

"A Candlestick of Pure Gold: of Beaten Work" Exodus 25. 31.



**A WITNESS
AND
A TESTIMONY**

"The Testimony of Jesus" Rev. 1. 9.



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 (literally—*full knowledge*) of the Son of God, unto a full-grown 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.

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EDITORIAL

“He made it again” (Jeremiah xviii. 4).

IT was a crisis in the history of the clay. The Potter had been forced to the necessity of reducing it to a shapeless mass. After long and patient effort, working and painstaking He had been compelled to take a sad and painful decision. The clay must be broken and go into a period in which it will seem—only seem—that the Potter has discarded it. During that time the clay—because it is not mere inanimate and insentient matter, but self-and God-conscious humanity—will have the occasion for considering its condition in the light of the past, and coming to see why this tragedy has overtaken it.

Into this crisis of the Potter’s House we have to read both the history of Israel and the history of many a piece of work which God undertook, either in the Church or in individual lives. There are two or three aspects of this crisis.

Firstly, the clay—the material of the vessel—was selected, chosen. Not because it was better clay than any other. It was all-of-a-piece with the mass of humanity. There was everything on the positive side to justify it being left in its abandoned state, and no merit to command its consideration. It was all that it should not be and nothing of what it should be to satisfy God’s requirement. Its selection was all of grace.

“Love to the loveless (unlovely) shown”.

But in the mystery of grace and the potency of grace it was taken, separated, and brought onto the wheel of Divine purpose. It was spoken to, with promise and covenant ; with comfort and exhortation; with instruction and warning; with entreaty and love. Not only in words, but in works ; strange and mystifying, deep and painful, gracious and kindly. The combining of word and deed constituted the Potter’s aim to produce “a vessel unto honour, meet for the Master’s use, prepared unto every good work”.

From time to time a warning shadow crept into the Potter’s face, and it implied that all was not well with the clay. There was something inconsistent with His object. His sensitive fingers met some

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foreign and unyielding substance. He added a little more pressure of pain, of warning, of instruction, of exhortation ; but that propensity, that adhesion persisted.

At last, after long and thorough endeavour, the Potter had to say ' I cannot go on, the only hope lies along a course of confusion, suspense, and breaking down '.

In that state the clay was driven to much heart-serching, in which, like David after his great mistake in the Philistine cart, the reasons were sought.

As these reasons were sought in heartbrokenness, the Potter, at length, began to speak again to the clay.

Some of the things that He said were these.

1. ' The fact that I chose you in sovereign grace, and therein took the initiative in bringing you into relation with my great purpose, was never intended to exonerate you from being responsible and co-operative substance. Rather did it involve you in the obligation of responsive love and self-abandoning gratitude. My very mercy and kindness, to say nothing of the immense glory that was to be the end, was meant to inculcate in you my own nature of grace and selflessness. But you have viewed it all objectively and acted as though you had little or nothing to do to " make your calling and election sure " . '

2. ' Then, you have failed to give sufficient heed to another very vital factor. I have given you much light and truth. My servants have risen up early and prayed late to obtain for you that truth that could minister to the " conformity to the image " that I have in view. Over a long period you have been receiving and receiving until you can hardly bear to have more. But you have not given heed to the fact that it is not sufficient to have light and truth without walking in it, and having it " in the inward parts " . You have failed to remember that the greatest tragedies are those which have had most light and have not turned it into life and character. You have the truth in abundance but it is not yourself. There is a gap between what you know in theory and what you are in being '.

3. ' Further, again, the greatness of my selecting grace, the patience of my longsuffering mercy, and the lavishness of my giving of light have only added up to make you spiritually proud, conceited, and superior. You have become self-centred and straitened. In all my thought and work regarding you I have had a *vessel* in mind, and a vessel not as a mere ornament on a pedestal, but for use. A great world-vocation has dominated all with me, but you have fed your own souls and not enough cherished and valued the great honour and responsibility of having a ministry to *all* the world. These are some things that I cannot go on with, hence the crisis of frustration, confusion, and suspense ' . (It will be recognised that these were some of the things which constituted God's controversy with Israel and which led to the crisis of the exile, when the clay was set aside awhile. They are tendencies at all times amongst the people of God.)

The Potter waits. Is there recognition, repentance, remorse, and yielding? If so—" He made it again " .

God does not finally abandon an undertaking or purpose. Even His most drastic dealings *in this life* are in hope. He is " the God of hope " .

We open the Bible with the earth in a sad state of chaos, but " He made it again " . We see the human race in terrible desolation through Adam's sin, but " In Christ there is a new creation " . " He made it again " .

Israel in Egypt is in a sad and devastated plight, but " He made it again " . Israel in Babylon is the clay cast off and—for the time—rejected ; but " He made it again " . Peter was pealed, scattered and desolated by his denial of his Master ; but " He made it again " .

John Mark no doubt had many heart-burning and self-reproaching hours after deserting from the work ; but " He made it again " . This is the history, story, and—thank God—the testimony of much " Broken Earthenware " . " He made it again . . . as seemed good to the potter " .

As we move into this new year 1960, and maybe are all aware of how we have failed and disappointed earlier hopes and expectations, let us focus upon—not " it was marred in the hand of the potter " , but—" He made it again, another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it " . The end of all God's work is, " It is very good. "

EDITOR

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MEN WHOSE EYES HAVE SEEN THE KING

III. OUR ANCHORAGE—THE LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST

Reading: Romans viii. 31-39.

OUR hearts have been directed to the glorified Lord Jesus, as the object and as the inspiration of Christian life, endurance, and service. We have looked at Him on the Mount of Transfiguration, and have seen a little of what that meant, for the rest of their lives, to the men who were with Him, and what Christ glorified meant to all the others who, at different times, and in different ways, and at different places, saw Him in glory—Stephen, and Paul, and later still, John.

John, in speaking many, many years afterward of the sole impression that remained with him from the time spent with the Lord Jesus, summed it all up in one marvellous phrase: a parenthesis it is in his gospel, but was there ever a more important and wonderful parenthesis? "The Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of an only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth" (John i. 14). What they saw, when they saw the Lord Jesus in His glory, was the manifestation of the grace of God.

This portion of Paul's Roman letter, which we have just read, seems to me to be Paul's way of stating what he saw in the face of Jesus Christ. After dwelling much upon this part of the Word, the impression has come to me, at this point, that this is what the apostle was working toward all the way through; this is his release. He has been doing a piece of very laborious work; he has set himself to a great treatise—and it is that—it has defeated all the greatest minds, ever since, in their efforts to fathom this letter and to interpret it. But you have a feeling as you read, and arrive at this point, that now the apostle said, 'Now that is that; let me say what I am after all the time, what I have really had in mind; let me unburden my heart.' And he does so here. 'These things' to which he refers—'What shall we say to *these things*?'—all these things that he has been saying, what is the upshot? what do they all point to? 'What is the supreme significance and implication of all that I have been saying?' And he goes on to answer his own question, and to release from his heart this thing that has been there, prompting all his effort and undertaking. It is this mighty, mighty revelation of *the love of God in Jesus Christ*.

I say he was working toward that. It is a painful process. The first stage of the letter, as you know, is occupied with that painful necessity, that so unpleasant necessity—the exposing of sin. He does it very thoroughly; he goes through the whole Gentile world, and gives, not an exaggerated picture, but a very terrible picture, of sin. There is no place in the whole Bible where sin in its awfulness is more exposed than in the early part of this letter. It is a terrible picture of human sin in its natural state. And he proceeds from the Gentile world to the Jewish world, the world of Israel. Although elect, chosen, called, separated, and given so much of Divine deposit and trust and revelation, Israel had to have the Law. You do not need a police force in a perfect State; you do not need law if there is no lawlessness. The very giving of the Law, Paul says, is only another proof that in this matter of sin Jews are no better than other people. 'By the law sin is manifested'. I have spoken of the Police Force: the very presence of a policeman says that there is wrong in the world; the very presence of the law means that there must be lawlessness. And so Israel is no better than the rest. Sin is universal; sin is in every creature; sin is the state of the whole creation. It is a terrible exposure, uncovering, but very necessary. I am quite sure that, when Paul got to the end of it, he sighed a sigh of relief; he was glad to get past that, to get on to something better than that—really what he was after.

You see the point: *this* is what he is after! He must do that—and God must make us know sin, the reality of sin, the awfulness of sin; sin must become a terrible thing with us, before ever we can appreciate the grace of God. No one ever appreciates Divine grace who has seen little or nothing of the sinfulness of sin in their own heart. Great pains, then, are taken in this letter to expose the reality and the nature of sin, and its effects; not in order to bring condemnation, not to make people miserable, but just to lead to the grace of God—to enhance Divine grace. So, the apostle says, 'where sin abounded'—abounded over Gentile and Jew, over the race, over the whole world; a great wave has passed over and inundated the whole creation—where sin, like a great ocean, spread itself, *abounded*, grace did *super-abound*! Grace was greater than the greatness of sin!

So he comes to this at last: "What then shall

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we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?" It is a marvellous thing: and, as you can well see, the apostle is speaking much out of his own experience and history here, when he catalogues these things which are a real threat to hope and to life and to prospect. Very real and terrible things they are that he catalogues here. 'Shall tribulation . . .?' Paul knew something about tribulation; tribulation in his experience was a very real thing indeed. 'Or anguish . . .?'—yes, we find Paul more than once in anguish; anguish over the spiritual state of his beloved converts, and the churches. To the Thessalonians he speaks twice of his 'travail' for them—his anguish. 'Or persecution . . .?' Paul knew quite a bit about that! 'Famine . . .'—he tells us he was in hunger; 'nakedness . . .'—yes, in nakedness; 'or peril, or sword . . .?' And if that is not enough, 'death . . . life . . . angels . . . principalities . . . things present . . . things to come . . . powers . . . height . . . depth . . .', 'and', he says, 'I cannot go on enumerating and analysing any more'—'. . . or any other creation'—that covers everything! 'I am persuaded that there is nothing in creation—all these things and anything else that you would like to gather into that—I am persuaded that none of these things shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.' That is *grace*!

Sin need not separate us from the love of God! Do you believe that? Sin need not separate you from the love of God, because of Romans viii: 'One died . . .'; 'it is Christ who died, yes, rather, that is risen'; and, further, He is 'at the right hand of God making intercession'. Therefore, sin need not, and, on that ground, cannot separate us from the love of God.

Now, whether we individually experience all the things that are mentioned here, or not, the fact is that there are a great many things that are given a complexion by the forces of evil, with the object of separating us from the love of God. Suffering, anguish, persecution, death, and even life—for life can be a terrible thing for some people—many things that come into our experience, are just played upon by these forces of evil everywhere, to tell us that the love of God is not a reality; that God does not love us—this is proof positive; this is the evidence! In this storm, when the winds blow from every quarter, when all the elements are against us, we need an anchorage; we need something that will hold.

There is no question about Paul's devotion to the Lord; he knew in his own heart that there was no controversy between him and the Lord; he was not aware of being in revolt against the Lord, or

being contrary to the known will of God; his whole being was poised and focused upon the pleasure of his Lord, to be well-pleasing unto Him—he knew it. And yet, with that in his heart, he is meeting all these things: his ministry is being discredited; his name is being defamed; he is suspect wherever he goes; he moves all over the world in an atmosphere of suspicion and ostracism, and not only in the world, but amongst Christians; he is not universally loved even in the churches that had their existence through his ministry. No, this thing has spread, like an awful vapour, everywhere, to somehow destroy this man and his ministry; and there were not a few who would be glad if he were dead. He knew it. And in these many forms of expression he met it almost every day of his life.

A man, or a Christian, meeting things like that, needs an anchorage. When things beat on you, and sorrow overwhelms you, you need an anchorage. Your anchorage will not be self-vindication—or self-justification—you will not get anywhere along that line; your anchorage will not even be your own sense of rightness. The only anchor that will hold in all this is God's love for you. You may make mistakes—and we are always wrong when we think of Paul or any other apostle as being faultless. I used to feel, in younger days, that it was a terrible thing to allow myself to think that Paul could be wrong, or that any other apostle could be wrong, or make a mistake. I thought these men must be infallible. Oh, no, it is we who are wrong when we take that attitude. Paul made mistakes, and he let himself in for difficulties by his mistakes; but what he came out with was this. The love of God is not changed when I make mistakes; the love of God does not let me go when I make mistakes. When I default, make wrong decisions, take wrong directions, perhaps say wrong things—that does not break the cable between my soul and the anchor of His love; it holds! 'I am persuaded . . . persuaded that none of these things—anything in the creation that you can mention'—"shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

That is what Paul saw in the face of Jesus Christ. John's word for it was: "full of grace and truth". Paul would have endorsed that; indeed, this is his great endorsement. Sin—yes, horrible, awful, despicable, wicked, cruel; unfaithfulness, on the part of Israel; departure from Divine intention—yes (for you know he throws in a section immediately after chapter viii; the next two or three chapters are a section by themselves to illustrate his point). But it does not make any difference to the Divine

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love. Let us think about that just for a moment—this section that he puts in to illustrate his point. Israel: ‘Hath God cast off His people? God forbid!’ (xi. 1)—it is one of his nine ‘God forbids’ in this letter. Yes, but look what Israel has done! Look at Calvary—look at their work; look at Stephen—look at their work; look at what they are doing everywhere—*Israel!*

Yes, they may be under judgment; they may be suffering for their sin, their wickedness, their iniquity; they may have been set aside for the dispensation as God’s instrument because of their unfaithfulness. ‘But’, says the apostle, ‘that has not ended God’s love for them.’ Judgment in this world, and in this life, is never a proof that God’s love is at an end; it may be the very proof of His love. It is better for us to suffer when we do wrong, in order to discover something new of His love through suffering. I venture to say that many of us have come to what little we do apprehend of the Divine love, through the realisation of our own faultiness, and what it leads to. But Israel is a great illustration; and even yet, a spiritual company from the natural Israel will be found in the Kingdom, and in the Church. God has not washed

His hands of them eternally as a people, and said, No Jew, no Israelite, will ever again have a chance. Not at all! Bad as they have been, and done what they have done, He has set His love upon them, and His love will keep the door open.

But you see the message. ‘Who shall separate us from the love of God?’ ‘What shall we say to these things? If God is for us’—and this is how He is for us, and where He is for us, and when He is for us, and through everything His love—what shall we say? Well, after making this tremendous sweep of Divine love, and then illustrating it with Israel in this most impressive way, he answers his question, his interrogation, by saying: “I beseech you therefore . . . by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (xii. 1). What shall we say? The answer must be not in words, but in an act—‘present your bodies, by the mercies of God’. That ‘love so amazing, so Divine, demands our souls, our life, our all.’

‘Sirs, we would see Jesus.’

What are you looking for? This is what you ought to see when you see Jesus—the Love of God in the Face of Jesus Christ.

T.A-S.

ANOTHER SPIRIT

Reading: Joshua xiv. 6-14.

THE last book of the Bible calls for believers who will rise above the confusion and declension all around them, overcoming all their temptations and all their enemies. Only the overcomer can be the inheritor: “He that overcometh shall inherit these things . . .” (Rev. xxi. 7). Such men must expect to find themselves in bewildering circumstances, in painful trials and without any human support. They must learn to stand firm in Christ’s victory, and if necessary to stand alone. From the day when those words were written in the isle of Patmos, until now, the challenge “to him that overcometh” has continued. Many have failed to meet it, but others have prevailed by grace and through faith. There has always been a need for overcomers. Given that we are now in the last days, that need is even more urgent. Now, more than ever, the Spirit’s quest in the churches is for believers who will be true overcomers.

WHOLLY FOLLOWING THE LORD

Perhaps the best illustration of this kind of spiritual victory, at least the best in the Old Testament, is found in the story of Caleb. His name

is not mentioned in the New Testament, yet surely he provides an outstanding example of the indomitable faith of an individual who had to live in the midst of prevailing unbelief and defeat. In his days there was a complete breakdown of corporate faith. The people of God were divided in their counsels, unwilling to go through with the enterprise which they had started, inconsistent in behaviour with their professed knowledge of the will of God, and more concerned with their own affairs than with the honour of the Name which they bore. Caleb was unmoved by all this. Listen to his own testimony: “But I wholly followed the Lord” (Joshua xiv. 8); listen to Moses’ commendation of him: “Thou hast wholly followed the Lord” (v. 9); listen to the Divine verdict and the verdict of history: “Because that he wholly followed the Lord” (v. 14). With this threefold stress on his whole-heartedness, surely Caleb has much to teach us as to how we also may be overcomers when defeat is all around us.

HIS BRETHREN FAILED HIM

His brethren failed him: he had to follow the Lord alone. “My brethren that were with me made the heart of the people melt: but I wholly

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followed the Lord my God." His brethren ought to have helped him—that is what brethren are for ; but they could not do so, for they themselves were half-hearted, faint-hearted, and more affected by the voice of reason than by the voice of God.

When he spoke of his brethren, Caleb was referring to the other ten spies. We should say at once that Joshua was just as whole-hearted as Caleb, so that it is not literally true to say that he was alone—we hardly ever are. Yet there was a real element of loneliness in Caleb's position, for Joshua had special privileges that were not given to him. The other ten failed Caleb because they failed themselves and they failed the Lord. They had the same experiences as Caleb. Like him, they shared the vision of the land of fulness, they handled the marvellous fruit of that land and brought back the same report of its richness. True, they saw the opposition and the difficulties, but so did Caleb. The difficulties were undoubtedly real ; they were there, all right, and what is more they were still there when the people returned 45 years later. Difficulties do not vanish with time ; they will not disappear just because we refuse to face them.

No worthwhile spiritual advance is free from opposition and perils. It is a tragic matter when God's servants become so obsessed with difficulties or so cautious over possible dangers that they do not dare to move forward with the Lord when His moment arrives. Perhaps the spies heard dismal stories of how others had tried and failed. There always are such stories. Perhaps they considered the weakness of their fellow-pilgrims and judged that they were not yet ready for the strenuous encounters which lay ahead. We do not know the particular and personal reasons for their faint-heartedness ; we only know that they said No! to the Lord. No, not yet! No, not this way!

They were very negative, these men. They wanted to evade the issue. It was not that they had a suitable alternative, but only that they could not, would not, venture on the Lord. It was in such a general atmosphere of confusion and question that Caleb showed what kind of a man he was. Brethren or no brethren, he was determined to be whole-hearted in his faith. He could not, of course, go on literally into the land without them. The purposes of God were bound up with the whole people, and not with mere individuals. The unbelief of the others could and did involve him in suffering and delay. But it could not prevent him from wholeness of heart towards his Lord, and he did not let it do so.

His brethren failed. How often we make this the

excuse for our own shortcomings! We suggest that we would have trusted the Lord, we would have gone forward, but we could not because of lack of support from our brethren. Caleb realised that this would really be no excuse. In the last issue, faith is a personal matter ; we can never blame those around us for our own failures to trust the Lord. Over against the craven-hearted group, Caleb was able to affirm : " but I wholly followed the Lord ". ' I did not excuse myself by the failure of the rest ; I did not allow myself to be disheartened by their failure ; I wholly followed the Lord.'

Caleb had no special privileges. Without at all detracting from the faithfulness of his leader, we must point out that Joshua did have peculiar helps and advantages. He had already commanded the Israelite army ; he had an intimate, privileged association with Moses ; and he was marked out to be the future leader of the people. None of these things was true of Caleb. He only heard what the others heard, and saw what they saw. He represents the ordinary man, like most of us. We have no peculiar incentives, no special prominence ; we just share with others a call and a vision. If the vision is realised we shall not occupy any outstanding position. We find, though, as Caleb did, that in the test of the people we have to face our own individual test. The whole nation was on trial, and it failed. The leaders of the tribes were on trial, and with two exceptions they also failed. But we must not forget that the individual man was also on trial. No failure of those around him could excuse his failure, and no general paralysis in the face of difficulties could be the excuse for him to be paralysed and he was not. He was unmoved and undaunted. His brethren failed, but by God's grace he overcame. He saw the same enemies, the same citadels, the same dangers as they saw. He was conscious of his own insufficiency just as much as they were. But he kept his eyes on the Lord.

Let us make no mistake about it : we are all on trial as individual Christians. We may be placed in the midst of confusion and defeat. We may find that the brethren whom we ought to be able to rely on are not to be trusted, but this cannot excuse our own personal collapse. We can be like Caleb, if we will ; and, because we can, we must.

THE PEOPLE ATTACKED HIM

Not only did his brethren fail him, but the people turned against him. He had to keep steady in his faith position, in spite of being misunderstood and criticised by all around him. Somehow,

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when we 'wholly follow the Lord', we expect to be appreciated and perhaps even admired by others. It comes as a shock to find it otherwise. When Caleb found how unreliable the rest of the leaders were, he tried to appeal to the people over their heads. We are told that "Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it" (Numbers xiii. 30). But the false leadership of unbelief prevailed over these appeals of his for active faith. It was then that the people turned against Caleb and Joshua. They tried to remonstrate with the people, to argue the Lord's case, and to show how unreasonable were their fears. "But all the congregation bade stone them with stones" (Numbers xiv. 10). What a strange reception for men who were seeking wholly to follow the Lord! The lack of support now turned to positive opposition and hatred. It must have surprised Caleb to discover how essentially unspiritual this people was, how unprepared to face the truth, and how capable of bitterness to the men who sought to bring it to them. This is one of the sad discoveries that any man of faith will sooner or later make, this realisation of how blinded and impulsive the people of God can be if once they take their eyes off Him. Only the sudden appearance of the glory of the Lord saved Caleb and Joshua from being stoned to death. If we wholly follow the Lord, we need fear no evil consequences, for He will be on our side. It was the men who gave the false lead who died. Unbelief always opens the door for some experience of spiritual death. "But Joshua . . . and Caleb . . . remained alive . . ." (Numbers xiv. 38). The way of utter faith is always the way of life.

THE WILDERNESS TESTED HIM

He followed the Lord "while Israel walked in the wilderness" (Joshua xiv. 10). Not only in the moment of crisis and of hope, but through all the long years of delay and disappointment, he could claim still to have wholly followed the Lord. In spite of his personal faith, he had to wait now while the nation was divinely disciplined before being brought back to Kadesh-barnea. Unbelief can never wait, so we have the strange spectacle of the very people who had refused when God called now trying to reverse His decision and His sentence of wilderness wandering. No sooner had Moses explained their sin and given them God's verdict that they were not now to go in, than they got together to make an expedition of their own. They thought that they would go in after all. True.

they had sinned, but they thought that they could soon put that right, and proceed as though nothing had happened.

It is not as easy as that. Something in them had to die out before they could again be given their opportunity; so, while that faithless element died out, they were sent back to wander in the wilderness. The process could not be hurried and it must not be only half done. The whole element of the old generation who wanted to live in the past had to be purged from among them. In addition to this, a new generation had to be developed and prepared. The wilderness years would not be wasted, for the Lord would use them to develop and discipline this new generation, who in due course would be able to succeed where the old had failed.

