetting that every day there is to be a beholding of the Lamb in very practical matters. It will require that you and I many times have to withdraw from the scene, as being too much for our natures, and get away with the Lord for a little while and fight that battle out—the battle of our souls, of our reactions, of our provocation—fight it out and get clear and come out with the Spirit of the Lamb, leaving it in the hands of the Lord to give an answer in His own time. That is following the Lamb. The Lamb repeatedly withdrew to be with His Father because of the situation, because of what He was meeting. He fought out the battle right to the end. He went a little further. "*He went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass away from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; remove this cup from me: howbeit not what I will, but what thou wilt*" (Mark xiv. 35-36). The cost was great. He fought it out and came forth serene, with an amazing serenity, resultant from that secret battle with His own soul. "*He poured out his soul unto death*" (Isa. liii. 12).

THE LAMB AT JORDAN

So God's Lamb is one that is wholly unto God. We see here two aspects of that: firstly, as He came to Jordan to be baptized of John, and John said, "*Behold, the Lamb of God*". That is the initial and consummate attitude and committal. The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world is now declaring publicly, in the world, that that has, from eternity, been His attitude toward God's interests. "*I am come to do thy will*". I have not come to debate it, to question it; I have not come

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

to contemplate it; I have come committed to it, fully, utterly committed. And Jordan was but a declaration; it was not an acceptance of the will of God—that had been done before the world was, the Lamb was slain then. Will you just dwell upon that statement—“*The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*”. What does that mean? It only means this: that in the counsels of God, when the great design of God, that eternal purpose, was being ‘talked over’ (speaking after the manner of men), and decided upon, then the Father said to the Son, ‘You know what is going to happen, you know the challenge that is coming, you know the result of that interference, that it will be an utmost cost to secure what we are talking about now, it will cost us everything’; and the Son said, ‘Father, I will pay the price’. That is the slaying of the Lamb. The Father said, ‘Very good, we will share it together, it will be My cost and Your cost’. And there it was that “God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son”. And when the Son came into the world, He was only taking publicly, on this earth, the position that He had taken then, and declaring it. It was an utmost committal, a consummate attitude, declared at the Jordan.

THE LAMB AS HE WALKED

And then again, it was a matter of beholding Him “as he walked”. The position that He had taken was the position in which He remained every day, meeting the cost of it. Every kind of test came to the position that He had taken. The world tested Him, and I do not mean only the world as a sphere and the people in it, but the spirit of this world, the ideas and conceptions and standards of this world, all so contrary to His. The prince of this world betrays the standard of this world when he suggests to Him that, by falling down and worshipping him, He should receive all the world’s kingdoms. The spirit of compromise—‘If only you will drop your level a bit and forsake your utter and ultimate standard, if only you will do a little compromising, you can get so much more; do not be so utter, so absolute, so consummate, it is not to your interests’. That is the world. He was up against that all the time. He was tested by the world spirit, the world’s concept, which is so completely different from that of the Lamb.

He was tested by the evil powers. Very often the evil forces come nakedly, not through men and not through things. They seem somehow or other to break right in upon us, apart from other people and apart from other things, and we sense an awful working of evil. It seems as though the evil

powers have got inside of us, ourselves. At other times they are in other people, provoking us; now they somehow seem to be working *within*. ‘Christian, dost thou see them, how they work within?’ Yes, they do; that is how it seems. I am not talking about demon possession in the case of Christians, but it seems sometimes as though they have their grip upon our very vitals. He knew soul-travail in conflict with the evil powers; oh, if it were known what a secret history the Lord Jesus had! We only read of His doings and His sayings and see some of the incidents in His life, but there must have been a tremendous secret history, battles and conflicts and sufferings and issues being fought out. He was here for that, but the position taken initially was maintained day by day in His walk, in His going, in His progress, and we must constantly in every situation follow the Lamb.

Thank God, we have not to fight this out alone. The Spirit Himself helpeth our infirmity, we have One alongside, we have the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, we have grace which is sufficient. But nevertheless, it is a bitter fight sometimes—this laying down of the soul, this selflessness. “*These are they which FOLLOW the Lamb whithersoever he goeth*”.

FIRSTFRUITS UNTO THE LAMB

I close by repeating that these are said to be the “firstfruits unto the Lamb”. That is, in them God’s rights, God’s thoughts, God’s desires, God’s intentions have their first full expression. These are they who have met in an initial way the blaze, the heat, of ripening suffering, spiritual suffering, and have responded. These are they who have passed along that peculiar way where others have not passed. I cannot explain this; I cannot tell you why it is that the Lord does this—the operation of the principle of election seems to be here also. Somehow or other God has laid hold of certain people to satisfy Him in a certain way, and He takes them through certain experiences deeper than others. How sorry we feel for people like that. We cannot do anything about it, we cannot help them. We see them going through unusual difficulties and adversities. Somehow or other, if anything can go wrong, it goes wrong with them; if there is any trouble, they are the people who get it. Now of course that may not be exclusive to such as we are thinking about. There are a lot of foolish people about who get into all the trouble that there is going. I am not speaking of those. But there is no mistaking the fact that there are people on this earth who have peculiar and unusual experiences under the hand of God, and who are

JULY —AUGUST, 1952

sometimes tempted to cry out against that hand, cry out with the Psalmist, "*Is his lovingkindness clean gone for ever? . . . Hath God forgotten to be gracious?*" Oh, the agony! Not every Christian goes that way. Multitudes of the Lord's children have an easier way than that. But here are these in our midst who so suffer. What is the explanation?"

I think it is the hundred and forty-four thousand—of course, not necessarily that actual number, but a marked out company, to be unto God's satisfaction as a firstfruits unto the Lamb. I do

not see any other explanation. Maybe we shall be given more light upon it, but I do feel that this touches many of our questions and problems. It is God's intention to bring near to Himself, by unusual methods and means, some to serve Him and His satisfaction in a peculiar way. That, I think, explains this company, and it may explain something in our experience. The Lord make us in any case those who follow the Lamb—as we have already seen, it is in the present tense—who *keep on following* the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.

T. A-S.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

THE GOSPEL OF THIS HOUSE CALLED "ME"

V. THE FURNACE

IN England not so many of the houses have furnaces as in America, and 'central heating' is also more rare, although it is on the increase. But when we come to the House called 'Me'—which means the body of every human being in the world—there is always a furnace and central heating. The simple truth is that we are all 'warm-blooded' creatures. There is heat in our blood from the day we are born till the day we die. The proper heat for every human being is ninety eight point four; we call that normal temperature. If it goes either above or below it means that there is something not right with us, and much above or below means something very wrong; indeed, it may be a matter of life or death. Isn't it wonderful how, when we are well, the heat keeps just at that level? Sometimes, for some reason—hot weather or strenuous exercise—we feel so hot that we are sure that our blood has gone above the normal temperature. But no; when the thermometer is put under our tongue or our arm-pit, there it is, 98.4°. Sometimes in cold weather we feel so cold that we are sure our blood has frozen. But, try again with the thermometer. There it is—98.4°. Of course, when we are not well and have 'fever' up goes the blood-heat and great care has to be taken, for this may be dangerous. Or, if we are weak after a bad illness, our fires may be burning low, and the blood-heat below normal.

Have you noticed that you usually feel more like eating in cold weather than in hot? Well, you see, food is fuel for the fire. It feeds the blood. In hot weather we don't need to help our blood to keep warm. In cold we do need to give this help. Have you noticed that in hot weather you want to

sit down and rest more, and in cold weather you want to be on the move? What does this mean? Well, all the 'little people', of whom we have spoken in our earlier talks, when they feel the hot sun, send a message to headquarters—our heads—'I say there, its getting a bit too hot outside, we shall all frizzle soon!' Then headquarters sends a message to legs—'Just you walk slowly over to that nice shady tree and sit down quietly for a little while till you cool off!' If it is very cold, the 'little people' send their S.O.S. to headquarters—'It's getting pretty cold, we shall all be frozen soon, can't you do something about it?' Quickly the answer comes back to legs and arms—'Get busy, boys, jump around, clap those hands, make a run for it!' And so, as we get on the move, we find ourselves warming up and helping the blood to keep running round our bodies like warm water.

If we want the warmth of our bodies kept up we must eat plenty of good food. If we don't want to get that nasty too-hot sick feeling we must not be greedy and eat too much.

Well, what has all this to do with the Christian life? Quite a lot! When we become God's children by being what Jesus called "born again" or "born anew" we find that there is in our hearts a new wonderful warm love for Him and for others. This love in our hearts is the proof that we are alive in the kingdom of God, just as our warm blood proves that we are alive in the kingdom of men and women, boys and girls.

We can, of course, catch a chill or get a fever in this matter as we can in our bodies. If we neglect our spiritual food—God's Word, and Christian fellowship—our spiritual temperature will become

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

low, we shall lose the warmth of our love. If we allow ourselves to keep bad company and breathe bad spiritual air we may find our love going after evil things and a destroying fever take hold of us—a wrong passion, like a high temperature—taking the place of that beautiful love of God, and so we find that we do not love Him, His people, and His things as we once did. So let us put the fuel on the fire, that is, 'feed on God's Word'. Let us breathe the pure air of heaven—that is, keep our times of prayer guarded and regular. Let us have good ex-

ercise—that is, seek to serve Him as much as we can. And let us rest in His love, and not get hot and bothered with feverish worry and care.

If we do these things we shall be spiritually healthy and strong boys and girls.

'Keep the love fires burning.'

"Keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 21)

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13. 35).

'Interpreter'

THE ETERNAL REWARD OF LABOUR AND SUFFERING

Reading: Numbers xxvii. 1-7;
Joshua xv. 13-19; Romans viii. 17.

I have just one thought that I want to pass to you here. It relates to inheritance. In the New Testament that word is found to compass quite a lot. In the first place, inheritance is there shown to be a matter of birthright; then it is extended to a bequest, a gift; and then still further it applies to reward for labour, for service. It is in this last connection that my word lies.

While it is fully recognized—not for a moment would we detract one iota from the grand fact—that everything is of grace: even enablement to work for reward is of grace—while that is true, this other aspect of inheritance, or heirship, as a matter of reward for service and suffering, is very fully revealed. Inheriting by labouring, entering into the fruits of labour; inheriting by warfare, entering into the spoil of battle; entering into suffering and being recompensed for suffering. It is surely inherent in labour, in suffering, that there should be some gratification, and the gratification is the wages. While we know that it has been grace that has enabled to suffer and to labour, nevertheless we *have* suffered and we *have* laboured and we *have* battled, and there is something for that, by the faithfulness of God—there are wages, there is that sense of achievement. There is no greater gratification than to know that, through labour and suffering, something has been achieved.

INWARD RELATIONSHIP TO THE OBJECT IN VIEW

It is just there that I put my finger. The very heart of suffering, the very heart of co-heirship with Christ, is this wonderful sense of inward relationship to the object in view, inward relation-

ship to the inheritance, inward relationship to the result, the reward. And that is the explanation of suffering, of labour, of conflict. The Lord does not just give to us without cost. He always brings us into the cost of that which He is going to give. It will be grace all the way through, but He brings us into the cost of the reward. In the end, let us repeat, we shall acknowledge that any part we have had in it of suffering, labour, warfare, has been infinitely outweighed by what He has given, and that is where grace will always be our theme; but I do believe that mingled with our gratitude will be this sense that the Lord enabled us to achieve, that He did not act without us and apart from us. He brought us into it, and there will be this deep, inward, heart-relatedness to the result, that we share with Him the gratification. That is the very heart of suffering, I believe.

Now why am I saying this? Where was this born? how was this born? Well, in a very practical way. I have just returned from a time in the United States, and it has not by any means been an easy time—very much otherwise. But we have been profoundly grateful all the time that you dear friends were so many hours ahead of us. In the Eastern part of the States you were five hours ahead. When we got further West you were six hours ahead, and we constantly reminded ourselves that your prayer gatherings were ahead of us. They had gone before and we were just following on, in our own prayer and in the conflict and the pressure: following on, and, as we believe, being carried through. And there came to me this: Those dear friends are right in the battle, and if there is anything here that really is for the Lord, if anything results for the Lord, it belongs to them, quite as much as it belongs to us. It is theirs; in a certain sense they will own this; it will be, so to speak, their property. They have battled for it, suffered for it, endured for it, toiled

JULY—AUGUST, 1952

for it. They have gone on ploughing the way, pioneering the way, and it is theirs.

That is the thought right at the heart of this word, that there is something that becomes ours through suffering. Yes, it is the Lord's, and it is all of His grace, but it is ours.

SUFFERING IS A PURIFYING THING

And that means surely that what we have laboured for, suffered for, travailed for, becomes something over which we are very jealous. Suffering for anything is a very purifying thing. Take the matter of the child for which there has been suffering, travail. Well, other people who have not so suffered and travailed and gone through for the child can see all the defects and pass all the criticisms and arrive at their judgments, good or bad, about that child, and just stand apart and say their say about the child. But the mother may see very little of that. There is something for the mother which transcends all that. 'Oh yes, you may say that, but that child is very precious to me. I have suffered for that child, that child is my child, the child of my heart and the child of my travail, and, while I may see its faults, there is something which covers them all, there is the jealousy of a love born of suffering'.

Now you see what I am getting at. There is nothing that is precious to the Lord, and which He would make the property of His people, but there will be suffering for it. It will only become their property—in that sense—as they suffer for it, and then woe betide who criticizes that! If you are detached from a thing, if you are detached from a testimony, from a work of God, you can do all the criticizing you like. You have no inward heart-relationship to it, and so you pass your judgments upon it. But if you are in it and you have suffered, if it has been a costly thing where you are concerned, then you are seeing more than all the failings, more than all those faults. The people who can criticize like that and judge and point out faults are the people who have not suffered.

On the other side, we may know all the terms, all the phraseology, all the doctrine, all the truth, and it may be just objective, something we have heard; we have lived in the midst of it, it is familiar to us. But what the Lord will do if that is to become ours is to take us into travail over the matter. He will relate that thing to our hearts in a deep, inward way, so that none of us will be able to say, 'I know all about that, I have heard all about that, I could tell you all that you could tell me about that'. The Lord would so work in a

costly, deep and painful way in relation to that, to make it ours through travail, that we are brought into a new position. We are not spectators, looking on, criticizing; we are on the inside, looking out, defending. We are jealous over it. Suffering is a great purifying thing. It destroys selfishness. It destroys that self-interest that is the cause of so much of the trouble. It makes us in a disinterested way jealous for what is of God. Yes, suffering purifies, and suffering makes this deep, inward link.

It gives an extra feature to things. That extra feature where we cannot just be occupied with faults and be people of a criticizing attitude, the extra feature with a love which covers a multitude of sins. We have suffered together. When we suffer together, what a lot we get over! We have gone through it together, perhaps through the years. We have been in the fire together, and there is a love, there is a jealousy which, let people say what they will about the other persons, simply rises up in us because we have suffered.

JOINT-HEIRS WITH CHRIST THROUGH SUFFERING

"Heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him" (Rom. viii. 17). This is not just an official thing, something that is a gratuitous gift in a mechanical way, as much as to say, 'Well, you have done a bit of work; here are your wages'. That thing has been wrought in us through the suffering and the cost and the warfare and the labour, and there is this sense of an inward co-heirship with Christ, if we suffer. It will be a very blessed thing, to us who know how much we are dependent upon the grace of God, how little we can even bear without the support of His grace; it will be a wonderful thing when at last He says, 'This is the reward of your suffering'. We shall say, 'Well, after all, it was our *light* affliction—in the light of the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. How have we earned this?' But there will be some gratification in recognizing that the Lord has taken account of what we have gone through, and has brought us into a sense of His own gratification, and given us to feel—'Well, it was not in vain, it was not for nought'.

Why did I read those passages in the Old Testament from Numbers and Joshua? They both have to do with inheritance. I read them for this reason, that here were people who, in the first place, were concerned, were jealous, for the inheritance. And then they were people who were prepared to enter

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

into the cost of the inheritance, after which, when they had got it, it was theirs. Yes, it was the Lord's, but it was theirs. Do you see what I mean? It is theirs. And many of us have gone through the years in toil, in suffering, in labour and warfare in the Lord's interests, and if there is anything that comes out of that at all, it is ours, in this sense—that we are jealous over it with a right kind of jealousy. It belongs to us in the Lord. Yes, it is the Lord's, but it belongs to us in the Lord, the fruit of suffering and of travail and of cost. Your faithfulness in prayer, and in prayer-gatherings—it is not without cost that you continue like that. Your faithfulness in the upholding of those who go out—it costs. Taking the years over, it is not without price if there is anything. The Lord has given it to you as your inheritance; that is yours. All that eternal spiritual value is yours in Christ. Now look after it, cherish it, watch jealously over it, and from all attacks defend it. If only we had this inward sense of relatedness to everything that costs, what a difference it would make, how less ready we should be to see the defects and the faults!

The Lord bring us to understand that the mean-

ing of the conflict and of the suffering, from His standpoint, is not only—and I say this quite reverently—not only in order to get something for Him. It is because He wants us in an inward relatedness to it, as a very part of ourselves. I believe that is the very essence of this joint-heirship with Jesus Christ. What does it mean to inherit if we suffer? Surely it means—'This is what you have earned through the grace of God. Here it is: you have paid for this in fellowship with Christ'. I do not understand all this in the New Testament about 'suffering together with Him', 'filling up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ for His Body's sake, which is the Church'—I do not understand unless it is this, that the Lord wants us not just as bits of a machine to work out some piece of work for Him. He wants a real heart-relatedness: so that, as we suffer with Him—and we are suffering with Him, there is no doubt about that—as we suffer with Him, we shall be gratified with Him. Glorified—yes, but gratified; the deep sense of gratification that we had a share in this. The Lord give us a right attitude toward all the cost.

T. A-S.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

"But solid food is for fullgrown men, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil" (Heb. v. 14).

"All chastening seemeth for the present to be not joyous but grievous: yet afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit unto them that have been exercised thereby, even the fruit of righteousness" (Heb. xii. 11).

THAT word 'exercise' is the word that includes what I have in my heart. The word means what it says. If you heard the Greek word for this English word 'exercised', you would at once recognize another English word. It would, of course, have been impossible for the translators to put the other one in, as you will see, but the Greek word sounds almost exactly like our English word 'gymnastics'. If you like to put it in here you can—'to those who have been through the gymnastics in relation to this matter of full growth'. 'Exercised' does mean something like that—those who have undergone gymnastics in relation to development.

THE OBJECT OF SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

If you look to see the object of this exercise, you will discover that it has to do with just one thing—

but a very great thing. It is not just development, getting big; it is what we call *capacity*—that is, ability, or being able for things. That is the Divine object in this exercise, quite clearly set forth in this letter. And capacity, as I am sure you will agree, is a very vital matter. Whether it is in the natural realm or in the spiritual, it does amount to something to have capacity—to have ability. It is a very distressing thing to find how few, even of the Lord's people, have real spiritual capacity. You will see what that means as we go on. But let us get the object of this exercise in view, that we may make no mistake. It is not just to *be* something, but to *be able for* something—that is capacity. In gymnastics you can do it for its own sake, just to develop yourself, just to be something, but the real object is to be able to do things, to be capable of much more.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE RELATED TO AN AFTERWARD

But here is a strange thing. This is so related to an "afterward". You notice it is afterward that the values of this exercise, of this increased capacity, are to be found. There may be, of course, immediate "afterward"s—there are—but there is always

JULY—AUGUST, 1952

the great "afterward": for what we find is that, just when people are beginning to have a bit of capacity—because it takes a long time with most of us—it is time to go home. The gymnasium closes down, we go to the Lord. Life all along has been one continuous exercise. There has been no 'let-up' in the exercise. We do not do it for a term and then work out the values for the rest of our lives. Here we are, those of us who have been on the way some time, and are on the last lap—we are still in the gymnasium, and it seems as though we are going to be there to the end. This whole matter of increased capacity continues to our last day, and the last breath of our last day, on this earth. Then what about it? There must be a big afterward, or life is an enigma, a deep and terrible enigma: so that the Scripture does come in with much emphasis and abundant evidence that all this is for a big afterward. It is capacity for something, ability to do, in the 'ages of the ages'.

Now that opens up a very large realm, and I am not going to enter into it. All I am saying is that it must be so—or I, for one, cannot understand why we cannot get this over quickly, and then for the rest of our time just be doing the thing for which we have been prepared. But the preparation goes on and on and ever on, and it will never cease while we are here.

THE REALM OF SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

What is the realm of this exercise? Here it speaks of having the senses exercised. Well, of course, that is very simple and easily understood. In our natural, physical man we have five senses. We have our sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. Those are the five senses of our physical natural life. But there is also an inner man called the "hidden man of the heart", and that inward man has what corresponds to the outer man's five senses. There is a faculty of spiritual sight, of spiritual hearing, of spiritual smelling or sensing, of spiritual taste and spiritual touch, and these senses are very important to the life of the inward man—yes, more important even than the senses of the physical man.

We know how we feel the tragedy of people who have lost any of those outward senses. It is a great loss: it is an imperfect life, a life of limitation. But it is equally true of the inward man. To be without spiritual sight is a tragic loss and a terrible limitation; or without spiritual hearing, that capacity for answering to the Spirit—"he that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith": if there is no capacity for hearing, that is a desperate

situation. What loss there is if there is no sensing—sensing as in the matter of smell, so that you at once scent things. I know how wrongly that has been used, in an everlasting attempt to scent heresy and fault and wrong, but there is a right faculty of spiritual scent which is very important. I believe it was to that that reference was made concerning our Lord—"his scent shall be in the fear of the Lord" (Isa. xi. 3, A.R.M.)—quick of scent, right on the mark in scenting what the Lord wanted. And how true it was of His heavenly life: what it saved Him to scent the enemy and what the enemy was up to, to scent what the Father wanted and when He did not want things. It is important to be quick of scent. And so with our taste and with our touch—our contact, and what we register by contact.

This is a very real inward man, and these are the senses which form the basis of spiritual capacity: these are the things to be exercised, to be 'put through it' for increase and development. In Hebrews xii you know that the Apostle is speaking about Sonship, and then in verse 9 he uses the phrase "the Father of our spirits" (R.V.M.). 'We have had fathers of our flesh and they saw to it that our fleshly, our physical, senses were developed, that we were kept up to the mark on knowing right and wrong in the natural realm; they taught us there what was true and what was false'. Now we have a Father of our spirits, and it is our spiritual faculties and senses that are the object of His concern. He is concentrating upon the development of capacity in spiritual seeing, and spiritual hearing, and spiritual sensing and tasting and touching. This is what is meant by the full-grown man.

THE NATURE OF THE EXERCISE

Then we come to this exercise. What is the nature of the exercise—if you like, of the gymnastics?—for the Lord does 'put us through it'! Some of you may not have been through gymnastics. I remember the very first time I went into a gymnasium as a youngster, and a vaulting-horse was put in front of me and I was told that I had to take it at a bound. I had never tried that before. I was scared! But I was put through it, I was not let off. No running round that horse, no running underneath it; I had to clear it, and I had to go on till I could make a clean show of it. And in every part of that gymnasium it was the same. It was terrible for a time, but capacity grew with exercise. This word "chastening" means that. We have such an idea that chastening means thrashing. It does not. It is child-training, it is

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

discipline, it is gymnastics. It is being put through it, so that these senses may be developed and capacity increased.

The point is this—that there is no development unless you are given something beyond your capacity. It is true in every realm. It means that the Lord is constantly putting you into situations beyond your capacity. If it is a matter of seeing, and you cannot see, what are you going to do—when you just cannot see what the Lord means, what the Lord is after, what He is doing? Give it up? Say, ‘I cannot see’—that is an end of it—and go home? Of course not! We are there for that faculty to be developed and capacity increased. Have we not already proved that through many a dark way? We just cannot see or understand, but we have at least learned something of the ways and mind of the Lord. And in every other way too we are put into positions beyond our capacity. Does that comfort you? Are you out of your depth to-day? Are you in situations that you just cannot cope with? The explanation is in Hebrews xii.

There is a very great cost bound up with capacity—that is what I find. There have been people of whom we have despaired. We have wondered if ever they really would see, whether they would ever grow at all. They seemed to stay for so long in exactly the same place and with the same measure, and we have despaired. And then the Lord has taken them into a very deep place, breaking and shattering and emptying: and before they are through, things have changed inwardly: they have got a new knowledge of the Lord: they have come out with something which we had despaired of their ever reaching. There is something there now; there is the possibility now that they are going to count for something more. They are *seeing*.

I do not think there is any other way for increasing capacity. Capacity is a costly thing. We had better face it: every little bit of increase means agony. There is a big afterward in view. “All chastening seemeth for the present to be not joyous, but grievous”—and do not expect it to be otherwise—but afterward, and maybe, in measure, in the afterward here, we may be of greater value to the Lord, as He puts us through His school.

Yet, even so, as I said at the beginning, the work goes on to the end. And then what? Well, we may leave something behind for the profit of others, but surely that is not the end. No, there is the great afterward. You notice that this letter puts so much emphasis upon going on to the end, continuing to the end. One thing that we learn in the Lord’s school is this—that we must never foreclose on God: we must not accept an end until He says it is an end. Let me put that in another way. How often there comes an afterward, when we thought there was going to be no afterward. We had thought it was all at an end, and then there comes an afterward, and we reproach ourselves for giving up too soon, before we ought to have given up. We give up in our spirits and we cease to run with patience. We go through a black, dark time when we seem to have been brought to the end and there is no more, and the enemy seeks to make us accept that. ‘This is the awful end of everything’. And we find, like Abraham and his horror of great darkness, that when it seemed that it was the end of everything, it was only the beginning of something more of the Lord—something far greater—a new beginning. So we hold on, realising that this costly way is a preparation for larger values, though it be “for the present . . . not joyous, but grievous”.

T. A-S.

A PECULIAR VESSEL

“FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS”

Reading: 1 Samuel i.

SPIRITUAL conditions among the Lord’s people to-day are very similar to those which existed at the beginning of the first book of Samuel. Three things in particular seem to stand out there as features of those days. One was formality in the things of God pursued in the energy of the flesh, resulting in mixture and spiritual adultery, and spiritual weakness and ineffectiveness. Another was the

absence of spiritual revelation and perception. “There was no open vision.” The “Spirit of wisdom and revelation” was inoperative amongst priests and people. Spiritual intelligence and apprehension was a minus quantity. The third thing was the constant menace of the Philistines, which eventually issued in the departure of the glory from Israel and the absence of the testimony of the Sovereignty from the midst of the people of God. When we remember that the Philistines always re-

JULY—AUGUST, 1952

present the intrusion of the natural man (uncircumcised, Col. ii. 11, 12) into the things of the Spirit, this is, a very significant feature.

We leave it with those who have eyes to see to judge whether there is any similarity between then and now. What we have on our heart is to note the method by which the Lord reacts to this situation.

Two things immediately emerge. The first is that the Lord is not satisfied to let the situation remain thus. He does not abandon it; rather does He begin in a secret way to secure the instrument for recovery. The second thing is that there has to be a very deep and peculiar travail in the bringing forth of that instrument. Samuel represents that instrument, and Hannah the travail which produces it.

What is clear from the chapter before us is that this will not come about in the natural course of things. The usual methods will not produce it. Indeed, it is declared that there was a deliberate act of God against that course (verse 6): Hannah's state was the Lord's doing. In other realms and for less important purposes—or shall we say, for more general purposes—the usual method may be followed. Samuel was not an afterthought. He was foreknown and foreordained, and yet humanly he was impossible. Why had the Lord so acted in this matter? How do we relate and reconcile the two things—that Samuel was determined—and yet was made humanly impossible by the act of God? The first part of the answer is that the bringing of this instrument into being was to be by a fellowship in the Divine travail in relation to the testimony.

Hannah went through unusual and uncommon soul-agony in the matter. She is represented as "in bitterness of soul", and she "wept sore" (verse 10). It was not just a personal interest or a selfish end that was in view. When at length Samuel was given she placed him at the disposal of the Lord as soon as she possibly could. Concerning Isaac, it says that "the child . . . was weaned" (Gen. xxi. 8); but in the case of Samuel it says of Hannah that "she weaned him" (verse 23)—as though she was not letting things go on, but was bringing about a separation unto the Lord as soon as possible. She was concerned for the Lord's interests in a specially eager way. This is impressive when we take into consideration the cost of this child, and therefore the peculiar endearment to herself.

Let us get the full force of the truth here. A thing which is to serve the Lord in a specially vital way is not born easily, and is not brought into being without some unusual suffering and

travail. There is much bitterness of soul to be gone through, and many tears.

For a time, a drawn-out time, it appears that there will be nothing. The barrenness, with its attendant heartache and sorrow, seems long to remain. And yet there can be no philosophical acceptance or fatalistic capitulation. The Lord is a factor in this situation, and there is a 'hoping against hope', a wistful look toward the "God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth the things that are not, as though they were" (Rom. iv. 17).

Not one of the least painful aspects of the suffering is the taunting of Peninnah (verse 6). Now Peninnah was of the same household and a co-wife with Hannah. She was not a stranger or foreigner. It was as such that she "provoked her sore for to make her fret". Peninnah had plenty of children, there was none of this (divinely appointed) human impossibility. Things with her were more or less simple and easy.

So it is, when the Lord determines to secure for Himself that vessel of peculiar purpose, and cuts off all the many activities, works and occupations which, while being in the same household of faith and in some relation to Himself, are largely by the energies of nature and the ability of man. When and where there are not those usual accompaniments and outworkings, those issues and results, the evidences and proofs; then there is criticism, taunting, pointing of the finger, and grievous imputations. The very acts of Divine sovereignty are given a twist to mean just the opposite of God's thought. So one system of things taunts the other. Well, well, so be it. It ever was; it ever will be. But wait. Samuel did come, and one Samuel meant more to God than all the children of Peninnah put together. And yet it is not a matter of comparative values. Samuel was for an hour of peculiar need. The suffering related to his coming into life was so deep as to solemnise beyond the suspicion of pride or comparison. All questions of self-realisation, vindication or satisfaction had been tested in the fire, and the refined issue was the glory of God.

Samuel came, and in the purpose that he served the suffering and sorrow were made well worth while, and the wisdom of God's mysteriousness was established. God was justified and the channel used was satisfied. We can leave it there. When the Lord wants something for an hour of peculiar need, the methods have to be out of the ordinary. To those concerned He has to say, 'Others can; you cannot'.

We are entering more and more deeply into such an hour at this time. The general thing is not

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

meeting the situation. The Lord must bring through something which will "come to the king-

dom for such a time as *this*" (Esther iv. 14).
Who will pay the price?

T. A-S.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We acknowledge with gratitude the following gifts received during April and May, 1952.

Aberdare 2s. 6d.; Abergwili 10s.; Alderton 12s. 6d.; Amstelveen, Holland £1; Basel, Switzerland £1; Bath 5s.; Beatenberg, Swit. 8s. 1d.; Belfast 16s., £1; Birmingham 10s., £1; Bolton 10s.; Canterbury £1; Carshalton 5s.; Chirk 6s.; Clacton-on-Sea 10s.; Copenhagen £1; Corby 5s.; Cowdenheath £1; Crawley 10s.; Crisfield, Md. £5 6s. 5d.; Dublin £5, 10s., 10s., 7s. 6d.; Edinburgh £1, £1; Enfield 5s.; Flushing, N.Y. £3 10s. 11d.; Glasgow £1; Glendale, Cal. 5s.; Hastings 10s.; Hongkong £2 4s.; Hounslow £1; Ilkley 10s.; Indianapolis, Ind. £1 15s. 6d.; Inverkeithing 12s.; Ipswich 10s.; Kingston Hill £1; Kirkcaldy 5s.; Launceston, Tasmania £3 3s.; Leigh-on-Sea 5s.; Little Madeley 7s. 6d.; London, N.1—2s. 10d.; N.W.10—2s. 6d.; S.E.1—£1; S.E.13—£1; S.E.23—2s. 6d., 5s., 5s., 5s., 10s., 10s., 15s., £1, £1; S.E.24—10s.; S.W.4—£1; S.W.18—10s.; W.12—5s.; Long Beach, Cal. £3 10s. 11d.; Lostock 10s.; Manchester 2s. 6d.; Louisville, Ky. £2 16s. 9d.; Mansfield £1; Mar- tock £1; Montclair, N.J. 7s. 6d.; Neuchâtel, Swit-

zerland £205; Old Kilpatrick 10s.; Otago, N.Z. £1; Parkstone 10s.; Philadelphia, Pa. 14s. 2d.; Pontypridd 3s.; Purley 10s.; St. Austell £1; Singa- pore £2; Sunbury 10s.; Swarthmore, Pa. £1 15s. 6d.; Taylor's Hill, Va. 10s.; Thorpe-next-Norwich £2 2s.; Tunbridge Wells 10s.; Welling £1; Whitley Bay 3s.; Wirral 3s. Total £279 18s. 1d.

Anderson, Ind. \$5; Auburn, N.Y. \$2; Banning, Cal. \$2; Dearborn, Mich. \$1; Hollis Centre, Maine \$50; Jacksonville, Fla. \$5; Lindsborg, Kansas \$1; Manila \$10; Montclair, N.J. \$1; New Rochelle, N.Y. \$10; Pasadena, Cal. \$2; Philadelphia, Pa. \$5; Queen's Vill., N.Y. \$10; San Diego, Cal. \$4.50; Taylors Hill, Va. \$5; Willow Grove, Pa. \$1.

Total \$114.50
(American)

Sundridge, Ont. \$3 (Canadian)

Zürich, Swit. 20 fcs.; Basle, Swit. 20 fcs.
Total 40 Swiss francs.

Somerset & Launceston, Australia £2 10s.
(Australian)

SPECIAL GATHERINGS

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

SATURDAY, August 2, at 3.30 & 6.30 p.m.

LORD'S DAY, August 3, at 11 a.m., 3.30 & 6.30 p.m.

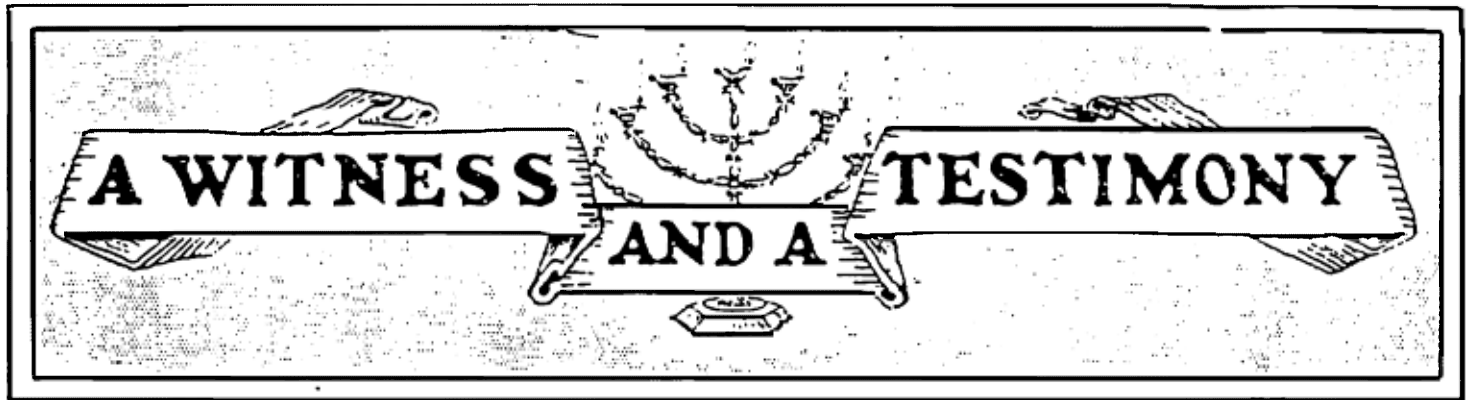
MONDAY, August 4, at 11 a.m., 3.30 & 6.30 p.m.

CONFERENCES

in SCOTLAND, SWITZERLAND and GERMANY

Write for information to:—

THE CONFERENCE SECRETARY
13, Honor Oak Road,
LONDON, S.E.23



SEPTEMBER—OCTOBER, 1952.

Vol. 30. No. 5.

UNION WITH CHRIST

(continued)

II. CREATIONAL AND RACIAL UNION

"If any man is in Christ, there is a new creation" (II Cor. v. 17, R.V. margin). (Note the translation, a correction and an improvement upon the King James' Version.)

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them" (Eph. ii. 10).

"To make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which from all ages hath been hid in God who created all things" (Eph. iii. 9).

"For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" (Gal. vi. 15, R.V. margin).

"So also it is written, The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. Howbeit that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; then that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is of heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (notice the marginal alternative to the last clause—"let us also bear the image of the heavenly") (I Cor. xv. 45 - 49).

IN this sequence of aspects of union with Christ we are following the natural order: that is, that which is natural first, and then that which is spiritual. We are passing by way of figure and representation in the natural to the spiritual meaning.

That is the Divine order; the Lord indicates that the function of everything is to lead on to the spiritual. And, of course, in this matter of *creation*, we are keeping *man* particularly in view. I want to be as simple and as practical as possible, and I am quite sure that no one will be offended at that.

We begin this matter of creational and racial union with Christ by reminding ourselves that God had a pattern for creation, and worked to a pattern; and that pattern for the whole creation was a Man, and that Man was His Son, the Archetype of all created things. If man had not rebelled and fallen and departed from the way of the projected pattern, sooner or later—we are not able to say how long it would have taken—but sooner or later, probably sooner, he would have arrived at that dimension. He would have been conformed to the image of God's Son, he would have 'conformed to type', he would have come to the Archetype of all things. But he did rebel and depart from that way. Redemption comes in to recover him to the way, and, just as it was *before* the necessity for redemption, so *in* redemption, God's Son is the pattern.

Now that is quite a simple statement, and very easily understood; it will not tax you a little bit. But there is much more in it than that. It is what that type is, that Archetype. That, of course, represents all the difficulty for us; but it is the whole work of the Spirit of God to perfect the creation according to the original pattern.

Now, how can we put that in a way which can be understood? Let us put it firstly in a very simple form. When we, who have never done so before, pass from the Western world to the Far

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

East, having never met anyone from the Far East, having never read anything about the Far East, but are suddenly—that is, as quickly as modern transport can take us—are suddenly taken from our world into that world, we find that we have got to learn everything all over again. Everything is done exactly the opposite way round to the way we do things. All the thinking is in just the opposite direction. All the acting is just contrary to all our training and constitution. It is so completely another world, in mentality, in conduct and habit and procedure and standards and values, and everything else, that we really do not know where we are. We are completely, as we say, at sea. We have to stop. It takes some people half a lifetime or all a lifetime really to get the mentality, to think the other side of the world, to adjust, to adapt. It is said to be someone of very considerable gift who can be in every way one of those people, without a flaw, even after many years.

But you could take it further than that. I am hesitating as to whether I ought to say it, but there was a time in my life when I used to go to theatres—many years ago! I remember that there was a play called "The Man from Mars". It was a very humorous thing, and I have often thought about it since. A man from Mars came to our earth, looked at everything. 'What is this?' 'Why do you do it like that?' 'That is not how we do it.' So he went round everything, comparing; everything was so strange, and most of it so ridiculous, so foolish; he went round putting everything right according to Mars. You see what I am getting at.

The Lord Jesus Christ is such a Being, such a Man, as has never been in this world before. He is in Himself the personal embodiment of a world which is another world from ours; and when we come into Christ, we are utter strangers to everything that belongs to Him, and we have got to learn everything all over again. Our thinking is all wrong, all out of the way, it is all different—our standards, our ideas, our judgments, our calculations, our expectations: yes, the whole constitution is another. In everything He is different, and the new creation is like that. Notice—"If any man is in Christ, there is a new creation: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new. But all things are of God". That is the difference.

So that becoming a Christian is something far more than adopting a set of doctrines and teachings and theories and ideas, practices and forms. It is coming into a new world, a strange, to us far-away, world, for which we have naturally no capacities at all. They all have to be given to us, and we have to start all over again, learning new ideas.

Well, that may sound simple, but it is not simple in practice. We stumble scores of times every day over that. Christ offends us—and He alone knows how we offend Him. It is like that every day. That is the Christian life—being transformed. It begins with this new creation, this racial union, this coming into, not the second Adam, but the last Adam. Everything is finished in Him, there will not be a third, there will not be any more. This is final.

As I speak, without premeditating, I recall a legend—the legend of St. Christopher, as he was called. Christopher was an immensely powerful man, physically, and his one quest in life was to find someone more powerful and to overcome him—or at any rate, to find someone more powerful than himself. He heard of someone more powerful and went and sought him out, but found that he was nothing remarkable. But this someone noted his quest and told him of the devil, of Satan, as being far, far more powerful than he. So Christopher went and found Satan, and he found him to be so much more powerful than himself that he sold himself to be the servant of Satan; and he faithfully served Satan as his much more powerful master for some time: until one day someone mentioned the name of Jesus Christ—and Satan fled for his life in terror.

And Christopher said, 'Well, there is evidently someone much more powerful than Satan; I am going to find him.' So he went in quest of this One, Jesus Christ, and he came to a hermit and told him what he was after, and the hermit said, 'If you go and act as ferryman across this river, taking people and their burdens over and giving yourself to humble service like that, you will find Jesus Christ.' So away went Christopher to the riverside, and built himself a little hut, and day and night he took the ferry over, and the people and their burdens, in calm and storm.

After some time he heard the cry of a little child, a little boy, and the little boy wanted to go over the river. Well, said Christopher to himself, this is not worth the ferry, so he hoisted the boy up on to his shoulder and stepped into the river. It was not long before the wind came up and the river became almost tempestuous—but something else was happening. This boy was getting intolerably heavy, at every step the boy got heavier, and at last poor Christopher was beaten, just beaten, by the weight of this boy on his shoulders. He had never known anything like it. 'Who are you, boy?' he gasped. 'You are going to drown me!' And the boy said, 'I am Jesus Christ'. And Christopher said, 'You are my Master!' And of course the legend says that the boy baptized him in the Name of the

Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and from that time he was the bond-slave of Jesus Christ and became St. Christopher.

Well, it is legend, but I think it serves my purpose. You take on Jesus Christ and you are taking on more than you know. You may take Him on lightly. You may take on the Christian life glibly. You may think it is child's play; but it will not be long before you have something to cope with that is more than your match. You have a universe upon your shoulders, and unless Jesus Christ gets inside, you will go down. You see the point. Oh yes, it is very easy to sign a decision card and say you will be a Christian, to act under some emotional persuasion and call yourself Christ's. You take on Jesus Christ, and you will find before long you cannot carry Him, He will have to carry you. He is far too great for us. That is what we are finding every day. He is too much for us, unless we have as complement the assurance of being in Christ, which is Christ in you.

But that is just it. Christ is not only the type, the figure, of the creation—He is the life of the creation. He embodies the creation as well as the creation embodying Him.

Having said that, let us now consider Creation and Racial Union under the following headings: Constituted; Conditioned; Cautioned.

(a) CONSTITUTED

We pass from Adam as type to Christ the Anti-type, and then to ourselves in Christ. Adam was constituted pre-eminently with capacity for Divine relationship. Union with God in Christ is spiritual. The medium of union with God in Christ is the human spirit. Man was constituted with a spirit because God is Spirit, and the human spirit was that which made it possible for man to have union and communion with God. The link between the human spirit and God the Father, in the Son, is the Holy Spirit. Union with Christ is all a spiritual matter. That is why we have become a new spiritual being. In the last Adam, in Christ, the union with the Father and the communion with the Father were perfect, but this was by reason of His human spirit—I am speaking of Him now in incarnation—by reason of His human spirit and the link of the Holy Spirit: so that His union with the Father was a perfect union. He lived, walked, spoke, acted and laid down His life, in perfect oneness with the Father. Everything was received by Him from the Father: He even had to obtain from His Father authority to lay down His own life. The oneness was complete, but it was wholly spiritual.

Now, in our coming into Christ, into the new creation—our human spirit being quickened and renewed and restored to its place, and we receiving the Holy Spirit to be the link between our renewed spirit and Christ—relationship with God is immediately established. All that sense of God's remoteness has gone. One of the blessings of conversion or regeneration, of coming into Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit, is that the sense of God being far off, remote, inaccessible, has all gone. He is near, very near, very real. Union has been established.

And then by an established spiritual union, that very constitution—that is, a renewed spirit linked with the Lord by the Holy Spirit—becomes the basis of an entirely new world, that world being Christ: a new world, a new creation, a spiritual world, a spiritual cosmos, where we begin again to learn, to learn, to learn from infancy everything as new. Much harm is done to the spiritual life by not recognising that. Christianity has become such a system, such a way. 'Get saved; get busy!'—and that is Christianity, and much of our phraseology has taken the meaning of an earthly system. For instance, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" has become a bit of liturgy, and its meaning as heaven's way of doing God's will has been lost to view. The Holy Spirit, if He had His way, would be causing us to act as we would not act naturally, and speak as we would never speak naturally, and think as we would never think naturally, as though in another world altogether—often to our own amazement that we should ever talk or think like that. That is not the way we are made. Yes, but we are being made all over again; it is another world, this creation which is in Christ Jesus. I think I need not labour that further.

Everything is now spiritual. Do remember that sin is fundamentally spiritual because it touches relationship with God. Relationship with God is that which is spiritual. Sin touches relationship with God. Sin is against the design of man's being: so that when we sin we are defeating the very design of our being; we are working against our very destiny from God's standpoint. We were designed for fellowship with God. We were designed for the kingdom of the heavens—but do not make that geographical: the kingdom of the heavens is a spiritual order—and sin being spiritual works against the very design of our being, and we know it. We know that it touches the very matter of relatedness to God.

Sin is not doing this and that and that. You cannot call sin by a whole assortment of names. That only comes out in a world like this. You say—This

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

is sin and that is sin. Well, you may be right, but you have to get behind all these names, which are names for *aspects* of sin. Sin is one thing; sins are another. Sin, which is behind all sins, is that which touches our relatedness to God; which touches the very design of our being and defeats the end for which we have a being and were constituted. Sin is spiritual and salvation is spiritual. The Christian is a spiritual person, in this sense—that relationship with *God* is established, and everything that is according to *God* is brought into view, and the whole system of the kingdom of the heavens becomes the Holy Spirit's sphere and basis of activity for our transformation.

Have I gone out of the realm of simplicity? I think you can follow that. This kind of Christianity is very different from the Christianity that is current, that is popular, which is—You must do this and that to be a Christian. It is something far removed from that! Now let us pass on.

(b) CONDITIONED OR PROBATIONED

After Adam was constituted pre-eminently with a capacity for Divine relationship, he was put on probation, and this with a view to graduation. What would be the graduation if he successfully passed his probation? His graduation would be transfiguration. I said a little earlier that sooner or later that is what would have happened. Adam would have been transfigured, which means he would have been glorified. He was on probation with a view to graduation. You see, the course of the Son of Man is the course of every child of God. There is a birth by the operation of the Holy Spirit. That is the Son of Man, that is every child of God. There is a baptism into the will of God, because, whatever else baptism may mean, over it all is this—an utter committal, abandonment, separation, unto the will of God; dead to all else, alive only to the will of God. The Son of Man took that position, and you and I are born again with that in view, with that before us—of being dead to the one race, and alive in the other only unto God. Then, on that ground, He received the Spirit: coming up out of the water the heavens were opened and the Spirit rested upon Him. The receiving of the Spirit should be the course of every child of God.

And then how strangely He was led right into the probation, right into the condition, as though now everything was prepared: He was led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. The Son of Man was on probation, being tested, tried, not only in the wilderness for forty

days and nights but for some considerable time afterward, being assailed along every line along which He could be assailed, from hell, from the world, from friends: under test, on probation—but triumphant. It is not without significance that it was at the farthest outward point of His journeys, from which He turned and went straight to the Cross, that He was transfigured, as though that were the goal of this Man. The end of this Man was the transfiguration. The rest, up to Jerusalem, was for us, not for Himself. It was for us, to bring us into that same way—the birth, the baptism, the receiving of the Spirit, the triumph of faith, the transfiguration. We shall speak about the transfiguration when we reach the consideration of Consummated Union.

(c) CAUTIONED

Adam was warned, was admonished, was made aware that there was a choice of two ways that he might take, a choice of two decisions that he might reach; and he was cautioned, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. ii. 17). Cautioned—with a view to what? Oh, not only to personal transfiguration, but to inheritance; constituted with a view to Divine relationship, conditioned with a view to transfiguration, cautioned with a view to spiritual ascendancy unto inheritance. You can call it world dominion, if you like. That is what it was for the first Adam, that is what it was for the last Adam, and that is what it is for the Church—dominion together with Christ, in union with Christ.

But we are on probation now. We have been born of the Spirit, we have been baptized into the will of God, we have received the Holy Spirit. We are on probation, not with a view only to personal transfiguration, but on probation for dominion. We are up against things, and things are up against us. The enemy has not been annihilated; the Lord has left him. Just as He allowed the enemy to get into the garden, just as He never acted to prevent him from coming to Adam, so He has done nothing to keep the enemy out of our way or to keep us out of his way. He has allowed him a tenure, and He permits him to assail us and drive us and test us along every line—with one thing in view. It is not our personal salvation or our personal glorification. It is that we may be with Christ in dominion.

The letter to the Ephesians makes that perfectly clear. That is, indeed, the object of the letter to the Ephesians. It is not primarily an individual thing; it is only individual in so far as the individual forms a part of the corporate. It is the Church that is in

view there, and the Church is in the heavenly warfare because the Church is "his Body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all", and it is the Church which is to be the vehicle and the vessel of His universal dominion. Do remember, when Satan assails and the Lord lets him 'have a go' at you, and you have a bad time, that it is not just some personal matter, some individual affair. It is related to this vast intention of God to make the Church His city of government for the universe throughout the ages of the ages. That is what is in view, and it is not at us, it is at the Christ, through us, that the enemy is striking. It is that union, that oneness, as set forth in this Ephesian letter, that is the occasion of it all. Satan knew very well that, if he struck the individual, he struck the rest; if he captured the individual, he captured the rest; if he dethroned Christ from the individual, he dethroned Christ from the race and enthroned himself: and he did so, and was called the prince of this world. But we have seen the Divine reaction to that, in bringing men back to heaven spiritually and going on with the purpose in justification, as though nothing had happened, going on with it with men of faith: but it is a tested faith, a tried faith. We know that. It is all to bring us to spiritual ascendancy and victory; into the inheritance, into dominion.

Now I close by reminding you, as I shall do in other connections, that inheritance is the key to the conflict with Christ and the Church. And heirship has two sides. It has a legal and a spiritual aspect. We are legally heirs when we are born anew. When we are in the new creation we are legally heirs by birth, but there is a very great deal of difference between the state of legal heirship and the act of spiritually inheriting. The Bible makes that distinction clear, in this connection as in the others, as we shall see. The letter to the Galatians is built around this very thought. "So long as the heir is a child, he . . . is under guardians and stewards until the term appointed of the father" (Gal. iv. 1, 2). And then the letter goes on—If children,

then sons: we are all sons, by faith, that is to say, legally, even if we are not actually and spiritually in possession of the meaning and value of sonship, that is, of the inheritance. We are legally inheritors by birth, but we become actually possessors of the inheritance by spiritual growth.

Is that clear? Well, if it is not clear in teaching, ask yourself whether it is clear in practice and experience. How many Christians are enjoying the inheritance, are possessing their inheritance, are even progressing towards the possession of their inheritance? Many are not, yet they are children of God, legally heirs. Between being a legal heir and becoming a spiritual inheritor, something may happen so that you miss the inheritance. The New Testament is all the time telling us that we have a great inheritance—then do not miss it; we have great rights—then do not let them go; we are called into something from eternity—but be sure you "make your calling and your election sure". It is the difference between our legal status and our spiritual state.