Rashly and carnally a group of the people "presumed to go up to the top of the mountain" (Numbers xiv. 44), only to be ignominiously defeated. Caleb had no part in this. There is no element of presumption in the man who wholly follows the Lord. He must not only be prepared to go forward in faith when the Lord's hour strikes, but he must also be prepared to wait the Lord's time and accept the discipline which He imposes.

So all through the years "while Israel walked in the wilderness", Caleb wholly followed the Lord. He did not dissociate himself from the rest of the people and try to act alone. He did not sulk at their behaviour and spend the next forty years bemoaning his unnecessary trials. He quietly took his place with the people, sharing their life and waiting for God to give them their new opportunity. When, at last, the time came, he was in his place as head of the tribe of Judah, and in the end his patience of faith was fully vindicated—after forty-five years!

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS UPHELD HIM

In the wilderness he was kept alive. Death prevailed everywhere. It was not only round about them—it entered into the camp and continued its work until every man over twenty years of age had perished in that wilderness. Caleb and Joshua, however, did not succumb to it, for they had committed themselves to the faithfulness of God. "And now, behold", one of them was able to say to the other, "the Lord hath kept me alive" (Joshua xiv. 10). The unbelieving people had struggled and argued in a vain attempt to avoid the supposed dangers of the land. They had tried to keep their lives and had lost them. Caleb let go of his own life in an utterness of committal to the Lord, and he alone—with Joshua—was kept alive.

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Moreover he was kept strong. "I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me" (v. 11). Caleb's efforts to reason with the people had proved futile. It is more than likely that after that he said very little. Those who reasoned and argued against him might feel that they had defeated him and that his spirit was broken. But silence is not always weakness. He was patient—he must have been—but we must not confuse patience with weakness. Indeed, this was the proof that it was Divine strength in him, for even after waiting for many years it was still as great as ever. He endured all the hardships which the others had to suffer, the lack of water and the monotony of the food, for he was not given any special considerations or favour because of his different spirit. He went through it all, and at the end he could testify to undiminished strength. This was a miracle. It was due to the fact that by faith he drew on Divine resources. When we attempt to do the will of God in our own strength, we may seem to have some temporary success, but in the end we shall wear ourselves out. Time provides a searching test as to whether our life is really based simply and solely on the faithfulness of God. In Caleb's case there could be no doubt about that faithfulness, since after the test of many strenuous years he was still found as full of energy as at the beginning. Those who draw on the Lord's life, gain strength rather than otherwise in all the trials and strains of the wilderness.

He was kept true to his vision. He not only came back to the land of promise, but eventually he returned to Hebron, to the original scene of his faith victory, to the inheritance solemnly promised him by Moses all those years ago. As we have said, the difficulties were still there; they had not lessened with the passing years. Yes, but the prize was still there also, waiting to be conquered and appropriated by the man of faith. Earlier on he had been denied possession by the carnality of his fellows. He had seen the Divine objective, but he made no attempt to break away from the rest of the people and move forward alone. As we have remarked, he would have nothing to do with the foolish impetuosity of those who tried to ignore or reverse God's decision that they must return to the wilderness. No. He had to wait. In a sense he had to let it all go. Yet he let it go to God, and rested in the Lord's faithfulness. In his spirit he never lost sight for a moment of the Divine objective, and was not at all surprised when, after forty-five years, he was able to return and resume his onward movement. Here is the man who "wholly follows the Lord", the man who has

"another spirit". He is a man of sustained vision, of unchanged purpose and of uncompromising persistence of faith. God honours that kind of man. Caleb was given Hebron for a lasting inheritance. "But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it" (Numbers xiv. 24).

ANOTHER SPIRIT

It will not be difficult for us to find many parallels between the experiences of Caleb and our own. His story is a challenge to us, a call to wholeheartedness in our dealings with the Lord. It may well be that we are surrounded by confusion and unbelief. It may well be that our vision of the Divine objective cannot at the moment be realised and our patience will be sorely tested. We, too, may have had to let go—to let go to God, and to wait for Him to bring back to life what seems for the time being to be lost in death and despair. As in Caleb's case, it is not our vehemence, our sincerity or even our rightness which will decide the issue, but our spirit. We shall only get through if we have this 'other' spirit.

It is good for us to remember that the years of wilderness wandering were not wasted. Some old element among the people died out—it had to do so. But that was not all. A new generation was fitted and prepared for the inheritance. As Caleb moved on into the conquest of his inheritance, he encountered a stronghold which called for this new element. Caleb uttered his challenge: "He that smiteth Kiriath-sepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife" (Joshua xv. 16). Where is the new life which is the product of our years of discipline? It was there, of course, and came forward in the person of a young man called Othniel, which means 'the power of God'. He took the position and he received Achsah as his reward. When we look more closely into this incident, we find that Othniel was Caleb's own nephew. So this is what had happened during those years of waiting! Within his own home circle, within the sphere of his own personal influence, a young man and a young woman had been reared and inspired to have the same spirit of wholehearted faith which he himself had shown. The rest of the story makes it plain that the daughter was just as full of spiritual energy as her husband, for when Othniel would not ask Caleb for the springs of water, she did so herself, and was given more than she asked for—"he gave her the upper springs and the nether springs" (Joshua xv. 19).

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It must have given him great joy to find that his offspring had inherited not only the same land but the same spirit as his own. This was what he had lived for. For this he had endured the rigours of the long delay; not only that he himself might win through, but that he might share in the producing of a new generation, governed by a new spirit, who could take possession of the inheritance in the name of the Lord.

Unlike Joshua, Caleb was never marked out for some special task of leadership. He seems to represent the less prominent influence of the ordinary man or woman of faith. Nobody can say how much the whole people owed to Caleb. We give much attention to Moses, the great leader, who successfully brought the people to the brink of the

land. We think of Joshua, his mighty successor, who led the people right over Jordan and into the land itself. These were the public figures, the men whose names were on everybody's lips. But let us not minimise the hidden influence for God of one simple man of faith who wholly followed the Lord. Perhaps this represents our own calling. It is impossible to exaggerate its importance.

He was a man of "another spirit". This should encourage us when we appreciate our own weakness and insignificance, realising that we are neither strong nor clever, and fearing that we cannot affect the larger situation of God's people. We can, if we wholly follow the Lord. We can, by the power of that other spirit, which is none other than the Spirit of Christ, the mighty Overcomer.

H.F.

WAITING FOR GOD

Reading: Psalm xxxvii. 1 - 9.

"Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from Jehovah, and the justice due to me is passed away from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard? The everlasting God, Jehovah, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary; there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to him that hath no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait for Jehovah shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint." (Isaiah xl. 27 - 31).

"REST in the Lord, and wait patiently for him". The Word does not say, Rest in indifference; nor, Wait for events: it says: Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him. That, I think, is one of our difficulties, perhaps one of our main difficulties—to rest in the Lord; to wait patiently for Him.

THE TIME FACTOR AND FRETFULNESS

Fret and worry are of the spirit of the world; but they seem to have percolated into the Lord's people: fret and anxiety, leading to impetuosity and precipitancy. Those things are the products of time, and we are so governed by time. There is a story of a visitor from the East, from China, who, after a little while, said to his host: 'You

find it strange that we in China have little idols, gods, that we worship; but you know, you in the West have a god that you worship. He sits upon the mantelpiece; his hands are before his face. He says, Do this, and you have to do it; Do that, and, again, you have to do it. He tells you when to eat, when to get up in the morning, and when to go to bed.' Well, there is a humorous side to that story, of course, but there is truth in it. How people are governed by time! How we, the Lord's people, are governed by time! We may have certain convictions; ideas of what ought to be: and how we fret, and how we worry concerning them. In the final analysis, their realisation may not be in our time—but is that of such importance? When D. L. Moody lay dying, a friend said to him: 'You have been praying for So-and-so for forty years; your prayers have not been answered; what about it?' D. L. Moody said: 'No, he is not saved yet, but he will be.' It did not depend upon the life-time of D. L. Moody: it depended on the Lord. These things that I have mentioned—fret, anxiety; our impetuosity, and our precipitancy—are the products of time. But rest and assurance and confidence and patience, are of the essence of eternity. We fret; God never does. God is never in a hurry; we are.

HASTE THE PRODUCT OF UNBELIEF

Isaiah says that one of the marks of a believer, a true believer, is that he 'shall not make haste' (Isa. xxviii. 16). Peter says: 'He shall not be put to shame' (I Peter ii. 6). And the Psalmist knew that these things are linked together—haste and

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

shame; unhurry and unashamedness. 'He that believeth shall not make haste'. So haste is akin to unbelief: unbelief begets haste. Why are we in such a hurry? Because we do not believe. But faith begets confidence, and assurance, and hope, and accomplishment. The Lord Jesus was never in a hurry. As we read through the record of His life, how impressive is the absence of any sense of hurry—He was never in a hurry. God is like that—He is not in a hurry.

The Lord Jesus drew the strong contrast between all others and Himself: He said this, "My time is not yet come; but your time is always ready" (John vii. 6). Now the language there is rather archaic, but what it means is this: 'You are always in a hurry'. How frantically we react to situations—it is time! it is time! we ought to *do* something! Time is passing; the moment, the opportunity will be gone; we must do something. And it would seem—I emphasise that—it would *seem* that the Lord is unconcerned: 'My time is not yet'. We will look at that a little more closely in a moment, in the incident of the raising of Lazarus.

THE UNHURRIED CONFIDENCE OF GOD

Even to-day, with all the chaos in the world, with the uncertainty of things—and how uncertain they are; when, as never before, men might well say, Why does God not do something?—God has said, and still says to His Son, "Sit thou on my right hand, *till . . . till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet.*" (Acts ii. 36). Could He not have done it following the Cross? Could He not have done it at least two thousand years ago? Could He not do it now? God says: "Sit thou on my right hand, *till . . .*" You see, it is not the calendar which is keeping God waiting; God does not work to days and times and seasons; God works to conditions and states. And God is doing something, even whilst He waits. It may be that, where you and I are concerned, He is waiting until we stop fretting, until our over-anxiety is cast upon Him, and we come to rest in the Lord. He is waiting for us to come to a place of quiet restfulness in Himself.

IMPATIENCE A HINDRANCE TO GOD

But our impatience is not merely negative where God is concerned; it is a positive hindrance. I want to turn to the Scriptures: there are many illustrations of this principle; we will take a few of them:—

(i) ABRAHAM

It is strange to associate Abraham with unrest in the Lord—fret—but it was there. On many things he had come to rest in the Lord. Basically he was believing in the Lord, but there was one thing, just one thing, and it nagged at his heart. "What wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless . . . and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir" (Gen. xv. 2, 3)—it was this longing, this desire of Abraham's for a son. And we know the story. Abraham could not wait for God. Stirred up by Sarah, he moved. Time was passing. Soon it would be too late; he must do something. And he did. He could not wait for the Lord; he was moved out of his place of rest; his patience was at an end. So Ishmael was born. There are many who know the tragic story of Islam—the posterity born of Abraham's impatience. He could not wait for the Lord—even Abraham! And notice, Abraham's impatience had to do with something that God had promised. Oh, the trouble that Abraham caused the Lord by his failure to wait patiently—and what trouble we cause the Lord! even in relation to His things, by not being prepared to wait. And the issue at stake was nothing less than the grand purpose of God, for Abraham was the one whom God called out in order to initiate His eternal purpose amongst men; the Seed, which is Christ, was in view; and Abraham could not wait. The fruit of his impatience was Ishmael; and if you want to know how much trouble such impatience caused the Lord, read the Galatian letter.

(ii) JACOB

Jacob could not wait for the Lord. The Lord had given him promises, had set His heart upon the fulfilment of the covenant made to Abraham; but Jacob could not wait. From the moment when he flies for his life, there begins the sad history, through all the vicissitudes of his stay in Padan-aram, years and years of feverish, fretful, impatient activity; he could not wait for the Lord. When he comes back to Jabbok, he has to confess: I have not obtained the birthright-blessing; I have achieved nothing. And if he were to speak the truth, he would say: I have delayed the Lord; I have held Him up. He has been waiting. The Lord was waiting for him at Jabbok—still waiting! (Gen. xxxii.)

(iii) MOSES

Moses could not wait for the Lord. When they came the second time to the place of need for water, Moses went out with Aaron at the bidding

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of God, and his impetuosity, his impatience, carried him away—impatience with the Lord's people. Crying out: 'Ye rebels, shall we bring you forth water out of this rock? . . .' he struck the rock *a second time!* (Numb. xx. 2–12). Only the act of a moment, but it shut him out of the land! Impatience may be momentary, but it is an awful thing.

(iv) AARON

Aaron was amongst those who could not wait (Ex. xxxii. 1–6). Moses had gone up into the mount to receive the tables of the Law. At the foot, there remained the people of God, and Aaron. The people became impatient: 'What has become of Moses we know not; we have been waiting now . . .' They had not waited long! Aaron is caught in this; Aaron could not wait. And so, in a very weak kind of way, he gives in to the people, and the product is the 'golden calf'. You notice that God does not excuse Aaron, and in reading it again, I see how unwilling he seemed to be to go with the people; he did not want to do it; yet he made the 'golden calf'. I believe that in the back of his mind was this thought: 'Well, after all, there *is* the thought of sacrifice, and if I make it into something that the people can see, I am not doing any harm! I will come down to their level, and I will draw them up again!' For you notice, he says, when he had made the 'golden calf'; 'To-morrow shall be a feast to *the Lord!*' But the fact remains that Aaron could not wait for what was happening in the mount, and his impatience shut Aaron out of the land.

(v) SAUL

Saul is the classic example of impatience in the Old Testament: the man that could not wait for God. His final setting aside was, of course, when he spared Agag—his incomplete obedience. But if you will read the history of Saul, you find that it went back earlier than that: he was rejected from being king, because he could not wait for God (I Sam. xiii. 8–14). Samuel had evidently instructed Saul to wait until he came to offer the offerings. And you can picture the scene. The days are passing; the seventh day has come; the evening of the seventh day, and Samuel has not come. Saul must do something! he begins to fret, to be anxious: and he offers the offering; he cannot wait. It cost him his kingdom!

(vi) THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

They could not wait for the Lord. Now that is specifically said in the Psalms—let me read it to

you. The Psalmist sums up their history like this: "The waters covered their adversaries; there was not one of them left"—that refers to the Red Sea, surely; He had done wonderful things for them—"Then believed they his words; they sang his praise. They soon forgot his works; they *waited not* for his counsel" (Ps. cvi. 11–13)—they could not wait. And again and again, in the wilderness, in the history of this people, you find them an impatient people, not prepared to wait for the Lord. And it cost them their inheritance. How important is this matter of waiting for God! Impatience cost the children of Israel their inheritance; they lost their place in the purpose of God.

WAITING GIVES GOD HIS OPPORTUNITY

Now the Scripture is not lacking, on the other hand, in illustrations of the value to God of quietly waiting. There are several; I have picked out one or two.

(i) RUTH

Ruth the Moabitess. Naomi's counsel to her was: "sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall" (Ruth iii. 18). 'Rest in the Lord'—and how effectively she did it. Quietly, confidently, she waited for Boaz—put the matter into his hands, and then waited. Her confidence and her patience gave God His opportunity, for Ruth became, in the providence of God, the great-grandmother of David, and David was the 'man after God's heart', to bring the people into the inheritance, fully; and through his son, Solomon—at least for that time—finally. They inherited. In the thirty-seventh Psalm from which we read, the Psalmist repeats this matter of inheriting several times: If we wait for the Lord, we shall inherit. Ruth waited for the Lord.

(ii) DAVID

And Ruth's great-grandson, David, is surely the outstanding example on this side, as was Saul on the other. Go through his Psalms. If he does not mention the word 'wait' in a Psalm, you will find that the spirit is that of waiting for the Lord. There is a Psalm which was written in the darkest hour, when he was in the cave (Ps. lvii; I Sam. xxii. 1, 2), when everything seemed hopeless; if you will read the Psalm, you will find that it breathes this very atmosphere of rest in the Lord. David was one who could wait for the Lord.

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(iii) THE LORD JESUS

But of course, if we are to see this thing at its highest and its fullest and its best, we must come to the Lord Jesus, the Man who could wait for God—and He did. He could wait until it seemed too late. Our trouble is that we put our confidence and expectation in a time or a place or an opportunity. The Lord Jesus did not: He put His confidence in God. Now the raising up of Lazarus makes that very clear (John xi). Look at the setting around Him: look at the general atmosphere. "If thou hadst been here, . . .", but it is too late now! too late! They come to the tomb, and to the command, 'Take the stone away . . . '—the protest is: It is too late! The opportunity has gone! If only you had been here!

Is that not largely our trouble? If . . . if . . . if . . . if only the Lord would . . . if only the Lord would do this . . . if He would come just when we think He ought to. But the Lord Jesus was not resting in circumstances, not in events, He was resting in His Father. So He comes to the impossible situation, the 'too late' situation, and God works! God can work if we can wait.

WAITING FOR GOD IS NOT
INDIFFERENCE

Now, I do want to make one thing very clear, for I am sure in some minds there is something passing like this: Yes, that is all very true, that is all right, but we can wait too long! This waiting for the Lord does not mean that we are supine, indifferent, nonchalant. I am not saying that there is never a time when the Lord says, Go forward; He does; He did with Moses: "Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel

that they go forward (Ex. xiv. 15). When the Lord has said, Go forward, All right! To linger when God says, Forward, is unbelief. Surely the counsel of Isaiah is a true one, and a very comforting one: I want to read it to you: "*Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant? he that walketh in darkness, and hath no light, let him trust in the name of the Lord, and rely upon his God*" (Isa. l. 10). When there is no clear, definite indication of the way, the thing to do is to wait for the Lord, not to try to press in, not to try to remedy things. Abraham tried that; Saul tried that. The thing to do is to wait for the Lord. "Wait for the Lord". When the Lord moves, move with Him, but if He is not moving, fret not thyself.

WAITING FOR GOD IS ACTIVE

That word 'wait' means *to hope*—it is an active word, not a passive word; it means, 'to expect', 'to wait', 'to look for', 'to reach out after'! This word 'wait' has about it the nature of the actively-passive.

The Lord would have us those who do not fret, but rest in Him, rest in the Lord. Let us face and resolve the question, once for all: Is the Lord able to do the things we desire or not? If He is, let us rest in Him; let us move out of ourselves, into Him. In New Testament language: Let us 'Abide in Christ'. He has said: "Abide in me" and He assures us that if we do that, the works will follow; the fruit will follow.

"Wait for the Lord:

Be strong, and let thy heart take courage;
Yea, wait thou for the Lord."

(Ps. xxvii. 14).

C. O.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

LOVE IS THE WAY

LION cubs in a gas-oven! It sounds alarming. Yet this is not a sad story, but one with a happy ending, and it is told by Mrs. Martini, the wife of the keeper of the Lion House in an American Zoo.

Imagine her surprise when her husband, Fred, came into the home one evening with an armful of towels, being followed closely by none less than Mr. Crandall, the General Curator of the Zoo. When the men had got into the kitchen, the towels

were two newly-born baby lionesses, both looking very weak and forlorn.

Mr. Crandall explained that the lioness had had four cubs born to her that day, but that she did not seem to know how to care for them, not did she want to do so. When two of the little creatures had died of neglect, they had rescued the other two, and now wanted to know if Mrs. Martini would do her best to rear them. The Curator's usually bright face was rather sad as he looked

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first at them and then at the keeper's wife, and he told her not to worry if she failed for it was really a hopeless task. He then left, followed by her husband, who had been so busy all day with the mother lioness that he still had other duties which he must finish before he came home for the night.

In her kitchen Mrs. Martini looked at the two forlorn little babies, wondering what she could do to save them. Clearly they needed food. She mixed some milk but it was no use, they were too weak to take it. As they were very dirty and unkempt, she tried to sponge them, but as she did so they grew steadily weaker and weaker. The method was proving too slow. In fact it seemed to be making things worse. Their half-opened mouths and the feeble beat of their hearts told her that the tiny spark of life in them was almost ready to die out.

Suddenly, in desperation, she decided that if they had to die, at least they should die clean. So she filled her washtub with warm, soapy water, pulled up the kitchen table on which she could dry them, and lit the oven of her stove, turning the gas very low and lining the oven with towels. She left the oven door open.

All was now ready, so the first little cub was lifted up and dipped right up to the neck in the warm water. When her matted hair was light and fluffy, she was rinsed in warm water, laid on the table and briskly towelled until her tawny coat was dry and fluffy; then the limp little body was placed on the towels in the warm oven. Following this, Mrs. Martini did the same with the other cub, and then placed her alongside her sister in the oven.

Later on Mr. Martini came home from his work at the nearby Zoo, and was surprised to see his wife kneeling in front of the open gas oven. He came up to her and found that she was massaging the little bodies and turning them over in the warmth of the oven. He realised at once what she was doing, and kneeling beside her asked, "How are they?" The answer to his question came not from his wife, but from one of the baby lions who gave her first weak cry, and rolled over by herself. This was wonderful. In a moment she was

whisked out of the oven, wrapped in a warm towel, and put into the arms of the surprised keeper. Then Mrs. Martini took the other one out also, and rushed to bring the warm milk. By this time both cubs were wriggling as well as uttering their husky little cries, and now they were very interested in food. The feeding was slow and difficult but it sent them happily off to sleep, and before the next feeding time was due they were crying out for more milk.

They were saved. When Mr. Crandall called the next morning, he was amazed to see the two lioncubs crawling under and over each other in their sleeping-box. Their coats were bright and fluffy and they were comfortably full of food. It was the warmth, however, which had saved their lives, first the warm water and then the warm gas-oven. So Mrs. Martini proved what many others who have reared baby wild animals have found, and that is that food is not their first need. The first need is warmth.

This is a lesson which we all need to learn, if we are to be able to help others. Their first need is the warmth of true love. Just as Mrs. Martini had to use her warm oven before she could make use of the milk bottle, so we need to show people the love of Christ before we try to teach them the truths of the Bible. That is how He begins with us. He loved us—even while we were yet sinners. Because our hearts were opened by His love, they were then made ready for us to receive the spiritual milk which would make us grow. Let us be sure to follow His example. People are waiting to be saved from death and despair. If we want to help them, let us remember that love is the way.

"Think how the Master
Came from above,
Suffered on Calvary,
Breathing out love;
Think how He loves us,
E'en when we stray.
We must love others,
Love is His way."

H.F.