So it is in this new creation. We have to do our learning spiritually; we have got to pass from the one realm to the other progressively; we have got to battle, to enter into the conflict, not for our salvation, but for our inheritance in Christ. We have to be tested, tried, not so that we shall prove ourselves good Christians, but so that we may learn what spiritual ascendancy is, and thus in spiritual ascendancy come into the inheritance. You will be calling to mind those seeming paradoxes about receiving as a free gift and then having to inherit. As we have seen, one is a legal position, the other is a spiritual position. We are in a new creation. By far the greater measure of it is beyond; but we are moving on. Indeed, whenever we gather together in Conference, it is simply because we want to go on with the Lord, we want to pass from the one realm to the other, our hearts are set upon all the Lord has meant by bringing us into union with Himself. By His grace, we will go through and go on.

T. A-S.

GOD'S VOICE FOR TO-DAY

IV. THE WORD OF LIFE

"Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Jeremiah, what seest thou? And I said, I see a rod of an almond-tree. Then said the Lord unto me, Thou hast well seen: for I watch over my word to perform it" (Jeremiah i. 11, 12).

"Go ye, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this Life" (Acts v. 20).

IF a word comes from the Lord it will always be a word of life. It is not enough for it to be only a

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

word of information or illumination, to bring encouragement, comfort or sustaining just for the moment; it is not even enough that it should be a message of reproof or correction; it must impart life, to the inward man. God's word is distinguished in this very way: it brings "all the words of this Life". It is 'this Life' which we shall now consider.

GOD ALWAYS HAS LIFE IN VIEW

The message which Jeremiah had to deliver was really a message of life. Gradually, and in spite of much misunderstanding, the challenge of his ministry became apparent: it was a matter of life and death. This is always true of God's word; it is a word of life. To resist or refuse it is to become involved in spiritual death—"He that abideth in this city shall die" (Jer. xxxviii. 2). On the other hand, life comes through the word—"but he that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live . . ." It did not seem to be so. The prophet's message called to the people to submit to a course which seemed all wrong to their own judgment, but it was God's way, and the only way of life.

Whenever God speaks He has life in view. His intention is not only to correct or to comfort, it is to produce vital effects in the heart and life of His hearers. The eternal life was not only *manifested* in the Person of Christ; it is offered, it is made available to us. And it is ministered to us through the Word, so that there can be no doubt that God's voice for to-day deals with this all-important matter of life. We have already learned something of God's speaking by considering Jeremiah's message and ministry. What has he to teach us concerning "the words of this Life"?

1. NEW LIFE

The first fact which we must understand is that Divine life is new life: it is different, for it is from heaven. Jeremiah's prophecies are full of the violent contrast between that which belongs to the old order, and God's new order. Each order had its own characteristics, for each was the outward expression and manifestation of a nature. So far as God was concerned, the old was corrupt and unacceptable to Him: His life is an entirely new and different life.

The contrast is clearly seen in the matter of the prophets. Jeremiah was by no means the only one: there were numbers of others who, equally with him, were claiming to speak the Word of the Lord. They are called false prophets, but probably this

does not so much mean that they deliberately invented falsehoods as that they failed to discern and to utter the truth of God. It might perhaps be a fair description to say that they were deluded prophets. There is nothing so false and unreliable as the natural wisdom and reasoning of man when associated with the things of God. The prophets spoke 'a vision out of their own heart' (Jeremiah xxiii. 16), which means that the source of the ministry was earthly, and not heavenly. They also prophesied in virtue of their dreams: "How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophecy lies; even the prophets of the deceit of their own heart? which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbour" (vv. 26, 27).

They were not only deceivers—they themselves were deceived. This was inevitable, for their considerations and arguments were based upon human reasoning rather than upon Divine revelation. They may have thought that they were expressing God's purposes and His reactions to the events of their day. They were dreaming, imagining, what would be for the glory of God, and what would best serve His interests. They doubtless prided themselves on being practical, for this is a favourite claim of the carnal mind. As if a man cannot be both spiritual and practical! They may well have used certain Scriptures to reinforce their assertions, but the natural heart is so deceitful that it will even take hold of the Word of God and apply it in a wrong way to strengthen its own position. It is all too easy for us to dream about spiritual matters, to dream even with the Word of God in our hands, and to mistake our dreams for the revelation of the Lord's will.

THE GREAT DIFFERENCE

Jeremiah, like the other prophets, was very closely in touch with the happenings of his day. As much as any of the false prophets, he considered carefully all that was taking place, and had a most practical concern about it all. But his judgments were not natural deductions or reasonings; they were formed in the light of heavenly explanation and interpretation. This was the great difference between him and the false prophets, and it is the same difference as that which exists between the new life and the old. The one comes direct from the Lord in heaven, while the other proceeds from fallen and corrupt human nature. The false prophets did not realise, what Jeremiah, to his great pain, had discovered, that "the heart"—even the well-intentioned heart—"is deceitful above all

SEPTEMBER — OCTOBER, 1952

things and it is exceedingly corrupt" (Jeremiah xvii. 9, A.R.V.). The people of God, and especially those who felt themselves to be in a special way the servants of the Lord, would not deliberately or willingly be a party to deception and lies, and yet Jeremiah's prophecies abound with denunciations against such unrighteousness. The false prophets were typical of the whole deceived condition of the people, and indeed of fallen human nature wherever it is found.

And not only did they dream: they acted upon their dreams. "I sent not these prophets, yet they ran: I spake not unto them, yet they prophesied" (Jer. xxiii. 21). How rash and impetuous the flesh can be: how ready to assume that it knows what will best serve the Lord's interests, and how impatient to get busy with its own ideas! "He that believeth shall not be in haste" (Isa. xxviii. 16, A.R.V.), but he who follows the impulses of his own heart can hardly bear a moment's delay in getting to work on the project. The old life rushes presumptuously on; it cannot wait for God. The new life is so different. As you read his book, you get the impression that Jeremiah was rather a slow man. He did not always know just what to say. He felt rather foolish in the presence of those glib prophets who seemed so self-assured as to what God wanted. He had to go away and ask the Lord; he felt obliged to wait for understanding from heaven. In itself Jeremiah's heart was no more trustworthy than were the hearts of the false prophets. Even his sincerity was not enough, for it was of himself, as well as of the rest, that he declared "the heart is deceitful above all things". Jeremiah acted with courage and decision when God's time came, but he had to learn to wait for the Lord, and not to be rushed into premature or wrong activities by the urge of his own desires or imaginations.

Only the Word of God is able to distinguish between the old life and the new: "... piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. iv. 12). How slow we are to sort out the thoughts and intents of our own hearts! Other people can often see our folly long before we become aware of it ourselves. We feel sure that a certain course is the Lord's will. It all seems so clear. Besides, we have prayed about it. Perhaps we have found someone of like mind, ready enough to agree with us, so we claim that our plan is confirmed by 'fellowship'. Only after matters have begun to work out to their logical and disastrous fulfilment, do we realise that we have been deceived by our own natural hearts. We could not wait to make sure what the Lord's

counsels were. "I sent not these prophets, yet they ran". We do not need to look very far to find people rushing on, in mistaken zeal, without any real commission from God.

BORROWED EXPERIENCES

There was another striking charge which was brought against the false prophets. "Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that steal my words every one from his neighbour". In this case the utterances were not mere inventions, but were quotations from the Lord's Word. Though they were the Lord's own words, they were not obtained directly from Him, but were borrowed from others, or, worse still, stolen, dishonestly acquired. A similar indictment is found in II Cor. ii. 17, where Paul wrote that he was not as the many who retailed the Word of God, but spoke sincerely that which he received from God Himself. The word came direct to his heart from God, often through bitter experiences of personal trial, by reason of the Lord's dealings with him.

In Jeremiah's day they may have quoted passages from Isaiah in their refusal of the prophet's message. It is never very difficult to find some Scripture in support of our own ideas. The Lord said that He was against that sort of thing; it was not straight, it was not honest. Instead of letting the Word of God search their own hearts, they were using it as a weapon against others, and not using it honestly either. The word 'retail' is translated 'corrupt' in our Bibles, since in Paul's day it was most likely that such activities would involve sharp practices. How dreadful to make personal profit out of the Word of God! In any case it is never the way of life to build up your spiritual experiences on what somebody else says, or to minister by passing on second-hand truths. It is one of the great weaknesses of the people of God to-day that they do not get their experiences direct from Him, but merely pass on to others what they have borrowed from someone who came before them. The Lord's Word will often come to us through some servant of His, which is right enough provided that that servant is a true channel of life from the Lord, ministering in a living way what he himself has been taught by God. "The words of this Life" can never be stale; they must be fresh from heaven.

2. RESURRECTION LIFE

Secondly, this life is resurrection life. This follows from what has already been said, since there

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

could be no new life for us unless it came by way of resurrection. This brings us back to the two basic visions which Jeremiah had at the beginning. He was made to see a budding almond rod, and then a seething cauldron. The second vision formed the basis of Jeremiah's public utterances. It told of the impending judgments which would come from the north, like a great cauldron of trouble, boiling over and covering the whole land. The first vision, that of the almond branch, revealed the purpose behind the judgment, the aim and end which God had in view, which was new life and fruitfulness. It showed also how the Lord will vindicate His servants, however much they may be rejected by others, and however weak and inadequate they may feel themselves to be.

Jeremiah came of a priestly family; he was a direct descendant of Aaron, the first High Priest. This meant, of course, that he inherited a Divine anointing and commission, but it also meant that he would have to face opposition from those who, out of a spirit of rebellion or jealousy, would repudiate his authority. Even in the first great days of the nation's history, it had been no easy matter to be God's anointed priest. Things did not go smoothly for Aaron, for even among God's people there were those who disputed his position and withstood him to his face. God Himself took up the challenge, and made answer for His servant. The incident is described in Numbers xvii. In it the Lord revealed that His power is expressed in His servants, not by natural life, but by supernatural—by life out of death.

AARON'S ROD THAT BUDDED

Aaron and the heads of the other tribes were each commanded to choose a rod, presumably of an almond tree; to mark it with his own name, and to present it to the Lord. In due course the rods were selected, duly inscribed with the twelve names, and given to Moses to lay up in the Tabernacle, that God might reveal His own opinion of each one. What a salutary experience, for those who claim to be the Lord's servants, to have this claim tested in His presence, and to know His verdict upon the true value of their lives! The twelve rods spent the night alone with God, while their owners waited until the morning, to discover what God really thought of them. They had been seeking a place of prominence, had been claiming to be something in themselves. They had the audacity to present their names before God in His House, expecting Him to accept their pretensions and acknowledge their qualifications. And now, one by

one, they were to receive His reply. It was an unmistakable one. In silence, and without any need for comment, the verdict was given. Eleven princes received back their rods, dead sticks, fruitless and lifeless, without beauty or value. On his rod each prince read his own name. That was what God thought of him. The twelfth rod was the one which belonged to Aaron, the Lord's anointed. This was startlingly different from all the rest. It was profuse with flower and fruit; no longer a dry stick, but a living branch. In one brief night the whole life-cycle had burst into amazing expression: buds and blossom, leaves and fruit, all proclaimed the glories of life, abundant life, life from the dead. No one needed to seek on this rod the name of any man, for the Name of the God of resurrection was written large all over it. The rod was not placed in water; there was nothing to feed it. It was not exposed to the light; there was no outside aid of any kind. By nature it should have been as barren and lifeless as the other eleven, but it was energized by a new power, the power of resurrection life.

At his first call Jeremiah felt himself to be as unpromising as the dry rod. He had neither ability nor strength to face the challenge which his ministry would involve. It was for this reason that he was given the vision, to assure him of the sufficiency of Divine life in resurrection power. It was as though the Lord said to him, 'Jeremiah, the temple has lost its meaning, the sacrifices are useless and unacceptable, the priesthood has become powerless, but I have not changed. Even the ark of the covenant may have gone, but I am still here. All that I was to your great ancestor, Aaron, I will still be to you, for you shall share the same anointing. The budding almond rod is more than a wonderful story of the past—it is a living experience which you may have to-day.'

RESURRECTION LIFE HERE AND NOW

This is a spiritual fact. We may live in the power of His resurrection. We are not to think of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus as only an event of the past. It is just as real to-day. The rod still buds for the man of faith. The Lord, by this vision, promised to see to it that Jeremiah should be constantly renewed and sustained, provided that he kept humble and obedient. This obedience was indeed an inward crucifixion for the prophet. It must have been a tremendous temptation for him to change his message, which was so universally rejected. He was as patriotic as the others, and loved Jerusalem as much as they. He must have

longed to join in with the rest in their assertions that the Lord would never allow His own city to be captured or His temple to be destroyed. But he must be true to the Lord, if he wished the Lord to be true to him. The Cross can always be avoided, but if it is, there is no opportunity for the power of resurrection life.

How often was Jeremiah literally delivered from death ! The Cross began for him not in Jerusalem but in his own home. The people turned against him in his own priestly city. He had to flee to Jerusalem because his life was in danger from the men of Anathoth. Then he was put in the stocks and threatened by the priests. Jehoiakim was so enraged with his written message that he sought to destroy both the writer and the writing. The princes of Zedekiah cast him into a 'horrible pit' and into the 'miry clay', and he was only saved from a lingering death by the kindness and energy of an Ethiopian. Just before Jerusalem finally fell he was accused of falling away to the enemy and was nearly executed. Yes, he was 'in deaths oft'; and yet he did not die. So far as the Scriptural record goes he was a miracle of survival. There is no romance like the romance of resurrection life. The wonder of the budding almond rod was indeed demonstrated in Jeremiah's many experiences of life from the dead.

What is the practical meaning of all this ? It is that the Lord will make it His business to keep us alive and fruitful, if we will make it our business to be true to Him. There must be no carnal straining, no natural effort : we do not have to keep ourselves alive. Every fear to go down into death, every clinging to that which belongs to us, every grasp on our own personal position or ministry, will only hinder the expression of this life. It is to be life out of death. Even when our trust in Him brings us into the most hopeless and impossible situations, we may rest assured that all will be well, for He is indeed the God of resurrection.

3. HOLY LIFE

It is also holy life. The real impact of Divine life, and its tremendous effectiveness, is due to its quality as well as to its earnestness. So often when life is spoken or preached about we think only of excitement or activity, of people who have a lot to say and a lively manner in which to say it. The secret of spiritual power is holiness. Jeremiah opened his public ministry by reminding Israel of their early days as a nation, of the days when God was truly with them and mighty things were done. It was in the wilderness, but that did not matter.

Circumstances do not count for those who are in vital fellowship with the Lord. They were wonderful days, days of heaven upon earth ; the prophet speaks of them as being almost like a Divine honeymoon. "Israel was holiness unto the Lord, the firstfruits of his increase" (Jer. ii. 3). We have no reason to think that the Israelites had anything to boast of in themselves. It was not that they were trying very hard to be good, for sanctification is something much more than that. "Israel was holiness unto the Lord" meant that God and they were joined together in a union of love and life, for holiness is above all else a matter of close relatedness to God. Although the word used is often 'consecration', we must not think merely of our own efforts to consecrate ourselves. Consecration or sanctification is something which God does with us. It is a Divine act, by which He lays hold of us to claim us altogether for Himself, and it must be responded to by a faith that expresses our contentedness to be set apart wholly for His delight.

A LIFE OF DEPENDENCE

Perhaps one of the ways in which this is most clearly seen in Jeremiah's case is in his life of utter dependence on the Lord. This absolute dependence is one of the fundamental features of holiness, because it is fundamental to real spiritual life. When Satan was seeking to undermine holiness by his temptation of the Lord Jesus in the wilderness, he did so by suggesting that the Lord should act in independence of His Father. The answer given was: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God". That is how Jeremiah lived. It is characteristic of a life of holiness.

It worked out, of course, in ways which were hard to the flesh. One of them was that the prophet was commanded not to marry. "Thou shalt not take thee a wife . . . in this place" (Jer. xvi. 2). The explanation lies in the words "in this place", for the commandment was not a general one, being due solely to the time and circumstances in which he was found. But the principle is very clear. Holiness always means that God must be first. Nothing must come in between us and the Lord, no claims must be given priority over His claims upon us, and no human ambitions must be allowed to weaken our desire to please Him. Jeremiah himself tells us, "I sat not in the assembly of them that make merry, nor rejoiced" (Jer. xv. 17). This does not mean that he deliberately made himself miserable, but rather that he could not find his joy from other people, and indeed was not permitted by

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

the Lord to have the easy time that the majority seemed to enjoy. Nevertheless he found a truer and more lasting joy in his life with his Lord. "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy words were unto me a joy and the rejoicing of my heart" (verse 16). Holiness is not an absence or repression of life. It is the life which is Life indeed. There is no other life. The eternal life which is given to us is holy life. The measure in which we break with holiness will be the measure in which we limit life.

4. A SHARED LIFE

Spiritual life is essentially a shared life. As soon as Jeremiah had completed his message as to judgment and was free to speak of God's afterward, he foresaw not just a single servant being true to the Lord, but a community of the faithful; not only a number of living ones, but a city, alive with the glory of God. He spoke of life as being something more than individual or personal; it was to be national. This is true of all the great prophets. They had to be faithful as individuals in a dark day, but for them the future was bright with the prospect of God's people living together in harmonious fellowship with one another as well as with Him. This was the goal set before Jeremiah, and it was for this that he travailed. No amount of personal blessing could ever be a substitute for this. A recovery of life meant recovery of a shared or corporate life. "The people that were left of the sword found favour in the wilderness" (Jer. xxxi. 2, A.R.V.). There will be something left when the judgment has passed. The sword will break up all sorts of associations which are not spiritually living, it will slay much that belongs to us and to this earth. This is necessary. What is left may seem to be a very small remnant,

but this can be made a basis for recovery of life. "Again will I build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel . . . Hear the word of the Lord, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off; and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him . . . And they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together unto the goodness of the Lord" (Jer. xxxi. 4, 10, 12). That was what Jeremiah was after. Life can only be realised and expressed in fulness when the people of God are living in fellowship together.

The great promise with which we are so familiar, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and will show thee great things, and difficult, which thou knowest not" (Jer. xxxiii. 3), relates to this very matter. It was not an open invitation for Jeremiah to pray for what he liked, but the Lord's challenge to him, in the darkness of his dungeon, still to believe that his life's vision and ambition were to be realised. It seemed difficult, if not impossible, to him. Its spiritual equivalent seems impossible to us now. That the scattered and earth-bound people of God should be gathered into a life together, which is glorious with His presence and mighty with His authority, may seem a thing of the past, rather than something for the present. Or perhaps we regard it only as a prospect for the future, when earthly influences and considerations shall all be left behind, and Christ alone be exalted in His Church. If, however, eternal life begins now, then that life ought to be expressed now in the true fellowship together of all God's people. We maintain that here on this earth there should be a Church which is the true expression of the mind of God, sharing together the life of the risen Head.

"Is there any word from the Lord" about this matter? There certainly is! It calls us to experience, as well as to proclaim, "all the words of *this Life*".

H. F.

FOLLOWERS OF THE LAMB

IV. THE CLIMAX OF THE WAY OF THE LAMB

Reading: Revelation xix. 1 - 10.

AS we pursue our consideration of this matter of the followers of the Lamb, we come to the part which relates to the climax of that path, the climax of the way of the Lamb—the climax of the Cross. But here it becomes necessary and helpful to widen our outlook, taking in the whole compass of things. It is a well-known and often-stated fact that the book of Genesis being the book of beginnings,

contains the first intimation of everything which we find subsequently in the Word of God. We can trace back what we find in all the rest of the Scriptures to some germ in the book of Genesis: that is, the Scriptures as a whole are the opening up and the opening out, the development, of all the beginnings found in that book. The book of the Revelation, being the book of consummations, takes all that up and gathers it into itself in a spiritual way. What we have in the book of Genesis in an earthly

and temporal and material way, in a typical, symbolic, prophetic way, we have in the book of the Revelation in spiritual consummation. It is therefore of very great importance to know how to interpret the book of the Revelation, and, although I am quite familiar with the attitude of opposition toward what is called spiritualising the Scriptures, I nevertheless make bold to affirm that the book of the Revelation has got to be interpreted, if not altogether, almost altogether, spiritually, and you will be entirely in a fog unless you do so. Indeed, you will be occupied with an interminable, impossible task. This is the book of consummations of all things in a spiritual way.

What do we find in the Old Testament beginning with the book of Genesis? We find two kingdoms coming into evidence: the kingdom of God, and a kingdom against God. As we see the development of the kingdom of God, we are able to discern that that kingdom is developing with a very definite plan, and we find that before we are at the end of the first five books it has taken very definite shape. A cameo, a microcosm, of the kingdom of God has been presented—yes, in imperfection, because it is only typical, that is, it is only a type, a figure; but its lines are capable of clear apprehension.

A country is marked out. That country has its distinct frontiers and is in its turn divided up, with inter-frontiers. The whole of that country is apportioned as an inheritance to tribes, and right at the centre—although not literally geographically so—but as the very heart and centre of the whole scheme is a city, and there is a place where God is met. Some of these parts of the kingdom, by sovereign Divine appointment, are in closer proximity to the heart of things than others. Some are nearer to, some are farther from, that centre, but that centre—the place where God is—governs all. And then around that inner, special kingdom there are many other kingdoms and nations, and they are learning much from what is going on inside there, deriving a very great deal—according to their attitude, of course, whether good or evil. That is, this kingdom of God is affecting all kingdoms. Being an earthly kingdom, and being set in the conditions of a disrupted world and humanity, and this other, spiritual kingdom being also in evidence, there are both good and evil represented: that is, there are available to the nations that walk in the light thereof both good and evil. That is perfectly clear at the beginning.

But that is only a section. You pass to the next part of the Bible, into what is called the historical section, where kingship is introduced, kingship

through priesthood, and you find things are beginning to take another form, come into another realm. You are passing on to a higher level of things. You are moving away from the earth, you are coming nearer heaven, and when you close that combination of kingly and prophetic movements, or when you see the close in the book of the prophet Ezekiel, you begin to see a heavenly country. The end of the prophecies of Ezekiel is a whole country re-shaped as an inheritance, and now in a new way it is the temple which governs everything, and it is the ideal temple such as has never been before or since the days of Ezekiel, a heavenly one, a spiritual one; a heavenly temple in a heavenly city in a heavenly country: for things have moved away from the earth, the earthly has been forsaken; now it is heaven. You ought to read those last chapters of Ezekiel again and note these two things—the shaping of the kingdom and the placing of the temple and the city, and then the relationship to the nations around. I just mention that—it is far too big and detailed a matter to occupy us now.

When you come to the book of the Revelation, you are right in the spiritual side of that whole kingdom of God. What I want to point out in connection with the spiritual interpretation of the book of the Revelation is this. In the first place, you have to recognise that the kingdom of God is a very great dominion, but that it is divided up into many regions. You find yourself, in different places in the book of the Revelation, in different places where the throne is governing. There is the earth and there is the heaven, but you speak about earth and heaven as though it were a duality. It is not, it is a multiplicity. There are heavens and heaven of heavens. Paul said he was caught up into the third heaven (II Cor. xii. 2). So heaven has various regions, departments, sections—upper, lower, perhaps middle.

And then you come to this remarkable thing, that the redeemed are also divided up into sections in different places. The Lord Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many abiding-places" (John xiv. 2). (Get rid of that word 'mansions'. There are not streets of mansions—at any rate, that is not what He referred to.) "In my Father's house are many abiding-places". There is the first heaven, second heaven, third heaven, heaven of heavens, and people are located accordingly, in relation to the Throne. There is this company right in the Throne. There is that company around the Throne. There is another company and another. The nations, redeemed nations, on the outer circle deriving values, now not good and evil, but deriving

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

their good from what is there in the centre. The kingdom of the heavens is plural, not singular.

A COMPANY IN CLOSEST SPIRITUAL PROXIMITY TO GOD

Now you are wondering why all that. For this reason: that we are occupied now with God's fullest intention for His people, as represented in the hundred and forty-four thousand of chapter xiv. God's fullest intention is to have His people as near as near can be to Himself, in the closest spiritual proximity to Himself. This matter of position, of disposition, of distinction and of inheritance is a spiritual matter. Dismiss your geographical ideas and mentality. We need not worry ourselves to try to decide where heaven is. We could spend the rest of our days trying to find where heaven is and we should not get an answer. Some have tried to tell us which of the planets is heaven, but no one has come to tell us if they are right. But you see this is a matter of spiritual proximity. It is just possible, just gloriously possible, that, wherever we are, with a very gracious visitation of the Lord, we should find ourselves in heaven without leaving our present location, and we would say—'This is just wonderful, nothing could be more glorious and blessed and perfect than this'. Perhaps you have never experienced this. It is possible! Being rid of all that other encompassment and embodiment and impingement that is of the kingdom of death—we need not bother about geographical locations—we may just have a foretaste of Divine glory, even in this scene and in these circumstances.

It is a matter ultimately not of going somewhere but of being something. I am not saying we are not going to heaven, but mainly and primarily it is not a matter of some *place*, literally, actually. It is being in a certain state that makes heaven; and the heaven of heavens, the highest place, the most utter place, is that where God has His fullest satisfaction in a life. There is nothing that can surpass the knowledge that God is as satisfied as He can be, being God, in any life; that He has got what His heart has been set upon; and I suggest to you that that can be tested all along the way here, in measure. If you and I ever have a difficulty over God the Lord having His place or His way in relation to something very costly, something very dear to us, something that we hold very precious, that we very much would have and it is so difficult to contemplate being without it, and then we get to the Lord after much battle and conflict and suffering and travail and we get through on that thing,

there comes in such a peace and joy and rest, such a sense of the Lord, that it is a touch of glory. God has got His place, and when He gets that it is glory in the heart where He has it. Only in small ways do we prove that now. But let that be complete, final, utter, with no more conflicts, obstacles, struggles, questions, at all; the thing is all over, God has reached His full, final, consummate end: then you will sing as these people here were singing—the hundred and forty-four thousand, who were singing with such a voice that it sounded to the Apostle like the sound of many waters. It is the glory of the Lord having His utter place in a people. That is the spiritual interpretation.

So forget henceforth the number one hundred and forty-four thousand in the matter of so many people singing round the Throne. I am not saying that it will not be like that, but it is what it means that is the important thing, and it is just going to be the measure in which the Lord gets His satisfaction which will be the measure of our approximation to the heart of things eternally. That means it is the measure in which the Cross has accomplished its purpose, or, to use the other figure, the measure in which we have 'followed the *Lamb* whithersoever He goeth'. That, in other words, means the measure in which the Lamb has overcome in our natures, in our hearts. *That* is the measure of our approximation to the centre of things eternally, and the measure of eternal glory, because it is the measure of the satisfaction of God.