THE OCTAVE OF REDEMPTION

III. THE CROSS

WE have said that these eight aspects, or 'notes', in the scale of redemption, succeed one another in a harmonious sequence, each one following the other and leading to the next. Our answer to the first question—Why the incarnation?

was threefold: the redemption of man, the reconstitution of man, and the perfecting and glory-fying of man. In seeking to answer the second question—Why the earthly life?—we sought to indicate the end in view in this whole redemptive

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

process, as exemplified in the earthly life of our Lord as Son of Man—the model. The earthly life, so fully lived under every test, was intended, in the purpose of God, to set forth the different kind of person that God has in view through redemption and reconstitution and perfecting to final glorification. It is necessary for us to take up the inclusive issue of all these phases, seeing how one leads to the other, and at the same time what each one represents.

But, before I go further, let me say this. The point is that God has put right down into this world, into the midst of mankind, a new kind of man, who is not just better, more or less, than other men, but different altogether from other men; and has, in effect, said, ‘*That is the Man that I have in view, and eternally it has been My purpose to conform to that image.*’ How important it is, therefore, for us to understand the real nature and meaning of the life of our Lord Jesus as lived here on this earth. It is not just a beautiful story, about a man living and working and teaching, in a country somewhere in this world, far away and long ago. But, right up to date, a Man is presented to us, as altogether different from us in constitution and yet as God’s pattern for His working in us. That is something very important.

THE ON-DRIVE OF EVIL AT THE CRUCIFIXION

So, then, those two points lead us to the third: Why the Cross? Let us approach this by looking for a moment at the record, and trying to get into the very atmosphere, evil as it was, of what took place on that day which we commemorate as Good Friday. We will take two verses from Peter’s discourse on the day of Pentecost.

“Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know; him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay” (Acts ii. 22, 23).

If we could, as it were, get inside those words, and really grasp their significance, we should have the answer to our question: Why the Cross?

Let us try to sense what was happening. If you have recently read in the Gospels the accounts of the events leading to the crucifixion, you will be able to recall the scene. On the one side, it is impossible, taking everything into account, to fail to recognise a tremendous on-drive over this matter

of crucifying Jesus. This is not just human. There is something here of an impelling force—an impelling, evil force—behind it. No argument will stem it, no appeal will weaken it; it will be influenced by no consideration whatsoever. When they cried: “His blood be on us, and on our children” (Matt. xxvii. 25), it was as though there was an implacable determination, set upon carrying this thing through—no matter what it meant—to the last degree, to the very uttermost. From that side, there was a fierce, awful, terrible on-drive of the evil powers to do Him to death, and it seemed that nothing whatever could stem that tidal wave of evil.

On the other side, there is Pilate—Pilate seeking, by every recourse conceivable to him, both personally to get out of this and officially to avoid it, to stop it. See how much there is that comes in to give him a case, to make his position a strong one, even to the message from his wife: “Have thou nothing to do with that righteous man” (Matt. xxvii. 19). But it is as though a hidden voice says: ‘Pilate, it is no good: wriggle, argue, say and do what you like—it is no good: it is going to happen. You may be held responsible from one standpoint, but you cannot help yourself.’ The on-drive of evil forces, the helplessness of man and office and temporal powers, and so many other factors, might have come in to weigh in this issue.

“THE DETERMINATE COUNSEL AND FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD”

But behind it all is another factor. The Devil may be blindly forging on, and man may be helplessly trying to counter; but behind Devil and man lies the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts ii. 23). The Cross is God’s crisis in which He says: ‘We are going to have this thing out, we are going to settle this issue at long last, once and for all. Nothing is going either to misconstrue it or to prevent it. The Devil may mean murder; I know what I mean by this. The Devil may be blindly driving on to destroy Him, but I know what I mean by it. I will take that up in relation to eternal counsels and foreknowledge. Man may try to stop it, prevent it: but no—the hour has come, and we are going to settle this thing. This is the Crisis of the Ages; the whole issue is going to be settled to-day.’

But what issue? Of course, the whole thing is far, far too great and many-sided for us to cover. It reaches so far up and so far down, so far back and so far on. All that we know about the Cross is only a fragment compared with what we shall

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know through eternity. We can only say a very little about this, compressing it into one or two things which answer the question, Why the Cross? The answer, as I have said, is inherent in the words which we have read in Acts ii.

What is the issue? What is the crisis? Why the Cross? Whenever we find ourselves in the presence of the Cross, whether in type in the Old Testament—the altar, the sacrifice, the fire, and so on—or in reality in the New Testament, we are always in the presence of three things: *sin, righteousness and judgment.*

(I) SIN

What do we mean by sin? what does the Bible mean by sin?—this far-reaching thing, like an octopus but with countless limbs and suckers—this thing called 'sin'. What does the Bible mean by sin? If the Cross of the Lord Jesus was the erisis, and God was going to settle this thing once and for all, what was it that had reached the point of crisis, what was it that He was going to settle? Let us here get away from *sins*—we are not talking about sins. Sins are only the fruit, or the outcrop, of the root—sin. Sin does not begin with the things that we do or do not do. Sin is something far deeper than our wrong-doings—our commissions or our omissions. Sins may be forgiven, sins may be remitted; but sin is another thing.

Now let us trace this thing as far as we can. In the Old Testament, sin, even before Adam's act, centred in *God and His alternative*. God, or His alternative—that is the focal point of sin. There is an inclusive word in the Old Testament, a word which includes and covers all other words used for sin, and that word is 'iniquity'. That covers such words as 'transgression', 'trespass', and others. The inclusive, comprehensive word for sin is 'iniquity', and not until we understand that word do we really understand what sin is. This word 'iniquity' at its very root means 'perversity', 'lawlessness'. It is not just the violation of certain laws, but a spirit of lawlessness and rebellion. That found its first expression, as the Bible tells us, before Adam sinned. Adam was only caught in something that had already started. The rebellion took place somewhere where God is, in relation to God's purposes—His purposes, as we have reasons to believe, concerning His Son, Jesus Christ, as Heir, the 'appointed heir of all things'. Rebellion was found in the heart of one exalted being, and then disseminated by that one amongst angels; and so a whole rebellious hierarchy arose,

and was cast out, and we are told that they are reserved in everlasting bonds unto judgment (Jude 6).

Iniquity, then, is rebellion, it is lawlessness. "Ye by the hand of *lawless men* . . ." We have got right to the heart of the thing, you see. This drive is from Hell itself. No appeal is heeded to law, reason, argument, consideration, sympathy, wisdom, or anything else—not even to the very children's well-being. No, this thing has run amok, it has broken loose, it has come out at last. There has come into the centre of the earthly, human stage One who is the focal point of it all, and He has drawn it right out. No longer can it go masked, no longer can it work secretly; it is out. *He* has drawn it out, *He* is the occasion of it. The hosts of evil surge round Him: to use the prophetic words of the Psalm, "they compassed me about like bees" (Ps. cxviii. 12); but, in the words of the Apostle, 'he stripped off principalities and powers' (Col. ii. 15). He has drawn them out.

Yes, in the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God the thing is up for decision—this whole matter of basic, fundamental rebellion, which started in Satan, spread to a host of angels who entered into complicity with him, and came down into this world. By man opening the door, the door of his soul, as we saw earlier, the thing came into him, and now every child of Adam has that deep-rooted thing in his or her nature: rebellion against God. Sooner or later you will discover it, if you have never yet done so. Let God put you to some of the tests to which He put His Son, and see whether there is any rebellion in your heart, in your nature, against God. Under testing, trial, opposition, or suffering, we find that it is there, ready to come up. It is in us.

Very well; that was taken account of by God. He said, 'We are going to settle this'; and that is the meaning of the Cross. Firstly, this spirit of lawlessness and rebellion, in all its ugliness, all its evil, all its sinister character, is dragged out into the open; and then, in the Cross, not just the evil in abstract, but the person responsible for it, is met and dealt with.

GROUND FOR SATAN

For sin is never looked upon just as something abstract; it is always personal—it is always a matter of Satan. The whole question is always this: Is Satan getting an advantage, is Satan being given ground? Too often we make light of these things. We think of 'failure', we speak about 'weakness' and 'imperfections'. We get offended,

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we get upset ; we lose love, perhaps we lose our temper ; and then we say that that is our weakness, our failing, our imperfection, our fault. Well, that may be so, but God always says : ' That is ground for Satan ' ; and that is what makes it so heinous, so much more evil. Because, you see, it is Satan who is all the time trying to work upon our ' weaknesses ' and produce such ground, and then to come upon it and use it—both as an accusation against us, to bring us back into that bondage from which we are redeemed, and to have an accusation to God. Always remember that it is this personal thing that is the essence of iniquity, that constitutes sin. God does not look at sin apart from the person of Satan : it is always that one that He has in view. And He would say to us : ' Now, don't forget : if you slipped up, that is not just something in itself—that is very good ground for Satan ; and unless you take it away from him, and get it cleared up and covered, he is going to enlarge it, establish it, and consolidate it, and it is going to be very much more difficult for you presently to clear it up. This is not just an incident, a mistake, a mishap : there is a person, there is a whole evil system at work in relation to it.

Yes, and what is the effect that he is seeking to bring about? Something antagonistic to God—rebellion, lawlessness. The Lord Jesus, while He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, was the Lamb of God that took away the sin of the world. (I Pet. ii. 24 ; John i. 29.) Do you not think it is very wonderful—seeing that sin is iniquity, rebellion, lawlessness, is this thing that is always breaking away and running riot against God—that a *Lamb* should deal with it? A lamb is the very symbol of yieldedness, is it not? " He was *led* as a lamb to the slaughter " (Is. liii. 7) : no rebellion there, no lawlessness there. " He was led as a *lamb* to the slaughter " : exactly the other extreme from this lawless, rebellious thing. The Lamb of God took away sin by the utterness of His yieldedness to God. He undid the unyieldedness of Satan. I think it is impressive. You see the principles that are at work, mighty principles embodied in two persons : the principle of lawlessness in Satan, the principle of yieldedness in Christ. These two things are in mortal combat, and the Lamb overcomes.

Does it not say much for the work of the Cross, the effect of the Cross? Do you see why the Cross, and why the Cross in you and me? What we are to inherit from the Cross—what it means as an abiding principle of activity in us? If the Cross really does work in us, we shall become more and ever more yielded to God, unresisting, compliant,

of the spirit of the Lamb. What a conflict that was ! It was the conflict between two natures : the conflict between sin, in the particular sense of rebellion and lawlessness, on the one side ; and the spirit of—" Lo, I am come to do thy will, O God ", and " a body hast thou prepared for me " (Heb. x. 7, 5), on the other ; and by that body on the tree He dealt with that other thing—with the embodied iniquity of this universe in Satan. " Now is the judgment of this world : now shall the prince of this world be cast out " (John xii. 31).

We feel our helplessness in trying to cope with this matter of the Cross ; it was such an immense thing that happened then. I come back to this : God said, ' We will settle this here and now, once and for all. ' Sin, in the sense in which we have spoken of it, was met there in its full tide—" Jordan overflowing all its banks "—what a tide !—and was fully and finally exhausted.

(II) RIGHTEOUSNESS

If we said that righteousness was just the opposite of sin, we should, of course, have said in a word nearly all that could be said about it. But let us look at it more closely, and begin by examining the word itself. Righteousness is an inclusive word. Just as ' iniquity ' is inclusive of other aspects of sin, so ' righteousness ' is inclusive of other concepts. There is the word ' holiness ', for instance ; there is the word ' sanctification ' ; there is the word ' consecration '. All these are gathered into this word ' righteousness '. What does it mean?

I am sure we shall not forget sin. It is written now in deep, dark, black letters. Sin is rebellion ; sin is lawlessness ; sin is that which throws off the government of God and puts Him out of His place and makes choice of the alternative to God. Of course, when we sin we do not consciously *mean* that—that is not thought out and intended ; but that is what is implied and what is involved in reality.

What, then, is the essence of this word ' righteousness '? Righteousness is that nature of God which is perfectly consistent, perfectly pure, perfectly transparent. Different symbols are used in the Bible for the nature of God, such as the crystal, and the jasper. It is that in which there is absolutely no mixture, in which there are no two things contrary to each other. For the Bible makes it perfectly clear that mixture, or contradiction, is what is most abhorrent to God. More than anything else, God abhors mixture—two contrary elements brought together, two different realms brought

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into association, the two being different in constitution. We recall some of the Old Testament types of that: 'Thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass together. Thou shalt not wear a mingled stuff, wool and linen together' (Deut. xxii. 10, 11). These are two different realms. Linen draws off bodily warmth; wool keeps it in: so there is a conflict in the two things.

These are only simple illustrations or figures of something very deep. God hates mixture; His very nature is against contrary elements. His nature is absolutely transparent, consistent, pure. And that is *righteousness*. It was for that that the prophets were always appealing. Unrighteousness was found in dealings; that is, people were being robbed by deceitful methods. They were not fair, not square, not straight. Satan is the great mixer, the great deceiver, the great corrupter, the great polluter. There is nothing transparent about him, nothing straight about him; he is always coming round, in some way, to get an advantage by unfairness, by cowardice.

Now, the Cross of the Lord Jesus was the crisis of this matter of righteousness. It was the other side. He "offered himself without spot unto God" (Heb. ix. 14). Here is something pure: there is no mixture here, no blemish here, no two things here; this is all one thing; this is all straight, this is all clear, this is all absolutely pure, transparent. You cannot find in Him any blemish of corruption. There is no clouding film; in Him there is no darkness. He had settled this matter of righteousness in His own Person and body, and established righteousness for ever, in type, as He came to His baptism, which was prefiguring His Cross. He said: "Suffer it now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. iii. 15). He satisfied God on this matter of His own nature, as something absolutely pure. When Jesus said, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness", God responded immediately and said, "My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased". 'It is the offering that I want, the offering that I seek: the offering satisfies Me.' He "offered himself without spot unto God". The question of righteousness is settled in Him, in the Cross.

(III) JUDGMENT

Sin, righteousness; and now judgment. What is that? We usually limit the idea of judgment to one thought—that is, penalty. The word 'judgment' is a larger word than that in the Bible. Judgment, we could say, has three parts. To take an illustration from the book of Daniel: you remember

Belshazzar's feast, and the handwriting on the wall, and how Daniel was brought in to interpret (Dan. v. 1-28). First of all, it means bringing something to have a decision given upon it, as to what it is. The first part here is: "Thou art weighed in the balances". That is the first part of judgment: being brought to be weighed up. Secondly, the putting of it into its proper category: "found wanting". When it has been determined what it is, that is the place to which it belongs. Thirdly, there is the pronouncement and execution of the sentence.

That is judgment in its threefold meaning. It is a big word. The Cross was that. God was saying, 'We will settle what this thing is in its nature; we will put it into its proper place to which it belongs; and we will deal with it fully and finally.' The thing was determined as to what it is: sin is not called by other names; it is called by its proper name—lawlessness, rebellion. For that is what sin is. It is against God. And it belongs to a realm that is away from God—the wilderness, the desolation, the place of the scapegoat, the place of the driven-away creature, driven from the very presence of God to where it belongs. When He bore our sins, when He was made sin for us, when, in that dire moment, He was made a curse for us, He was put in the place to which you and I belong. The thing was settled as to what it was, and driven out from the presence of God; the door was closed upon it, and the face of God for ever turned away from it. The judgment was carried out.

Yes, there are two sides to the Cross, but that was the judgment side. Of what? No, not the judgment of our *sins*—that may be included—but the judgment of our *sin*. "Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; that we might be made *the righteousness of God* in him" (II Cor. v. 21); that is, that we might be brought to the place where there are no two things in conflict, no two contradictory elements. And that begins on the very day when we—to use familiar, homely language—come to the Cross. When we come to the Lord Jesus and accept the work of His Cross for ourselves, there is given to us, there is brought into us, that transparent, pure, holy, righteous life of the Lord Jesus. It is a thing without mixture. We are all mixture, but that life has no mixture.

CLEAR AS CRYSTAL

And then, when we live by that life—and this is not only a statement of fact, but a very searching test—if you and I live by the life of the Son of God, we are going to become more and more

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transparent people, absolutely honest, absolutely straightforward, absolutely square. Anything that is not like that about us says that somehow or other we are countering or not moving with the life. The Cross involves us in that. So the end of the Bible gives us the picture of the City, as one of the symbols of the Church. In its entire constitution it is, as it says, like pure gold, or glass, or jasper (Rev. xxi. 11, 18), and its river is the water of life, free and clear as crystal (xxii. 1). It is all clear—that is the end of the work. This is a truly practical thing. About true Christians—Christians who are truly crucified with Christ—there ought to be a steady progressiveness in transparency, further and further away from duplicity, from deception, from murkiness, from everything of that kind. They should be clear as the light.

That is the answer, so very imperfectly, to—Why the Cross? Sin, righteousness, and the determination as to what is what: judgment determining, judgment placing. “Thou art weighed in the balances”—that is the first thing. “Thou art found wanting”—that is the second stage. “Thy

kingdom is divided”—the third stage. It is all judgment. In the Cross the Lord Jesus effected all that.

That is, perhaps, the darker side. But it is a wonderful deliverance that the Lord Jesus has wrought for us in His Cross. Just think of what we were involved in! We were involved in Satan’s sin, we were involved in his rebellion, our very natures were involved in it: but by His Cross He has saved us—“delivered us out of the authority of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love” (Col. i. 13)—set us free, given us another nature, set us on the way to the City of God. That, as we know, is not geography, but spiritual condition; not an objective thing, but an inward, subjective state. What a day it will be when we are like that—absolutely free of the last trace of Satan’s touch, the touch of the serpent, upon our human nature! What a great day that will be! But He started us on that way on the day in which we came to the Cross. And “he which began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. i. 6).

T.A.S.

THE UNVEILING OF JESUS CHRIST

AT the beginning of the book of the Revelation, we find, on the one hand, a situation of spiritual loss and failure, weakness, and many other conditions and features which even the Lord Himself, in all His grace, has to deplore. Through His servant John He sends a series of letters to seven representative churches, aimed at securing the renewing of the life of His people, and the restoring of those primary and primal values of their beginnings. Then, it was a situation of many difficulties—sufferings and trials and adversities from various quarters and of various kinds. The Christians at that time were both actually in a time of much adversity, and were moving yet more deeply into suffering. To one of these churches the Lord said that they were *about* to suffer; they were *about* to be cast into prison; they were going to have tribulation for a specified time (ii. 10). It was a time when Christians both actually needed real help and stimulus, and needed to be prepared for further battles, further conflicts and further sufferings. These were the two main aspects of the general situation.

In the light of those facts, we stand back and ask: How did the Lord, and how does the Lord, meet that need? Indeed, we might say: How does the Lord ever meet a great need? What is that

which alone will supply the need, and be the key to the problem, the answer to the demand, and the assured ground, both of recovery and renewal, and of fortification for the suffering? And the answer has ever been, and always is: A new revelation—an unveiling—of the greatness of Jesus Christ. That is the very platform, we might say, upon which and from which the Lord moves into these situations, and into all the situations that follow in this book. He prefaces everything with this fresh revelation or unveiling of His own personal greatness.

That has ever been the way. Abraham was called upon to take tremendous decisions, to make immense sacrifices. In his native country and city, with its marvellous and rich civilisation, he had a very full life indeed; and, without assurance that his movement would be justified, he was called upon to move under sealed orders. ‘Get thee out . . . unto a land which I will show thee.’ ‘I will show . . . when you get there!’ It was a tremendous move, very costly, and very testing. But if you have wondered how it was that Abraham went through, met all the tests, and at last survived, you have, I think, the answer in these words: “The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia” (Acts vii. 2). If

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ever that happens, you have got something to move on ; you have got a background ; you have something that will again and again come to your rescue in a time of difficulty.

Moses was called upon to undertake a tremendous responsibility. We know the whole story now. Moses was not altogether ignorant of what he had to face, in Egypt and afterward ; and we may wonder sometimes how he kept to the course and got through. But we know that he met God 'face to face'; it could be said equally that 'the God of glory appeared' to him. Reference is made several times in the Bible to that encounter with God in the bush. And we are told that "he endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. xi. 27). That was the secret of his sustenance.

Joshua was called as a young man to face very great responsibilities and undertakings, in the ridding and clearing of that country of those ten kingdoms, getting that people in—such a people—he knew them!—to possess the land, and all that was bound up with it. And no wonder the Lord had to repeat one word to Joshua continually, to get him on the move. 'Be of good courage'; 'be strong and of good courage'; 'only be of good courage . . . only be strong' (Joshua i. 6, 7, 9). How did the Lord give to Joshua the basis? He 'lifted up his eyes' and saw the 'Captain of the host of the Lord' (Joshua v. 13, 14). From that time it was all right ; he could go on and go through.

Isaiah was a young man in a very, very difficult day, one of those very cloudy days in Israel's history. He was taking up his great prophetic ministry in the face of great difficulties and threatening problems. How did he get through? 'I saw the Lord, high and lifted up', he said (Is. vi. 1). That is the answer.

Think of Paul—did ever a man have to face greater difficulties, oppositions and antagonisms and sufferings and perils, more than that man? How did he get through? He saw the Lord, or the Lord appeared to him. He saw the greatness of Jesus Christ.

Stephen triumphed as he saw 'the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God' (Acts vii. 56). So we could go on.

Some thirty years later, the Lord's people had come to a point where there was going to be a devastating blow struck at their corporate life. It was just on the point of that final siege of Jerusalem, when everything was going to be shattered and scattered ; a great earth-shaking was about to take place ; all that the Lord Jesus Himself had foreshadowed, '. . . not one stone

left upon another . . .', and all those other terrible things, were all about to take place within a very little time. How were the believers going to get through?

The Lord took up a man—we do not know now exactly who it was ; some say one and some say another—but He took up a man to write what we call 'The Letter to the Hebrews', and he begins with an almost matchless unveiling of the greatness of Jesus Christ! The Lord was saying through that letter: If only you can get that as your foundation, you will go through it all. You will not go back as you are being tempted to do, as perhaps you are contemplating doing. If only you see how great your Lord is, you will go on. So He laid the foundation for survival of faith—for that is the issue ; you know how it all comes up in the eleventh chapter—the survival of faith, on the ground of an apprehension of the greatness of Christ.

And then we come to this book of the Revelation, and again we are in the presence of these things: on the one side, spiritual declension, failure, breakdown, loss ; on the other side, suffering, growing suffering, terrible afflictions for the Church. How will the one be remedied and recovery take place? What is the key to a renewing of spiritual life when it has reached a low ebb? How shall they go on through the tribulation and the tribulations, and come out in victory in the City of God? The Lord's only answer, His one answer, which has always been successful, and is the only one which will be successful in any situation of need, is a new unveiling of the greatness of the Lord Jesus.