THE SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION OF THE REVELATION

May I touch parenthetically upon this matter of interpreting spiritually. You must go through the book and ask yourself questions. I find myself, as a somewhat questioning kind of person, up against difficulties all the time. I see the Lamb making war and overcoming, and I see saints with Him making war and overcoming. I have asked many questions: what does that mean? I wonder what your mentality is about it. Is it a *Doré* Bible mentality, with pictures of all these things? You see one picture: Christ literally, personally, coming, with a sword literally in His hand, and a whole host of saints behind, with swords, going literally to slay and make devastation and spill blood all over this earth. Is that your mentality when you read about the wars of the Lamb? Did He do that in the first days of the Church? Did He overcome? Did He overcome the Roman Empire which set itself to destroy Him and His testimony in the earth? Did He come out from heaven literally with a drawn sword and

angels and shedding of blood upon the earth? How did He do it?

Well, how has He ever done that sort of thing? He has been making war all through these centuries. It has been a sorry look-out for peoples who have lifted their heads against the Lamb. It is a sorry look-out for those nations to-day who are deliberately lifting their heads against the Lamb. Do not have any doubt about what the issue is going to be, as to what is going to be the end of the great red dragon. (That phrase, that term, has some meaning now—great *red* dragon.) Do not have any doubt. "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion"; "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision" (Ps. ii. 6, 4). That is the position; it has been like that. If we could read the spiritual history of nations and kingdoms from Nebuchadnezzar's day onward, we should see the wars of the Lamb, something working mightily unto devastation, but unseen; a spiritual force at work. And these wars of the Revelation are spiritual wars. There may be an acceleration of the process, may be sudden things happening in the collapse of these opposing forces, but it will be, so far as you can see, a common explanation. You may say that this and that worked to bring it about. But you have to get to the ultimate. When you get to the ultimate, you see it is in the wars of the Lamb. You see what I mean. It is very important to get your spiritual vision of this book.

OVERCOMING IN RELATION TO GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE

So we are brought here to this matter of the differences and distinctions on spiritual grounds. It is not a thing of a general character, a wider nature, that I want to say. What we have in the book of the Revelation is not something new to the New Testament. It is not really a new order of things at all. I have before pointed out that when you come to the beginning of this book and you have the messages to the seven churches in Asia, you have the risen Lord speaking to the churches that were raised up through the instrumentality of the Apostle Paul. Paul was used in Asia for the bringing into being of those churches, either personally or indirectly, and it was through Paul that the full revelation of God's eternal purpose was given to the churches in Asia. Look at Ephesus, and remember that the letter to the Ephesians was not specifically for the Ephesians, but was a circular letter for Laodicea as well as Ephesus. This full revelation of God's eternal purpose in its fulness was given to those churches, and then the risen Lord comes back to

those churches to bring them to judgment—for what? He is standing in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, those churches, for what purpose?

It is to deal with them on the basis of the full revelation of His eternal purpose. There are plenty of things that are less than the Lord's purpose, and while He commends everything that is good—He has to condemn much that is wrong, but He commends what is good—in effect He says, 'But that is not all I revealed to you, this is not all I have shown you; I have given you to see My eternal counsels in fulness—read the letters that are in your hand. Now to judgment! Not that you are wholly and utterly bad and corrupt,—not that there are lacking all signs of goodness, not that there is not something that is quite commendable about you—but what about this full revelation that has been given to you? That is the point and that is going to determine the issue'. "He that overcometh . . ."; not just he that overcometh certain sins, faults, failures, weaknesses, but he that overcomes everything that gets in the way of full purpose. The hundred and forty-four thousand are the overcomers. And what are the overcomers? They are those who have come into the value and meaning of the whole revelation of God's eternal purpose, and they are nearest to His heart. It is a spiritual matter.

THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

Does that impress you? If we do not see it in that light, I do not think we have the key to the whole book. This book, you see, stands apart. God is dealing with everything in the light of His full revelation of eternal counsels. Then, when we have seen that, we are ready, prepared, to come to this matter which is the centremost thing of the whole book—the grand consummation, the marriage of the Lamb. It is like a mighty climax when you come to this—"And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying. Hallelujah: for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth. Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." The marriage of the Lamb is the climax, there is nothing beyond that. God's end is reached in the marriage of the Lamb. God's heavenly thought about marriage is identity, such a oneness of heart and spirit and constitution that the two are one. "This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church" (Eph. v. 32). It is oneness, utter oneness, with Him

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

as the Lamb. She has come to such identity with Himself. She is like Him, she answers to Him in every way. When that end is reached there will be the supreme "Hallelujah" in heaven, for the Lord will find the satisfaction toward which He has been working all along—"His wife hath made herself ready".

How? "*It was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints*" (Rev. xix. 8). This is something far ahead of imputed righteousness. Imputed righteousness is for every believer. It is only another phrase for justification by faith. But this is something as to character, as to transformation, as to something wrought, the practical side of righteousness in the life: "the righteous acts of the saints". It is conformity to His image. *That* is the bride, the wife of the Lamb, and when the Lord gets that, He is satisfied, He is satisfied indeed, and all heaven is satisfied.

THE BRIDE'S LOVE FOR THE LAMB

Now there are, as I have said before, approximations to that represented by different companies in different positions in relation to the centre and heart. This one is nearest, that one is not so near, and the other is still less near, and it is all a matter of the measure of Christ as the Lamb. That is, of course, just a statement of truth. But do note that this discrimination is not an arbitrary one. It is not just that God sovereignly appoints that it shall be so, and that if you are meant to be of the hundred and forty-four thousand group you will be because you are meant to be, and if you are not meant to be it is no use your trying to be—you never will be. It is not like that at all. When you come to the question of the Lamb and His bride it is all a love matter. It corresponds to chapter xii, the great red dragon, the woman and the man child, the man child caught up to heaven, and the great declaration—"And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they loved not their life even unto death"; they loved not their own souls unto the death. *For Him* they loved not their own souls unto the death. It is a love matter, and you know you cannot force love, you cannot compel love, you have to leave love alone, and if it is not love you can do nothing about it. But if it is, well, it is spontaneous and it will go all the way; it is a love matter. And so it is here. *The bride*—it is just this whole question of love for the Lord and how far it will take us, how strong and deep that

love for the Lord is, and whether we will just follow Him to the measure of love, unconstrained, uncompelled love, spontaneous devotion to our Lord; self-forgetting, self-denying, self-yielding; all of self being set aside *for Him*.

Do you not feel that this is something that we must face in a new way? We are so continually weighing things up in the light of how they affect us. We are so governed by the effect that situations and circumstances have upon us and our interests. It is really the root of most of our trouble, if not of all of it. We are so earth-bound, so time-bound; this life does mean so very much to us, this world does mean so very much to us. Heaven and eternity are not as real as this world is. If only we could get the heavenly vision and the heavenly sense! If only it could really take hold of us that eternity is real, that everything is as real in eternity and in heaven as it is here, and far more so, just as spiritual things can be more real than temporal things even now. If only we could get the sense of that, would we not be more ready to let go—to let go those things which take such a large place with us here, in this life; should we not be much more prepared to let them go? It is a matter, after all, of heart-relationship to the Lord, and that is what the Lord is trying to work to all the time, to get us there. Every conflict, every battle that we come into, is really circling round one issue, if we recognised it. Right at the heart of everything is this question of love for the Lord, whether we are going on with the Lord. It is like that.

Well now, I said that this is not some new issue in the book of the Revelation. We are right back in the rest of the Bible, and we are particularly back in those letters of Paul. At the end it is a matter of having reached those counsels, those purposes of God from eternity which are revealed in the letters of Paul. Then, when these have been revealed in the first chapters of the letter to the Ephesians, when we have been taken back there and shown the greatness of God's purpose concerning this elect people, Paul goes on, not in a sense of an anticlimax but as so much a part of the whole: "Walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love". Is not that the Lamb coming in there? Is not that walking in the way of the Lamb in relation to the eternal purpose? It is so clear. "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love."

Now do you see the three movements? There is the revelation of the purpose in chapters i, ii and iii of Ephesians. There is the walk according to the Lamb. Where do you arrive at the end of the letter?

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.” “The marriage of the Lamb is come.” That is only saying in figurative language that God has reached that purpose in a company who have gone the way of the Lamb, walked the way of the Lamb, followed the Lamb, and now they are presented to the Lamb as His bride. “The marriage of the Lamb is come.”

And that, may I say again, is the explanation of the particular pains that God takes. It may sound a frightening thing to say that the more we love the Lord the deeper will He take us, the more utter you mean to be for God the more utter will He require you to be. It is like that: that is a fact: and He takes infinite pains with those whose hearts are

really set upon Him; He spares them nothing. He works very deeply and very intensely. He has His opportunity when we say that we mean to be all for Him, but do not let us think that the measure of our devotion to the Lord is going to be the measure of His delivering us from trouble. It will work out the other way. All through it has been like that. The most devoted to the Lord have been the greatest sufferers, but God is taking pains. This ought not to discourage us: it ought to explain to us a great deal. If the Lord really gets hold of us, He is going to do a very deep, thorough work, and we shall have an unusual experience of the way of the Cross, the way of the Lamb. It will be applied at all points, but the issue—nearness to His Throne. The issue is that which satisfies Him most and serves His interests most, for out from that, as we may see later, is fulfilled a marvellous vocation to all regions through eternal ages.

T. A-S.

FAITH THAT RIDES THE STORM

Reading: Mark iv. 35 - 41; 11 Cor. xi. 23 - 30.

IN THE STORM BECAUSE OF OBEDIENCE
TO THE LORD

IN reading that catalogue of experiences, in which Paul draws back a curtain and gives us a glimpse of the course of his life, I could not help thinking what a wrong conception we have of the Christian life. For it is accepted that Paul is a man who is a representative and type of the Church, and here we have the story—the ‘inside’ story—of thirty years packed full of this sort of thing—‘misadventures’, ‘misadventures’, ‘hardships’, ‘disasters’—and it is well that we should recognise that. With all our longing and desire for a peaceful, restful and straightforward course—the mirage that is ever before us—there is here depicted the real life, where it is nothing less than a continual passing from one crisis to another, through one dark, terrible experience after another. We get out of one trouble, fondly hoping that it is the last and now it will be all right, now things will be straight, but we very soon find ourselves facing another emergency.

Now this is the normal, not the abnormal. Once we see that, it is of the greatest help to us: for otherwise we shall be always thinking that things have gone wrong, always struggling to get into straight paths and smooth and calm waters. It is deliberately of the Lord’s ordering that that sort of thing happens in Paul’s life: yes, and in your life and mine, as we are found following the same heavenly call in heart obedience.

The little story that we have read in the Gospel by Mark holds such a wealth of value. It was deliberately of the Lord that they found themselves in the boat. They were not novices in matters relating to the sea. They well knew the possibilities as to what might happen, what could very well happen: but, because He told them to do so, they got into the boat and took Him with them. There is only one way of avoiding the full force of a storm, and that is to stay on shore, leaving the boat at anchor, or tied up to the quay. You may to some extent evade the discomfort of the storm by so doing, but I am not so sure that you will not get more damage and hurt. I remember once crossing the Clyde from Gourock, when there was a fairly heavy sea running, and there was a big boat going down which had no small wash with it. I happened to get on to something that seemed more like a cockleshell than a boat, and I noticed great haste and concern on the part of the crew, and very quickly we were away from the quayside—and then I realised what was the matter. The wash had just arrived, and it was fortunate that we were away from the quayside, for some other boats that were tied up really got hit and did not escape some damage. But we were away, and although we were well tossed about, we suffered no damage. I say, you can escape some of the perils of the storm by being

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

tied up, but there is much associated with being tied up that is not for our good ultimately.

In this whole business, you see, the Lord is working with us, trying to make us spiritual men and women; and the essence of that spirituality is dependence upon God—and that is faith. The Lord is seeking to train us, from the primary class that He brings us into at the beginning, right through all the classes to the end, that we might have true, mighty, overcoming faith for the final battle.

THE LORD ASLEEP IN THE STORM

This little story shows us how the disciples committed themselves to the boat, and took the Lord aboard: the Lord knew all that was going to happen, but He went on board and lay down on a cushion and *went to sleep*—and then the trouble began. It is an amazing thing that the storm did not wake Him. Even with the waters coming into the boat and the spray lashing His face, it did not wake Him. It was the cry of the disciples in their distress that awoke Him. But then, you see, He awoke to rebuke them, to rebuke their lack of faith; and it seems to me that what the Lord was looking for and expecting from His disciples, in that crisis, was a faith that could enable them to ride the storm without a cry of despair. He was disappointed, and how often He is disappointed with you and me.

You see, *the Lord was in the boat*. Of course, He was asleep—that was the whole trouble. They imagined that, because He was asleep, He was quite helpless and the control of things had passed out of His hands. *We* need never believe that, for our risen Lord has no need of sleep. In those situations into which He brings us, as He seeks to teach and train us, where the waves are so menacing, the wind is so threatening, everything seems at the point of disintegration, let us see to it, let us make sure, that the Lord is with us, that we are not on our own. If the Lord is with us, that is enough. The Lord wanted that boat to get through that storm without His being awakened. The disciples had not got the faith for it. They were in a panic of despair. They said nothing about Him perishing, you notice. They said, "Carest thou not that *we* perish?" This personal concern, when *we* are involved, is the utter negation of pure faith, it is the sheer loss of what the Lord is after. "Carest thou not that *we* perish?"

The Lord, we may suppose, was hoping that He would remain undisturbed. How many times has He got you into that position where everything seems at an end: there is only one thing for you to do, and that is to cry to the Lord—cry out in

the sheer despair of your heart that there is no way through, that things are going to pieces in your life? In your private life, in the secret of your heart, maybe things are all under the lash of the storm—the Lord there, but taking no notice, letting you get on with it. Yes, He is wanting to see if you have the ability to ride the storm in faith. He is there. Because He is there, can the boat go down? With the Lord of the heaven and the earth and the sea there, is it possible for the boat to break up? is it possible for those that are with Him to be drowned? He is there. None of those things can happen. Great as the storm was, had it been tenfold more in its intensity, the Lord was in the boat. Is the Lord in your heart? Whatever happens, with the Lord there you cannot drown, you cannot be lost. Yes, but have you the faith, the assurance, quietly to face the storm, the tremendous upheaval, without crying for deliverance, without in panic turning to Him—yes, to rebuke Him—"Carest thou not?"

THE LORD SEEKING A QUALITY OF FAITH

You see, this is a quality of faith that the Lord is seeking. Surely we are entering into days where this kind of faith will be found essential for the Church's life and for the upward movement of the saints. I have no question whatever that what is happening to us immediately as a people here is along this line—a challenge to our faith. You are in a situation, you have a problem. It may be that, like so many, you are in a critical situation—a situation of real crisis. What are you going to do?

Every crisis through which Paul went was an adequate justification for Him to cry out, 'Have I made a mistake? the Lord is not with me now!' I wonder what his thoughts were when he was in the sea for a night and a day. I wonder what passed through Paul's mind with the scourgings, one short of taking his life, with the beating with rods, with the hunger and the thirst: what were his thoughts? Surely he had enough ground to be stumbled! Surely he had enough to say, 'We are not getting through like this, this will not do, this is enough. I have finished!' He had everything. But what a tremendous man Paul was! What a grip God had on his heart! What a faith had been instilled into him! What an inspiration he is to us as we think about him! He went through it all, thirty years packed full of this sort of thing, as just the side-issue, the background, of all the other ministry—yes, of a world-ministry. It was the very essence of his ministry that in the midst of it all he could hold

on to God without panic, without fever. He could hold on to God through all that: in quiet, humble dependence upon the Lord—not in any stubborn strength of will—he could go through it all. If ever a man in this life rode the storm, it was Paul.

And our contribution to one another is along this line. Eyes are upon you as you go through the fire or the water. How will he take it? How will she take it? What will happen? And your life will be an inspiration to the Church and a strengthening to those who are weaker as you are seen quietly going through; and, as you let the Lord see that the attitude of your heart is, 'He is there all right, He is there', instead of earning the rebuke—'Have you not yet faith, do you not yet believe?', earning a commendation.

You wonder what the Lord would have said if they had got to the other side and had woken Him

up to land—not to still the storm. I am quite sure of this: the purpose of His putting them into that situation would have been fulfilled, He would have got what He wanted in them.

As we read this story, we think what a wonderful thing it was that the Lord had power over the wind and the sea. Of course He had. But are you wanting constant demonstrations? The Lord wants you to believe in His power and let Him see it. In your situation to-day the Lord is after this. He is seeking to develop your faith. If you will commit yourself to Him and leave the land, cut all those things that have tied you up, get out on to the sea with Him, it may not be a smooth crossing, but you will come into values that you could never have known by remaining where you were, or if the sea had been calm. The Lord grant it to us to do so.

A. G. T.

PRIDE AND ITS UNDOING

IF I were asked to choose a text for what is on my heart I should have very great difficulty. I can only say to you that the whole Book is the text, so I give you the whole Bible as my text, and what I have on my heart I am going to present, in the first place, in the form of three propositions or questions.

Firstly: If there was one particular thing that was the cause of all the suffering, the misery, the trouble, the distress, the wars, and the necessity for God to stand back in reserve; would we not wish with all our being to be saved and delivered from that thing? There is such a thing, and I am quite sure that, if it really did come home to us that all that I have mentioned, and much more, from the beginning until now and to the end, was related to and bound up with that one thing, your answer to my question would be, 'The Lord save me from that! With all my heart, with all my being, I do seek to be delivered from that!' I am sure you agree.

Secondly: If there was one thing that gave God the ground for being toward us, free from fear and free from reserve on His part, so that His purposes could be realised, His power be released, His wisdom be active, fellowship with Him be unclouded, and His glory be resultant from our having been here on this earth; would we not with all our heart and with all our being say, 'Let that be in me!'? We certainly would be in very earnest and whole-hearted quest for that, would we not?

Thirdly: If that first thing should be *in* us, that first evil thing, and we could only be delivered from its power and its activity by a deep application of the Cross of the Lord Jesus, and ever deeper application, though it might cost suffering, breaking, emptying, humbling; would we not say that the Lord would be justified in whatever course He took to bring that thing into subjection, making way in so doing for the other thing, really supplanting the evil thing by the other, the good thing; would we not justify God in His methods, in His way? If that were the end in view and He was moving toward that end, would we not say, 'The Lord is right, the Lord is justified'? Do you agree with that? Perhaps it is not so easy to say, Yes here—but when we come to think about it, what is the alternative? The alternative is the loss of the one glorious thing, with its far fuller meaning than I have indicated, through the remaining of the other evil thing. These are the alternatives. Then is the Lord justified in what He does to displace the one and implant the other?

What is the one evil thing, the cause of all that we have mentioned, and very much more? It is *pride*—the root of all the trouble. What is the good thing? Well, just the opposite—*humility*. I started by saying that I gave you the Bible as my text, for the whole Bible is built upon this issue of pride or humility, with their twofold consequences. That is a big field in which to walk and meditate; but there is no doubt about it—where-

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

ever you look, from the day that man sinned to this day and to the end which the Bible gives us, you find it is just that issue which lies behind the whole history of God and man and the evil forces—just that issue. There are many aspects of it, but it comes to one question. In one way or another it can be traced to this question of pride or humility.

Yes, the whole Bible is built upon it. The whole meaning of Christ's coming into this world is bound up with it, His very coming from glory. Somewhere, somehow, before He arrived, He "emptied himself" (Phil. ii. 7). He spoke to the Father later of the glory He had with Him before the world was (John xvii. 5). He had laid aside all that, He had emptied Himself. And then His strange—ah, yes, very strange until we have this key—His strange entry into this world, the circumstances of it all related to His coming and His whole time here. "*The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests [lit. roosts]; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head*" (Matt. viii. 20). It is all this one issue. Some tremendous thing is being fought out and dealt with, some immense thing. The whole meaning of His coming—His condescension, self-emptying, birth, life, death—and the whole explanation of the experiences of His people, is all centred in this one matter. The discipline—the chastening, as it is termed—the Lord's dealings with us, are centred in one thing: it is all related to the purpose for which Christ came, and how He came and how He accomplished the purpose.

And, further, the whole nature and vocation of the Church is centred in this one thing. The Church that is going to serve the eternal counsels of God will never be a Church of pride, self-glory, worldly glory, worldly power, worldly praise. It will be, ever and always, what it was at the beginning, something that the world will not look upon with praise, will always look upon with contempt. That is essential to its vocation, for its vocation is positively to displace the world, and its temper and spirit and standards: to do something spiritually in this universe—to rid it of that evil thing which has been its plague and curse from Adam onward.

It does not need any argument to show that the cause of wars, the cause of all the trouble, is pride—somewhere, somehow. No wonder then the phrase occurs—"the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. xiii. 8). This is not something subsequent, taking place late in the history of this world. From the foundation of the world the Lamb was slain. And if a lamb symbolizes anything at all, it symbolizes purity and innocence of motive, dependence, selflessness, weakness—all

that from this world's standpoint of glory, greatness, power and wisdom is at a discount—and it is therefore not surprising that the Holy Spirit chooses to use the diminutive in relation even to a lamb. It is not apparent in our translation, but it is there quite clearly in the original—"a little Lamb"—a symbol of that which overcomes, fights out this battle from the foundation of the world. This issue is the cause of all the trouble—the cause of God standing back, God in reserve, God unable to commit Himself, because of this thing here that is always ready to take hold of Him and make Him and His blessings serve its ends and glorify itself; that is always there ready to snap up the slightest goodness of the Lord and turn it to its own glory. It is there. And so the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world.

And it does invest that proclamation of John with such full significance—"The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world" (John i. 29). What is *the* sin of the world? It is pride. You may not think so; you may not see it: but I would ask you to consider again and see if all that is called sin cannot be traced to this, if it is not this in some form of expression. For what is the root of pride? What is pride? It is *selfhood* come to life, risen up, active—that is the root of pride; and the branches and the fruit—how many they are!—are jealousy, covetousness, wrath, and all the rest. How is wrath pride? Well, wrath, if it is not holy, purified, blood-purged wrath like the wrath of the Lamb, if it is wrath which is actuated by ourselves and our interests, is the wrath of selfhood. So often our anger is our self-preservation, our reaction to some threat to our interests or our likes. Rebellion, stubbornness, prejudice, and much of our fear, are all traceable to pride. What are we afraid of? What are we fearing? If we examined our fears, why are we afraid? If we were utterly severed from the personal interest—that is, if we could hand entirely over to the Lord and get out of the picture ourselves—would not a lot of our fear go? And so we might go on: but we do not want to indulge in a wholesale analysis of human nature or of pride. We have mentioned enough to show that pride is the root and that there are countless fruits traceable to that root.

So, on the one side, it is terribly true: "Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. xvi. 5). "The haughty he knoweth from afar" (Ps. cxxxviii. 6). It all sprang out of that proud heart that lifted itself up and said, "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: . . . I will be like the Most High" (Isa. xiv. 13, 14). With that *I*, all the trouble began, and that one bit

his poison into the race. The poison of the human race is pride, and it has come all the way down. It is sometimes almost untraceable: we are not able always to trace it out in all its forms, because pride has what we might call negative aspects as well as positive. There are, of course, the obviously, manifestly proud, the ambitious, the assertive, the self-important, the self-sufficient. But there are negative aspects—and I use that word with regard to pride very carefully, because pride is positive whatever form it takes. It is an ugly thing. A lot of our murmuring is pride; a lot of tears are pride—we think they are humility. A lot of our criticism of other people springs from pride: we think we could do better, we could go one better, setting ourselves up as the judge, the critic: pride is at the root. Very much of our poor, miserable tone is, after all, pride. Oh, how subtle and serpentine a thing this is! It is there. So the Lord has to stand back.

On the other hand, look at humility. "To this man will I look"—that is the beginning, the Lord even looking in anyone's direction—"even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit" (Isa. lxvi. 2), and He dwells with them (Isa. lvii. 15). And "the meek will He guide in judgement: and the meek will He teach His way" (Ps. xxv. 9). And "the meek . . . shall inherit the earth" (Matt. v. 5). It is like that all the way through; vindication is on that basis. "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. xii. 3): and you know when that was said—at the time when his position was disputed, and God appeared at the entrance of the tabernacle and answered the challenge on the ground of the meekness of His servant. God stands by and vindicates the meek.

I say the whole Bible is founded on this issue. What a vital matter this is! Is not the Lord justified in taking *any* steps to clear up that situation—breaking, emptying, humbling, withholding, deferring, delaying: in any way bringing us to nought, to a place of utter dependence, where there is nothing we can rely upon at all but the Lord Himself? Is He justified? It is a tremendous process. It is a very real, very devastating work: and the very fact that we suffer so much shows how deep and real it is.

Yes, but you see the Lord has such great ends in view. It is not just that the Lord wants people of a certain kind and type: not just that He wants us to be of a certain nature. He created man for a great destiny, and this thing—pride—came in and

made it impossible for man to fulfil that destiny. So He has secured it in a Man utterly different from us—the Lamb slain, the Man who emptied Himself, the Man who became obedient *unto death*, yes, such a death as the Cross, the last word in shame, in despicability; and now He says to us, "Have this mind in you" (Phil. ii. 5). I think the greatest conjunction in all the Bible is there. "Wherefore . . . God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name" (Phil. ii. 9). "*Wherefore*"—all that leads up to that and all that issues from that. Two vast realms of meaning and value are linked by that conjunction. "*wherefore*". But—'this is the way the Master went'. Well, we cannot do what He did, or fulfil all that He fulfilled, but we are called to drink of the cup which was His cup.

So may this be a word of interpretation as to why the Lord is dealing with us as He has and does—on the one hand, overcoming this evil thing, breaking, emptying, grinding to powder, until there is nothing of us left in the matter of self-sufficiency; on the other hand, giving Himself, increasing Himself.

Now this is not a word, perhaps, of great inspiration, but I feel it to be a word of very great importance. This must be true of us individually. There must also be a corporate humility. This is the way along which the Lord will commit Himself. He will never give us anything to feed our flesh, to enlarge and strengthen our natural life. He will hold us to the way that keeps us safe where that is concerned. How wonderfully the Bible becomes alive when you look at it in this way! It was Adam's sin, Israel's sin, the sin of us all. "By reason of the exceeding greatness of the revelations . . . that I should not be exalted overmuch, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, that I should not be exalted overmuch" (II Cor. xii. 7): that was making a man safe for great revelation, undercutting pride.

Yes, this is an important word; it explains a lot. But let us remember that the Lord always has positive ends in view, not negative. Though His ways may seem to be destructive, even annihilating ways, He has always in view—and not in the far view only, but as quickly as possible, as soon as possible—that position where He can Himself let go, so to speak, His own fears, His own reserves; and say, 'I have found that to which I can give Myself without fear'. May it be like that with us.

T. A-S.

ON GIVING GOD A CHANCE

" Prove me now, saith the Lord of Hosts " (Malachi iii. 10).

OCCASIONALLY we light on somebody who tells us that he never had a chance. Everything has been adverse since his birth. He may have been born of degenerate stock, and cradled amid vice—then afterwards, when he has wrecked his life, he cries " God knows, I never had a chance ". But there is someone else who never had a chance, in the lives of innumerable men and women—and that someone else is *God*. I should like my readers to ask themselves this question, " Have I ever really given God a chance? "

Of course, it may be argued that there is no need of giving God a chance. He has a power that is irresistible, and He can make His chances. But that is the one thing God never does. Recall that mystical saying of our Lord, " Behold, I stand at the door and knock ". If He yearns to enter why does He stand there knocking? Why does He not shatter down the door? The strange thing is He never will do that, though He be clothed in the panoply of heaven: we must give Him the opportunity to enter. When He made free beings to have converse with, the Almighty self-limited His power. He and man could never have loving fellowship if freedom were overborne by His omnipotence. That is why we have to open the door if the blessed Saviour is to enter. That is why we must give God a chance.

We must give God a chance, for instance, if we want to discover what He is. We never can find that out by speculation. In one of the most beautiful of the books of Dickens we have the story of little Florence Dombey. Her heart was big with love towards her father. But Mr. Dombey never knew the wealth of affection that was hidden there, because he never gave his little girl a chance. One brings to me a hyacinth bulb, and tells me it is a fine variety. And I may be an expert botanist, and be able to lecture learnedly on bulbs. But it will never reveal its hidden glory, nor ring for me its carillon of bells, till I give that hyacinth bulb its chance. The farmer must give the seed its chance if he is to find the harvest in the seed. The mother must give her child a chance, to know the powers slumbering in her child. And if we are ever to know all there is in God, it is not enough to be learned in His attributes. We must give God a chance.

It is equally necessary to do this if we want to know what He can do for us. One might illustrate that from Simon Peter. When we first meet Peter by the Lake of Galilee he is an untutored and pro-

vincial fisherman. When we last meet him everything is different: he is one of the greatest characters of history. Peter found what Christ could do for him, not by discussing His claims to be Messiah, but by following and giving Him His chance. There were many prodigals doubtless in the far country; but they had not the courage to go home. They, too, had fathers who were yearning for them, but they gave them no opportunity of showing it. But one went homeward, taking all the risks, and gave his father the chance that he was longing for—and for him there was music and dancing in the house.

If you ask how we give God a chance, I answer we do it first by trusting Him. Trusting is just giving God a chance. When one suffers excruciating pain very often the surgeon is brought in. He diagnoses the nature of the malady, and immediately suggests an operation. It is a big venture to take chloroform and surrender oneself entirely to another—but the surgeon gets his chance by being trusted. A traveller wants to get to London by a certain hour in the evening. The railway company bids him take a certain train, and he will arrive at the appointed hour. The traveller knows nothing of the engine-driver, nor of the permanent way, nor of the couplings—but the company gets its chance by being trusted. Trust the surgeon and he gets his chance. Trust the railway and it gets its chance. And much in the same way, when we trust God we are giving *Him* the chance that He is longing for—to heal us, to carry us safely to a city more beautiful than London, for there is no night there.

But not only do we give God a chance by trusting Him: we do it also by obeying Him. One thinks of the ten lepers in the story. When our Lord said, " Go, show yourselves to the priest ", it must have seemed to them a strange command. They were lepers—they could look for nothing save the rejection they were too familiar with. Then follows that very beautiful word, so rich in meaning for us all—it came to pass that *as they went* they were healed. Had they refused obedience to a plain command they would have been lepers to their dying day. Had they stood where they were, arguing the matter, they never had known cleansing. But they obeyed, though it was difficult, and though they failed to see the reason of the order—and obeying, *they gave the Lord His chance.*

(SELECTED)

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

THE GOSPEL OF THIS HOUSE CALLED "ME"

VI. THE PUMP

NOT many houses have a pump inside them, but very few do not have a pump somewhere connected to them. Most have the pump some distance away; a great pump-house with huge arms in it moving up and down, sending the water through the great mains, through the pipes which run from them to our houses, and finally through the taps in our wash places.

I have just been to a house where the pump is inside, and day and night, year in and year out, you can hear that little engine throbbing away as it pulls the water in and then sends it out to every point of supply.

No boy or girl needs to be told that in every house called "Me" there is a pump. When you have been running hard, or when you have had a fright, or when you are very excited over some special pleasure that is coming, the little pump just *hammers* away, and you know quite well that it is there. If you were to listen to it through one of those funny things used by doctors when they examine your chest, you would almost be scared at what a noise it makes and would not believe that this pump, which usually seems so quiet, is all the time banging away like that. We call the pump our 'heart'.

In a full-grown person the heart only weighs about three-quarters of a pound. We speak of these bumpings as heart-beats. There are between sixty and eighty of these 'beats' every minute: about 100,000 every day: 40,000,000 in a year. It is strong enough to move more than ten tons of blood every twenty-four hours. Not that we have ten tons of blood in us, but, if we had, the heart could move it in that time. It never rests for more than a tiny part of a second at a time, and it must never get tired or we shall be seriously ill. I am not telling you now what its work is, but just telling you that our life depends entirely upon its faithful, untiring going on.

How much we use the word 'heart' when we mean the most important things in the world. We speak of something or someone being the very heart of things! We say that people do or no not

'put their heart into things'—work, games, and so on. We say that such-and-such a person is 'broken-hearted'. Some people 'lose heart'. Others are said to be very 'hearty' people. All such ways of speaking are only meant to show that the 'heart' is *very* important and everything for life depends upon it.

We can really say that the heart is the seat of life. If the heart stops, life ends. If the heart is weak, life is weak. If the heart is sick or diseased, life is like that. If the heart is strong, clean and healthy, then there is the best hope for life. Often it is the heart that overcomes other weaknesses and troubles in the body.

Well, this is why the Bible has so much to say about the 'heart'. Of course it does not always mean this little engine or pump, pumping the blood all round our bodies to every tiny point, but it means that the heart is a parable.

God has made these bodies (as we said in our first talk) to be like parables—object-lessons—of His wonderful thoughts and ideas, and from what we see, hear and feel, we are led to more wonderful things which we cannot see.

The wise man—Solomon—said, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life". He was meaning our minds and the thoughts we think, for, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he". (That is the kind of man he is.)

The Psalmist cried, "Create in me a clean heart, O God". Through Ezekiel God said, "I will take away the stony heart . . . and I will give you a heart of flesh". There are very, very many references to the heart (can you find some more?).

Well then, this is what we mean when we say that we have 'given our heart to Jesus' or we 'have asked Jesus to come into our heart'. It is our way of saying that we give all our life to Him, or have asked Him to come into all our life.

Indeed, it means more than that, it means that we want Him to *be* our very life. We also mean that we cannot make our own life good, or keep it right; we need Him to do that for us.

Have you done that?

'Interpreter'

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

DELIVERANCE IN A DAY OF JUDGMENT

Reading : Ezekiel xiv. 12 - 20.

THAT is a very difficult and hard portion of Scripture ; but you must remember that the people of God had gone very, very far away from God's mind and will, in the days when Ezekiel prophesied : so much so that the Lord took the attitude that their state was practically incurable. They had for many centuries had the knowledge of God's will, as it had been proclaimed to them by seers and prophets. They had in their possession the very oracles of God. God had, in numerous, almost countless ways, made it clear that He was for them, that He was ready to show His power and His love to them, and they had steadily set aside His word, turned away from Him, neglected His law, violated all that He had given them of the knowledge of His will ; they had persistently hardened their hearts : so that the state had come when they were entirely without a sense of sin, when no appeal to them from God made any difference. His signs, all the things which spoke of Him, were in the land, but they had no respect, they passed on their way, they were almost entirely without any sense of God's requirements in their lives. They had reached the place where a prophet might hold an open-air meeting and proclaim to them God's mind, God's will, God's requirements, and no one would stop to listen : they passed on their way indifferent. The places of meeting, the house of God, were neglected. And so it came to be like this : the Lord made this terrible declaration, that, though Noah and Daniel and Job were in the land, it would make no difference, except to themselves. When God is so ignored, repudiated, left out of account, judgment is inevitable.

Of course, for a company of God's people that may have no message, when we leave it there. But there is a message for us. That state of things is not unlike the condition as found in our own country—the unheeding ear, the cold, rejecting heart, the increasing difficulty to get men to attend to the things of God. We are moving fast toward such a place, and we can already see the dark clouds of judgment drawing very near ; and it is not exaggerating, or saying too strong a thing, to say that, if the men who, in their day, did represent God in a very mighty way, were to be accumulated in our day, it would not make much differ-

ence. Here were three men who had mightily counted for God in different ages. In their own days, in different ways, they registered for God in this world, and now the Lord says, 'Though I were to gather them all together, in one day in one place, it would make no difference ; people would not take any notice.' That is terrible. Their ear is so heavy and dull, their hearts are so cold and indifferent, that it does not matter what appeal you make.

But let us take this principle in reverse for ourselves. In a day of judgment which must be, which is inevitable—it is coming—who will be delivered ? For there are those who will be delivered. "They should deliver . . . their own souls" : that is, they would be delivered. While it says that many will not, it does say, if not in actual words, at least by implication, that there are those who will be delivered. God will be faithful to His faithful ones. Here are three representative men, representative of those who in the day of judgment will be delivered : Noah, Daniel, and Job. Note the order, because that is not the Biblical order. Noah, of course, does come first of the three—but where does Job come ? He might have come before Noah or he might have come after ; but certainly Daniel stands third : yet he is put second here. It is not a mistake, not an oversight, not a slip. No : as it is here in the inspired Word of God, it is right, it is spiritually right.

I cannot stay with the significance of these three men in any fulness. But I note one thing about them all. Noah, mentioned first, lived in a day when the whole course of human nature had moved away from God, when human nature had become altogether indifferent to God. It was a matter of the race. God looked in the days of Noah and saw that all men had gone astray. It was the course of man's evil nature : and Noah lived in that day and stood against the course of nature, against the way that humanity goes when it is left to itself, leaving God out and getting further and further away from Him. Daniel, coming second here, lived in a day and in a place where the world power was all against God, the day of Babylon, the world system, in the glorifying of man and the excluding and denying of God ; and Daniel stood up against that, not only against the course of human nature, but against the whole world system. He stood up against that, and

overcame it. Job is mentioned third, and the scene of Job's conflict was still deeper, still more remote. You know the story of Job—it was in the realm of spiritual forces, something more than human nature and this world system. It was in the realm of 'principalities and powers and world-rulers of this darkness'. Job's whole battle was against the devil himself.

And in these three realms these men triumphed. In the realm of evil human nature, Noah triumphed. In the realm of the world's glory in itself and rejection of God, Daniel triumphed—at great cost, but he triumphed. And in the realm of the very devil himself, Job triumphed. A threefold glorious triumph is represented by these men. It makes this statement of Ezekiel a very terrible one—for three men like that to be brought together in one time, and yet for men to take no notice, to be unaffected.

However, these men bring their message to us. We are in this threefold realm. We know the course of nature, sinful nature; we know the conflict with this fallen humanity. But, blessed be God, we know the way of victory there. We know that it is in that very realm of sinful nature that the Apostle cries his great, exultant, triumphant cry—*"Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Rom. vii. 24, 25). That is victory over sin.

The world is a very potent force against God and what is of God. This whole system makes it very difficult for Christians; it is altogether opposed to the living of a godly life. You know it, most of you—you young people know it very well—and you have got a real conflict here in the realm of this world system—God-neglecting, God-rejecting, God-spurning, God-ignoring; you are right up against it. But the same Apostle cries, *"Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world"* (Gal. vi. 14). Here is victory over the world.

And Job—well, we know something about conflict with the spiritual forces of evil: we know that there is a real drama being fought out there. Job

did not know. I think one of the helpful things about Job is that he complained and grumbled so much. I am very glad that he did! Why? Because, in the light of what God said about him later, it shows that God knew that the complaints and grumbles were just the mental perplexities of Job, that they were not true of his spirit. His spirit was steadfast with God, his spirit was true, his heart was really for the Lord. Although he was perplexed, and could not understand what was going on or what was the meaning of things, and sometimes felt that God was not doing the right thing by him, and said so, God knew Job better. We do not understand God, and we sometimes have a quarrel with God; but He knows us and knows that we love Him—that we want nothing beside Him. What we want in our hearts is the Lord and only the Lord. This other sort of thing is only our mental state for the time being. The Lord knows better than that. Your grumble is just your inability to understand, but He knows your heart. Job went through in his heart. God was able to say of him—and He never says anything just for the sake of paying compliments—that Job had 'spoken of Him the thing that is right' (Job xlii. 7). Here is that righteousness which is of faith, that is a triumph over the very power of the enemy.

How much ought to be said on these things! But here is a threefold triumph, in spirit, in heart: over flesh, over sin; over the world and its power; over Satan and his hatred of that and those who belong to God; and there is triumph in Christ. These are the ones who will be preserved by God, who will deliver themselves, who will be saved in the day of judgment. These are the ones who go through.

And, what is more, God *must have* such people in the earth. Even though others spurn them, do not heed them, pass on their way—even though it be like that, God must have them here as a testimony. He must have such people as that in the earth. He must be able to point to them and say, 'Have you considered my servant Job?' If there should be an enquiring one—'There you are: there is where you will get help'. He must have us here like that until the end comes; He needs us.

T. A-S.

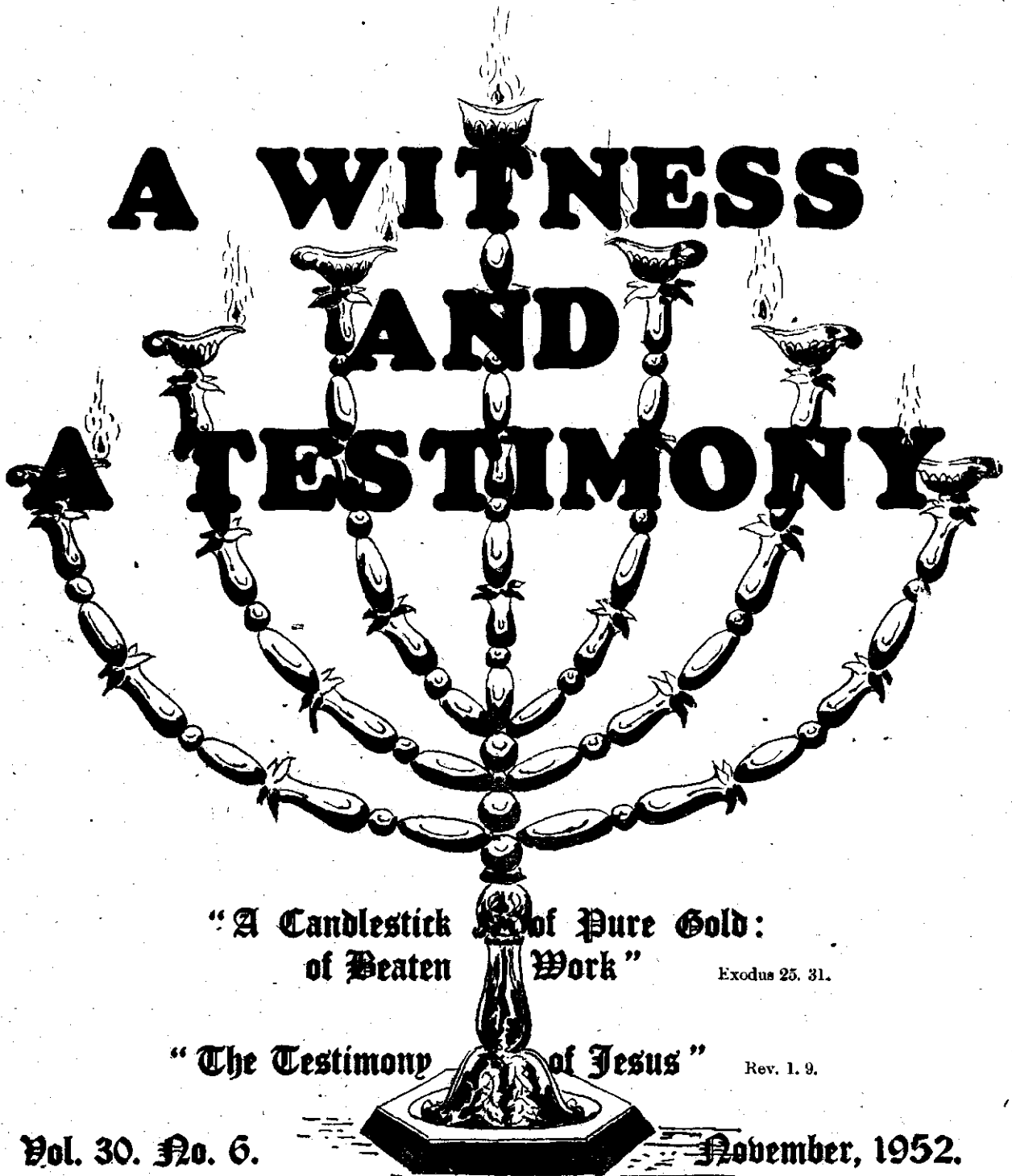
THIS MINISTRY

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

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

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

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



A WITNESS AND TESTIMONY

**"A Candlestick of Pure Gold:
of Beaten Work"**

Exodus 25. 31.

"The Testimony of Jesus"

Rev. 1. 9.

Vol. 30. No. 6.

November, 1952.

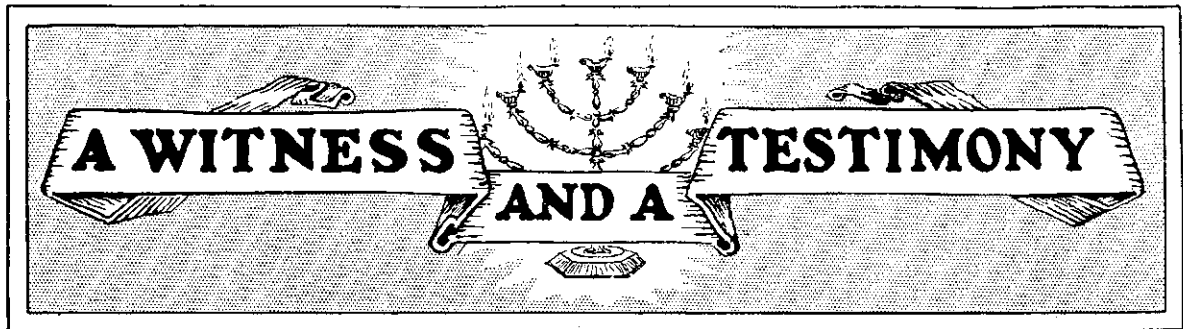
THIS MINISTRY

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

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

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

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



NOVEMBER — DECEMBER, 1952.

Vol. 30. No. 6.

EDITOR'S LETTER

BELOVED OF GOD,

With this last issue of the paper for this year (and it will not reach many of you until very near the end of the year) I feel a strong desire and urge to look back and on with you. For myself, it has been a very full year. So far as movements are concerned, the fullest year of my life. I have travelled by air alone twenty-six thousand miles, and quite a bit in other ways. This has involved *many* conferences, meetings, etc. so that there has been a very great deal given out. To this must be added all the ministries and labours of my colleagues and fellow-workers. This is not mentioned just as news or information, although it will show that "a great and effectual door" is opened to us. But I mention this because it will indicate that we are not spending our time up in some corner, imagining things, and ministering to hypothetical situations. We are in immediate and direct touch with the spiritual and actual situation as represented by a very large area. We have no hesitation, though much sorrow, in saying that the situation spiritually is very, very sad and deplorable. It is our well-considered and deeply-rooted conviction that some great and drastic judgment from heaven of Christendom is absolutely imperative. We are equally convinced that it has commenced and is moving obdurately and inflexibly across the world. Just as the Assyrians were the instrument under the sovereignty of God to sift Israel in the last dispensation, so it is most likely that the power moving over the earth to-day—a combination of Satanic forces with human instruments—is going to test the whole of Christendom as to its real spiritual measure. This may very well be the counterpart of what took place in the year 70 A.D. when Judaism was shaken to its foundations and fell. The Scriptures quite definitely foretell a tribulation coming upon "the whole world to try them that are upon the earth". This is something much more than Jewry.

The words quoted from the prophet seem yet to be capable of a fuller-ranged fulfilment than even the above-mentioned 'shaking'. "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also the heavens". (Hebrews xii. 26, 27).

There is no doubt that the Letter to the Hebrews was a supreme effort to get Christian believers detached from an earthly form of Christianity, and attached to Christ in heaven. That effort had as one of its strong reasons the fact that a great shaking was foretold, foreseen, and imminent. That shaking was to be in two parts, an earlier and a latter; an entirely earthly, and later an earthly and heavenly combined. The effect of the shaking, and, indeed, the purpose of it, would be to test everything as to abiding values. The former and earthly shaking was Jewish, but it had all the elements in principle and type of the latter.

In the destruction of Jerusalem—toward which the Letter pointed—the whole earth was shaken so far as Jewry was concerned. The Temple, as the focal point of that whole world, crashed even with

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

the ground. The priesthood, as gathered up in the high-priestly order, passed away. The temple service ended, and the nation ceased to be an integrate and unified people.

These were things capable of being removed. And yet how long they had stood! What forces they had withstood! What confidence there was that they could never cease to be! How assured they were that God was so bound up with it all that it could never be destroyed and cease to be! How they fought and clung to it to the last terrible extremity! But it was of no avail. God was no longer wanting the framework and earthly system, which had taken so much room, and energy, and expenditure, before the really spiritual was reached. The percentage of spiritual value was so small after all, and spiritual interests lay so far along the labyrinthine ways of religious machinery and tradition, that it was not worth while. The means to the end was not immediate, that is, there was far too big a distance between the means and the end. There was no *immediate* touch with the real Divine requirement, and there was far too much that was intermediate. And so it had to go, and, rather than preserve it, God Himself shook it.

What remained after the shaking was just that, and that only, which was Christ in a spiritual and heavenly way: Christ in heaven, and here by His Spirit, the gathering point, or occasion of assembling; Christ in heaven the High Priest and Sacrifice; the order of God's house here a purely spiritual and heavenly one—not formal, arranged, imposed, imitated, or material. Order grows out of life, and if that life is Divine, and unchecked, Divine order will be spontaneous.

The amazing thing is how blind and unbelieving Christian people are, and therefore how unwilling to seek to know the way of the 'unshakable'. In a *very small* part of our lifetime the phrase 'world evangelization' (from one part to another) has been rendered unusable, and all that mighty machine is having to be revised. Countries which were until quite recently the greatest spheres of 'missionary' activity are now closed as such. There is a feverish race to try to move ahead of the flood in other countries which are already encircled and undermined. In those overrun countries nothing but a true and living knowledge of the Lord is stemming the tide. The framework and organized structure of Christianity is gone. Deeply, stealthily, and irresistibly this sinister work is paving the way for swift and paralyzing movements in all the rest of the world, as much in the West as in the East. The result will be the same everywhere, little as it may seem possible because of long traditions and strong establishments. It seems a terrible thing, even to think, but as we have touched so very much of what is called 'Christianity' we are bound to believe that, because vast numbers who call themselves Christian are in an utterly false position, and the system itself has become so largely an earthly, traditional, formal, and unspiritual thing, this world-wide shaking is quite necessary and will be eventually justified. If we were writing a treatise, we could show that what is called 'Christianity' is really the greatest enemy of Christ.

It will be seen that it is not a matter of substituting another and better *system* for an old and poor or bad one. Some people seem to think that it is all or largely a matter of the order, technique, and form, and if we returned to the 'New Testament' form or order of churches all would be well. The fact is that, while certain things characterized the New Testament churches, the New Testament *does not* give us a complete pattern according to which churches are to be set up or formed! There is no blue-print for churches in the New Testament, and to try to form New Testament churches is only to create another system which may be as legal, sectarian and dead as others. Churches, like the Church, are organisms which spring out of life, which life itself springs out of *the Cross of Christ wrought into the very being of believers*. Unless believers are crucified people, there can be no true expression of the Church.

This brings us to our particular point. What is the pressing imperative in view of this oncoming flood of testing, which has already carried away very many of those who were called Christian, and even evangelical Christians?

Surely there is only one answer:—On the one hand, a ministry which has as its substance and object the "rooting and grounding", the establishing, the building up, of believers; the real increase of "the measure of Christ". This must get behind evangelism, so that the work is deep, not superficial; enduring, not transient; intrinsic, not general! On the other hand, believers must really take stock of their Christianity. Is it just a tradition, an assumption, an external system, the thing which is common

NOVEMBER — DECEMBER, 1952.

acceptance—more or less? Or is it really “by revelation of Jesus Christ” in the heart? A real walk with God, and a *growing* knowledge of Christ, a life in the Spirit? God has said it: the things which *can* be shaken *will* be. What have we got that, being unshakable, will remain?

So, with our review and outlook, we gird up the loins of our minds, and feel that the small bit of this ‘building’ ministry committed to us must be pursued with greater devotion. How we wish that it were possible to gather the people of God together in every country and minister Christ to them, and more than we have done!