But oh, these are but words! When we have said these things—and we would all agree that they are true—we are still so helpless, because it is the *thing* that matters—not talking about it! If only, by the Holy Spirit—and there is no other way, no other means—we could catch a new glimpse of His greatness, how many problems that would solve, questions that would answer, needs that would meet! How *overwhelming* it would be!—and when I say 'overwhelming', I mean, how much would be overwhelmed! A mighty tidal wave, making all these rocks, upon which we threaten to founder, as nothing ; they are sunk beneath it, disappear from view.

Now that is not just language. Look—who is writing this? It is the apostle John. The apostle John? Yes, that man who walked with Jesus of Nazareth, listened to Him, watched Him at work, and, at supper, and at other times, sat next to Him, and put his head upon His shoulder—the

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most familiar picture of a man alongside of a man, in close, devoted, affectionate association. John always called himself 'the disciple whom Jesus loved': it showed that there was a sacred, holy familiarity between John and Jesus, marked by very human terms and language.

Yet that same man said: 'When I saw Him I fell, as one dead.' It is the same Jesus, and the same man; but—'I fell to the ground as one dead.' And if that One had not, in His great mercy, come and laid His hand upon him, saying, 'Fear not, John: I am the first and the last; I am the Living One', John would have been there as a dead man. It was the same Jesus—but look at the transition from the 'Jesus of history' to the Christ of glory! That is the difference. From the John of the Gospels to the John of the Revelation it is a marvellous and mighty movement! He never felt like that when he walked with Jesus, devoted as he was. With his fullest consciousness of who Jesus was, he was at most perhaps sometimes awestruck and awe-inspired. It was not until he saw Him glorified that he went down, helplessly prostrate, like a dead man. It was a great transition from the Jesus of history to the Christ of glory.

Now, I take nothing whatever from the values and blessings of the Gospels, when I say that I am sometimes afraid that we may dwell too much upon the Jesus of history, and fail to remember that the men who wrote those four Gospels wrote them long after Jesus was glorified. You notice, they did not, at some point toward the end of His life, when they perhaps began to sense that He would not be with them much longer, get away and decide to write the story of that life—of His birth, and His manhood, and His teaching, and His miracles—as a mere human, earthly story. When they wrote, they had all the mighty facts and realities of His resurrection, ascension and heavenly glory, which they were seeking to crowd into that story of His life here, as those who would say: 'That One was This One! That was not just Jesus of Nazareth—that was the mighty Son of God from Heaven!' They were crowding every incident with the fullest apprehension that they had of the glorified Christ—Christ, who was now there at the right hand of God! They were not just writing a human story.

That is the only way in which to preach the Gospel from the Gospels. Do you notice, when after His ascension and His glorification they preached or they wrote, how little, how remotely little, they ever said about the three-and-a-half years?—just a fragment here and there. They said

very little about His teaching and His miracles and His walk about Palestine. They were all occupied with *this* One who had been 'crowned with glory and honour'—that was their message. Yes, there was that other One—Jesus of Nazareth, 'who went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed with the devil'—a sort of passing reference to that earthly phase, a summary . . . 'But God raised Him'! God honoured Him, *this* One! It will not get us very far just to be occupied with the incidents of His earthly life, however precious they are. If we are going on and going through, we need an apprehension of that fulness of glory that is His now—the greatness of Christ.

It is, indeed, just because men have robbed or stripped Him of His essential greatness, that we find, down the centuries, the deplorable conditions that have obtained. Our 'liberal' theologians have stripped Him of His Deity; with what result? Oh, devastating results in the impact of Christ upon this earth! They have made Him a lesser Christ than He is. The philosophers have just made Him one in their gallery of great and wise men. It was against that tendency even with the Christians in Corinth that Paul raged in his first letter—taking something from the Lord Jesus, and just putting Him amongst other great men. The gnostics of Colossae—what were they doing? They had a theory of angelic ranks and orders, from the highest order of angelic beings down to the lowest subordinate; and they put Jesus, perhaps at the top, but as nothing more than an 'angelic being', robbing Him of His essential Person. He is Very God!

The 'comparative religionists', all along and in our own day, are saying, Well, there are great founders of religions—there is Buddha, and Confucius, and Mohammed, and Jesus . . . and so on. You see the subtlety?—a comparative, not an absolutely Supreme and unique! And then there are the humanists of our time, inflating and glorifying man and humanity to such a point that, after all, humanity will be deified one day, will reach God-head—and Jesus is only, after all, the Super-Man! So it goes on, and it is all these things, this Satanic work, to reduce the size of Christ, to make Him less than He is, that has done so much mischief. If we lose, or fail to have, the essential greatness of Christ in our consciousness, ours is going to be a lesser spiritual life than it could be, and we shall break down under the stress and the strain of adversity. The only thing for every need is the recovery of His greatness.

Now here He is presented in the Revelation, and He is not presented in the language of Deity,

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although it runs very close. At some points, you cannot distinguish between the humanity and the deity. You do not know whether John is speaking of God or of Christ at certain points. The fact is, he is speaking of the One who is both. But the title, as we have already seen, by which He is presented in this matchless, incomparable unveiling, is 'Son of man'. Let us now consider the personal greatness of the Son of Man, who is, at the same time, Son of God, Very God.

We have referred to the Letter to the Hebrews, and we call it in now for our help in this matter. We read from it, and we begin with this "*effulgence of his glory*", and then we read: "*Whom he appointed heir of all things*"—appointed heir of all things!—"through whom . . . he made the ages . . .", and so on. "*But one hath somewhere testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou . . . didst set him over the works of thy hands: thou didst put all things in subjection under his feet . . . We see not yet all things subjected to him. But we behold him who hath been made for a little while lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that by the grace of God he might taste death for every man.*"

Here is the Son of Man in *His own personal greatness*. See who He is: 'the effulgence . . .', 'the express image . . .'. See His appointment: 'heir of all things'. See His instrumentality and agency: 'through whom the ages were made'. The Son of Man—how great this One is! You would not think that, when you see Him walking about Palestine—not all that! You do not recognise Him. But that same One is now here before John, with these devastating effects; that same One, now revealed, unveiled, as to what He is essentially in His Person; who He is; what position He holds. He is here as the Heir of all things come for His inheritance. And the rest of the book sees Him working it out—the securing of that inheritance of which He is the Heir, and, in the end, of a 'new heaven and a new earth'. What a glorious inheritance comes into view in the last chapters of this book! This is the Son of Man; this is His greatness! But we are completely defeated at any attempt at a true, not exaggerated, unveiling of Jesus Christ. There is His personal greatness.

But as Son of Man, we have, in that very title, *His representative greatness*. To borrow again from the Letter to the Hebrews, where first He is appointed Heir of all things, then He is the 'Captain of their salvation', 'bringing many sons

to glory'. The word 'captain' there would be better translated the 'Pioneer' of their salvation—the One who goes before to lead them into that into which He Himself has entered. Of course, that is the substance of this Letter to the Hebrews. He has gone before; He has entered into the heavens; He has "passed through the heavens"; He has gone the whole way, and reached the end, as the Pioneer of the many sons being brought to glory, whom He calls His 'brethren'. His representative greatness, as there at the end, in fulness, in glory—for *there* He represents all those whom He is going to bring and is bringing—how great it is! We read in the Revelation of a 'great multitude which no man can number out of every tribe and kindred and tongue . . . thousands . . . ten thousands of thousands . . .' Language is taxed to breaking point to describe the fruit of the sufferings of the Lamb! And He is the Representative in glory of them all. How great is His Person and His representation!

And then, *His official greatness*. That is seen through this book of the Revelation, and again in the Letter to the Hebrews. His official greatness, as High Priest—what a great High Priest He is, as according to that book; what a tremendous thing He does! Think of it: through century after century, sacrifices of lambs, and goats, and bulls, and other things—blood enough to fill an ocean—all through the centuries, day after day, and never reaching an end in effectiveness where sin was concerned: but *He*, One Offering—only one!—went far beyond the millions of sacrifices on Jewish altars. How great was His sacrifice, and His priesthood, as He offered Himself without spot to God, once for all.

And here, in this book, as the other side of His official greatness, we have His description as 'King of kings, and Lord of lords'! What a thing to say, in a day when that tyrant at Rome was dominating the world, assuming lordship over all lordships, and seeking to subject to himself every power, not only in earth, but in heaven, since he claimed deity. In *that* day, the unveiling of Jesus Christ is 'King of kings'—yes, and Nero amongst them!—'and Lord of lords'.

To sum up: I believe we would have very much better converts if they were presented with a very much greater Christ. To anyone who does not know in their own life and experience salvation in Jesus Christ, what it really means to be born again—to be really a 'child of God', and *to know it*—to be able to join in heartily with this apostle John when he said, 'Beloved, now are we the children of God . . . Behold what manner of love

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God, and such we are!'—to any such I would say this. While Jesus would be your Saviour, the Forgiver of your sins, and many other things to you, He is far, far greater than anything you can imagine. Salvation takes its greatness from the measure of the Saviour. If you want a great salvation, see what a great Saviour He is. And remember that because of what He is, you need have no fears in putting your trust in Him; you need not fear that you may not be able to 'keep it up'! No, you won't, but He will; He will be able to keep you up—He is great enough! We need an unveiling of the greatness of Jesus Christ, to get a better kind of Christian.

For the recovery from our spiritual losses and declensions and failures, and deliverance from all these things which are so abhorrent to us and to Him, there is only one way, and that is, really to see His greatness. If we do that, we cannot live on a 'little' level. I recently went to the Planetarium

in London. The thing that was with me, while listening to the lecture, and afterward, was, how ever can anyone be 'little' when they are dealing with these things all the time! I suppose it is possible even for a Fellow of the Astronomical Society to be a 'little' man in character (I am not implying this about this man, but it is possible!) But it is not possible to have a revelation of the greatness of Jesus Christ and remain a little person! Oh, for our enlargement, our ennoblement, our deliverance from our pettinesses, and all this which is so despicable! What is the answer? A new grasp of His greatness—that is all!

And then, if we are suffering; if we are knowing adversity and trial; if the clouds seem to be gathering, and increasing, how will we get through? Only by getting away, and asking, seeking, pursuing in prayer a new heart revelation, a new unveiling, of Jesus Christ, and that will surely do it.

T.A.S.

If He should come to-day and stand beside me,
 And I should see Him as He was of yore,
 When veiled in flesh in all His stainless beauty
 He walked beside the Galilean shore:
 If He should speak and beckon me to follow
 A lonely path and dreary up life's hill—
 I wonder—should I dare to go unflinching,
 Caring for naught—save but to do His will?

If I should see Him, scorn'd of men, rejected,
 Bending beneath that bitter Cross, anew,
 With patient eyes that smile through tears of anguish—
 His brow thorn-crown'd, scarr'd hands, pierced
 through and through—
 If He should hold to me the cup of suffering,
 Bidding me drink the dregs and trust Him still—
 I wonder—should I shrink from such a testing,
 Or stretch out hands of faith to do His will?

If I should see Him in His risen splendour,
 Bearing the palm of perfect victory,
 Love's very self enthron'd, triumphant, tender,
 Gleaming in light of awful purity;
 If He should touch me with those radiant fingers,
 Sealing me His, His purpose to fulfil,—
 Should I refuse that claim to my allegiance
 Or, strong in faith, go forth to do His will?

M.W.

JANUARY — FEBRUARY, 1960

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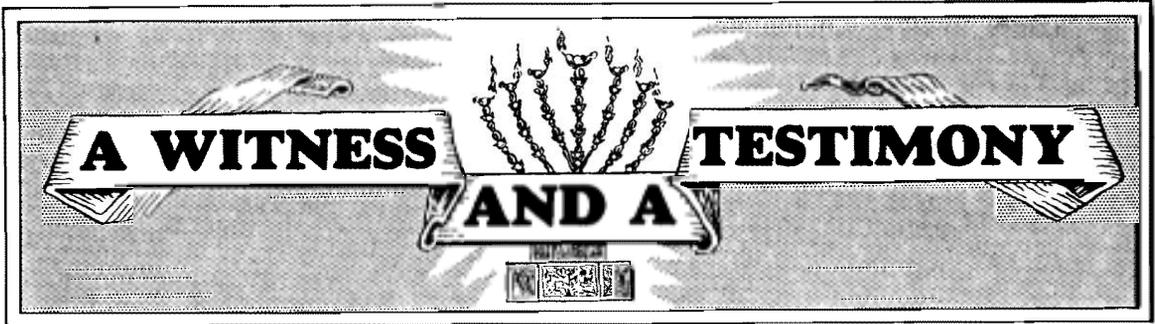
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EDITORIAL

“Lest any one of you should seem to have come short” (Hebrews iv. 1).

FOR those who, like the New Testament writers, have a real burden and sense of responsibility for the spiritual life of God’s people, one of the most heart-breaking things is the way in which so many who gave promise of going right on with the Lord are caught in some side-track and turn to something other or less than He meant for them. Not necessarily to sin or to the world, but to something which, while it brings them a great deal of gratification for a time, eventually proves to be a diversion resulting in arrested spiritual growth, and they are found in a backwater, a *cul-de-sac*, occupied with an alternative to “the whole counsel of God”. Their ‘new discovery’, or ‘light’, or ‘guidance’, as they speak of it, by reason of the let-up of some tension, solution to some problems, promise of release into self-realisation, and escape from pressure, when the novelty and glamour have worn off is found to have been “deceitful waters”, producing Jericho’s fruits which fall before they are ripe.

The pathway of God’s eternal purpose is strewn with such tragedies. The Bible, in both its Testaments, records the sad story of many who have missed the way, turned aside, and—to use the language and fear of Paul—not attained ‘unto the prize of the high calling’. The New Testament is predominantly occupied with warnings, admonitions, exhortations and entreaties, because of this possibility, and with the tragic contingency as the ever-lurking peril and threat.

There is a pathway from eternity to eternity marked out in the Divine councils which is beset by numerous and various perils, ever waiting for the feet of the saints; always with a view to turning them aside, tripping them up, impeding their progress, or frustrating their intended destiny in the full thought of God.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

The little word "lest", with its sevenfold context in the Letter to the Hebrews, links on with some of the most terrible things in spiritual experience, and compasses a long history. It is not our intention to trace that history or attempt the impossible task of enumerating its many-sided context. What we shall do is, firstly, enunciate a general principle of safety, and then instance the peril in one or two connections.

THE PRINCIPLE OF SAFETY

Whenever we are being faced with some new and different course, some fresh proposition or position, there is one all-governing question that we should ask, and which we should take ample time to ponder and pray over seriously. That question is—Does this thing before me stand in direct line with the full purpose of God, as revealed—not in a fragment—but in the fulness of His Word? God has left us in no doubt that He has a clearly defined purpose in view as the ultimate object of all His dealings. He has also made it abundantly clear what that purpose is. Further, it is distinctly shown that believers are "called according to his purpose", and that they are to 'make their calling and election sure'. One who was an aged and advanced believer, and a greatly used servant of God, said—*toward the end of his course*—that his great concern was that he 'might apprehend that for which he had been apprehended by Christ Jesus'.

It is the business and duty of every true Christian so to study as to be quite clear as to what that 'Eternal Purpose' is. Having done so, *everything* that arises to engage us must be brought to the judgment bar of that purpose, and interrogated in its light. God will not cut across our path, or give us particular light at any fork in the road, if we have not been diligent in this quest, or faithful to the light given. It just will not do to allow ourselves to be influenced by questions of comparative right or wrong, good or bad, permissibility, desirability, expediency, or policy. Nor must ambition, soul-gratification, enlarged prospects 'for the Lord', wider acceptance in Christianity, or any such thing, colour our judgment or affect our decision. Advantage and cost are ruled out here as deciding factors. One question, and one alone, will decide tragedy or glory: Does this that is before me stand directly in line with the full purpose of God? When the end is reached, the full story told, the sum taken, how much that is bound up with this will be stripped off, as having no real substance with what is Christ, and therefore fail to be carried over into the eternal? What will the River carry away, and what will emerge on the other side? This was the big question that Paul put to the Corinthians.

In all the generations of this dispensation God is at work, seeking to secure a maximum of *eternal* value in accordance with *eternal* purpose in His elect. His discipline is to sift out the chaff, the merely perishable, and store up the imperishable. When He has secured—in *heaven*—an adequate and commensurate measure of that which is His Son out of all these generations, the terminus of the age will be brought about, the world purged by fire, and that accumulated eternal value be brought in with the elect, to be the governing character of "the ages of the ages". Because so much hangs upon this issue, the course of the Purpose is beset by every means and effort for its frustration.

The peril or snare will be cunningly and ingeniously adapted to the 'prey'. What would capture some would make no appeal to others. The most spiritual will be presented with what *appears to be* most spiritual. Our particular temperament will be our peculiar danger. We shall have, ever and always, to be governed by principle, and not by feelings, preferences, arguments, or natural appeal. Intellectual palliatives, emotional ecstasies, activity-gratifications must be suspected or challenged. The one question must be paramount—Where does this lead? Does it essentially and intrinsically relate to the one supreme purpose of God?

Having enunciated the principle of safety, we proceed to touch upon the nature of the peril. Firstly, and in general, there is the ever-present snare of—

MIXTURE OF TRUTH AND ERROR.

It does not require a great deal of intelligence in order to recognise that, throughout the history of God's work, the master-stroke of the great perverter has been confusion. God is not the God of confusion, but of order. Satan is the god of confusion. To get order out of chaos, God said:

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“Let there be light”. To get chaos out of order, Satan says ‘Let there be confusion’. His it is to confuse issues and elements. To do this, he must—as the word suggests—fuse (or try to fuse) elements which are constitutionally different and do not belong to each other. Thus there is a constitutional contradiction and inconsistency. It is only when his master-method runs amok that we have utter and unmitigated wickedness. His main work is deception by mixture.

It is just here that the place, meaning, and sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in the life of the child of God has its meaning and importance. He is ‘The Spirit of Truth’. He alone knows where truth ends and falsehood begins. Only as we truly “walk in the Spirit” shall we know the truth and be made free from error. A walk in the Spirit demands a ‘circumcised heart’, a heart in which the severance has been made between flesh and spirit, Christ and self.

There has never been a heresy that has not had in it sufficient truth to deceive very good people. Likewise, there has never been anything wholly of God but the strategy of the Evil One has been to fasten on to it some implication, insinuation, interpretation, or suggestion, that would make it questionable or ‘dangerous’. He even did this with the Lord Jesus Himself. He did it with Paul all through his life. Let a demon-possessed girl in Philippi sponsor the preaching of Paul and Silas, and it is damned and discredited.

So, we come to this. A good thing can be made its own enemy, by being either confused, or taken out of its true meaning. Take, for instance, the doctrine of—

‘PREDESTINATION’—‘FOREORDINATION’—‘ELECTION’.

Before we go on to illustrate our main object in this particular connection, one or two things must be said with emphasis. Firstly, let it be understood that we have no question as to whether ‘predestination’ is a true scriptural doctrine. When we speak of perils and side-tracks, we do not include this doctrine in them essentially. *Rightly interpreted and understood*, the doctrine of election is of very great importance and value. Wrongly interpreted and related, because it is so great, there are few things more calculated to create confusion and spiritual arrest. Secondly, in what we say we do not claim to have any new revelation or special authority. Indeed, we only put forward our thought as a suggestion and in the form of a question. There may be more in it than that, but, whether we are wrong or right, we are determined to pursue the note of warning, because we have no small experience of many people of God being brought into limitation and division by this very thing. The thing itself may be right, but it must not be *everything*. If it is made that, then it can defeat its own purpose.

There has been more recently a considerable revival of what is called ‘Reformed Doctrine’ (or ‘Theology’); that is, the teaching of the Reformers. Foremost (or almost so) among these is that which is especially associated with the name of Calvin. Indeed, it has become generally known as ‘Calvinism’. It is the doctrine of predestination. There are very few subjects which have resulted in more controversy, divided teachers and followers, and led to greater confusion and perplexity.

We are not taking up the controversy on one side or the other, but we do suggest, by way of question, that one consideration may not have been given sufficient place. It may have escaped the eye of the exponents, or, if it has been facing them, they may have refused it adequate attention. The fact is that this matter of predestination has issued in very strong controversy, and not a little resentment or bitterness, for one reason. The reason is that it has been so much—if not entirely—related to, and confined to, salvation. Is it not possible that predestination, and its kindred terms, has nothing more to do with salvation than a relative connection? Supposing that it was taken out of that association, in its main conception, and put into relationship with Divine Purpose—i.e. Predestination to a Divine Purpose, the Purpose being the governing everything? Supposing, further, that salvation and purpose are, respectively, the way and the end, but that the purpose is **much more than salvation**, so that it is possible to have salvation but miss the full purpose? Would not this solve many problems and explain much of the teaching of the Bible?

Look at several contexts in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, where the words “predestinated”, “foreordained”, “elect” are definitely used.

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1. This matter is almost, if not entirely, related to Christians after they have become such. All the instruction, exhortations, warnings, provisional 'ifs', and so on, are directed, not toward salvation or its conservation, but toward purpose, and that at the end or hereafter. It is all focused upon 'making the calling and election sure'. It is bound to an all-governing statement: 'foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son'.
2. Then note how closely this is connected with the Church as a corporate Body, and only to individuals as related to that Body. It is the Church that explains and answers election. Indeed, the designation "elect" is a collective-singular word; that is, the individuals are looked upon as one corporate entity—'The Elect'. 'Chosen in Christ' relates to the Church. If we discern the particular *function* and vocation of the Church in the coming ages as governmental and administrative, implying the supreme place with Christ and His throne, and therefore implying that there will be other categories and ranks in the eternal Kingdom, we get beyond redemption and salvation to their full meaning. It is the purpose that gives meaning to election. Believers are "the called according to his purpose" (Rom. viii. 28).
3. The New Testament is very largely built upon the possibility of a great loss, even after justification by faith. Paul himself was deeply concerned about this "prize of the on-high calling", and that he might apprehend that for which he had been apprehended. Was he fearful of losing his salvation? Or was it what he called "the prize"?
4. Lest anyone should introduce here the argument of grace and works, let us hasten to point out that in Ephesians, where 'predestination' and the Church are most fully mentioned, and exhortations, urgings, and 'walking worthy of the calling' are so characteristic, *grace* is mentioned no fewer than twelve times. Grace is far more wonderful in relation to the immense and glorious Purpose than it is in basic salvation. Works and merit do not come into it. The greater the glory the greater the grace.

In the Old Testament, which is the book of foreshadowings of heavenly things in earthly matters, we read of the 'portion of the firstborn' in families. Israel was the firstborn in the family of nations. Their vocation was to be related to the nations, a sign and covenant to the peoples. For that, not merely for their own salvation, they were an elect nation. To them was given the portion of the firstborn, particularly in connection with the purpose. This they despised and lost by reason of pride, exclusiveness, and self-centredness.