Dear friends, let us away with suspicions, prejudices, misunderstandings, and fears; these things which are such successful means and methods of Satan to defeat God’s purpose in many lives—His purpose of the fulness of Christ; and let us pray much—as Paul besought the saints to pray—that “a door may be opened to speak the mystery”; that a mighty new movement of the Spirit of God will take effect in the direction of spiritual purity, strength, and reality. Oh, that such a movement might begin before this year closes, and the critical year—1953—be marked by a deep movement of the Lord’s people toward Himself!

Make this a matter of prayer as to yourself, and then for all His own.

Pray also for us that we may be very truly and faithfully led as to what the Lord wants of us, and where. Calls and needs are so many; our burden is so great! We do want to do that which will have the greatest measure of *intrinsic* spiritual value. You know that it is *not* a ‘teaching’, a ‘movement’, or any ‘thing’ that we are interested in or concerned with. It is truly “the measure of Christ” in His members and Body.

The Lord continue to make this ministry effective to His end. Thank you for all your loving and faithful co-operation and fellowship.

With greetings in Him,

Yours in His grace,

T. AUSTIN-SPARKS.

UNION WITH CHRIST

(continued)

IV. VOCATIONAL UNION

“I will build my church” (Matthew xvi. 18).

“Christ was faithful over God’s house as a son. And we are his house, if we hold fast our confidence firm unto the end” (Hebrews ii. 6, R.S.V. margin).

“Christ Jesus . . . in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians ii 20–22).

“Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house” (1 Peter ii. 5).

I trust that you are seeing in these various aspects of union with Christ a particular value and meaning and conception bound up with each one. If you have not quite clearly and definitely grasped that, will you please go back again and start at the beginning, not just accepting that these are forms of

union with Christ, that there is eternal union and there is creational union and there is marital union, but fasten upon the particular meaning and idea of each one, and, if you can, put a single word against each, a word of your own choosing.

The word which stands against this fourth aspect is vocation, for the house of God is constituted for a specific purpose for which a house exists. Before we can go any further, we must just stop with that word ‘house’. “Whose house are we”. It is a very interesting and a very full word. When we use the word ‘house’, at any rate in English, our minds have a very limited conception. In the original word, all the ideas of a dwelling, a household, an arrangement, the furnishings and the stewardship are found, and it is those various meanings, like the facets of a jewel, that we are now going to consider briefly. But remember that the governing thing is union with *Christ* in this sense, union with Christ as a house.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

(A) A BUILDING

The first meaning of the original word is a building. "*I will build my church.*" "*Every house is builded by someone; but he that built all things is God*" (Heb. iii. 4). The house is a building. This building is that which corresponds to Christ Himself. He said, as He looked at the House, the stone house, the great temporal building, and immediately transferred its spiritual significance to Himself, to His own body—"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John ii. 19). "*I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*" All the destructive arts of hell will not be able to prevail against that which He builds, His building: a building, not now of stone, but of living stones. That is Peter's word about this house—"Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house."

This house, which "house are we", has as its governing object and vocation the making of God Himself present and available to men. That is the first idea. The building is for a habitation of God, "a habitation of God in the Spirit"; a habitation of God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, so that God becomes present and available. That is a statement. It could remain just a statement of truth, but things ought not to remain merely as such. It is the setting forth of a test, the test as to whether the house of God exists, and the test as to the existence of the house of God, or of living stones comprising the house of God, is first of all whether God is present or not. Is God known to be there? That is the test of everything so far as the house is concerned, for that is its vocation. It has no meaning apart from that.

In the Old Testament there was a time when the glory went up from the sanctuary: it went up from the place where God had been; and, although the thing continued, the fabric went on, it was a shell—it had no significance, no value, no meaning at all, or, if it had any meaning, it had the meaning of tragedy. The glory had gone up, removed; God was no longer to be found there. So, quite simply, the test of the existence of the house of God and of living stones is just that. Is the Lord found in us, and is the Lord found in the midst of us? If He is, that just satisfies all His requirements. He does not want the elaborate and the ornate structure. "*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*" (Matt. xviii. 20). That is the house of God. The house of God is determined, not by a name, a title, a designation, a place, a thing. It is determined by the presence of the Lord, and anywhere, amongst any

two or three, no matter where that may be or who they may be, if God is found there, that is the house of God, and that is all God wants.

The trouble with people is that they must have something over and around it, a building to meet in and call the 'church'. How often the glory has departed immediately something like that has happened; something has gone. Begin to arrange this thing, begin to set up an order of things, and where has the Lord gone? That is what you come to so often. The Lord simply says, Give Me living stones together, and that is all I want. Do not try to improve on that. You can gather more living stones: that is the way; but that is all I want—living stones together in an inward 'togetherness'; firstly because it is union with Christ, Christ united, Christ in His oneness. The Lord says, Give Me that, and I will make My presence very real.

And then of course the object is not that that should exist merely as something enjoying the Lord's presence. So often that is where a mistake is made. 'Yes, we are having a lovely time with the Lord, we few, this little group, we are having a lovely time with the Lord'—and you think that you can perpetuate that indefinitely. You cannot. It is not only for the presence of the Lord: it is to make the Lord available to others, that they may know where to find the Lord—nay more, that they shall know that the Lord *can be found*. It is to provide the answer to their question, "Will God indeed dwell with men?" Yes, here He is. The presence of the Lord is the answer to men's hearts, to men's quests, and that is enough. When the Holy Spirit came to the Church on the day of Pentecost, 'the multitude came together', and that is what happened—God was made available. What is needed is a few living stones, not to discuss doctrine, theology, the technicalities of Church order or anything like that, but to speak of the Lord, to be occupied with the Lord. If the Lord is not enough to occupy us for all our days here, there is something wrong with us. If you peter out—with apologies to Peter!—when you begin to talk about the Lord, and then have to fill up the conversation with all sorts of other things, there is something seriously wrong.

God's eternal desire has been to have a dwelling and to dwell with men. So the Bible reveals. A marvellous thing! It was the thing which astounded Solomon. "Will God in very deed dwell on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee" (I Kings viii. 27)—'and yet He has commanded me to build Him a house!' God wanting to dwell with men. That is the very first thing about a house—that it should be a place

NOVEMBER — DECEMBER, 1952.

of *residence*. Union with *Christ*, you see, means bringing *God* in: for where *Christ* is corporately expressed and personally present, there *God* comes in. Do remember that. If you want to know *God's* presence, be occupied with His Son, for, as we said in an earlier meditation, *God's* appointments are with His Son.

(B) A HOUSEHOLD

The second phase of this wonderful word 'house' is union with *Christ* as a household. That is a slight enlargement of the conception. You will understand what I mean, or what that means, if I remind you that in the Old Testament you have such phrases as "the house of Jacob" or "the house of Israel", or, in the New Testament, "the household of faith" (Gal. vi. 10). In Germany you had the House of Hanover; in England you have the House of Windsor.

A household denotes two things—a single progenitor and a family name. For example, the house of Jacob—Jacob was the progenitor, and the house takes his name; or the house of Israel—one man gave his name to a whole line, the house of Israel. And then consider the household of faith. This household of faith—we know who the progenitor is. "I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God" (Gal. ii. 20), said the Apostle. We are of those who are of the faith. It is the collective thought of one household, and brings in immediately the conception of the Church as a family, Father, Son and children.

Now here I want to say something which is to most of you by no means new, but which is of very great importance. We must not take these things as abstract truths and ideas. We can, of course, have all the teaching on the house of God; we can know what the Bible says about the house of God and get the whole technical conception—and yet it can mean nothing of practical value. This house of God must be expressed locally; it must be found in existence locally. What we are going to say in this connection shortly, under another phase, makes it quite clear that this thing must be in *existence* in order to satisfy *God's* requirements. There must actually and literally be, in locations, that which corresponds to the union of living stones—be it even so few as two, the irreducible minimum—to provide *God* with this.

But it is not, let me say it again, an ecclesiastical building called the house of God. Our Christian mentality is all astray. There are people, who really ought to know better—for they are under the sound of the teaching all the time—who, when they come

into gatherings, still say, in prayer or in worship, that they are glad to have come to the house of the Lord, meaning that they have come to a *place*. They do not mean that they are glad to have come into the presence of the Lord's people—though of course that may incidentally be true. The house, for them, is still this other idea of some place, of something external. But that is not it. It is not an ecclesiastical thing—to say nothing about architecture. It is not any particular place or any particular form. We can kill the house of God by starting with its technique—demanding the technique of the house of God. Whatever comes along that line must come organically and spontaneously, as we shall see at another time. We do not begin by constituting something according to a form. We are present together in a place, a location, as living stones, livingly expressing this house of God and fulfilling its vocation, bringing *God* into that area, making *God* available. Perhaps that will be better borne out as we go on.

Well, this family conception, this household idea, speaks, firstly, of purity of strain or pedigree. You remember that in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah a very severe test was applied to everyone who had any place at all in recovering and reconstituting the house of God. He had to show his pedigree, because there were a lot of people who wanted to have 'a finger in the pie', who wanted to come into that thing and have a place there, and because a lot of people had come in and there had been a mixture of seed, everyone must now show his pedigree. 'Now, then, your birth certificate, please; where were you born, when were you born, what is your parentage, how far back does it go?' If I asked you this, what would you say? When were you born?

Now, perhaps you do not have to be able to say the precise day, hour, moment, when it happened, but you must at least be able to say, Yes, I know that at a certain time in my life something happened, and that happening was nothing less than a new birth. You must be able to do that to be in the household. And what is your parentage? Where were you born? Now you would be quite wrong if you said, I was born again at such-and-such a place. The only answer is, I was born in heaven, from above; my citizenship is in heaven, my franchise is in the city of God. "This one was born *there*" (Psalm lxxxvii). "All my fountains are in thee"—I take my rise and my support from up there, the heavenly city. Where were you born, and how far back does your pedigree go? Ah, blessed be *God*, it goes back beyond time, altogether outside of time. In *Christ*, we are not chil-

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

dren of Adam; we are children of eternity. We are chosen in Him before the foundation of the world.

So this household must imply absolute purity of strain, of pedigree; there must be no mixture here.

Then it speaks of filial relationship. The household of God is a family which is a family bound together by filial relationship. "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren" (I John ii. 14). The filial relationship and our birth are linked together. You cannot prove your birth if you do not love the brethren—the brotherhood, the family. You cannot prove your birth if that is not true. The proof of our birth is our mutual love one for another.

And then as a household it speaks of loyalty and jealousy for the Name. How the house of God is spoiled, how the household is marred, by our lack of loyalty. We may not think it is lack of loyalty to our Lord—we do not mean it like that—but we all bear His Name, and lack of loyalty to the Name is found in our lack of loyalty to one another. Is it not a terrible tragedy that Christians, whether individuals or companies, find it so easy to criticize one another. There is a loyalty in the world that is very often better than the loyalty between Christians. Think of the loyalty of the professions—you never hear one doctor speaking to the detriment of another doctor. There is a covenant of honour, there is a standard of loyalty, and there is always an extenuating, an excusing, not only there but in other realms also. But here, sadly, amongst us, we do not so easily try to excuse, to cover a multitude of sins, to let what is good be the object of our attention more than what is bad. That is a contradiction of the household.

And it is very practical. If that is a true conception of God's presence, God being available, then it requires a very practical outworking in our relationships. The house requires the household, the larger conception of the family, of the pure strain of heavenly life that is above this earth.

(C) A TEMPLE

Again, union with Christ is a temple. Perhaps you might think that that has been covered when we say that God is present and God is available. These are not watertight compartment ideas of union with Christ. They are all parts of a whole, the house of God. The temple simply brings out one particular idea. You see, it is not only where God is, God is in His holy temple, but that temple idea is that it is there that God's rights are recognised and where God gets His rights, because that

is just the meaning of worship. The temple is the place of worship, and worship is just giving God His rights. God's rights are absolute, and in His temple God gets everything—all is unto God. In the day when the temple was not what God meant it to be, as a figure—very much otherwise, indeed—Isaiah wrote, "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple" (Isaiah vi. 1). It is the place where there is no room for anyone else. You know the story of Uzziah—how he entered the temple to burn incense, unlawfully, without right he forced his way in and touched the altar, and he was smitten with leprosy and died in a leper-house. In other words, he got into God's place. And then, when Uzziah was out of the way, Isaiah saw the Lord filling the temple. That is the true idea of the temple, and there it is "Holy, holy, holy", as we shall see. The thought behind the temple, then, is—Here, amongst these people here, in the two or the three or in the greater companies locally found, God is getting everything. God has a full, free, unhindered, unreserved way; His rights of complete capitulation, surrender, yieldedness, obedience, are ceded Him. And it is not just in lip, it is in life. That is the temple, a living temple, a spiritual house. God's rights are ceded to Him.

(D) A STEWARDSHIP: (E) AN ORDER

And then, finally, we come to union with Christ as a stewardship and an order. The word translated 'stewardship', strangely enough, is from the same root as the Greek word for 'house': it means the management of a house or household, and gives us our word 'economy'. It is the word that is elsewhere translated 'dispensation'—what we call an economy, or administration; that is, an order of things—the order which exists in a certain place at a certain time. It has two aspects: one is that it represents and expresses this Divine, heavenly, order; the other, that it is an administrative place, a place of administration, or ministry. That is the double idea of stewardship.

I was saying a little while back that it is foolish to think of a heavenly order being found without some company to express it. There must be that here and there in the earth which *expresses* this order, in which this order is seen. Now, I am not contradicting myself in saying again that *you must introduce the New Testament system*. It just depends on how it comes in, but it must be there. It must be a heavenly order expressed. But it is possible to have the order without the doctrine, and it is better so than to have the doctrine without the

NOVEMBER — DECEMBER, 1952.

order. We have found that the very thing is there, in existence, and people do not know anything about it. There it is: it exists—a wonderful spiritual order. They have sensed that this is how the Lord would have things done. When it has been pointed out to them that there is a whole revelation from God on that very matter, they had never realised it, but there it is. They have come under the régime of the Holy Spirit, and found that this is how the Lord does things, this is what the Lord would have; it is spontaneous.

So we do not begin by saying, 'Now, to have an expression of the heavenly order, you must first bring a company of people together, and then you must have the Lord's Table and baptism, and you must have brethren in authority and corporate ministry—everything must be corporate and in fellowship'. Do not have that kind of mentality. It is deadly; it can be as earthly as anything else. You will find, if the Holy Spirit really gets things into His hands, that you will begin to be exercised about things. We have seen that happening so wonderfully. Where Christ is preached, with a seeking of complete and utter surrender and abandonment to Him and the establishment of His lordship and headship; when all those things are brought into view and have been accepted, it is not long before people say, 'I am beginning to be exercised about so-and-so; you have never said anything about this, but it has been coming up with me lately'.

That is the way, and the only way, that is fruitful and valuable. The Holy Spirit precipitates things when He gets His place. He brings the house. He brings the stewardship, the dispensation, the economy, the heavenly order, and when it comes up like that, it is a very blessed thing, and you say, 'This is not some system of teaching I have taken on; it is something the Lord has shown me'. That is the way, and the only living way. If you walk in the Spirit, if you really walk in the Spirit, you will find that, as you go on, all sorts of adjustments will be made because the Lord indicates them to you; all sorts of things will be put away or be brought in, because the Lord is speaking. He is a Son over God's house, and as such He is bringing in this heavenly economy, this heavenly order; not to have ordinances, but testimonies—those things which embody spiritual and heavenly principles.

Well, that is familiar ground to many, but to all who read these lines it may not be equally so, and it may be the Lord would have that word said. Yes, union with Christ as a stewardship: there is an arrangement that the Holy Spirit will make in the house of God, that Christ as the Son over God's

house will bring into being; a heavenly arrangement. It means a new mentality—"stewards of the mysteries of God" said Paul (I Cor. iv. 1)—a new mentality, a new conception of things; or, as Peter said, "According as each hath received a gift, ministering it among yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (I Peter iv. 10). In the place of 'stewards' there, put 'housekeepers': 'housekeepers of the manifold grace of God'. If you think that is straining the sense, look at the context. "Using hospitality one to another"—that immediately precedes it. "According as each hath received a gift, ministering it among yourselves, as good 'housekeepers' of the manifold grace of God".

It means a new mentality bringing heavenly conceptions; heavenly-mindedness. It says that Adam gave names to everything—I suppose the animals and the flowers. (I am quite sure he did not give Latin names: none of that in Paradise, please!) He gave names to everything. My point is this. We have to find a heavenly name for everything, find out what the Lord calls things. The Lord calls a thing by a certain name. We go round it and call it by other names, but the Lord says, No, that is that, it is this; you are calling it by another name. We have to call things by their right names, give the right heavenly names to things. The Lord calls a certain virtue meekness; we call it weakness. Give the right heavenly names to things and you will have plenty to do—it is a very big world.

The other aspect is administration or ministry: the house as a stewardship, a ministry, a place of ministry. That does not mean, of course, setting up a professional ministry or a particular company called ministers. It is the household; that is the place of ministry. Everybody in this household ought to have a stewardship; everyone ought to be a steward of the manifold grace of God. In some way or other you can be a steward, because you are *called* to be a steward, to have something of the Lord to give. That is why the Lord is dealing with you as He is. He is trying to make you a steward in His house, to make it possible for you to have something to give to someone else, something of Himself that you have received, that you have come to possess, that you can pass on to someone else.

Well, all this is compassed by the word for house, and its related forms, all referring to *the house of God*. This house is a wonderful thing. Do ask the Lord to make more clear to you what it involves, and let us ask the Lord very much that there may be literal expressions of His heavenly house found more and more widely on this earth.

T. A-S.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

GOD'S VOICE FOR TO-DAY

V. THE WORD OF FAITH

Reading : Romans x.

"Is there any word from the Lord?" (Jeremiah xxxvii. 17).

"The word of faith, which we preach" (Romans x. 8).

WE have been considering the question put to Jeremiah by King Zedekiah, at a very critical moment of the nation's history, "Is there any word from the Lord?"—or, according to another rendering, "Has the Lord any message for me?" We have seen that He certainly has, and that His Word is not merely the speaking of generalities, but is timely, is personal, and is life-giving.

Yet the fact remains that the word did not profit Zedekiah. Although he was spoken to by an anointed prophet, and although God had a special message particularly for him, a message of deliverance and life, the king never was delivered, and finally died in Babylon, a blind and disgraced captive. The Lord's message proved to be of no avail. Even the Word of God, then, can be ineffective under certain conditions. Our present purpose is to consider what those conditions are, and to discover what is necessary from our side to give fulfillment to the speaking of the Lord.

Whenever God speaks there arises a crisis, for certain responsibilities are then passed over to the hearers. The word which we preach is the word of faith, the word which can only become effective and fruitful if it is received in that spirit of yieldedness and responsiveness which is called faith. Even the mighty speaking of the living God can leave a man or woman unaffected, unsaved. Or perhaps we should not say unaffected, for no one is really the same after the Lord has truly spoken to his heart. It is a most solemn matter to receive a direct message from God, for to hear it in faith will bring life, whereas to disregard it in unbelief will always result in spiritual death.

THE INITIATIVE AS TO FAITH

Faith does not begin with us ; it begins with God. In his argument concerning man's experience of salvation, the apostle traces back the matter of faith to its source, and this source is a message from God, "And how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent?" (Romans x. 14, 15). This argument is often used in earnest appeals to God's people to send out

missionaries. "How shall they preach, except they be sent?"—the inference being that we ought to take the initiative of sending out more workers. But woe to the worker who in moments of testing can only be assured that he was sent out by men! No ; the sending in this case does not refer to a missionary society or to a church: it involves a mandate from heaven. Though man's co-operation with the Lord in the sending forth of His servants is valuable and important, the origin of the mission must be more than human. "How shall they preach", indeed, and how shall they sustain their ministry in the face of opposition, or endure the cost which it entails, unless they have the assurance that God Himself has sent them?

So clearly the first matter which arises in connection with the word of faith is that its origin is in God. It is not we, but the Lord, who takes the initiative in regard to faith. "How beautiful are the feet of them that bring glad tidings of good things!" (Romans x. 15 ; Isa. lii. 7). The words of Isaiah refer, of course, in the first place, to the recovery and redemption of captive Israel, speaking of the swift messengers hastening to bring news of the decree made by Cyrus. But the prophet seemed to see far beyond this, and to tell of the motive power behind those swift and beautiful feet. In the next chapter he sets forth the redemptive work of Jehovah's great suffering Servant. The messenger has a commission to announce what great things God has done. He has done far more than to move the ruler Cyrus to command the return of an earthly people to a material city, for He has acted in such a way as to move heaven to send His Eternal Son to bring about the relief and deliverance of captive mankind. We may think that it was a wonderful miracle for God to lay hold of an earthly monarch, and constrain him to serve Divine ends in providing for the release of Israel, and indeed it was. But far more wonderful is the amazing fact that He laid hold of His own dear Son, and sent Him into the world for man's salvation. It is the love of God which is the motive power behind the message. God sends us the word of faith which originated in His own purposes of grace, and is based on His suffering Servant and the finished work of Calvary.

GOD'S RESPONSIBILITY AND OURS

The truth was that God had put His Name upon this people and was responsible for them. In spite

NOVEMBER — DECEMBER, 1952.

of all their waywardness and their great sin, in the last issue He was their God and had undertaken responsibility for them. In a certain sense this is true of us all: in the vaster concerns of the human race God is responsible. "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek: for the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich unto all that call upon him" (Romans x. 12). Paul had already asserted that in another matter there was no distinction between Jew and Greek: "All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans iii. 23). God's answer to the universal sin is a redemption great enough to meet a universal need. We sin because we are sinners. We may be blamed for sinning, but we cannot be blamed for being sinners, and God does not blame us. We know that if we had not committed any one specific sin we should certainly have committed some other one. By our very natures, we are inevitably bound to express our sinfulness in some form of sinful act. God knows all about this, and He takes full responsibility for our state. He did not bring it about, but in the final sense He has undertaken to provide for it, and has done so in the Cross of His Son. The word of faith tells us that, while we may not be able to help being sinners, we certainly can help not being saved from our sin. In Christ full provision is made for deliverance from our sinful state and all its manifestations: the responsibility now lies with us to appropriate and enter into His redemptive work. The same Lord over all has abundant wealth for all who will come to Him through Christ and receive it.

It is no crime to starve to death. It is not a crime but a misfortune. If, however, in the presence of food and drink a sane and responsible person were deliberately to refrain from eating and drinking, to refuse free provision and finally to die through lack of nourishment, that would be most culpable. Of course, no sane person would ever do such a thing. But how often God's full and free salvation in Christ is refused or ignored by unbelief. How often do men wait for God to do something for them, when He is urging them to take freely of the full provision already made for them in the Lord Jesus. There is always a very solemn aspect to the privilege of hearing a God-sent message. Nothing is impossible to God if we will trust Him; but even to God nothing is possible if He is not believed and trusted by those to whom He speaks.

A PRELIMINARY TO FAITH

It appears that this word of faith was spoken by Moses. This may seem strange, for already we have

been told that "Moses writeth that the man that doeth the righteousness which is of the law shall live thereby" (Romans x. 5). This, indeed, sounds like Moses, whose ministry we usually associate so much with the word of the law. But on verification we shall find that it was Moses also who pointed the way to faith. He it was who urged, "Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down): or, Who shall descend into the abyss? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart" (Rom. x. 6-8; Deut. xxx. 12-14). That is the Gospel by Moses. These two statements by the great Lawgiver are brought together by Paul, and placed in this order, with a purpose, for only when a man has been brought to a place of despair as to his own capabilities is he ready to receive the word of faith. God never expects us to attain to life by our own efforts, but He finds us slow to convince that we cannot do it. When we realise that we can do nothing of ourselves, we are ready to accept His full provision in Christ. This realisation seems to be a necessary preliminary to faith. Nobody ever had faith in God who had not first come truly to despair of himself.

Some of the Gospel stories appear to show that the words of the Lord Jesus were intended for this same purpose. "Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why askest thou me concerning that which is good? One there is who is good: but if thou wouldest enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt. xix. 16, 17). Did the Lord Jesus really mean that this ruler could find eternal life by keeping the commandments? Surely not. His aim was to convince the young man of his fatal lack. To the lawyer who asked, "Who is my neighbour?", the Lord Jesus told the beautiful parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke x. 25-37). Did the lawyer respond, 'Right! now I know what to do, I will do it, and so gain eternal life'? No. His reaction was to feel that this was impossible: no man could live up to such a standard. This is just what the Lord was working for. He was cornering the lawyer, as He will corner all of us, with the one intention of impressing upon us that our own efforts will never suffice, that we never can do the will of God as we should.

God calls us to realise and accept His own verdict upon us, so that we may move away from the ground of self-effort on to that of whole-hearted committal to Him. When Moses had done his work of convincing everybody of their failure and hopelessness, the way was clear for the proclamation of

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

an entirely new way of life. This is not by a painful attempt to climb up into heaven to find acceptance, nor by a deep descent into the abyss to deposit there the burden of sin. No, the way of salvation is without effort and without delay; it is very near at hand, awaiting the simple appropriation of faith. What makes things so difficult? What is the secret of so much spiritual failure? What is the reason for the lack of assurance in the knowledge of the Lord? In all probability it is because men are struggling to mount up to heaven, hoping to attain to the heights in their own strength, only to find to their chagrin how impossible it all is. Or else they are aspiring to be profound, to get to the depths of things, and discovering that they can never get deep enough. The word of faith calls a halt to all this. It bids us, right here, without another effort, without another word, without delay, to call on the Name of the Lord. "For, Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans x. 13; Joel ii. 32).

Towards the end of this same chapter in Romans we read, "Isaiah is very bold". It is a bold Gospel, and it calls for a bold response, the boldness of absolute committal to the Lord. Faith is no product of human desires or ideas; it is man's simple response to the message which has its source and origin in God. His Word is the word of faith; we are not called upon to discuss it, to admire it or to argue about it, but to accord it whole-hearted belief. We can afford to be bold when we are dealing, not with man's feeble efforts, but with Christ, the Wisdom and the Power of God.

THE BEARER OF THE MESSAGE

Then, of course, there is the responsibility of the channel, the bearer of the good tidings. No wonder that his feet are swift and beautiful when he has such a mission. The words seem to be concerned with those who had remained in Jerusalem during the whole 70 years of the tragic captivity. They had seen their city burned and destroyed, their land wasted, and their whole national life brought to a condition of hopeless desolation. The day came, however, when these few wretched survivors who dwelt among the ruins were called to rouse themselves and pay heed to an approaching messenger. Speeding along the mountain road and crying aloud in his excitement, this newcomer announced the glorious news of Cyrus's decree, ordering the release of the captives and the rebuilding of the beloved city. The beautiful feet conveyed the glad tidings of deliverance and new hopes of glory. Zion must no longer sit hound and fettered in the dust, but must awake and put on her

beautiful garments—"for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God." (Isa. lii. 1, 2, 9, 10).

It is this message of a finished work of redemption which constitutes the word of faith which we preach. The Church's commission is not merely to denounce, and to spread abroad condemnation, but to proclaim the full salvation which is freely provided in Christ. Men need to be troubled and disillusioned; they need that the Spirit shall convict and prepare them; but our chief task is to provide the Lord with "the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" (Isaiah lii.7). So far as God is concerned the work is finished. That is why it is called the word of faith. It calls only for simple acceptance of the reality of full redemption, and faith's committal to the Redeemer.

The apostle stresses the timeliness of the word. "The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart". It is as though he affirms that the word of salvation is reserved for the time when the heart is brought very low in conscious need. It is not a long way off, to be waited for or struggled after; it is brought right to the heart at the moment of need. Just when the mouth longs to know how to cry to God, what answer to make to the challenge, what promise to utter in faith, just then the word is so near that it can be described as 'in the mouth'—or, as we might say, 'on the tip of the tongue'.

How very timely is the word of the Lord! So often He keeps us waiting, seeming to have nothing to say, and bringing us almost to desperation in the intensity of our need. Then, and not till then, does He speak. The word seems to come right into the heart and mouth, a word of assurance on which we may rest all our hopes. "How beautiful are the feet..." The most important feature is not the face or the form, not the beauty of the messenger himself, but the beautiful truth that heaven itself is speeding on the good tidings. And note that this messenger has feet, not wings! The channel through whom the Lord makes His call to faith is a human one. If, then, the word is to come through the agency of men, and yet to be timed accurately in regard to the situation, there will clearly be necessity for the servant of the Lord to have all his movements governed by Divine sovereignty.

GOD'S DEALINGS WITH HIS MESSENGERS

It sometimes happens that our feet are led into very strange paths, so much so that we feel that we

NOVEMBER — DECEMBER, 1952.

have every right to question the Lord's wisdom in His government of us, or in what He permits to happen to us. There may seem to be no reason or value in our being forced into such unpleasant circumstances. The truth is, however, that these are the very ways by which the Lord is making our feet beautiful as His messengers. The bearer of the word of faith to others must himself first be proved in the matter of absolute faith in the sovereignty of God.

Once when I was visiting a city in the Amazon region, I went to see a Brazilian Christian who was in deep trial. The man belonged to an up-country village to which the Gospel had been taken, with the happy result that he and his family had received the good news and turned to the Lord. For a time he gave a very faithful testimony, and then a great calamity befell him. He contracted leprosy. This meant, of course, that he had to become an outcast. He left his happy home, and was exiled to a leper colony, which was just a group of unhappy sufferers, collected in rough shacks on an island near to the city. In those days there was no treatment for them, and no hope of anything more than a lingering death in loneliness and poverty. How strange are the Lord's ways! This brother had truly consecrated his life to the Lord, and yet he now found himself among a group of human derelicts, gathered on an isolated island to die. Greatly moved by his story, I went to visit him, thinking that perhaps I might take him some spiritual comfort and strengthen his sorely-tried faith. Imagine my surprise and joy when I found him the centre of a little band of Christian lepers, every one of them led to the Lord by his radiant testimony. At first he had entered on his life there with a very heavy heart, but soon he had come to realise that he was in that place by the will of God, having been sent to his needy fellow lepers as a bearer of God's good tidings to them. It was a humbling and inspiring experience to hear this man pour out his heart in thanksgiving to the Lord for the privilege of being His witness, as he actually thanked God for the providence which had so disposed of his life. Although the others did not use these words, they might well have exclaimed concerning him, "How beautiful are the feet of them that bring glad tidings of good things". If we are to be channels of the word of faith we shall find that the Lord will deal strangely with us: He may take us to places where we should never choose to go—He may even allow apparent calamities to happen to us. We may resent it; we may rebel; we may struggle to be free. But how much better to become a testimony to Divine sovereignty and to seek, in simple faith,

that ours may be the beautiful feet of the bearers of His message of deliverance and blessing!

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF HEARING

Finally we are confronted with the responsibility of those who hear the word. We should take note of what the Scriptures call 'hearing'. This means something more than awareness or even assent; it means giving the response of faith's committal. Isaiah's complaint, following immediately upon this passage is, "Lord, who hath believed our report?" (Rom. x. 16; Isa. liii. 1). They heard, but they did not heed, they did not hearken. Now this is the main point of our present consideration. The word which we preach, the word of the Cross, the word of the Spirit, the word of Life, is also the word of Faith. The Lord's word to us requires more than consideration, study, acceptance or even propagation. It demands personal faith. The message is not primarily concerned with our efforts. It does not call for high climbing or for deep delving. The word is at hand, to be taken hold of; it is in the mouth, to be uttered in fearless faith. We may think it strange that with such a Gospel, with such a Saviour, so many do not avail themselves of the blessings so ready to hand. But perhaps it is stranger still that among those who are the Lord's the word can have so little effect. There is nothing wrong with the Word of God, but we must remember that it is the word of faith as well as being the word of life. When God was dealing with the creation, "He spake and it was done"; but when He sends His Word to us, there can be no effective outworking until we hear and respond with faith's obedience.

God's call is to believe with the heart and confess with the mouth. This confession does not add to the faith, but it gives expression to it—it ensures a real committal from which there can be no drawing back. There are many people who are not sure whether they are saved or not; some of them probably are, but their lack of assurance is due to the fact that they have never openly committed themselves. The same is true of many Christians. The Word has been received with some sort of agreement in the heart, but has never got beyond that; it has never found real expression in the life, perhaps because of some fear or shame. Faith is simple, but it has to be definite and downright. When the Lord reveals His will to us, He expects us not merely to harbour a secret hope that it may be true, but boldly and confidently to yield to Him our whole lives for its outworking and fulfilment. It is thus that we shall confess Jesus as Lord.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

The word of faith. What an end of strain and anxiety when we receive it as such. Those who are trying to be Christians by their own efforts, trying and not succeeding, know very well what is meant by climbing up to heaven. What a climb! What a struggle! What an impossible task! You know, if you are trying somehow to lay hold of the Lord in the energies of your own desire and purpose, and even in your own efforts to pray—you know, if you are trying to force your way down into depths of spiritual experience, what an unsatisfactory and

heartbreaking life of strain it all is. The quest for a life of holiness or of victory can become, for such, a weary and burdensome affair, full of soul tension and unhappy shadows. It was never meant to be that. When we truly hear the Word as a word of faith, we no longer say, 'I must climb up', or, 'I must dig down', but instead we say, 'Thank God, I do not have to do anything; Christ does it all'. Faith gratefully lays hold of the fulness which is in Christ Jesus. And it is the word of faith which we preach.

H. F.

FOLLOWERS OF THE LAMB

V. THE GOVERNMENT OF LOVE

Reading: Revelation xxi and xxii.
WE have now reached the end, with this symbolic or pictorial presentation of what constitutes God's end: and it is surely very impressive, and a very significant thing, that, as we come to the end and are given to see the city, the phrase 'the Lamb' touches everything. Seven times in connection with the city that phrase occurs. Everything is based upon the Lamb. The Lamb gives character and meaning to everything. When the angel said, "Come hither", he might just as well have said, 'I will show you the Lamb'; for it is all the fruit of the Lamb, and that sums up everything in the Bible. As we have been seeing, the Lamb reaches right back to what God purposed and intended—a people answering to the heart and mind of God—and the Lamb has secured it. Now here it is, secured, and this is what it is like. That people is here represented as "the holy city, new Jerusalem", and identified as 'the Lamb's wife'—such a mixture of similes that we are compelled to draw back, and say, 'Well, it can only mean that that people is characterized by two things in one: the city ever and always stands for government, the seat of government; the wife, according to God's mind, always stands for love: put those two things together and you have the sum of the whole history—it is the government of love.' And that is the meaning of the Lamb, the Lamb of God.

Then that inclusive truth, the government of love, is analysed for us, in the sevenfold reference to the Lamb. Without anything like a full or exhaustive study of the content, we just light upon a single point in each reference.

THE FOUNDATION AND WALL OF LOVE

You notice, then, to begin with, the first mention of the Lamb after being presented in connection

with the bride—that is, after the statement, "I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb". The first reference to the Lamb after that comes in verse 14: "And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb". I am not going to touch upon the phrase 'the apostles of the Lamb'. The foundations bear the inscription of the Lamb. But what is this wall? What does it stand for? Well, many of you know quite well that a wall is that which includes and excludes and declares that within this demarcation a certain state of things obtains, while a different state of things obtains without. We speak of it as a 'testimony', the wall of testimony. Here is a "wall great and high"; and when you look at the dimensions of this city wall, you find that it is very great in extent, as well as in height. It just speaks of the fulness of Christ in terms of love. It is a big area—there is a lot inside; and it surely does correspond, as we were saying in our previous meditation, to Paul's words in his Ephesian letter (iii. 17 - 19)—"That ye . . . may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge" - 'the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ'. That is the wall—'the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ'. This people, then, to pass from the typology and symbolism and imagery—this people, this redeemed people, is the embodiment of the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ.

The length: it takes us back to eternity past, to the Beloved of the Father—so beloved that the Father gave Him a mighty inheritance: through Him, by Him, unto Him, were to be all things created (Rom. xi. 36; Col. i. 16). He, says the Apostle, was "heir of all things" (Heb. i. 2). The Beloved; the first-begotten of the Father; the heir of all

NOVEMBER — DECEMBER, 1952.

things—"that he might fill all things" (Eph. iv. 10); and the purpose was to sum up all things in Christ. That is the measure of the Father's love for the Son. The Father speaks of Him as "My beloved Son". All the mighty vast extent of the love of God is centred in Christ. That is the length of it—from eternity to eternity. And then "his grace, which he freely bestowed on us *in the Beloved*" (Eph. i. 6); that is, He made us heirs of that same love, so that the very love which He has for His Son is transferred to us. We were 'chosen in him before the foundation of the world', and on into the ages of the ages to come. That is the length of His love.

Its depth is seen in its being redeeming love—cutting deep down under and beneath the uttermost iniquity.

The height—"and hath seated us together with him in the heavenlies" (Eph. ii. 6).

And the breadth—"Whosoever": "... his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life".

You see the mighty, all-embracing love of Christ—and at last there is a people found in that. The foundation of everything is the Lamb, as embodying God's great, redeeming love, and in the end there will be this great testimony to the greatness of God's love. It is a strong foundation. Sometimes you may be tempted to despair—and well might we despair of ourselves; and perhaps we might despair of others too. Sometimes we might wonder if ever we shall get through and come out at the end all right. Many questions, indeed, arise in us, forced up by the power that is against us, the strength of everything, of all that we have to meet both within and without. Yes, it is tremendously strong, but His love is stronger. There is a foundation here that cannot be shaken. It is mighty redeeming love, as suggested by this very name—the Lamb: a mighty foundation. Well, if we are there at last in the city—and do not objectify that: we *are* the city, by grace—if we are components of that, we shall never be able for one moment to say anything about it but 'Oh, the strength of His love!' It is a deep and mighty foundation. That is very simple, but very blessed. It is the beginning.

HIS CLEANSING LOVE

And then you notice in verse 27—"There shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie: but only they that are written in the Lamb's book of life". Leave the last word for a minute and get the value of the other. Here is access into the city, or having a place

in this: and how do we have a place? Yes, by His love—but oh, by His *cleansing* love! Really there is nothing that can cleanse and purify more mightily than true love. The Lord is dealing with us in chastening, yes, disciplinary suffering, but we are told quite definitely that it is because He loves us. And here His love must work in a cleansing way. You notice that these are the things that are not according to the Lamb—unclean, abomination, lie. These are the things that the Lamb of God destroyed. The "unclean"—He is a Lamb without spot and without blemish. He destroys in Himself everything unclean and unholy; and by His mighty, mighty work of the Cross He will present this Bride to Himself "not having spot or blemish or any such thing".—"Abomination": that is a word that would take us through a very great deal of the Bible, and we dare not stay at the moment with it. It is that which God abhors: an abomination to God. What is it? If pride is an abomination to God, if pride was the thing that commenced all the mischief—when pride was found in Lucifer's heart and all the trouble came from that proud conception—we can understand that pride is the root-sin and that everything of pride is an abomination to God. And the Lamb is just the opposite—emptied of all self, all pride. You find the Lamb is the synonym for meekness, not pride. He by His own blood would purge us of that abominable thing.—"That maketh a lie"; yes, it was a lie that started the course of iniquity from the 'liar from the beginning'. Everything untrue, everything false, everything that is not absolutely clear and transparent, open, capable of standing the searching eyes of Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire: all that is dealt with by the Lamb. A state of purity is brought about. "Having the glory of God: her light was like unto a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal"; absolutely clear.

So then, this access, this franchise of the city, this right to be there, comes by the sanctifying work, the continuous cleansing, of His precious Blood, and the deepening application of His Cross to all that falsehood and pride and uncleanness that there is in us. It is His sanctifying love.

LIFE FROM THE THRONE

"He showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev. xxii. 1). Life from the Throne. What Throne is this? It is of God, yes, and of the Lamb. We have seen through the pages of the book of the Revelation the Lamb in the midst of the Throne; the Lamb as the centre of

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

worship, of adoration; the Lamb in the place of supremacy, of dominion. What is this supremacy?

We are dealing with principles, not with figures. I feel sometimes that the figurative and symbolic gets in our way. We cannot help getting a certain kind of mentality which visualises things. It would be ridiculous to literalise here. To talk about a wife being a city and a city being a wife is absurd. But, you see, you are dealing with principles, and here you have a Throne, which speaks of government, dominion, power, authority, victory; and life coming out of that—life coming from the victory of the Lamb.

How can I make that helpful? Well, I think in this way. We are concerned in these meditations with the followers of the Lamb, those who "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth". This means that, if we in fellowship with Christ are baptized into His death, as an experience, not once nor twice, but ever more deeply, so that there is being brought about a continuous decrease of ourselves, in painful death-experiences of many kinds, in order that we may know the power of His resurrection proportionately, that is bringing us into a place of great strength, great power, great authority. This power of His resurrection, working in life triumphant over death, does put us in a strong place. If you know what it is to be taken into a very desperate situation where, but for God, it is the end, it is death, and then God comes with the power of resurrection, you have a tremendously strong position. You are able to say, 'Well, now I know: this is no theory with me, no fiction, no mere doctrine: I know beyond any question the power of His resurrection, the power of His life as triumphant over death'. That is governmental. You can never govern in a really spiritual way by just having a doctrine of resurrection. It does not bring you personally into any place of power to believe in resurrection as a matter of truth, but go through it, know it in your own experience through desperate situations, and you are established. That is the principle of the Throne—coming to know life as triumphant.

You will recall that Ezekiel saw this river—and wherever that river came, death was overcome, life triumphed. Right down even to the Dead Sea, wherever the river came everything lived. It is the mighty power of life, His life, the life of the Lamb imparted to us, a tremendous thing. Simple as a statement, but not simple when it comes to going through the experience to know it. But it is a very powerful position to be in when you are able to say to other people, 'Look here, I have been in your desperate plight; I have more than once been

in the place where it seemed to me to be an utter end; and I have known the coming in of the Lord to bring me right up out of that, right back into life'. That is a powerful position to be in. It will have very great influence and weight, be of the greatest value. The river comes out of the Throne, and it is the Throne of the Lamb; that is, it is the government of a life laid down and raised again. I am only talking about the rest of the New Testament. God raised Him from the dead, and that is something you cannot get over, that is a mighty thing, that is the impact of the Throne. "*I am . . . the Living one; and I became dead, and behold, I am alive unto the ages of the ages, and I have the keys of death and of Hades*" (Rev. i. 17, 18, R.V.M.). That is the Throne, authority in the power of resurrection life, and that is found here in the people at the end, a mighty thing that God is doing now.

LIGHT THROUGH SUFFERING

Then we pass back again to chapter xxi. 23—"*And the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb*"; the margin says, "and the Lamb, the lamp thereof". It does not matter which way you put it; it means the same. What we have said about life is also true about light. Light is a governmental thing, it governs. But what is meant here is that you come into light through suffering. You come to possess light and radiate light by way of the Cross. "The Lamb is the lamp". Light is not a mental thing: that is to say, it is not just a matter of having a store of mental knowledge. That is not light. It is possible to have an enormous amount of doctrine and truth and never be luminaries, that is, never register impact upon darkness. Real light is experimental: that is to say, it is the fruit of experience, the experience of suffering.

How have you children of God come to know what you do know of the Lord, that real kind of knowledge of the Lord which is so precious to us, which means so much and which makes you in that measure of value to others? Well, it is through suffering, it is through the difficult way the Lord has led you, it is through the work of the Cross that He has wrought in you. "The Lamb is the lamp"—suffering leading to knowledge, to light, to understanding. It is the only way. These people at the end will be in the good of a great and wonderful revelation which has come by their fellowship with Christ in His sufferings. It is very true. It may not be too comforting from one standpoint, but it is

NOVEMBER — DECEMBER, 1952.

true; and it ought to help us to realise this—that the Lord, in the way in which He is dealing with us, in the sufferings which He allows to come upon us, is really seeking our education, that we may have a knowledge of Himself which can only come that way, and which is a peculiar kind of knowledge of tremendous value to us and through us to others. We do not learn in any other way. It is the Lamb, always the Lamb-principle, the way of suffering and sacrifice and self-emptying, that brings us into the knowledge of the Lord. "The Lamb is the lamp thereof"; and, just as it is deeper death unto fuller life, so it may often be deeper darkness unto fuller light.

The Lord seems to lead us in a way where we are less and less able naturally to understand Him. He gets us altogether out of our natural capacity, beyond our capacity for interpreting His ways. We just do not know what the Lord is doing, or why He is doing what He is doing; yet it is the way by which we come to a very real kind of inward knowledge of Himself. It may not be capable of explanation in words to anybody, but we know, somehow or other we know, and that is a mighty thing, a mighty power of knowledge. It is light through the Cross.

THE WIFE OF THE LAMB

"Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (Rev. xxi. 9). These people answering at last to God's deepest desire and fullest intention must be a people in the good of the preciousness of Christ. I think that is what is meant by the wife of the Lamb. Peter puts it this way: "For you therefore that believe is the preciousness" (I Peter ii. 7)—the old version is, "he is precious"—the preciousness of Christ, an apprehension of how Christ is to be desired above all others. And this preciousness has been wrought inwardly. He has, indeed, seen a preciousness in her—"Christ . . . loved the church, and gave himself up for it" (Eph. v. 25)—preciousness as of a pearl of great price. But somehow or other with these people that has been turned the other way, and they have come to such an appreciation of His love for them that He has become endeared to them unto an uttermost abandonment to Him. "For this cause"—and this is the heavenly law of marriage—"for this cause" to leave everything else for the one, means just this: such an apprehension of the preciousness of Christ that all is for Him, with no reserve whatsoever. That is the principle of the wife. What the Lord would seek to produce in us, in growing measure, is that appre-

hension of His value which draws us out to Himself ever more deeply and fully, in this wonderful relationship of unreserved abandonment to Him as our Lord.

THE LAMB THE TEMPLE

"And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof" (Rev. xxi. 22). What is a temple for? Well, the temple is the immediate seat of God, just where you expect to find God—and the Lamb is the temple. We shall find God in Christ crucified, Christ offered for us, Christ our Lamb. It is in Him as such that we shall ever meet the Lord. There are many people who are trying to find God without and apart from Jesus Christ crucified, and they cannot do it and they never will. Oh, what pathetic and tragic cases there are like that. We have heard them. 'Yes, I believe in God, I pray to God'. 'What does that mean to you?' 'Oh, well, it means a lot to me to believe that God is, it helps me to think about God'. 'But what is the effect in your character? Does that really mean victory over sin, does it really mean salvation?' 'Oh, well, now you are talking about things that I do not know anything about'. 'Where does God's Son come in, and His work on the Cross—His atonement for sin?' 'Oh, no, I cannot accept that'. And so, with all their believing in God, they are walking either in the darkness or in the shadows; for there is no way to God but by Christ crucified. You will never come to God's end in any other way. He is the one in whom alone you will find God. Christ crucified, Christ your atonement, your sacrifice: that is the meeting place of God with your heart and of your heart with God. God's place is there. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (II Cor. v. 19); and you will never find God or reconciliation anywhere else. These people are the ones who have found God, and they have found Him in Christ and they know that the Lamb is the temple.

THE THRONE OF THE LAMB

"And there shall be no curse any more: and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein" (Rev. xxii. 3). We have spoken about the Throne and what it means—governing; but, again, how far-reaching and comprehensive is this truth, that it is Christ crucified who solves all problems, who really governs all the situations. We are carried back to Paul's letter to the Corinthians, back, indeed, to that terrible situation amongst the be-

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

lievers in Corinth. What a deplorable state of things existed there. It was a condition that might take the heart out of any man. You might feel, 'Well, how can we handle a situation like this? How can this be cleared up?' And Paul had to sit down with the whole situation and think it out and pray it over, and then he arrived at one conclusion. "*I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified*" (1 Cor. ii. 2). Then see how he applies that. He applies Christ crucified to their divisions, to their lawsuits, and to the whole situation, and then he resolves it all into one word—love (1 Cor. xiii). That can solve it, and that will solve it. Every problem, every situation, can be cleared up by that love of God in Christ Jesus expressed in the Cross. Yes, the Cross governs. It is the Throne.

When we have said all that, and it is only so very little, what do we arrive at as the ultimate meaning? I think it is in verse 24 of chapter xxi. "*And the nations shall walk amidst the light thereof; and the kings of the earth do bring their glory into it*". My only comment upon that for the moment is that here we have the secret and principle of service. (And do remember that, when you are dealing with principles, you are not dealing with past, present and future. This picture must not be wholly referred to the future. All this must not be regarded merely as something yet to come. The consummation may be future, but the principles are eternal, they are always present.) The principles of service, of others being ministered to, others deriving profit and benefit—is that it is only possible as the Lord's people are in fellowship with the Lamb as the Lamb: that is, in fellowship with Him in His sufferings, in the way of His Cross. That is the only way to be of value to anyone else. You can never really serve other people's spiritual life

by study, by the accumulation of knowledge, or by any technical means whatever. The measure in which other people are benefited or helped by you will be just the measure in which you know the Lamb-life, the way of the Cross.

And again I come back to this that has been said so often in these studies. It will be the measure in which we follow the Lamb, as the Lamb, and what that word means in all its content, that will be the measure of our present and eternal value to God in others—just that measure; and therefore, if the Lord seems to be taking you more than ordinarily into sufferings; if it does seem that yours is an unusually hard way, and the Lord's hand seems to be very heavily upon you: do interpret in the light of this ultimate issue in the whole book of God, that others are to get benefit, others are to come into some good through the way He is taking you.

That really is the way of service. The principle of service is suffering: you cannot get away from it. And the measure of value is the measure of your fellowship with Him in His sufferings. I say again, that we cannot get away from this—it is true. Perhaps some are now able to recognise this, and to see quite clearly that, if the Lord has been able to use them, it has been because of the deep way in which He has led them—and that is the justification of it. It is the Lamb everywhere, stamped upon everything, and ultimately it works out in value. "*The nations . . . walk by the light thereof*": they derive their value from this thing which, wherever you look, from circumference to centre, has the Lamb on it. God is going to impress and stamp His people with the Lamb, and so He will secure that instrument, that vessel, that channel of universal blessing, upon which He has set His heart.

T. A-S.

SINS REMEMBERED NO MORE

"*Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors: yet he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors*" (Isaiah liii. 12).

"*And when they came unto the place which is called The skull, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand and the other on the left*" (Luke xxiii. 33).

"*And they indeed have been made priests many*

in number, because that by death they are hindered from continuing: but he, because he abideth for ever, hath his priesthood unchangeable. Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews vii. 23-25).

BEFORE we turn to a particular portion of Scripture, let us remind ourselves of the whole substance of the letter to the Hebrews. It is occupied

NOVEMBER — DECEMBER, 1952.

with this matter of priesthood. It takes up the Aaronic priesthood in its relation to the putting away of sin and follows through with a comparison between the Aaronic ministry of priesthood and the priesthood of our Lord Jesus after the order of Melchizedek. There are a number of comparisons made. The point is all the time being stressed that under the Aaronic priesthood sin remained an outstanding question awaiting final settlement. There were the sacrifices offered year by year, but they only brought sin to remembrance. Every year the people were reminded again of sin, and of the fact that that sin prevented them from entering into the presence of God, for on the day of Atonement every year the High Priest alone, and on that one day only, was allowed in beyond the veil, and the Word states expressly that "the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest" (Heb. ix. 8, A.V.). The question of this approach to God and the outstanding question of sin was all the time being emphasized under the Aaronic system.

THE SIN QUESTION FINALLY SETTLED

But the letter to the Hebrews brings in the fact that with the Lord Jesus the sin question reaches a settlement. That does not mean that sin ceases to exist in the people of God, or that they cease to sin or are incapable of sin; but it does mean that there are certain conditions brought about by the Lord Jesus in His redemptive work which enable us to come to *rest* about sin, so that we have no more *conscience* of sin. The Lord Jesus is He who, in virtue of His own precious Blood, more precious than that of bulls and goats, enters into the Holy Place once for all, for ever; and He is there, not as other priests who die and have to be replaced by another man, who starts the process all over again, but having entered in, He is a priest for ever, and is able to bring things to perfection.

Now that perfecting of the work is what we need to come into, the perfecting of the work in relation to sin; and you know that the whole of the argument finds its climax in the tenth chapter, where the writer re-states a fragment from the new covenant as defined in the prophecies of Jeremiah, and then finishes this way (verse 17): "*And their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more*". If that could get into the heart of every believer, what a transformation it would make! Their sins—your sins, if you like, and your iniquities, God says He will remember no more. Would it not be good if we could believe that? Then it goes on—

"*Now where remission of these is, there is no*

more offering for sin. Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a great priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience."