The Church is 'the church of the firstborn ones, whose names are written *in heaven*' (Heb. xii. 23). It is not earthly, but heavenly. To the Church belongs the peculiar "calling", position, and vocation of an eternal and heavenly sort. This is what is called 'partnership in a heavenly calling', and "the on high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Heb. iii. 1; Phil. iii. 14).

To the Church as such, and in relation to her function in the ages to come, belongs the election; but to allow election to set aside perseverance (Phil. iii. 12-15, etc.) is to make nonsense of all that teaching and admonition that is represented by such words as: "Give . . . diligence to make your calling and election sure", or "Walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called" (II Pet. i. 10; Eph. iv. 1).

There is a salvation which is "so as by fire", with the inheritance lost. There is a reigning with Christ with which a big provisional 'if' is connected.

We know only too well that the great and complicated subject of predestination cannot be solved or dismissed by a simple formula, but we have no doubt that election is governed by inheritance, to which salvation is relative and but the beginning. True, salvation is essential to the inheritance, but the inheritance is more than salvation—it is 'The Purpose' itself.

For want of space we must break off here. We may take up this governing issue in relation to other 'perils' later. In the meantime let us re-emphasize that the thing that matters is that no 'truth', 'doctrine', theory or teaching, whether it be good or doubtful, must ever be allowed to become either an end in itself, or a side-track. It must never be taken out of the essential context of God's full purpose.

EDITOR

MARCH — APRIL, 1960.

MEN WHOSE EYES HAVE SEEN THE KING

IV. BEHOLDING . . . CHANGED . . . TRANSFORMED

“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 behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Matthew xvii. 1, 2, 5).

“We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit” (or, “the Spirit which is the Lord”) (II Corinthians iii. 18, 19).

THE link between the two passages lies in one word, unfortunately slightly obscured in translation. In the King James' Version it is 'are changed into the same image'; in the Revised, 'are transformed into the same image'. The Revisers certainly have made a slight improvement on the other, and perhaps with a fine sensibility, or sense of fitness, they avoided putting the true translation, and made this slight change into 'transformed'. The fact remains that we have the same Greek word here as that which is used to describe what happened on that Mount—and he was *transfigured before them*. That is the same word exactly as is here translated alternatively 'changed' or 'transformed'. The exact rendering here would be 'are transfigured into the same image'. So that the children of God have a transfiguration, even as the Lord Jesus had. His was an event, an act; a thing, shall we say, as of a moment. We do not know how long it lasted, but it was at a definite time point. Ours is a long process; indeed, right from the beginning of our Christian life to its climax, this is what is supposed to be going on with us: we are being 'transfigured into the same image, from glory to glory'.

THE OUTSHINING OF THE GLORY OF A PERFECT MAN

That at once is very challenging to us, for Christian history, life, progress. There may be—and I am always conscious of being on very delicate ground in making any comparison between the Lord Jesus and ourselves—there may be something different about Him. It has been said that

the transfiguration was the outshining of His Deity, and I have no quarrel with that: if that was so, all right; it does not affect the issue at all. But we have reason to believe that it was something other than that also—that it was the perfecting of His humanity, and the outshining of the glory of an absolutely perfect Man. We do believe, and we feel we have ground for believing, that something like that was God's intention for all men, when He said, 'Let us make man in our own image'. And when there is so much in the Word about the glory and the glorifying which is the consummation of our pilgrimage, surely there is something in the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus which is not altogether isolated from what the Lord intends for us.

That is where I would put the emphasis in our present consideration; that is the point. Indeed, in an earlier meditation on this matter we said this very thing. We said that the glory which took hold of Him, and emanated from Him, filled Him, and transfigured Him, was the glory of His personality as utterly satisfying to God. For God's satisfaction is always the ground of glory wherever you look in the Bible. Whenever you find in any place that state of things with which God can be well pleased, you will find the glory there—the glory fills and breaks forth. That is supremely the case in the Lord Jesus, and that is why at this point the voice from Heaven attested Him, marked Him out, and said, ' . . . in whom I am well pleased'. The Father was completely satisfied.

I repeat, then, that it was the glory of His personality as the Son of Man; for, almost in association with that, He spoke of His coming again as being 'the coming of the Son of Man in the glory of the Father'. This, so far as His perfecting was concerned, was not something that took place on the Mount. The Mount was the mark of the *consummation* of His perfecting. I do not mean in the matter of sin—sinfulness or sinlessness—but the perfecting of His character, the perfecting of that inner Man which we call personality. Personality is a strange thing, an elusive thing, something that you cannot get hold of, but you cannot mistake; it is *the person within*—the man inside. Now, He, in that inner life of His, had worked out this whole matter of God's pleasure, God's satisfaction, through His life. There was the Divine approval at His baptism in similar words,

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indicating, probably, that His thirty years were approved; certainly indicating that the step that He was now taking, right out into public, with the Cross accepted (for His baptism certainly implied that) was approved. That brought the word from Heaven: 'My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'.

But now this period, between the baptism and the Cross, is concluding, and what a period! One New Testament writer says that He was 'tempted in *all* points like as we'. And that was crowded into a short three years and a few months. Yes, hell tested Him; the world tested Him; in a sense Heaven tested Him. He was put through it in every detail, and won through. He, in that time, was 'made perfect through sufferings', 'learned obedience through the things which He suffered'. That time brought that inner life, that inner personality, to perfection. Now, you will see why I am saying this at the outset; it is not new, it is not fresh, but it is basic to everything else. That is the point.

'WE ALL . . . ARE TRANSFIGURED'

The apostle takes hold of that very word, and says: 'We all . . . are transfigured into the same image'. I am glad he uses that little word with its so comprehensive meaning—'we all . . .' He is not talking only about himself and his fellow-workers, brothers in the work; he is talking about the Corinthians and all believers. 'We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transfigured into the same image'. He takes hold of that same word, and brings it over to all saints; making of that which had been perfected and completed in the Lord Jesus a continuous process in the life of believers. He is but saying: What was completed and perfected in that One, has now to be reproduced in us progressively; that perfection, that character, that personality—the personality of the Lord Jesus—perfected, brought into us, developed in us, manifested through us. For 'personality', we could equally well substitute the word 'character'.

Now the first thing to note about this, which is, of course, so helpful and encouraging, is where the apostle finishes this statement, 'as by the Spirit who is the Lord'. With all that we know about the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Person and the work of the Holy Spirit, all the effects of the Spirit's advent and indwelling, let us recognise this as supreme: The inclusive work of the Holy Spirit, in all His manifold activities, is one thing—to reproduce the Lord Jesus in a people. When you pray about the Holy Spirit, and you speak about

the Holy Spirit, remember that. The Holy Spirit's supreme and comprehensive object is to reproduce the Lord Jesus, in His character, His personality, His perfected Manhood or humanity, in a people.

This is very testing to you and to me. If we really contemplate it—and it has challenged my own heart to the point of making me very hesitant to speak freely—the test of the Holy Spirit having His way in your life and mine, the proof that He is there and that He is doing His work, is our transfiguration. In other words: Is what Christ is in His perfect humanity becoming more and more true of us, in our natures, in our hearts? The real test of a Spirit-governed life lies here: the progressive increase of the character of Christ. If we are going to meet one another as really Spirit-governed men and women, what we must meet in one another is the Lord Jesus; and that must be, not just to-day, not just in one time of our lives, but going on, going on all the time.

TRANSFIGURED THROUGH THE
LIBERATION OF THE SPIRIT

That is the test and the proof and the challenge of the Holy Spirit's presence, and of the Holy Spirit's liberty to work. You see, the apostle says that here, just in a sentence earlier: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (II Cor. iii. 17). He is, of course, making a comparison, or a contrast, with the old dispensation of the Law—Moses coming down with the Law. There it was all compulsion; there it was all 'you must' and 'you must not'; bondage, thralldom, limitation, suppression, repression, and anxious fretful striving. Now, all that has gone, and the Spirit comes and has His way. Moses, even, as representing that order of things, and that dispensation, had to put a veil over his face—not to hide the glory, but to hide the departure of the glory, and pretend, pretend—for you know it was a dispensation of pretending, on the outside. That was what the Lord Jesus was up against in His day, with the Scribes and Pharisees. He called them 'hypocrites', that is, pretending something that was not true; it was all put on, on the outside. The glory that had gone was not seen through this veil of pretence.

But with Christ, says the apostle, all that has gone; the Spirit has come, and come within; now we are set free from all that sort of thing. When the Spirit is Lord, it is liberty; everything is spontaneous, it is free, it just happens. You do not have to make believe, strive, fret, worry, and suppress; it happens if the Holy Spirit is there. And what

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happens, what happens? The glory of the Lord—that is, the perfection of His manhood—begins, and continues, to express itself in us spontaneously. That is the ‘life of the Spirit’. It is ‘normal Christian life’; there is something sub-normal if it is not up to that, and something abnormal if you are putting on to that. But the ‘normal’ is that the Holy Spirit, having His way, does this one thing: He makes Christ more and more manifest in *our* mortal bodies.

So that is the heart of this. Now, the point is that this is the work of the Holy Spirit. That helps us very much, that the Holy Spirit has taken the responsibility for this into His own hands. You and I have not to strive to be Christ-like. With all due respect for Thomas à Kempis, it is not an ‘imitation’ of Christ—something that we *try* to do. It is this: to a true child of God, who is not putting something definitely in the way of the Holy Spirit, it is as natural to become more Christ-like, as it is to breathe. Now, you do not stop to discuss the question of whether you are going to breathe, how many more breaths you are going to take; whether you are going to breathe now, or save it up till later on, and make a theory of it—you just do it without thinking. And it is as natural as that, because the Holy Spirit is our breath, our life. Set that over against the many difficulties that people find to be Christ-like!

TRANSFIGURATION THROUGH TRIALS

Now what is said here is these two things: First of all, there is the Pattern, perfect, complete—Christ glorified. The Holy Spirit comes to work that pattern out progressively in the children of God. He has come for that purpose, to take it over, and to do it. We are not allowed to say *how* He shall do it; He chooses His own way. That will lead to this next thing. The apostle goes on: “We have this treasure in vessels of fragile clay, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves” (II Cor. iii. 7). Now, how is it going to be done? how are these vessels of fragile clay going to contain, and increasingly contain, and manifest, this glory of the character of Christ? Not in the way that we would think, perhaps, or choose: ‘We are pressed on every side . . . we are perplexed . . . we are pursued . . . we are smitten down . . . we are always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus . . . we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake . . . death worketh in us . . .’ (v. 8–12).

That is rather a disconcerting, discouraging view of things, but that is how the Spirit does it. The

fact remains, whether we like it or not, just this: being pressed on every side means that we are pressed into something more of the Lord Jesus, and that something more of the Lord Jesus is pressed into us. It means that you and I would never come to this transfiguration, only through these trials and these adversities. These are the Holy Spirit’s means of our perfecting, of our growth in Christ.

It is a pity that it has to be like that; a great pity that we cannot be Christ-like, without being put into difficulty and trouble and suffering, but that is how it is! Give people absolute exemption from all kinds of difficulties and troubles, and see what kind of people they are—self-centred; self-sufficient; self-assertive. People who are never ill have very great difficulty in being sympathetic and understanding with the sick. They have, at least, to make a great effort to be patient with them—that is why I like doctors to be ill sometimes! But sympathy, understanding, patience, come to us along this line of painful experience; it is a matter of character, is it not?

And so the apostle puts alongside of our transfiguration, all these difficulties and adversities, and in effect he says, This is the Holy Spirit’s material; these are the Holy Spirit’s instruments for working Christ into us. If we are not rebellious, if do not allow bitterness to creep into our spirit, it works out that way. Under the government of the Holy Spirit, suffering and trial, difficulty and adversity, will effect this.

OCCUPATION WITH THE LORD

But then the apostle checks us here; he says: “We all, with unveiled face, *beholding* as in a mirror . . .” The Revisers have had some difficulty here, as the translators of the Authorised Version had, and they have not settled their difficulty. Here is a matter in which they did not really know exactly what Paul meant, so they put it in these different ways—what we have in the text, and what we have in the margin. Did he mean that we are a mirror? that the image is thrown upon us as upon a mirror, and then rebounds—is that what he meant? Or did he mean that Christ is the mirror, and we are looking into Him, and He is reflecting the glory of God? I think that is what he meant. He spoke about the ‘glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’—I think the word ‘face’ there is really equivalent to ‘mirror’. I know that it is not the same Greek word, but it is just another word in meaning; it is ‘in the face of Jesus Christ’. ‘And we *beholding*, as in the Face of

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Jesus Christ'—that is what the apostle is talking about here.

Now the word 'beholding' is a strong word; it is not just taking a look, it is 'fixing our gaze'. That is what the New Testament means by beholding, behold. We all, fixing our gaze upon Christ, as He mirrors in His own Person the glory of God, the satisfaction of God, the mind of God in perfection. The point is that you and I must contemplate the Lord Jesus in spirit, and be much occupied with Him. We must have our Holy of Holies where we retire with Him. We must have a secret place where we spend time with Him. And not only in certain special seasons, but we must seek, as we move about, ever to keep Him before us. Looking at the Lord Jesus, contemplating Him, we shall be changed into the same image. The Holy Spirit will operate upon our occupation.

You become like that which obsesses you, which occupies you. Is that not true? You see what people are occupied with, and you can see their character changing by their obsessions. They are becoming like the thing which is obsessing them; they are changing; they are becoming different. Something has got a grip on them; they can never think about anything else, talk about anything else; and it is changing their character. Now Paul said, 'For me to live is Christ—being occupied with Him'. It is the wrong word to use, but nevertheless it would be a good thing if He became our 'obsession', our continuous occupation. As we steadfastly fix our gaze upon Him, the Spirit changes us into the same image.

**'THIS MINISTRY' IS FOR ALL:
A MATTER OF CHARACTER**

Notice the context of these words in II Corinthians. The apostle here is mainly concerned with the effect of the life of believers in this world, on this earth. He calls the effect 'this ministry'. Perhaps that word needs transfiguring for us. Note that when he says, 'we all, beholding . . .', he includes all believers in that word 'ministry'. It is all believers he is speaking to about ministry. And herein lies a tremendous difference. Our technical, professional conceptions of 'the ministry' are mostly external: that is, you give a title; you, more or less, put on a uniform; and so you are 'the minister'. It is all put on the outside, therefore it can be artificial. But what the apostle is saying here, is, that the ministry is not something that you put on, but something that comes out from within. We all—and that includes you, my

brothers and my sisters—are called to the ministry. Any special application of that word would only be permissible, in the New Testament, in *measure*, and not in kind. That is, some have a special ministry, and they are God's ministers in that particular way, with that particular measure. It is not that they are a class called 'ministers', and other people are 'laity'—such ideas are altogether foreign to the New Testament. 'We all, beholding', have the ministry, resultant from the beholding. And so we are all called to the ministry; it is just the effect of our being here.

Now, what is the apostle saying about this? He is clearly saying that the personality and the ministry must be one. How searching that is, but how very meaningful. The ministry must not be some 'thing'—preaching, teaching, and all those things that are called 'ministry'—something just done, whilst the man himself is different, and the person is apart. What Paul is saying so emphatically here is this, that when you meet a truly Spirit-indwelt and Spirit-governed man or woman, what they say comes out of their life—is a very part of their life. Their teaching can be seen to have been wrought into their history and their experience. When that man or that woman seeks to teach, to 'minister', to say something to someone else of a Christian character, it is known that that has come out of some secret history with God, something that the Holy Spirit has done in them. Their ministry and their character are identical.

That is very important indeed; it is indispensable. That is why the Holy Spirit is so meticulous about character, so careful about the personality, about the inner man, the inner life. That is why, if we are under His government—and this does not apply to everyone who ministers, or is in Christian service—but if we are really under the government of the Holy Spirit, if we, in word, exceed what is true in our own lives, the Holy Spirit will soon take us up on that, and, in effect, will see to it that we are brought abreast of our teaching—that the thing is kept in correspondence and balance. Have you ever said something, and the Holy Spirit has checked you up, and said: Is that true of you? Is that something you have said? It is very important, and, if we were honest, we would not really have it otherwise. We want it to be like that.

THE IMPACT OF THE GLORY

But this is something that involves the glory—that is the point. There is such a thing as the *power* of the Holy Spirit in the glory. We spoke of it on a previous occasion as the 'impact'—the impact

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of the transfiguration upon those men ; and the impact of a seeing of the Lord by anyone afterward—what it registered of power. Now, you and I perhaps covet and crave as much as anything that there should be impact in our lives, that there should be power, that our lives should register, that our presence should not just leave things as they were. We long that, as we go on, and when we have passed on, something may have been left of an impress, at least through our presence, and perhaps through our ministry—something that shall remain. Yes, impact is a very good word.

That is bound up with the glory—that is the glory. It registers ; it is something that remains. Things may come in, and for a time the glory may be veiled, but there is something there that will come up again. I confess that I have had difficulty in understanding—and yet there is some understanding, because we are all made alike—how three men, and one of them in particular, could be on the mount of transfiguration, yet in His hour of need they all could forsake Him and flee for their very lives ; or how one amongst them, who by a revelation of the Father had declared that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God—how that man could yet, when it came to it, deny Him with oaths and curses. And yet all this was only a veiling for the time being ; the glory came up afterward. It came up with Peter at the end. Many years afterward he remembered: ‘ We were with Him in the holy mount.’ It remained. There was a

temporary eclipse, but it was something that they did not forget. God forbid that such an eclipse should ever be true of us ; perhaps we shall never have to go quite the same way as they went. But there is a permanence about this matter—an abiding effect of really having Christ revealed in the heart ; and, by that inward revelation of Him, there is a manifestation of His character, something that remains.

Now it is clear that we cannot say this of all that is called ‘ministry’. It is a sermon, an address, something given, and it passes. And it goes on like that in a routine, week after week, week after week. But, of course, we do not want it like that ; we really do not want that we should come and go, should be just passing things, and not leave any abiding mark. No, there is an impact bound up with this. So, it is not a matter of what we call ‘the ministry’—something external. The ‘ministry’ with Paul is nothing less than, nothing other than, what is true of Christ coming out of the life of His servants, of His people ; being there, and coming out.

“Therefore seeing we have this ministry, even as we obtained mercy . . . we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully ; but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (II Cor. iv. 1, 2).

T. A-S.

THE VALLEY OF ACHOR A DOOR OF HOPE

Reading : Joshua vi. 17-19 ; vii. 1-4, 10-15, 20-22, 24-26 ; viii. 1, 2 ; II Corinthians xii. 1-10 ; Hosea ii. 14, 15 ; John v. 19, 30 ; II Corinthians i. 9, 10.

“I take pleasure in weaknesses”. That is not a common testimony amongst the Lord’s people. It is certainly contrary to nature, for nature rejoices in strength. These are the words of a man who, in the immediate context, tells us of an experience in which he was ‘caught up into the third heaven’ and ‘heard unspeakable things’. We may, therefore, take it that this testimony as to ‘glorying in weaknesses’ is strictly according to heavenly standards ; and therefore we may say Paul was right and we are wrong when we shrink from weakness and long for the consciousness of power. His testimony is altogether in line with what His Lord said before him—“I can of myself do nothing”.

It scarcely needs emphasizing that it was not

a matter of grief or trial and difficulty to our blessed Lord to be in that position—“I can of myself do nothing”. He did not say that mournfully, dejectedly, as if it were a heavy cross that He had to bear and He was seeking to bear it patiently. The whole tenor of His life confirms that to be shipwrecked on His Father was to Him a joyful thing. He had not the smallest capacity and ability for anything unless He received it on the spot from Heaven. It was not even that He received, as it were, a measure of capacity, that would carry Him on for a couple of days, and then He could come back for more. He tells us elsewhere that the very words He spoke—not just the general theme that He proclaimed, but the very words with which He proclaimed His message—were received from the Father (John xii. 50). How very ‘moment by moment’ was His dependence!

And yet both the Lord Himself and His servant, Paul, were men not only of perfect dependence,

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but of perfect rest. Of the Lord, of course, I use the word 'perfect' in its literal sense; of Paul, I use it in the more common sense in which we speak. But that is altogether contrary to nature, that people who are bereft of the slightest bit of ability to do a thing should yet be persons of the utmost rest of soul. This is a heavenly condition.

Even the ungodly man will agree that a soul at rest is something greatly to be coveted. Unrest is universally condemned. Rest is accorded from all sides as a desirable end to attain.

THE REST OF DEPENDENCE ON GOD

How, then, are we, in the fullest, deepest sense, to enter into rest? I suggest that we enter into rest just in the measure in which we enter into dependence upon the Lord and find in that dependence our satisfaction.

Dependence on the Lord obviously carries with it an independence of all other resources. This is the happy and blessed state expressed by Paul in those words—"I take pleasure in weaknesses". They help us perhaps a little bit to test our own position. 'I take pleasure in being weak.' Quite frankly, I do not! There are times—as in standing up to address a meeting, for example—when it would be much more restful to my soul if I felt full of ability! But that is not a heavenly thing at all. That is not what the Lord Jesus knew, it is not what Paul knew, and it is not what God intends us to know. For if this record of II Corinthians xii says anything, it says this: that if a man of God is in any peril of being restfully conscious of his own ability, God will take very severe measures to undermine that sense and to reduce that man to poverty—if need be calling in the aid of Satan himself in order to do it. God will bring men to weakness in order that they may restfully depend on His strength, and from one point of view that is one way of expressing the thing God is doing with you and me.

Paul goes on to say, "when I am weak, then am I strong". But strength is what I aimed at! Yes, but not the strength that is the comfortable strength—not the confident assurance that I *can*. It is the strength of Christ, that tabernacles upon my weakness. Paul says: 'I am glad to have come to that position!' Whether we can say we have come there or not, at least we can see that this is the end to which God would surely seek to bring us.

JUDGMENT UPON SELF-RELIANCE

This is all illustrated by the story that we read in the Old Testament. You remember that, at

Jericho, the Lord laid down a condition for His gracious and powerful work on behalf of His people. He had said He would give them the city, and it was certainly 'not by might nor by power, but by His Spirit', that the city was given, for they did nothing but walk round it and shout. The condition attaching to it was this, that the city and everything in it should be devoted to the Lord and destroyed; there should not remain that which became the possession of even one Israelite. There must be nothing that came to them as a result of that victory. So far as Israel was concerned, they were to abandon everything to God. But we know that there was one man, Achan, who disobeyed that command, and retained to himself something that should have been put away. That disobedience caused very serious trouble for the whole of the people, as was manifest in their next battle at Ai.

But what Achan did was only a symptom that belonged to more than Achan. It belonged even to Joshua and to all the rest of Israel. What was it a symptom of? That also was manifest at Ai: for when Joshua sent the spies up, they came back and said: 'This is a very small job! There is no need to send all the men up—we can manage with two or three thousand. We can keep back the much greater resources that we possess; we need only put forth a small effort!' And so they went up, and fled before the men of Ai.