In that phrase, "a new and living way", the word 'new' means literally 'newly slain', so that we draw near by a newly slain and living way. Under the Aaronic priesthood, the offering had to be newly slain. It was useless for an offerer to come in virtue of an offering that was slain last week. He must come with a newly slain offering. The offering, having been slain, was dead, but it was a newly slain offering. Now, in Christ our offering there is all the value that was in the newly slain types under Aaron, but, unlike those, which were dead, this one, though having been slain, is living: so that there are in Him all the values of the fact that He is alive, and therein lies the great superiority of Christ over Aaron. He not only makes an offering to deal with sin so as to put it away, but He brings in a life in the power of which the sinner, being now reconciled and justified by the putting away of sin, is brought into the very presence of God and accepted, and so the word is 'through the veil into the holiest of all'. That is the place appointed for you and for me, sinners though we be: in the value of Christ's work our place is there within the veil in the presence of God; and that is for every one of us.

THE PICTURE OF THE BRAZEN SCAFFOLD

I want to take you back to II Chronicles vi, where this is set out pictorially. Chapter v contains the story of the bringing in of the ark into the temple; then chapter vi opens, "Then spake Solomon", and so on; and then we read in verse 11: "*And there have I set the ark, wherein is the covenant of the Lord, which he made with the children of Israel. And he stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel and spread forth his hands (for Solomon had made a brasen scaffold, five cubits long, and five cubits broad, and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court; and upon it he stood, and kneeled down upon his knees before all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven.)*"

Before we read on, please turn back to Exodus xxvii. 1, remembering what we have just read about this brazen scaffold upon which Solomon stood and

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

then knelt in intercessory prayer before the Lord.

"And thou shalt make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad; the altar shall be foursquare: and the height thereof shall be three cubits."

You see the similarity. Now please come back to what we were reading.

"And he said, O Lord, the God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in the heaven, or in the earth; . . . who hast kept with thy servant David my father that which thou didst promise him: yea, thou spakest with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thine hand, as it is this day. Now therefore, O Lord, the God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father that which thou hast promised him, saying, There shall not fail thee a man in my sight to sit on the throne of Israel; if only thy children take heed to their way, to walk in my law as thou hast walked before me. Now therefore, O Lord the God of Israel, let thy word be verified, which thou spakest unto thy servant David . . . Yet have thou respect unto the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O Lord my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer which thy servant prayeth before thee . . . And the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer" (II Chronicles vi. 14-17, 19; vii. 12).

What was the prayer that Solomon prayed? It was all dealing with the matter of sin. You are familiar with that long prayer, which says in effect this—'If and when a man, any man, sins, or if and when thy people Israel sin: if and when, because of their sin, the Lord has to bring tribulation upon them, pestilence, drought, famine, the sword, even a carrying away into captivity; when they sin—and', he says, 'there is no man that sinneth not, so we are all in it—when they sin, and then turn toward Jerusalem, the place where the House is, the place where the Name is, and pray unto Thee'—he says, 'toward this house'—'then hear Thou from heaven their prayer and their supplication, hear Thou from heaven and forgive their sin.' The whole burden of Solomon's ministry there is to say, 'The people will sin, there is no doubt the people will sin; but, Lord, when there is found in them an attitude such as Thou Thyself hast voiced it—"if my people . . . shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways"—then do Thou hear from heaven, and . . . forgive their sin' (II Chronicles vii. 14).

Now forgiveness with God means forgiveness, and the Lord says to Solomon, 'I have heard thy prayer'. The point of all this is the fact of Solomon making a brazen scaffold on which to make this prayer. It says that Solomon stood before the altar.

There he is in the presence of the altar, and, right in the presence of the altar, he makes another exactly of the dimensions of the altar in the Aaronic system, a brazen structure, on which he stands and spreads forth his hands to heaven. Does this not suggest, in actual picture, that Solomon is, as it were, upon that altar itself? He is in the place of the one offered.

"HE EVER LIVETH TO MAKE INTERCESSION"

It is very interesting that, in the whole of this section about the dedication of the temple, no mention is made of a sin-offering anywhere. Go back to Leviticus ix, when you have the corresponding event in that era, and you read that the first thing that had to be done was that Aaron had to offer a sin-offering for himself and then for Israel. Yet here, in the dedication of the temple, the sin-offering is not mentioned; but here is Solomon, as it were in the place of the sin-offering, on that brazen scaffold before the altar, with hands stretched out to heaven; and he is praying—he is praying for sinners, and he is saying, 'Lord, when they sin, forgive'; and the Lord says, 'I have heard thy prayer: when I find in these sinners a humble attitude that comes to Me in the spirit of desire for forgiveness, in repentance, I will hear them, I will forgive them.' Can you catch the Hebrew letter in all this? Here is one in the place of the altar, a Son—that is the Hebrew letter; and a royal Son—that is the Hebrew letter; and not one of the family of Levi at all, but of the family of Judah—and that is the Hebrew letter. It is our Lord Jesus in His royal Sonship as a priest, first of all, in the place of the offering, as the offering itself; and it says that He, "through his own blood, entered in once for all into the holy place" (Heb. ix. 12). Here is the offerer, Solomon, as it were suggesting in type that it is his own blood that is the background of all this. Clearly Solomon is here typifying Christ, whose own Blood is the ground of His intercession, and there is therefore no mention of a sin-offering.

We read that fragment in the Gospel, as He hung upon that Cross—upon the altar. His cry was, "Father, forgive them". Do you suppose His prayer was heard and answered? Every prayer of His is heard and answered. There, upon the Cross, He was the one offered; but now, in virtue of His own offering, He is in the presence of God making intercession for the people. The whole burden of His cry is, "Father, forgive them". Do you suppose that prayer is answered? The Lord says, "I have heard thy prayer". Now the Hebrew letter has

NOVEMBER — DECEMBER, 1952.

its whole strength in this—that there is a royal Priest, who is the Son, who is in the presence of the Father, ever living to make intercession for us. Can you get the picture of Solomon transported into the heavenly realm? Think not now of the Aaronic system, with ever fresh offerings being made and none of them ever satisfying the conscience of the offerer. A man sins to-day and offers a sin-offering: he must offer another to-morrow. But here is one Man in the place of the offering on the altar, and He is saying in virtue of His own offering, 'Father, when they sin, forgive', and the Father says, 'I will forgive'; and Hebrews says, "there is no more offering for sin". He did it once for all. "He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. x. 14). Get those chapters of Hebrews into this, and see a royal Son before the throne of God praying for you and saying, 'Father, when he sins, forgive; when she sins, forgive'. The Father says, 'I have forgiven'—all in virtue of the Son's own offering, His own precious Blood; and this is going on continually—for not like those other priests does this one die and have to be replaced by another, and not once a year only does this one go through beyond the veil and spend a few moments in the presence of God and come out again, but this one has passed through the heavens, now to appear in the presence of God for us, and He ever lives to make intercession.

I have no ability, and perhaps not much desire to try, to pinpoint the application of all this, and to say, This means that; but the picture of this has caught my imagination, and I want it to catch yours. Then in the moment of depression because of sin, of failure—what about it? There is one in the presence of God saying for you, 'Father, forgive him; Father, forgive her'. What do you say about that? Do you say, 'He cannot forgive me'? Why not? God said to Solomon, 'I have heard your prayer'. He did not even say first of all, 'I will hear the prayers of the people when they pray one by one toward Me'. 'I have heard your prayer, Solomon', and Solomon prayed for all and for each one separately. "If a man sin against his neighbour . . ." "And if thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee . . ." "Father, forgive." Can you put yourself outside that? Only if you are outside of Christ, for if you are outside of Christ you are outside of this covenant altogether; but if you are in Christ, Solomon represents you, for it is this royal Son who is in the presence of God interceding. He is praying for you.

And oh, the blessed fact goes even beyond that forgiveness of sins, blessed as it is. In the case of

the antitype of all this, our blessed High Priest has the power to impart to you the very life in virtue of which He stands before God, so that you, poor sinner, you may find a lifting up whereby you come into a realm where life carries you. Even then we shall doubtless, most regrettably, sin, even though we have His life in us, because of the frailty of our flesh; we shall sin again—not because He could not keep us, but because we fail to stand in the good of the life. But when we sin the prayer goes on. His own Blood still speaks, for He is on the brazen scaffold in the place of the offering praying for us; and they who stand in the good of this come in through the veil with Him and stand in all the value of His acceptance in that innermost place within the veil.

A ROCK OF ASSURANCE

I want to leave with you this picture of Solomon, the offering and the priest in one person. His intercession is securing for each one and for all the people the absolute pardon and the favour of God toward us. Until we come into a settled assurance about this matter, we have no knowledge of the rest into which God wants to bring us, and we shall be virtually ineffective in the service of the Lord because we are on unsuitable ground. Get your feet on this rock, the intercession and the Blood of Christ. His Blood as my offering, His intercessions as my priest, secure for me all that this prayer of Solomon's asked and obtained. Read the chapter through, put yourself in it, and say, Yes, that is my sin, I come in there! Put yourself into every sin listed and then hear Solomon praying, "Father, forgive", and hear the Lord say, "I have heard thy prayer". All that He asks from us is this—"If my people humble themselves", and we are bound to dwell on that, for this is no automatic happening. This requires an attitude of heart that says, Though I be what I am, and being what I am, I abase myself before the Lord, but I have no need to stand there. That is all forgiven. "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities . . . As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. ciii. 3, 12). That is how far He has put your sin from you. How far is the East from the West? Not the east and west of London, but the distance from the East to the West. That is how far He has separated you from your sin. Oh, this picture of a priest ever interceding! Do you catch the picture, perceive the vision? It is into the good of that that He bids us to step by faith. Do not stay on the shaking quicksand of your own waverings about your sin. He has made

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

full provision for us to have a rock under our feet, and though you sin ten thousand times the ground and basis remain the same.

This house, this temple, found its locating, its originating, on a certain spot known as the threshing-floor of Ornan, and David said, "*This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of burnt-offering for Israel*" (1 Chron. xxii. 1). What was this? It was the place that centralized one of the biggest sins that David ever committed in his life. The threshing-floor of Ornan was the place where David had to confess to deep sin in the sight of God. You would have said, Surely he will never lift up his head again. "This is the house of God", he will say, and all this glory that followed through Solomon had its very foundation there in the place of David's grievous failure. Does that excuse his failure? Not at all, but it says, "*Where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly*" (Romans v. 20). On the very ground of a man's utter failure, God raises up this testimony to His pardoning grace and builds the house for His

glory there out of frail humanity, that has within itself, as in David, the very seed of sin. He can take men and build His house with them. Do lift up your head. "Lift up the hands that hang down, and the palsied knees", says Hebrews xii. 12, 13, "and make straight paths for your feet, that which is lame be not turned out of the way, but rather be healed". Here is a straight path for feet—the intercessions of the blessed Lord in the Throne have secured for us an absolute title to heaven and to forgiveness, to cleansing, to acceptance with God, to fellowship of an unbroken and an unshadowed kind, because He is there as the Lamb offered and as the Priest within the veil, saying, "Father, forgive them". We must be established on this ground or we shall be undone and useless to the Lord. Are you there? If you are, you will rejoice in the Lord a little more after this. If you were not there when we started, for the Lord's sake and your own, come on to the ground, believe in Him whose Blood cries, Forgive them! God in heaven always answers His prayer.

G. P.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

BLACKWALL TUNNEL, in the East of London, is quite an exciting place for those who use a car in London and have to drive through it. The tunnel runs under the River Thames, and is only just wide enough for one line of vehicles to pass in each direction.

One fine summer day, a man was returning from the East to the South of London, and had to drive through Blackwall Tunnel. Slowly he steered his car down the slope at the entrance, leaving behind the bright sunshine, and passing into the gloom of the narrow road under the river. Just as he left daylight behind and moved on into the tunnel, everything began to go wrong. Happily no traffic was coming from the other direction, for he started to swerve from one side of the road to the other. It was as though he was almost blind. The way in front was so very dark, and though he peered anxiously ahead he could see very little.

At first he thought that the lights had all gone out, but no, they were still twinkling at him from the walls on each side. Surely, though, something was wrong with them, for they seemed to have no power, and not to give any help in finding his way along the tunnel. 'This is really too bad', he said to himself, 'the authorities ought to provide better

illumination than this. How on earth can anybody be expected to travel safely in this dismal gloom?' But when he complained to his companion seated beside him, he received no sympathy from him. His friend replied that he could see all right. This didn't help much. In fact it only made the driver feel more indignant.

He was just about to stop altogether when the truth suddenly dawned on him. It was all his own fault. He put his hand quickly up to his eyes, and found the cause of all his trouble. He had forgotten to take off his dark glasses! No wonder it had all seemed so obscure and foggy to him, since the darkness was not in the tunnel, but in the black lenses of his spectacles. In a moment he whipped them off, and found that the lights were shining all along the roadway, making it possible for him to go safely on his way.

Now in some ways life itself is like a journey through a tunnel. The Lord Jesus has promised that He will not leave us to find our way in the dark, but will give us the light of life. Yet there are many who *are* in the dark, and don't know where they are going. Some of them are ready to blame God for this, not understanding that the fault is really their own. The driver was ready to blame

NOVEMBER — DECEMBER, 1952.

the tunnel. He thought that he was being badly treated by those who were in charge of it, that they ought to provide better lights. This is just how we begin to grumble at the way in which the Lord leads us. We feel that things should be made plainer and easier for us, and then we could get on. The driver was almost about to blame his friend. It did not seem right that another should be seeing so well, or at least claiming to do so, while he could hardly tell one side of the road from the other. There are many who feel angry with Christians who are journeying happily along the way of life, glad to be walking in the light of the Lord.

But it was no use blaming the tunnel or his friend, for it was the driver himself who was to blame. The fault was all his. The moment he took the shades off his own eyes, there was plenty of light to help him on his way. Perhaps we are like him. If the Christian way seems dark and uncertain, so that we dare not go on; if the light of God's Word has no power for us; it may be that our own hearts are the real cause of the trouble. If the dark glasses were taken away from our hearts we should see the light, and be able to go on safely and happily.

There are the dark glasses of *pride*. How blinded are those who think that they know all about it, and are not willing to be told anything! Pride means that we have wrong ideas about our own cleverness, or are too ready to fancy that we can manage by ourselves, and do not need the Lord's

help. Proud people say that they can get no light from the Word of God, but truly it is their own heart which is made dark by conceit.

There are also the dark glasses of *carelessness*. This was really the reason why our driver got into such a muddle. He was not thinking of what he was doing. When we have these dark glasses on, it means that we are so busy and taken up with other things that we have no time for the Lord or for prayer. Sooner or later such people always find that they get lost in the darkness.

Some people lose their way because they are wearing the dark glasses of *fear*. They are so afraid of being thought different or laughed at by others, so fearful of letting their lives be governed by the Lord Jesus, that their eyes are closed to the power and blessing of His Word.

And then, of course, there are the dark glasses of *sin*. This shuts out the light of God's love and keeps us away from Him.

As soon as the driver realised what was wrong, he only had to lift his hand, remove the sun glasses, and look again. All was well. He found there was light all around him; it was only his eyes that were shaded so that he could not get the benefit of it. If we feel that we are not able to remove the darkness from the eyes of our hearts, we have Someone who will do it for us. We must ask the Lord Jesus. And a very good prayer for us to pray will be Psalm 119. 18—"Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law".

H.F.

“GATHER MY SAINTS TOGETHER”

“Gather my saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.” (Psalm l. 5).

“Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him” (II Thess. ii. 1).

“Not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh” (Hebrews x. 25).

IN all of the above passages there is this one common factor, that an end-time movement and feature is dominant. It must be remembered that the Psalms themselves represent what remains when a history of outward things as to the general instrumentality has ended in failure. The history of Israel in its first great phase closed with the book of “Kings” in a calamitous and shameful

way. Weakness, paralysis, declension, reproach, characterized the instrument in general. But out of that history now so concluded the Psalms are carried forward, and they represent what has *spiritually* been gained and is permanent. This is pre-eminently a personal, inward, spiritual knowledge of the Lord gained through experience. That is why they always reach the heart and never fail to touch experience at every point. To them the saints have turned in times of deep experience. They are the ministry of experience to experience, the only ministry which is permanent. The end-time instrument will always be that which inwardly knows the Lord in a deep and living way through history fraught with much experience of the heights and depths. What David gave to the Chief Musician for the wind instruments and the stringed instruments touches the highest and deepest notes of a mortal's knowledge of God. Worship, Salva-

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

tion, Sorrow, Appeal, Victory, Battle, Faith, Hope, Glory, Instruction, are all great themes interwoven with the mass of matters touched, but the point is that all came in *real life*; he passed through it all. It is this, and this alone, which can serve the Lord when what He first raised up has failed Him as a public instrument. So the Lord would take pains to secure this, and this may explain much of the suffering and sorrow through which He takes His chosen vessels.

It does not need pointing out that, in the other two passages with which we commenced; the end-time is in view; they definitely state it.

There is a further common feature, however, which is more particularly the subject before us. They all definitely refer to gathering together as something related to the end-time. The Day is drawing nigh, therefore there is to be a "so much the more" assembling together. The Lord is coming, and there is a gathering to Him.

A history of a religious system which sprang out of something which the Lord raised up in the first place has ended in weakness, chaos and shame. Therefore, there is to be a re-gathering *to the Lord* of His saints.

Before we deal with the nature of this end-time gathering, we must get clearly in view those that are concerned in it. The passage in the Psalm would embrace and include those referred to in the other two passages.

"MY SAINTS ... THOSE THAT HAVE MADE A COVENANT WITH ME BY SACRIFICE"

It need hardly be remarked that when all has been said and done through type, symbol and figure, the covenant means an entering into what the Lord Jesus has done by His shed Blood. It is an appreciation and apprehension of Him in His great work by the Cross. The Lord, by His Blood, has made a "New Covenant" by sacrifice, and we, His spiritual people, have entered into that covenant and set our hand to it. Christ as "the mediator of a new covenant" stands for both parties, for a covenant requires two parties. On one side He is God, "The Son of God": on the other side He is man, "Son of Man". In Christ we are made the humanity side of the covenant, and by taking our place by faith in Him we enter into the covenant. Just as, in Christ, God has come out to us in a great committal, so also—as in the case of Christ—we in Him go out to God in a like utter committal. The Blood seals the covenant, that is, makes us wholly the Lord's, and the Lord wholly ours.

If we see the meaning of "a covenant by sacri-

fic" then we shall see who it is that will be in this gathering together. It will certainly be only those to whom the Lord is everything, to whom He is all and in all; and those who are all for the Lord without a reservation, a personal interest, or anything that is less or other than Himself. Spiritual oneness is only possible on this basis.

The Lord's word to Abraham in the day of covenant was, "Now I know that thou fearest God". Malachi's end-time word was "Then they that feared the Lord . . ." The fear of the Lord is an utter abandonment to Him at any cost; His will being supreme, claiming and obtaining the measure of a whole burnt-offering.

THE NATURE OF THE GATHERING TOGETHER

Having then in view the kind who are concerned, which forms a test as well as a testimony, we are able to look at the nature of the gathering together.

We are well aware that there is a widespread doubt as to whether we are to expect anything in the way of a corporate movement or testimony at the end. Indeed, it is strongly held by some that everything at the end is individual, and this conviction rests, for the most part, upon the phrase "If any man", in the message to Laodicea.

Let us hasten then to say that we here have nothing in mind in the nature of an organized movement, a sect, a society, a fraternity, or even a "fellowship" if, by that, any of the foregoing is meant.

Having said this, however, there are some things on the other side which need saying quite definitely.

The Church of the New Testament never was an organized movement. Neither was there any organized affiliation of the companies of believers in various places with one another. It was a purely spiritual thing, spontaneous in life and united only by the Holy Spirit and mutual love and spiritual solicitude. There were other factors which acted as spiritual links which we will mention presently. Further, and still more important, was the abiding fact that a "Body" had been brought into being. This is called "the body of Christ". You can divide a society and still it remains, but you cannot divide a body without destroying the entity.

Are we to understand from the exponents of the individualistic interpretation that all the teaching of the Lord, in nearly all the Scriptures concerning the House of God, and in nearly all the letters of Paul concerning the Body of Christ, is now set aside or is only an idea without any expression on the earth?

NOVEMBER — DECEMBER, 1952.

Are we to blot out the mass of the New Testament and live our own individual Christian lives with no emphasis upon working fellowship with other believers? Surely not. This would be contrary to all the ways of God in history, and would certainly spell defeat, for if there is one thing against which the Adversary has set himself it is the fellowship of God's people.

Ultra-individualism is impossible if the truth of the "one body" still stands, and what is more, the Lord's people are becoming more and more conscious of their absolute need of fellowship, especially in prayer. The difficulty of 'getting through' alone is becoming greater as we approach the end.

What then is the nature of this gathering together?

It is a gathering to the Lord Himself. "*Gather my saints together unto me*"; "*our gathering unto Him*".

In times past there have been gatherings to men, great preachers, great teachers, great leaders; or to great institutions and movements, centres and teachings. At the end the Lord will be very much more than His vessels or instrumentalities.

God's end is Christ, and as we get nearer the end He must become almost immediately the object of appreciation.

Our oneness and fellowship is not in a teaching, a 'testimony', a community, a place, but in a Person, and in Him not merely doctrinally but livingly and experimentally.

Any movement truly of God must have this as its supreme and all-inclusive feature, that it is the Lord Jesus who is the object of heart adoration and worship.

The two great purposes of the 'gathering' are prayer and 'building up'; "supplication for all saints", and spiritual food. These two things have ever characterized Divine gatherings or convocations—representation before God, and feeding in His presence.

This, then, is the meaning of "call a solemn assembly" (Joel i. 14, ii. 15). The need more than ever imperative as "the day" approaches is the gathering together *unto Him*.

May we see more of this as His Divinely inspired movement to meet the so great need!

T. A-S.

 THE NEXT

SPECIAL GATHERINGS

at HONOR OAK

will be held, if the Lord wills, on

SATURDAY, JANUARY 3, at 3. 30 & 6. 30 p.m.

LORD'S DAY, JANUARY 4, at 11 a.m., 3. 30 & 6. 30 p.m.

MONDAY, JANUARY 5, (for Christian Workers) at 11 a.m., 3. 30 & 7 p.m.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We acknowledge with gratitude the following gifts received during August and September, 1952.

Anon 10s.; Aberdare 2s. 6d., 10s.; Ahmednagar India £1; Auckland Park 5s.; Banbury 10s.; Barton Hartshorn 10s.; Basingstoke 5s.; Bearsden £1; Bearsted 10s.; Bedford, Ind. £4 8s. 8d.; Belfast 10s.; Bembridge 10s.; Birmingham 1s. 11d., 10s.; Blackrock 5s.; Bognor Regis 5s.; Bombay, India 5s.; Brechin 5s.; Brynmawr £2; Canterbury 10s.; Carlisle 10s.; Chislehurst 15s.; Christchurch, N.Z. 10s.; Cleveleys 5s.; Crawley 1s. 4d., 10s., £1; Drumnadrochit 5s.; Dublin 10s.; Ewell £1 10s.; Glasgow £1; Gumligen, Switzerland £1 10s.; Halifax 3s.; Hastings 2s. 6d.; Hjorring, Denmark £1; Hove £2; Hyderabad, India £2; Ipswich 5s.; Kilcreggan £10; Kirn 10s.; Leicester £2; Lisburn 10s.; London N. 1—2s. 4d.; N.W. 2—6s.; N.W. 4—5s.; N.W. 9—5s.; S.E. 4—5s.; S.E. 20—£1; S.W. 18—10s.; Louisville, Kentucky £3 10s. 11d., £3 10s. 11d.; Lydd £2; Minneapolis, Minn. £1 3s. 3d.; Moffat £2; Montrose £2; Morden £1; Newcastle-on-Tyne 10s., £1, £1, £3; New Mills £1 0s. 3d.; Newport Pagnell 10s.; Oslo 10s.; Peterborough 10s.; Plumstead 5s.; Porth 10s.; Pretoria, South Africa £1 7s.; Purley 3s. 4d.,

18s. 3d.; Quinton £1; Radway 5s.; Salem, Oregon £1 15s. 6d.; Sidcup 5s.; Stanmore £1; Strasbourg, France £8; Sunbury 10s., 10s.; Sunderland 3s.; Swansea 5s.; Toronto, Canada £1 5s., £1 10s.; Tunbridge Wells 5s.; Warradale Park, Australia £1 10s.; Welling 5s.; Wembley 5s., 5s., 10s.; Wentworthville, Australia 10s.; Wilson Heights, Ontario £2; Zelten, Holland 10s.

Total £93 0s. 8d.

Anon \$5; Almore Dist., India \$1; Banning, Cal. \$10; Birmingham, Ala. \$10; Brentwood, Cal. \$15; Corona, Cal. \$5; Council Bluffs, Iowa \$2, \$5; Hackensack, N.J. \$5; Idiopa, Belgian Congo \$5; Jacksonville, Fla. \$11; Los Angeles, Cal. \$2; Louisville, Ky. \$4, \$5, \$5; Minneapolis, Minn. \$3, \$10; Oslo, Norway \$1; Sangus, Mass. \$2; Sharon Hill, Penn. \$1; Springfield, Mo. \$5; Southgate, Ky. \$1.50; West Newton, Mass. \$10

Total \$123.50
(American)

Regina, Sask. \$1 (Canadian)

Palmerston, N.Z. £1 (New Zealand)

The MOTTO for 1953

IS NOW READY

LARGE 5d. each, (4/6d. a dozen)

Postage : 1 to 6 mottoes 3d., on 12—4d.

SMALL 3d. each, (2/6d. a dozen)

Postage : on 6—2d., on 12—3d.

The wording of the motto is as follows:—

“The LORD is MY HELPER”
“Having obtained HELP from GOD”
“I WILL HELP THEE. saith the LORD”

LITERATURE IN INDIA

Information and literature can now be obtained through Dr. A. I. KINNEAR, 6, Brunton Road, Bangalore, 1, India.