What was it that Joshua and Israel wrongly retained after Jericho? They retained self-confidence in their own ability. If Achan became, as it were, the key to the story, he was only the embodiment, the illustration, of what was just as true in all Israel. Something that ought to have been utterly put away at Jericho—a sense of personal strength—was carried over; so that when Ai was faced they measured its strength, and compared it with their own, and concluded that their own was sufficient. There was something brought through that ought to have been left behind at Jericho.

Then we read of the utter putting away of Achan and his sin. Not only the things that he brought out—the wedge of gold and the Babylonish garment—but also the man that dared to bring them out, had to be utterly put away and destroyed. And following immediately upon that comes the Lord's word to Joshua: 'Now take all the men of war and go up; I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land'. The very fact that this time all the men of war go up is proof of their change of heart. Their attitude now is: 'We are making no com-

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parison between our strength and their strength ; we are going all of us together, as if this were the mightiest task we could possibly be set. We are going up at the word of the Lord, and our dependence is upon the Lord to give us the city, not upon our great strength to take it.' It is again as if it were Jericho. It is the Lord who is giving the city, not Israel who are taking it. Their confidence in themselves has been put away, even as Achan and his possessions have also been put away out of sight. Now here is a people to whom the Lord can give the city.

The valley of Achor, then, was the place where that thing was put away of which, though in intention and purpose put away at Jericho, something had, as it were, sneaked through, and had to be dealt with afterward. Destruction had to be poured upon that forbidden thing which, by its presence, was marring everything for God.

“ A DOOR OF HOPE ”

And the Lord through Hosea says that He will give to Israel the valley of Achor for a door of hope. Perhaps, when we read the story of Achan, you expected some fierce, fiery message that would hunt out secret sin. Not at all! It is the *door of hope* that I want to leave with you. I am happy if only that text remains, that the Lord from the wilderness will give the valley of Achor as a door of hope. Hope for what? What can I hope for in the valley of Achor? What does that door lead me to? Oh, it leads me to the perfect rest of knowing that, when I get to the place of perfect dependence on God and perfect independence of myself or any other, then I enter into that deep rest of God which is, in a sense, the finality of our pilgrimage. That is where you and I want to come to. God's call to us is to enter into that rest.

What is the key? It is probably here—that we need to enter into the place where to be dependent on God is an acceptable state of things ; and for that we need to be shorn utterly of all confidence in our own ability to get us through. That is the hope that this door leads us to, and the door is the valley of Achor. It is the place, the time, the experience, when God takes us in hand to work a full and thorough doing to death of Achan and all his works and all his goods ; that is, when God takes in hand so to deal with us as really to reduce to nothingness our confidence in ourselves. You say, But there is little hope about that! That is a most fiery trial. It was a fiery judgment for Achan ; he was stoned with stones and burned with fire and a great heap brought together and

piled up over his corpse, and that was the end. Yes, for Achan it was the end ; for Israel it was the beginning. Achan is but a symbol of this thing. For Israel the valley of Achor issued in the capture of Ai, the wiping out of the previous failure and the going on in joyful confidence that the Lord whom they thought they had lost was with them again.

THE LORD AS OUR ADVERSARY

Very often it works just like that with us. The Lord whom we thought we had lost—oh, we have not really lost Him, but we may have lost the consciousness of His blessing, enabling, gracious upholding and help. What is the explanation of that? So often it is because the Lord has seen we are in deep need of learning a new measure of this lesson, that 'I can of myself do nothing'. The learning of it is progressive—I do not think it ever will be final here ; but there are periods in our experience when it almost seems as if the Lord sets Himself to be our adversary. I wonder if you have known such an experience? That does not contradict the word that God is for us, but in a certain very real sense God sometimes becomes our adversary.

What is He doing? He is opposing something in us which is seeking to have its own way, seeking to move in its own strength, which has a confidence in its own ability. God gets in the way of that thing and He says, No, that shall have no liberty : I will not allow that line of progress—I will balk you on that line at every point! You know the experience of meeting God as your adversary like that. It is a painful experience, until the truth breaks in upon the heart—God is withstanding! This is not Satan—it is God getting in the way, as He got in the way of Balaam ; this is God frustrating satisfaction along this line. For if such satisfaction were allowed, the effect would be to feed and to strengthen and to encourage confidence in myself, in my own ability, my own strength. God will never have that.

THE WILDERNESS

How does He frustrate such satisfaction? Why, by the wilderness. We read in Hosea : “ I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness ”. The wilderness is the place of barrenness, where there are no resources available. We cannot happily meet our own need in a wilderness. The people of Israel were shipwrecked on God there, and He met their need. The great lesson He sought to teach them in those forty years was how utterly

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they were dependent on Him. How gloriously sufficient God was when He was their only resource!

But that is only half the story. Put Paul down in that forty years in the wilderness—the Paul who wrote II Corinthians xii. What would be his language? Would he be harking back to Egypt? Would he be saying, 'Our souls loathe this light bread—where are the leeks and onions and garlic that we knew there?' Would Paul have been saying, 'This is cruel, bitter, awful—let me get out of this!?' Paul would say, 'The deeper my dependence, the more blessed I am. I take pleasure in weaknesses, in dependence upon the Lord!'

When our Lord Himself was in the wilderness with no bread for forty days, what was His attitude? 'I will not even turn My hand or use My power to meet My own need. Though I could do it if I would, I refuse to do it. I live by My Father's will!' That is dependence rejoiced in.

If any of us have any kind of reason to suppose that we are naturally gifted in any direction, or that we have natural capacities of any kind, let us give heed to the fact that the Cross of the Lord Jesus meant the putting away of the whole man. Those abilities and those capacities were all put away in His Cross, and our great danger, where we have even the slightest sense of such ability, is to be found, perhaps long years after we have known the Lord in a deep way, consciously or unconsciously presuming upon those abilities as the ground of confidence. For a little while, it may be, the Lord allows us to go wrong; and then He allures into the wilderness. The time has come to deal with that residue of nature which we have brought through with us past our Jericho. The Lord says: 'Now, just as Achan and his garment and wedge of gold had to be brought to a full end, now I take in hand to deal with that entire life, which has been improperly carried over, and which must be put away if you are to attain to My highest for you!'

And so the wilderness, and in the wilderness that capacity or ability in which we took some pride begins to be found out. Whereas perhaps for years we have been able to go on quite nicely along that line, now we find that that which carried us through before is failing and at every turn God says No! to it. We are then in the unhappy position, on the one hand of finding that our own ability will not get us through, without, on the other hand, having found in the Lord another ability to substitute for it; and we are at a place of darkness and despair and sorrow. And then, in His mercy, God so perfects His work that in the very place of destruction, that valley of Achor,

suddenly a door opens, and we see there is a way through and it is leading us to hope—to hope in the Christ who wants to become for us the resource that shall take the place of our own.

'NOT I, BUT CHRIST'

That is why Paul was so radiant. He says, 'I take pleasure in weaknesses, that the power of Christ may cover me! He yields gladly that which is his own, in order to receive thankfully the corresponding quality of Christ. Paul was learning the lesson bit by bit—'Not what I am, but what Thou art'. That was his blessed instruction at the hands of the Lord, and he was always coming into situations where that was not merely doctrinal, but was becoming the necessary experience of every day. He would say, in effect, 'In this situation in which I am placed to-day, God's purpose is that in it I should lose something that is mine and receive in its place the corresponding thing which is of Christ.' Once that lesson is really burned into the heart and consciousness, the trial of a present experience holds for us only gain.

Let us not then take the attitude, In a year's time I will be out of it, then I can go on. No, here in this trial, this valley of Achor experience, God means to supplant something by something better, to lose something and gain something more. Always the end of His purpose is that you should cease to trust in yourself and henceforth trust in Christ for that very thing that formerly you found within your own nature. "We have the sentence of death in ourselves." God has written across our very being, 'You shall die!' Why?—'that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God . . .' And the more we come to trust in Him, the more do we find rest to our souls.

Where does the door of hope open? Well, first of all in the wilderness, and secondly in the valley of destruction and death and darkness and desolation, where everything you reckoned on is at an end. It is the last place in which you would expect hope. But we are dealing with the God of resurrection who, out of a dying, crucified Christ, out of the death of a tomb, brings the glory of a resurrection morning and a risen, living, Saviour and Lord. We need to look in places where death is to find resurrection, to look in the dark valley of Achor to find a door of hope. Do not start looking for hope somewhere else. "Christ in you" is the hope. "Jesus Christ . . . our hope" says the Apostle (I Tim. i. 1), and always on this basis—Christ, not me; Christ, not nature; Christ, not people; Christ, not this world. It is always *Christ*

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instead. These other things are always left experimentally, not by believing something about them, but by a deep dealing of God with the heart. We know that something within us has died in that realm, and our language is, 'This is the end; unless I can find in Christ the alternative to this, there is nothing!' And in that moment the door of hope is opened, and I see Christ as the answer, the alternative, to the other

thing which has been brought down to death.

If you are in the valley of Achor and God seems to be taking away even that which you thought you had, that is the very place to look for the door of hope. You will find it in the face of Jesus Christ Himself, instead of in you. That is the way through every time—'not I, but Christ'. The Lord enable us all to find the door and joyously to go through it.

G. P.

"WHEN THEY SAW THE LORD"

Reading : John xx. 19 - 29.

"The disciples therefore were glad, when they saw the Lord" (John xx. 20).

"They looked unto him, and were radiant" (Psalm xxxiv. 5).

THE Jerusalem Upper Room was the scene of new beginnings for a worldwide testimony to God's grace and glory. From that room the disciples went out with a message of hope and salvation, their claim being: "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (II Cor. iv. 5). What happened to them behind the closed doors of that room is the key to all Christian life, to all true joy, to all fruitful service; it is also the secret of the constitution of the Church of the living God. ". . . They saw the Lord." That was how it happened. The Bible is full of examples of men who found deliverance and life in this way. From Jacob onwards, there are many instances of those who were emancipated from their problems and from themselves, and were able to move on into fruitful service to God, just because they saw the Lord. It may sound very simple, too simple; but we are not considering just 'seeing' truths, seeing explanations or solutions, but of the radical transforming experience which comes to those who really have a vital encounter with the Lord.

NOTHING LESS WILL DO

The disciples were sad with no ordinary sorrow. They had been plunged into the depths of despair. They were muddled and confused, slaves to fear, depressed by failure; for them the past was a tragic and complicated tangle, the future utterly without prospect or hope. Suddenly everything was changed. They became entirely different men. What was it that caused the change? "Then were the disciples glad, *when they saw the Lord.*" In a

sense the Church was founded in that hour. It was certainly founded on that basis. "Upon this rock I will build my church"; the Lord Jesus had promised, and had connected this building on the rock with a heaven-sent understanding of Himself as the Son of the living God. The movement of the Spirit was begun, not by a group of men who accepted or understood Christian doctrine, merely, but by those who had looked on Christ. That set the standard and gave the pattern for the age in which we live. The secret of all true testimony has been the release into the earth of those commissioned to make men see Christ because they themselves have first met Him face to face.

They had already heard about the resurrection but seemingly this had not relieved their gloom. The women had told them of their experience. Two of them had seen the empty tomb. Two others had returned from Emmaus with a heart-warming testimony of their encounter. This, however, had not made the rest glad. It is not enough to rely only on the experience of others, to base one's position on hearsay or conjecture. Their emancipation and their world commission awaited this personal appearance. Gladness did not come, until He came. Once they had seen the Lord, then everything most unlikely or impossible became gloriously certain.

Doctrine may help us to know Him, but doctrine of itself can never bring us true deliverance. We must not even seem to lessen the value of a clear understanding of Divine truth, but it is not the doctrine of redemption or the doctrine of sanctification, or any other doctrine, which produces the vital transformation. These disciples had doubtless learned salutary lessons about the complex nature of their own hearts; they understood as never before the power and wiles of the devil; in theory, at least, they had been instructed about the need for the Cross; but nothing of this had any value until they actually saw the Lord. It is not truth as an intellectual explanation, but Truth as a living

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Person, who brings the joy and power of full salvation. And this is our task in all our dealings with our fellow-men—to help them to see the Lord for themselves. They must ‘look unto Him’, if they are to be saved.

THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION

As the Lord stood in the midst of His disciples, He showed them His hands and His side. This was the authentic Christ of Calvary. Yet many people, the disciples among them, had seen those signs of suffering before—they had actually seen Jesus crucified on the Cross; but they were no different; they certainly had not been made glad. Clearly even the Cross has no power of itself to transform. There are many people in our own day who, at least with the mind, and perhaps with the emotions, have some knowledge of the fact that Jesus was crucified. They may accept the facts of His death as authentic; they may even have crucifixes; they may constantly remind themselves of the pierced hands and side: and yet they are not glad and they are not saved. There seems to be a very great difference between seeing Jesus, as it were, on the Cross, and having the Risen Christ show you His hands and His side.

Only the Risen Christ Himself can make us know the true meaning and power of His Cross. We shall not be emancipated by the facts or teachings of the Cross, but only by personal knowledge of the One who died there and rose again. Radiance will not come to our beings by reason of the ‘things’ of Christ, even the most sacred of those things, but only by a sight of Him. “They looked *unto him*, and were radiant”.

THE SECRET OF THEIR PEACE

Both before and after showing the disciples His hands and His side, the Lord spoke to them of His gift of peace. They had been discovered to themselves in all their innate sinfulness. They had failed abysmally, had failed in spite of many blessings and unique privileges. Their hearts were heavy, not only with sorrow for their lost Lord, but also with the bitter awareness of how they had failed Him just when He seemed to need them most. There can be no radiance for those who are burdened with their own shortcomings and sins.

The pierced hands are a proof that there is no more need for such a burden. All the question of man’s sins and sinfulness has been for ever settled by the perfect sacrifice of Christ. It needed the Risen Lord to convince them that they were for-

given; it needed His own voice as well as the evidences of His sacrifice to speak peace into their heart. There is no room left for doubt or fear when the peace of Christ takes possession of the soul.

If any are depressed with their sinful state, then the remedy lies in a new vision of the Lord. Nobody in such a condition can expect to give God the service He desires, nor to give to men the witness which they need. Before ever the Lord Jesus could begin to talk to the disciples about their new commission and the Spirit’s power by which it would be fulfilled, He had to bring the power of His transforming peace into their spirits. In the pierced hands and side they not only saw the identification marks of the Saviour—they also found assurance as to the perfect sufficiency of His sacrificial work for them. We shall never get peace by mourning over our failures, by waiting until we feel better, or by running here and there to get advice or consolation from our fellows. No, there is only one way of knowing the powerful peace which has been made for us at the Cross, and that is by first-hand dealings with the Lord who died there and who now is risen. Their gladness came from the sight of Him—‘they looked unto Him and were radiant’. And with the sight came His word of power—“Peace be unto you”. This was no mere word of greeting, for it was repeated after He had displayed the signs of His passion to them. When they were rejoicing to know that it was really He, “Jesus therefore said to them again, Peace be unto you”.

THE SECRET OF THEIR COMMISSION

The appearance of Christ to His disciples was intended to do more than to quieten their fears and comfort their sorrows. A life’s work lay before them. When they knew that their own problems were settled; when they were delivered from the gloom of their own failure into radiant enjoyment of His glorious triumph—then, and only then, were they ready to begin their true service to the Lord. The pity is that so many Christians spend their whole lives in anxious questionings about acceptance, or in a vain search for deliverance from sin and power for holy living, so that they are never in a condition to hear their Lord tell them that He sends them out into service. “. . . As the Father hath sent me”, He said to the disciples, “so send I you”. Once you are emancipated and adjusted, then you are to take your radiant testimony out into the world which the Father so loved.

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These words must have brought infinite comfort to the disciples in the subsequent tests and sufferings of their ministry. They had been sent—sent by the Risen Lord. The very assurance is the guarantee of a heart peace which this world never knows. They became ‘apostles’—‘sent ones’—and the commissioning had come from the Lord Himself. When Peter and John were in the temple prison, when they were beaten by command of the Sanhedrin, when James was led out to execution, when Peter was shut up by Herod, when John was in the isle of Patmos; in all these experiences and many more, the affirmation held true, “So send I you”.

It was amazing that the Lord Jesus should liken their apostleship to His own. The Father had sent Him. This was true of every moment of His time here on earth. When He was led to the Cross, the disciples doubted its truth; but now that they saw Him in newness of resurrection life, how could they ever doubt it again? He had been sent of the Father. Not only in His glowing sermons and miraculous signs, but in His trials, His tears and His deep sufferings, nothing ever came to Him by chance. He was where He was because the all-wise and loving Father had sent Him. Now they were to experience exactly the same sending. “As . . . so . . .” Was it possible? Only the authentic voice of the Lord could convince them that it could be. However, it was not only true in their case; it can and should be true of us also. This kind of apostleship was not just for a few men; it was for the Church, the whole Church. Reconciled by His Cross and breathed upon by His Spirit, we are commissioned and sent into the world to bear His testimony. But how can this be except to those who have seen the Lord for themselves? Church membership cannot give us this kind of commission. Proficiency in Bible truths cannot do it. Life vocation demands something much more personal than these. It depends for its beginning and also for its maintenance on that spiritual transformation which comes from personal encounter with the Lord of glory Himself.

He did not send them out with promises of easy success. He did not show them His garments of glory or His crown of gold. No, He showed them nail-pierced hands and a spear-scarred side. With these evidences of the cost before them, they heard Him say, ‘So—so send I you’. Yet they were still radiant, and they remained radiant through years of trials and triumphs. Why? Not because they enjoyed their ministry, as such, nor because they gained a great name for themselves here among men. No, they were able to rejoice at

all times, because they always kept their Lord in full view, and were content to share in His mission and His rejection. Only a crucified Church will really fulfil the task of ‘sent ones’.

THE SECRET OF THEIR POWER

There followed an action which was symbolic and prophetic, but which was fully substantiated when the Day of Pentecost was fulfilled. With the commission for service, He gave them the power for its fulfilment. “And when He had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit.”

It is clear that only the Spirit’s power can give the inward counterpart of that ‘seeing’ of the Lord. Their own testimony to the Risen Lord must be confirmed by the witness of the indwelling and anointing Spirit. For this reason, when the Lord ascended to Heaven He left the definite injunction that the disciples were to tarry in Jerusalem until this endowment with power from on high came to them. It is absolutely indispensable. It is, indeed, the proof of the lasting power of their vision of the Risen Lord. He came to them in the Upper Room, not only to comfort them, but to fill them with His own resurrection power. First they needed to be convinced that such power was *in Him*; then they needed to know that it was also *in them*.

So it was that He breathed on them. In the first creation, man’s dead clay had become a vital being by virtue of God’s breathing life into it. In the new creation men live again by the breath of life, this time imparted from the Risen Christ, the Lord of life. It was a symbolic action which we do well to note carefully. The Holy Spirit was not just a power or a ‘presence’ handed over as a gift to these believers. He came from Heaven, but He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and His presence in the Church represents, as it were, a constant breathing out from the Godhead of the Spirit of Life. Such breathing out requires on our part a breathing in. “Receive ye . . .”, the Lord said, and in so saying reminded them and us that we only have life and power as we derive them directly from the Risen Son of God.

All this was implicit in their vision of the Lord. No wonder they were radiant! Here they were with the fulness of Divine peace ruling heart and conscience, with a mandate from Heaven in direct association with the mighty mission of the Son of God, and with a constant impartation of His very life as their strength and sufficiency. And, as we have said, this little band represented the Church

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of this dispensation ; they represented *us*. This is where we begin ; this is how we must continue. How important, then, that we too should see the Lord.

OURS IS A FAITH VISION

There is a sense in which the experience of those who saw the Lord during the forty days was unique. We shall not literally see the Lord as they did, until "this same Jesus" comes again even as He went into Heaven. It is therefore particularly important that we should follow on with the narrative, as it describes the experience of Thomas. He missed the original visitation to the Upper Room, but the Lord graciously returned. This time he was present, and this time he shared the joy and the blessing. But after Christ had made him see His hands and His side and had wrought a transforming work in him also, He added these words: "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and

yet have believed" (John xx. 29). This blessing is for us. Ours is to be a faith vision. Nevertheless it is essentially a vision of the Lord Himself. The words of the Lord Jesus make it plain that such a faith vision is no less precious and no less vital than that which came when the disciples first saw the Lord.

John's Gospel is followed by the book of the Acts. In that book we see the outworking of what happened in the Upper Room, and are greatly impressed by the powerful testimony which these disciples were able to give. Truly the peace of God filled and transformed their lives. Truly they went into all the world as 'sent ones'. And there can be no doubt that the power of their life and ministry together all derived from the mighty breathing into them of the Spirit of the Risen Christ. The sequel to the book of the Acts has continued to be known through the centuries. The story is still being written. We, therefore, are called to know the same vision and to experience the same blessed outcome.

H. F.

THE OCTAVE OF REDEMPTION

IV. THE FORTY DAYS

"I came to cast fire upon the earth; and what will I, if it is already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke xii. 49, 50). (The real sense of the first sentence is perhaps better given in the American Standard Revised Version: "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and WOULD THAT IT WERE already kindled!")

"To whom he also shewed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts i. 3).

"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the Living one; and I became dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades" (Revelation i. 17, 18).

WE approach this particular aspect with the same question as that with which we have approached the others, and ask: Why the forty days? We shall sum up our answer to that question in three ways, although there are many more details than we can at present cover.

It is evident that those forty days were very much fuller than the records indicate. We have

only ten recorded appearances of the Lord during the forty days, and five of them took place on the first day, leaving thirty-nine days for the remaining five (if ten were the full number of the appearances). But John, in speaking of the Lord's appearance after His resurrection, did say: "Many other signs . . . did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book" (John xx. 30), and I think the context would lead us to conclude that these "many other signs" were done after His resurrection. This receives support from Luke, when he speaks of the forty days as containing "many proofs". So, they were evidently very full days, and that being so, the period was one of very great importance. It is not our purpose to stay with the various appearances, but to seek to understand the significance of the whole.

Now this note in the Octave of Redemption has not been struck nearly so strongly and firmly as it ought to have been. We know how sometimes, in a piano, a hammer becomes slightly worn or damaged, and when you go up the scale, that particular note is weaker than others, and you sense it. In the same way, I think that this note of the forty days has lost a good deal of its strength, or has not been given the strength and positiveness and fulness of volume which it ought to have been

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given. I trust that we shall see that as we proceed. For this was the great turning-point, and everything for Christianity rested upon this aspect of redemption's plan.

We can mention only a few of the things that rested upon these forty days, but they are sufficient to indicate what a tremendous period this was. Let us, however, note firstly that this is one of the great 'forties' of the Bible. It is not an accident that there were forty days after His resurrection. There are eight major 'forties' in the Bible—I leave you to look them up—but I mention some.

There was the great forty years of the life of Moses in Egypt, a time of deep preparation and testing, especially the testing of his heart. If all the wealth and treasure and learning of one of the greatest empires in history is open to you, at your disposal, your attitude to it constitutes a very good test of where your heart is! And Moses came through just such a test as that. At the end of those forty years, it was seen that his heart was not in *that*: his heart was for God and God's interests. Forty is always the number of probation, of testing and proving and deciding, and it was fairly decisive, was it not, with Moses at the end of those forty years.

But then commenced another forty years for Moses, in the land of Midian; and if the first forty was a testing of his heart, the second forty was a time of testing of his faith. What a tremendous probation that was—disappointed undertakings, disappointed hopes and expectations, and the consciousness that he was in the main responsible for it by his own folly. It was a tremendous test of faith. But he emerged.

Then there were the forty days and forty nights spent by Moses in the Mount. And what a time of testing that was for Israel down below! Yes, it was meant for that, I think, to find them out; and we know how they emerged from that time. They were proved, beyond any question. This issue was decided very definitely, and out from that God had to make His great movement concerning the Levites. That is a subject full of instruction; but we must leave it there.

And then there were Israel's own forty years in the wilderness. What a time of testing, probation and decision it was!

There are other forties, but we leap right over from there to the New Testament, to our Lord's testing for forty days in the wilderness—a time of unexampled testing; and, finally, to these forty days after the Resurrection. You see the character, the nature and meaning of forty, as a time of

testing and proving, of establishing, deciding and settling. All that was gathered into the forty days that we are now to consider.

But look at some of the factors included in this period, as affecting Christianity, the Church, the future. All the work of the apostles hung upon this, as we shall see. It is so very clear. Of what good were they before the beginning of those forty days? what could they have done in the state they were in while He was in the tomb? He might have risen and gone to Heaven without their seeing Him, and then, in some way, it might have come to them that He was in Heaven—ah, but there would have been something of very great importance lacking if it had been like that! The door would have been open for all kinds of things to come in. But the Lord did not leave it like that. Their future work rested upon these forty days. The Lord was laying the foundation for everything with them during that period.

And the very existence of the Church rested upon the same ground; it demanded these forty days. That we shall see again presently, more fully. The ability of Christians to suffer, to endure and to conquer required these forty days. The many proofs—the ground soundly and solidly established—for the fact that He was alive, were essential for the steadfastness and overcoming of believers in all the sufferings of the days which lay ahead.

Again, the assurance of an eternal future for believers rested upon this. That death is not the end; that there is a life which has conquered death; that this life is for them, and that an eternal future is secured—it rested all upon these forty days.

Again, the very nature of the believer's resurrection body is established by these forty days. The Apostle Paul makes that quite clear. In I Corinthians xv, it is positively stated that this mortal and corruptible shall be put off and immortality and incorruption shall be put on (vv. 53, 54). The believer's body is to be "conformed to the body of his glory" (Phil. iii. 21). But what is that body like? have we anything to go upon? Is there any solid ground for believing that after resurrection we have a body? Well, the Lord was taking great pains to make it perfectly clear that He was no phantom, no disembodied spirit. "Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye behold me having" (Luke xxiv. 39). Our knowledge of a resurrection body, its features and nature, was established during those forty days.

And what of the hope concerning those who are asleep? That hope is established by this period.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Still other factors could be mentioned, but the mention of these alone is sufficient to indicate that this was no unimportant phase of the great octave of redemption. It is truly *redemption* that is focused upon in this period. Everything had to be well founded and grounded, with "many proofs". As we said earlier, Luke was a meticulous historian: he tells us that he had taken pains to ascertain and make sure of the facts that he was recording; and he says that the Lord Jesus "showed himself alive" to the disciples "by many proofs". As we have already seen, John said that the Lord did "many other signs . . . in the presence of his disciples". The object? To set the evidence, to leave things—or rather, one thing—beyond any doubt. What is it? The fact that Jesus lives—Jesus lives again after death! In other words: The Lord is risen!

So much for the more general side of this matter. We come now to look at the three more specific things which, to some degree at any rate, sum up the answer to the question: Why the forty days? What we have already seen provides, of course, a good answer, but that is not the whole answer.

THE RELEASE OF THE LORD

Firstly, what did the Lord Jesus Himself conceive to be the particular value to *Himself* of His resurrection? The answer is in those words which we have read from Luke xii. 49, 50: 'I came to scatter fire on the earth . . . O that it were already kindled! . . . I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how I am pent up until it be accomplished!' There is no doubt that He is speaking about the baptism of His Cross and passion; and He is looking through the baptism and thinking of the other side as His release. So the very first thing about these forty days is that it meant the release of the Lord. 'How am I straitened, how am I pent up, how am I confined! I have come to scatter fire—to broadcast the fire over the whole earth: but here I am, tied to these few miles of a little country, tied to time, tied up to all the conditions of life here.' Oh, how limited He was! limited in His own movement, limited in His disciples, limited in every way. He was longing to be free, to be out, to be released. He looked upon the resurrection as His release, and upon the Cross as the way of it.

Now, the Lord had, at the commencement of His ministry, made a great announcement. You remember that His first recorded ministry was in Nazareth, when He took up Isaiah lxi and spoke of the sevenfold aspect of His ministry: "The

Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . . He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives . . . to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke iv. 16-19). Now there is little doubt that in His mind He was thinking of the year of Jubilee: because those words of Isaiah are an echo of the words used in Leviticus xxv. 10 concerning the Jubilee year, the fiftieth year, the year of release, when everything that had gone into bondage—man, woman, child, houses, land, or anything else—had to be released. And so, right at the commencement of His ministry, He said: 'I am come in relation to God's jubilee, God's fiftieth year, the year of the Lord's release.'

From the exodus of Israel to the beginning of the ministry of the Lord Jesus there were thirty jubilees—an interesting piece of Bible study for you, if you like! Here is the thirtieth jubilee beginning. Now, when the Lord Jesus made the declaration in the words of the Scripture—"release to the captives . . . recovering of sight to the blind . . . liberty [to] them that are bruised"—He knew what He meant. He made the announcement that He had come to bring in the greatest of all the Jubilees. The realisation, the actual fulfilment of that, was still a little way ahead—perhaps three-and-a-half years ahead—but it took effect during, and as the outcome of, the forty days.

It took effect, first of all, as to Himself. By the resurrection He came into His own release, His complete emancipation. He was set free. See Him now: no geographical confinement can hold Him;—He is outside of all that. No time limits can hold Him; none of those old features of limitation and straitness now obtains. Time does not matter, distance does not matter: He is out. On the day of His resurrection He walked with two to Emmaus, broke bread with them, and . . . disappeared! They raced for their very lives back to Jerusalem to tell—but He was there before them! It was like that all the time. It is an instructive exercise to tabulate all the marks of His release during those forty days.

See now what He is doing with these disciples, the larger company who are to be the nucleus of His Church. He appeared to above five hundred brethren at one time, says Paul (I Cor. xv. 6). What is He doing? He is establishing the evidence for the fact that now He knows no limitations, He knows no bounds or bonds—He is free! That is a tremendous inheritance for the Church, for us. How glad we are of that to-day!—to realise that geography does not matter, whether it be fifty, or five hundred, or five thousand miles; that time does not matter—none of these things matter: He

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is free! It is a tremendous thing for the Church to have it established by “many proofs”. Our old Authorised Version used to put in another word there—“many *infallible* proofs”. Even if it is not in the original text, the epithet is fully applicable.

THE RELEASE OF HIS OWN

That was His side. But He had not only come to proclaim His own release and to secure it through the Cross. There was the other side, the release of His own: the release of the men and the release of the Church. Look at the men before: they were terribly tied up in themselves, were they not? They were manifestly limited in every way: in their capacities for spiritual things, in their understanding, in their spiritual intelligence. Paul’s word to the Corinthians might very well have applied to them: “ye are straitened in your own affections” (II Cor. vi. 12). But look at their release in these days! There is no doubt that it has happened—and it is happening all the time: you can see it growing! They have been released. You have only to think of the difference between Peter in the judgment hall and Peter on the day of Pentecost. One man limited, bound, straitened, defeated; the other man out, right out—a man emancipated.

They are all like that. It was the year of jubilee for them! The Lord Jesus had proclaimed it; by His resurrection He had brought it in; and by the sending forth of the Holy Spirit on the jubilee day, the fiftieth day (‘Pentecost’ means ‘fiftieth’), He had finally sealed it. The fiftieth year is jubilee, and Pentecost is the fiftieth day. Yes, it is jubilee, it is release; everything bears the stamp of that. And so Pentecost was the crown of those fifty days, and the making good especially of the values of the forty. It was their day of release!

If you and I were really in the good of these forty days, we, too, should be liberated and released men and women. Think of Thomas. Was ever a man more tied up than Thomas? He was tied up with himself, and tied up with his own temperament. He had that kind of temperament, you know, that does not believe anything unless it has absolute proof. It can never take anybody else’s word for it—it must have everything proved and demonstrated. What an unhappy fellow he was! “Except I shall see . . . I will not believe” (John xx. 25). That shut him up to a little prison of his own soul. No Gospel, no good news, not even the very best news that you can bring, is any good to one like that, because they won’t have it,

they just can’t believe it. ‘Yes, but that is, after all, only what you say’—that is their reaction. ‘You say that, you believe that; I have no proof that it is so.’ Poor Thomas is representative of a whole temperamental class.

But look at the man a few days later. The Lord soon settled all that for Thomas—settled it so thoroughly that when, eight days later, he was invited by the Lord, with the words: “Reach hither thy hand . . .”, to consider and test the evidence for himself, it is never recorded that he did so. He could only say: “My Lord and my God.” He is overwhelmed—but he is a man released. The same thing was true of them all: each one of them needed release—and that release came during the forty days. Then they were men out! There they were, standing up together on the day of Pentecost—men who were free! The resurrection of the Lord Jesus ought to have that effect in you and in me. It ought to release us from ourselves and our own little world—and thank God it does, if we come vitally into it. If you do not know that in experience, that is nevertheless your inheritance. These forty days are not just a chapter in history; the value of them is your inheritance: it is for you—for us all. This is not a point of Christian doctrine; this is an up-to-date power for every life, offered to our faith to take hold of, for our release from ourselves. It was the year of their release, but it is also the year of our release, the Church’s release. The jubilee is not over yet.

THE INTEGRATION OF THE SCATTERED FLOCK

We come now to the third thing. The Lord Jesus had said to them, as He was going to the Cross, as He was with them on the mount of Olives in the last hours before the Passion: “All ye shall be offended in me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad” (Matt. xxvi. 31). What a scattering took place! They one and all forsook Him; they were broken up into fragments, ‘all over the place’, as we might say, like a shattered vessel. They were outwardly in pieces, as a band, and inwardly in pieces, as men. His word “scattered” was very truly realised. Now look at the forty days. What is He doing? He is bringing together again all the pieces, He is collecting all the fragments. Here, and there, and there, He is finding those pieces. Two have gone off in this direction, one is here, others are there; there is no sign of any oneness about them. But now, during the forty days, He is finding them all, collecting them up,

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bringing them all together. At the end He has got them all together, and in a 'togetherness' that had never been before, in a oneness that they had never yet known. This is the value of the forty days.

But remember, things could not have been otherwise. There were all the elements of disintegration in them before, and so it had to be—it could not be otherwise. Now that wants thinking about, because in those eleven men you have the Church in representation. They are a picture of the Church in division, all broken up into fragments, with no mutual confidence—doubting one another, suspecting one another, not believing one another—a broken-up Church, a divided Church, a scattered Church. That is how they were, simply because of the conditions which were in themselves before the Cross; the ground was there for it. But just think: they had had an association with Him for three-and-a-half years, they had companied with Him during that time, they came under His influence and His spell, they heard all His teaching, they saw His works—they were His disciples; and yet, and yet, there was all that latent which made possible these divisions and suspicions and questions.

If our relationship to the Lord Jesus is something merely objective and outward: if it is a matter of knowing His teaching—of course believing that His teaching is right—and of having some measure of devotion to Him: all that kind of doctrinal, theological, historical relationship to the Lord Jesus, but falling short of something deep and drastic wrought inside; falling short of that tremendous action of the Cross to break the natural man and open up the way for something other from Heaven: then such conditions can and will obtain. In saying this I am saying more than my words perhaps convey. But very often that is the ground of all the scattering and the division and the quarrelling and the suspicion and the questions, and everything else. The Cross has not done its work to break the natural man—even in his relationship to Christ, in his apprehension of the things of Christ; to break all his natural life and so to speak split him wide open for something from Heaven. There is a long, long story bound up with a statement like that, and a terrible story. And so that is why I say that their disappointment and scattering was not just because Christ was crucified: it was because the seeds of that scattering were in them—the ground was already there.

But now what has happened? They have been broken and shattered, and now a new ground is being put in, the ground of another life and another kind of knowledge of the Lord. That is the great

thing about the forty days. They have never known Him like this before. Indeed, they are finding it sometimes difficult to believe that this is He at all. "When they saw him . . . some doubted" (Matt. xxviii. 17). 'Is it He?' When He first met them coming from the tomb, He had to say: "Fear not . . ." (v. 10). No, they were not sure yet. This is another kind of knowledge of Him; it is knowing Him on another ground. Paul said: "Even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know him so no more" (II Cor. v. 16). In that way, no more! This is a different kind of knowledge of Him, as the essential basis of a true oneness: a knowledge which has come, on the one side, through a terrible shattering of all natural knowledge, and, on the other side, through a new coming of the Lord, personally, to those who have been shattered. It is always like that. Until we have been broken, we are not in a position for the Lord to come and show us the greatest things, the deepest things, the truest things. These are abiding principles.

And so He gathered them—or shall we say gathered them—and then, upon the basis of a new kind of life, upon a new kind of knowledge of Himself, He established among them an altogether new oneness. They are off the ground of their own life now; they are on the ground of His life. Their life was a divided life; His life is a uniting life. It is all very well for us to say that we are 'all one in Christ' because we all share one life. Of course, that is true, but it might be quite a superficial statement. We really only come into the practical value of that one life if the Cross has done something in us. The practical expression of the oneness of that life demands this deep work of the Cross. That we are all one in Christ, because we share His one life, the eternal life that He has given, may be positionally true; but the expression of it may still be waiting.

Is that not true to-day? We can say that all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, who have received the gift of eternal life, are one—one by reason of the one life that they all share with Him and in Him. Yes, but look at the expression of it amongst Christians! Where is the manifestation of the oneness of that life? That is tragically lacking. With the disciples, the manifestation of it came about when the Cross had done its deep, breaking work in their natural life, and had turned them over on to another ground, where all their apprehension and knowledge of Him was a spiritual one. It was on the ground of something tremendous that was happening in them. These forty days were not only days of things happening

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to them: you could see something correspondingly happening *in* them all the time. Before, when He made the slightest allusion to or gave the least hint of His departure, they were thrown into consternation and terror. Now, they are moving rapidly toward the place where, far from feeling consternation that He is going from them, they are quite happy about it—even full of joy. All that fear has gone; it is all right now. As He appears, during these forty days, something is happening inside them.

THE NEW SCATTERING

There is another factor here that to me is of very great significance and comfort. You remember that it was not so very long after this that the persecution arose over Stephen, and they were all scattered once again (Acts viii. 1, 4; xi. 19). They were all scattered—and now it is perfectly safe for them to be scattered. The old scattering was a devastating thing: all loss, all weakness—all wrong. But they can be scattered anywhere, all over the world, now, and it is as safe as eternity. Once the thing is done inside, it is all right, it is all to the good. An Ethiopian no longer needs a Philip to lean upon: He can go his own way, rejoicing, without Philip or anybody else, when the thing is done inside. When that has happened, we can have every confidence that people will go on. Thank God that it is like that! There may be persecution, scattering, imprisonments, but they are going on.

These, then, and many others, are the values that sprang out of those forty days. But let us remember that this is here in the Word for *us*, it is handed down to *us*. It is not just history, Church history, of what happened long ago. This book of the Acts—which, as we have said, might very well be called 'The Book of the Lord's Release'—is given to the Church as the very basis of the Church's life. It is for ourselves, and we have a tremendous heritage in these forty days. If only we were really established upon those values, what a difference it would make!

Let me emphasize once more that factor of the regathering and the consolidating in a new fellowship. That is what is needed. Is not the present deplorable situation amongst Christians, with all the fragments and divisions, all the questions and suspicions, and so on, a clear proof that believers are not really standing in the meaning of what has been done by the Cross, in destroying the natural ground and the natural life, and in making room for the spiritual and heavenly? That is where it all focuses. The deeper the Cross goes in us, in dealing with our natural life in all its forms, and the more we are open to the heavenly life, so the more we shall be drawn together and established. That is a statement of fact, but it is also a very real test of our own position.

I trust that I have said enough to show that these forty days were very, very important, and that they stand for all ages as a most significant epoch for the life of the Church.

T. A-S.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

THE WHOLE TRUTH

IN the days when knights wore armour and challenged one another to mortal combat on the slightest pretext, a certain Baron Veritas was said to have suspended a gigantic shield over the path which ran past the drawbridge of his castle. One day a Black Knight, who was riding up from the South, came in sight of this shield as it shone brightly in the sun, and stopped to gaze at it. While he did so a White Knight drew near from the other direction, and seeing the first man gazing up at the shield he reined in his horse and looked up too.

As they were halted in this way, the one to the North of the shield and the other to the South of it, the Black Knight greeted his fellow in a loud voice (they spoke in loud voices in those days) and began at once to praise the magnificence of his

friend, Baron Veritas, drawing attention to the splendid gold shield which hung across their path.

'Truly Veritas is a great lord', shouted back the White Knight, 'but you are mistaken in saying that the shield is golden, for any churl could tell you that it is made of silver.' 'Sir Knight', scoffed the one in black, 'you need to look again. Those northern mists must have dulled your sight. If you had had the benefit of living in our southern climes you would have known at a glance that the shield is golden.' Then the White Knight grew angry and said that whether a man came from the North or the South he ought to know silver when he saw it, and the Black Knight grew still more angry and thundered out, 'Not silver, Sir, but gold! Gold!! Gold!!!' And so the argument went on, each certain that he was right

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SATURDAY, APRIL 16, 3.30 and 6.30 p.m.

LORD'S DAY, APRIL 17, 11 a.m., and 6.30 p.m.

MONDAY, APRIL 18, 11 a.m., 3.30 and 6.30 p.m.

N.B. Friends are asked to note the alteration in times of gatherings.

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and that the other was wrong, and each insulting the other more and more.

By this time it became clear that words were not enough, but that they must fight for their opinions, so the gauntlet was thrown down, and each drew back his horse and lowered his lance, ready for the charge. They galloped towards each other with great fury and met with a terrific clash right underneath the shield. I am glad to say that neither was really hurt, though the White Knight was unseated from his horse and fell clanging to the ground. At this the Black Knight wheeled his horse round, so that he could return and demand submission from his routed enemy. To his immense surprise when he raised his eyes to the shield, he discovered that after all it was not gold but silver.

Now he was an argumentative and hot-headed knight, but he was also fair-minded, so that once he was convinced of his mistake he hurried forward to make amends to his opponent. 'Forgive me', cried the Black Knight, 'for I was wrong. The shield is made of silver after all'. Meanwhile the White Knight had picked himself up and was leading back his horse. His head was low with shame, but when the other called out to him he lifted it up and from his position South of the shield he saw it gleaming in the sunshine. And it was golden!

The White Knight was again filled with anger. 'You have defeated me in fair combat', he belatedly, 'but you need not insult me by trying to humour me as if I were a child. You need not pretend that you were mistaken. It was I who was in the wrong. The shield is not silver at all, but pure gold'. 'Not silver?' cried the Black Knight, greatly offended, 'of course it is silver, man. You do not have to lie to me'. This, of course, annoyed the White Knight very much. Once again they began to hurl insults at each other, the one crying 'Silver! Silver!!' and the other 'Gold! Gold!!', until it was clear that the only thing possible was for the White Knight to re-mount so that

they could have a further tilt at each other.

All this disturbance had not gone unnoticed in the castle, so that it was at this very moment that Baron Veritas came walking over the drawbridge to enquire about the quarrel. They were in a great hurry to fight each other and did not want to waste more time with words, but as both the castle and the shield belonged to the Baron, their good manners compelled them to listen to him. He called the Black Knight back to the South side where the other was waiting, and told them both to look up. The shield was glistening gold. The White Knight was just about to cry out that he was right, when Lord Veritas desired them both to pass to the North side and look again. This they did, and saw then that the shield was made of silver.

'What a pity you had all that argument and fighting', he said to them, 'when if you had both come here together you would have seen that it is silver, and on the other side you would have agreed together that it is gold. For gold it is on the South side, but it is silver on the North. You were wrong because you only knew in part. You needed to be guided into all the truth.'

Having said this the Baron Veritas went back over his drawbridge into the castle to wait for the next travellers who would quarrel over his famous shield. For men were always doing so, and they continue doing it until this day. Probably you boys and girls who read this may have done the same thing. Certainly it is true that all through the history of the Church men have seen different sides of the same Scriptural teaching, have denounced one another and sometimes even fought one another. How much better to wait for the Lord of Truth Himself, humbly seeking to be guided into all the truth by Him. We cannot do better than close with these words of advice from the New Testament: "But let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1. 19).

H. F.

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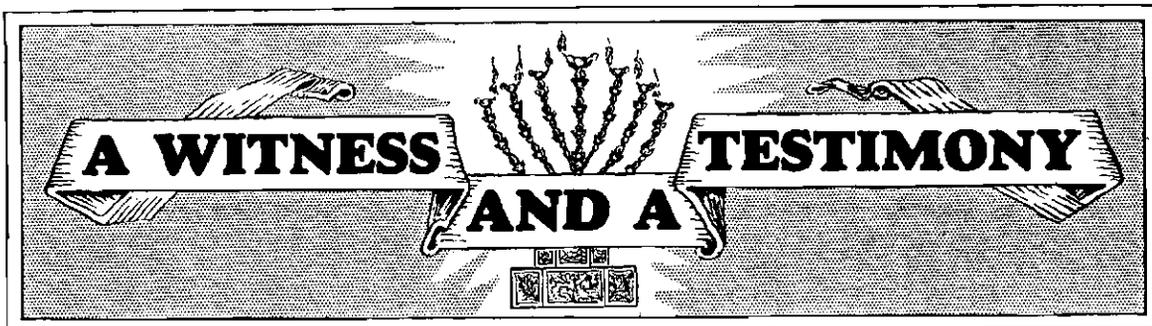
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MAY — JUNE, 1960.

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EDITORIAL

SPIRITUAL PUNCTUATION

HOW very few people there are who can cope with punctuation! This act or art of dividing sentences by points seems to trip up most people. Not many can give the inflections, differences, and values which belong to each small note of punctuation. That is, the difference between the comma, the semi-colon, and the colon. How much of our singing and how many of our hymns are spoiled because of a careless ignoring and over-running of these little marks! On the other hand, how a reading or a hymn can be changed from a heap of words into a living message just by a simple and thoughtful observance of these tiny points. Here is a matter in which there can be displayed or betrayed care or carelessness; thought or thoughtlessness; meaning or confusion. Anyone who has once been awakened to this realm of rich values is very sensitive to the violation of even a comma. A little thing like this dot with a small tail can hurt, or give much pleasure.

But, you are saying, what has this to do with the Christian life? Paul would say—"Much, every way"!

Our spiritual life is a book being written. It is a narrative of God's ways with us, and of our history with God. It is a record of what we learn in the school of Christ, and of how we learn it. This narrative of real life can be given a great deal of meaning and be saved from much confusion if we know and observe the laws of spiritual punctuation: that is, where to pause; where to take a breath; where to let down a little, or more, or completely. Unless we do this we shall ourselves become embarrassed, like a singer who has used up all his—or her—breath before the sentence is finished. We shall also be unintelligible to others. Let us illustrate and explain.

THE VALUE OF CLARITY

What an important thing is clarity, and what a disastrous thing is confusion! Upon the smallest punctuation marks hang these great issues. An excellent example in very common usage is the way in

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which the metrical version of the twenty third Psalm is sung. (Not written, but sung.) Very rarely is this Psalm sung correctly. Take it in hand with the tune Crimond. The way in which it is commonly sung is not the way of the punctuation. This is the more usual way:

“The Lord’s my Shepherd, I’ll not want ;
He makes me down to lie //
In pastures green He leadeth me ; //
The quiet waters by.”

Thus, the lying down is detached from the green pastures, and the quiet waters are something by themselves, unrelated to ‘He leadeth me’.

This makes nonsense of the verse: and so also in later verses. Clarity and intelligence are preserved by giving due respect to the punctuation.

So, our first lesson is that a brief pause may save from confusion and embarrassment. We have instances of this in Nehemiah and in the Lord Jesus. Nehemiah was caught in a difficult situation which could have led to serious complications. The monarch, whose cupbearer he was, caught sight of his face when it was sad (a forbidden thing in the king’s presence) and challenged him about it. Being given the reason, the king further pressed to know what his cupbearer wanted. This was no small matter, and really carried very far-reaching issues. Nehemiah paused—only for the value of the comma or semi-colon; just to take a breath—in which infinitesimal break his heart went up to Heaven (Neh. ii. 4) and, instead of confusion, or even disaster, order and tranquillity resulted. A similar pause for lifting His heart to Heaven occurred in our Lord’s life (John xii. 28), when things were becoming very difficult. There are not lacking indications that it was a common practice in His life. In neither case was there opportunity for the much prayer and thought that the situation seemed to demand, but, with a background of habitual touch with Heaven, the instant pause, the simple spiritual comma saved from confusion and gave meaning to the movement. We cannot substitute sudden ejaculations for a more solid prayer life, but there is a very great value in the periodic pause in which, amidst the pressure of work, perplexity, sorrow, and care, we take a spiritual breath of Heaven.

We shall, with this lesson, also come to know how very much can hang upon a very little. A comma is not much in itself, but the real value of the whole context may hang upon it. In the comma you need not always raise or drop your voice. It just marks a little break, while you continue on the same level. But when it is a semi-colon or colon, there is a respective relating of pitch and starting again, in a less maintained course.

“How oft in the conflict, when pressed by the foe,
I have fled to my Refuge and breathed out my woe ;
How often, when trials like sea-billows roll,
Have I hidden in Thee, O Thou Rock of my soul.”

May it not be that, not only the private withdrawal for a small space of time, but the prayer or fellowship gathering, is like the rule of the colon, in which there is a sufficient pause and let-down to provide for a fresh start before the present phase is completed?

But what about the full period? How great is the value, the burden, and the responsibility that it carries! How varied and many-sided is the context of this that is represented by a dot! The greatest matters in all the Bible (which is only a representation of all human history) are governed by this ‘period’.

“And on the seventh day God finished his work . . . and he rested on the seventh day” (Gen. ii. 2).

Thereupon and thereafter God established in the creation the law and principle over which His most serious jealousy was manifested. It would be a principle by which He would stand with greatest blessing or fiercest judgment. The time came when the whole nation of Israel would go into *seventy years* of exile for violating this principle—ten times seven ‘that the land should enjoy its sabbaths’. A whole lifetime, a ‘three-score-years-and-ten’ of frustration, impotence, unfruitfulness, desolation; the price of violating—not a day but—a principle represented by the day. What was—and is—that principle for which God will exact everything, even a whole life-time and life-work? Hear it reverberating down the ages backward and forward from the Cross—“IT IS FINISHED!”

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The desolation, chaos, disruption, darkness, and ruin of an old order has come to a climax in the person of God's Son ; its cause has been judged and destroyed : and now the ground is secured for "all things new". The way of 'a new creation in Christ Jesus' is opened. The closed Heaven is cleft. Pentecost is God saying from Heaven—"It is very good". "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." God has entered into His rest. The Sabbath of God is more than a day, it is a Person and His finished work. It is not the day as such, but the finished work and new life, that lies behind, and is implicit in, our 'coming together on the first day of the week'; the Table of the Lord being—for many—the first act, showing forth the Lord's death.

How great is this period! No wonder that, even in the type, God showed His supreme concern. It is no less a matter than all that the Cross of Christ means in human history and the creation. The exile of Israel, in Babylon, and *now*, declares that life has no meaning or value with God when the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is counted "an unholy thing", and made to mean just the opposite of what God sees in it.

God has written this law, the law of this 'period', deep in human life. Some of us have had to learn deep lessons by painful ways in this matter. We cannot—even in what we call service to God—violate this law of the rest period, without having to pay heavily for it in lost values, maybe lost days or months, vitiated energies, and frustrated labours. It is never lost time to take rest when there is conscientiousness in work. Satan is all against rest. To drive, harrass, and keep *too* busy is a part of his strategy to mar the new creation life.

God has many points at which He puts a 'period' and says—"That phase is finished: that chapter is closed." It is of very great and serious consequence that we be sensitive to His punctuation.

So, meaning, intelligence, value, and effectiveness are bound up with spiritual punctuation, from the comma to the full period ; not forgetting the parentheses, the hyphens, the notes of emphasis or interrogation.

EDITOR

MEN WHOSE EYES HAVE SEEN THE KING

V. BORN OF GOD

"The power of the Most High shall overshadow thee : wherefore also that which is to be born shall be called holy, the Son of God" (Luke i. 35).

"As many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name : which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John i. 12, 13).

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh ; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John iii. 6).

"These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation : but be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world" (John xvi. 33).

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God : and such we are. For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him ; for we shall see him even as he is" (I John iii. 1, 2).

"For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world" (I John v. 4).

IN bringing these Scriptures together, that about the birth of the Lord Jesus and those about the birth of believers, I am not failing to recognise a great difference. One has always to safeguard this matter of the Person of the Lord Jesus. He was Very God of Very God ; 'God manifest in the flesh' ; 'Emmanuel, God with us.' In that He stands alone, unique ; there is not another like Him. His birth was different, even, from the new birth of every child of God : it was different in kind ; it was different in degree.

THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN CHRIST'S BIRTH AND OURS

Nevertheless, there are factors in His own birth which constitute the nature of the birth of every believer. Deity apart—Godhead left with Him—there is yet something in these passages about the believer's new birth that corresponds to His birth.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

It is to some of these features that we are now to give attention. You will not confuse the two, I trust, at any point, on that matter of His uniqueness; at the same time, and on the other side, I do trust that you will be able to recognise what John said, that that which is true in Him is, in its own realm, and after its own kind, also true in us (I John ii. 8). And, in this matter of the birth and the new life of the children of God, we shall be able to understand better if we recognise some of these features in the birth of the Lord Jesus. For His birth does, as I have said, hold all the factors which go to make up a true child of God.

THE NEW BIRTH A DIVINE INTERVENTION

The first thing, which is quite patent, is that the birth of the Lord Jesus was a Divine intervention in human life: and that is true of the new birth of every believer; it is nothing less than a Divine intervention in human life. We do not stay with all the minute details of Christ's birth, but it is perfectly clear in this way, that out from Heaven there came a heavenly Visitant, making an announcement; and, from the same Heaven, the Holy Spirit came into human life and intervened, and did something—something that we shall see, I trust, in a minute. The point is that here is a breaking in of Heaven into human life.

Perhaps you wonder why this should be stressed, and given such emphasis. But let us be clear that that is not what is very largely conceived and taught about the new birth. Even with the best intentions the new birth is so often placed to man's side—it is what man does. Man has got to do something—either raise his hand, or make some statement, or sign some document, or make a decision, make a profession, accept certain things that are being stated, and so on. Perhaps such things are meant to open the way for God; but, even if we allow that, people are often left with this idea that it is something they have done. They have accepted Christ; they have accepted Christianity; they have made a gesture; they have done something; they have become Christians by what they have done, by their own act.

BORN NOT OF THE WILL OF MAN BUT OF GOD

Now, being fully generous, and not critical at all, it is very important to recognise that the new birth never necessarily takes place by anything that we do. It never really is consummated by some act of our own will, or of our own desire, or of our

own mind—not at all. 'Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, . . . '—the man being the case in point, or the other man who would seek to bring it about—'. . . but of God.' If God does not intervene in human life and in human history; break right in, as it were, from Heaven; if the Holy Spirit does not overshadow, and Himself produce that new life, that is not new birth; there is something lacking.

You are wondering, perhaps, why this message. I will tell you why. With a growing concern—and concern is a weak word—as one moves about the world touching Christians and Christianity, the one thing that is borne in upon one's heart, overwhelmingly, sometimes almost to the point of despair, is the need that those who bear the name of 'Christian' should know the real nature of what it means to be a child of God. They seem, so many of them, to have taken on something from the outside, by their own volition, choice and act, and so many have really not the faintest idea of what it means to be 'born' out from Heaven. And in all the needed work of recovery, in every department of Divine purpose at this time, this is one of the needs—a recovery of the real meaning of new birth, of what it is to be born from above, to be a child of God.

THE COMING TEST OF OUR STANDING

I have sometimes wondered—maybe wrongly—whether the enemy is not very pleased with putting countless multitudes of people in a false Christian position, because he knows the day is coming when the winds will carry them away; and for a Christian to fall away is a greater reproach to the Lord perhaps than anything. Oh, how we do need to get our roots down; how we need to be grounded in the truth, and in the truth of our very nature as children of God. That is why we come to this message. The day is coming when our standing as Christians will be deeply and terribly tested—there will be a great shaking. The prophet Ezekiel is very up-to-date; I believe these words will have perhaps a larger fulfilment in a not very distant future, than they had when Ezekiel uttered them: "I will overturn, overturn, overturn . . . until he come whose right it is" (Ezek. xxi. 27). There is going to be a great overturning of what is not true—of what is false. This judgment must begin at the House of God. So you will understand this present emphasis.

We begin here. As with Christ, so it must be with every child of God: they must, at the very begin-

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ning of their Christian life, be the result of a Divine intervention in human history, in their own human history, in their human life. But that is the great basic fact. Thank God that there are many who understand that, and know what it means. They are able to say: 'God intervened in my life; God broke into my life; God came out, even, as it were, from Heaven, into my life.' If we have the experience, we know the truth; but it is sometimes helpful to have it defined. This is it: When you and I were saved, God broke out of Heaven—nothing less than that. It was as though God Himself came out of His Heaven into a human life; broke into its world, and interrupted its course of history. Things could never be the same after that.

NOT ONLY A NEWNESS BUT A DIFFERENCE

That is perfectly clear, is it not, in the case of the Lord Jesus? An angel indicated this intervention of the Holy Spirit from Heaven—and it is no less than that in principle and fact with each new birth. But the next thing that is clear in the case of the Lord Jesus is that this was something different; it was not only something new that had not happened before, but it was something different. This birth is different from all other births. We cannot dwell too much upon the details of the account, but that is what it amounts to. The angel made that perfectly clear, and Mary knew it: that was her problem, her perplexity, her wonder—How? how? It was the perplexity of Nicodemus, his great question—How? This contains a profound mystery which constitutes a deep, a mighty difference. This is not the common thing; this is not the usual thing; this you cannot find, except here; it is different.

And that which results from this intervention contains this fundamental difference in its very constitution. Oh, that all who bear the name of Christian, and claim to be children of God, were fully alive to this! I think this is where the weakness lies with so many, and it will not hurt us, even though we know it well, to be reminded of it, to face it again. It is something that we need to keep with us in our consciousness continually. Our new birth is different from all other births, and by new birth we are made fundamentally and constitutionally different from all other beings. You know it perhaps in some measure in experience. The birth of the Lord Jesus was so patently a different kind of birth. It was not in the usual natural way; nature had nothing to do with it; man's will, choice, decision, had nothing to do with it. And

'that which is born shall be *holy*': can you find *that* in nature anywhere? It is of a different kind and a different order of being—that which is, in its very essence, *holy*. That is the contrast with every other creature and every other birth. The Psalmist cries: 'I was born in sin, shapen in iniquity'—and that is true of us all.

THE NEW BIRTH BRINGS INTO A HEAVENLY KINGDOM

Now when I say that that principle holds good in every new birth, it needs this explanation. We know quite well that it is not our bodies that are born again; therefore they are not holy. We know that it is not our souls that are born again: if our souls are our minds—our reasoning powers, and our emotions, and our power of choice—well, they are not different. It is the trouble of our whole Christian life that we still have so much of that which is not holy with us, in mind and heart and will. It is the realm of our conflicts, our battles, our sorrows. Nevertheless, something, somewhere, has happened, something has come in, that is not of that kingdom at all, that is of another heavenly kingdom; and *that*, which is born of God, is holy. Do you know that? Even if it has never been explained or defined to you, you know it in experience. You know that there is that within you that revolts against sin and unholiness; you know that one of the great blessings of your life is an inward power of reaction when things are not right, not good. As we go on, we do become more and more sensitive to evil, to the sin of this world. Our peril may be sometimes to accept its presence; to have to take it just because it is there.

A good many years ago, I was travelling up north by train with an older sister in the Lord. We were in the dining car, and a dear girl entered and sat down at the next table, and took out a cigarette and lighted it. Of course, that is an accepted thing now. To my companion it was then new; a look of consternation came into her face; her eyes almost started out of her head! She looked at me, and I can tell you I had the utmost difficulty in restraining her from going over to that girl, and begging her to put out the cigarette and give up smoking. Perhaps you think I was wrong in restraining her. Being a little more a man of the world, I knew this common thing. But for her it was the deepest shock. Now, we are in a world like that. Perhaps much of the shock has gone; but nevertheless it is true of every child of God that there is that feeling about it—something of a tremendous inward revolt and reaction to sin, to

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evil, to unholiness. What a safeguard that is! what a gift of God it is to have that! God forbid that ever we should lose our sensitiveness in that realm, or cease to be moved by the sinfulness of sin.

THE NEED FOR SENSITIVENESS TO THIS DIFFERENCE

Beware, young people, that you do not blunt the edge of your new birth, by accommodating yourself to this world's ways, its forms and customs and acceptances, and taking it all as something inevitable. Ask the Holy Spirit to keep you very sensitive to sin, very sensitive to evil; to keep alive this *difference*, which is your birthright—a part of your very birth. If you are a true child of God, you know something about the difference, as you go out into the world, not only in the matter of sin, but in all kinds of ways. You are different; something has happened to you. If it has not, it is time for you to begin to look into this matter, as to whether you are a child of God.

At some point, this difference should have become quite clear to you, so that you know it—not just because you are told, not because your parents are Christians and do not like you doing certain things, and you have got a sort of conscience which is your parents' really, and not your own—but in your own heart, in your own self, you have got this consciousness of being *different*, fundamentally different, from those who are not the Lord's. If that is not true as at a crisis in your life—for all do not have a violent breaking in as in the case of Paul—nevertheless, there has to arrive at some point this sense: 'I am a child of God; I am different; something has happened; a great difference has been made deep down somewhere; I am not the same; and I am not the same as those who are not the children of God.'

Not only so, but it is the nature of spiritual growth that that difference becomes more and more accentuated. It is the thing that is making this world more and more a 'foreign' land to us—it is not our home, not our place; and conversely, making our 'native land' more and more so to us—making Heaven truly to be our home. Now, where Heaven is I cannot tell you; but I do know this, that, whatever Heaven means, that is where I belong. And more and more I am discovering that I belong there, and that I do not belong here.

THE DIVIDE OF THE NEW BIRTH

I speak to young Christians particularly, that this is the very nature of your new birth, that more and more it must be like that. And do not be

afraid of it; do not rebel against it; accept it. It is a proof of something, of the greatest thing that God is doing in human history—breaking in to make this tremendous difference. It is on that ground that the Great Assize is going to be set up. We get our mental pictures of the Judgment; well, we will not argue as to the material side of that. But I do know that this judgment has already begun, and it is going on, and the finality of it will be here: that there are those who belong here, and there are those who belong there, and there is no mistaking to which realm these people belong. The great divide has been made. The Lord is seeking to bring that about now. But oh, the tragedy of many Christians, and many young Christians, trying to bridge that gap—to hold those two things together; instead of allowing the gap to widen, whilst they stand on the side where they are moving further and further away from a judged world.

AN INHERENT POWER TO OVERCOME

The next thing that comes out in this matter of Christ's birth, and the birth of the children of God, is that by this birth there comes into us an inherent potency, an inherent power. Now, the Lord Jesus said: "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John xvi. 33b). And John says: "Whosoever is begotten of God overcometh the world" (I John v. 4). In Christ, in the born anew child of God, there is an inherent power and virtue which is going to overcome the world. It is there in the very nature of things, in the very constitution of the new life: it is going to overcome. There may be failure—there may be frequent failure; there may be falling in the battle; there may be some casualties; there may be some dark patches; there may even be some going away. But it is a most remarkable thing, and a most heart-ravishing thing, to see how this life persists.

I sometimes have to smile. People tell me that they are going to give it all up; they cannot go on any longer; and off they go, and you do not see them for a little while. But they are back again. And that happens a hundred and one times. How many people have said to me, and quite recently, 'I am giving it all up; I am finished; I am going.' And as far as they knew themselves, they meant it. But they cannot do it; they are just like moths round the lamp—they cannot keep away; back they come, and, yes—crestfallen and ashamed! You know, if it were natural, they would not do it; I would not do it; for very face-saving, I would not come back again, show my face again after that. But there is something else.

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something more, that is stronger than our shame, stronger than our self-reproach, stronger than our self-despair, stronger than our constant delinquency: there is a persistence that brings us up, and brings us back. It is the history of most children of God. 'That which is born of God overcometh the world.'

It was true of Jesus. How did He overcome? Not by physical force; not by resolve of will; not by power of brain and mind and argument. He never did bring the world under His feet in those ways. By sheer force of Divine character; by the kind of Man He was; by the Divine nature in Him, He overcame. And so, with every child of God: in so much lesser degree than in His case, perhaps; so much slower in expression and manifestation; nevertheless it is there. Every true child of God knows quite well that, had it not been for that inward grip of something, or Someone, not themselves, they would not be where they are today, still seeking the things of God. No! It is inherent in that which is born of God to overcome!

THE INEVITABLE ANTAGONISM AGAINST HEAVEN

The next thing, of course, is the inevitable antagonism. It was not very long after the birth of the Lord Jesus before it broke out. The kingdom of Satan knew who He was, and what He was. That kingdom had many a powerful instrument and means at hand, and Herod was one such. We are not to know what happened during the thirty years of His boyhood and young manhood—that is passed over. It would not be surprising if there were many narrow escapes even then. But we do know that, from the moment of His stepping out from His anointing at Jordan, to take up this work of bringing 'the other sheep', bringing the other sons to glory, all hell was on His track. Whenever He came into a place, the atmosphere became charged with antagonism. We perhaps know something of those atmospherics, but how infinitely worse it must have been for our Lord, with His very sensitive spirit, to have known this terrible hatred and animosity of the evil powers toward Him, and working through men. Oh, the constant, almost monotonous repetition: 'They sought to destroy Him . . . they sought to destroy Him . . . they sought how they might destroy Him.' That was the atmosphere in which He lived. Why?

Well, it might be put down to many causes; but the fundamental cause was this: He belonged to Heaven, and the destiny of the Heavenly One and the heavenly ones is to possess this world and

govern it, by the final abolishment of its prince and his whole kingdom. And they know. Said they: "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mark i. 24). And they know every one who is holy, in that sense. There is an inevitable antagonism in the spiritual realm. Often it cannot be traced to any physical, material, or temporal cause, or to people; it is just there in the air. We know something of the antagonisms of a spiritual kind that the Christian has to meet in this world, without provoking deliberately or knowingly or really, by words or deeds. When you are born again, somehow or other the consciousness comes alive that you are a speckled bird, a marked man or woman. And so John says about these that are born of God: "For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not" (I John iii. 1b). It 'knoweth' us not. There is a deeper meaning in that word 'knoweth' than just being aware of us, knowing who we are. It is being able to place us; being able to explain us; being able to trace us, as to what we are and where we came from. To the world there is something about us that is inscrutable; and that constitutes an antagonism.

Let me appeal once again to young Christians. Do not try to cut out that kind of antagonism. Be careful not to give unnecessary offence; try to 'commend yourself to every man's conscience in the sight of God' (II Cor. iv. 2b); do things honourably before all men (Rom. xii. 17b); give them no occasion for accusing you fairly as a Christian. But when you have done all, do not think that you will not meet this antagonism—if you are a child of God you will. You just cannot avoid it. Do not try to eliminate it; recognise that this is a part of the very fact, a wonderful evidence of the fact that you are in the company of Jesus Christ. The world knew Him not; therefore it knows us not.

THE NEW BIRTH IS ALL OF GRACE

In conclusion, let us think for a few minutes of Mary herself, because she is characteristic in some ways of the vessel of the new birth. To whom, to what, upon what ground, will the new birth take place? Here there is a correspondence between the birth of the Lord Jesus and the new birth of every child of God. We have, of course, to recognise the Divine sovereignty of eternal election: 'chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world'. Let us accept that, and leave it for the moment. We come into the operation and activity of God in time. Upon what ground in time, in our own lives, will this thing come to us? Are there

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some grounds, are there some occasions, are there some conditions which will always obtain where God comes in in this way?

Yes, always. One of the beautiful things about Mary, as characteristic of a vessel of new birth, was that which the angel said to her: 'Hail, thou that art highly favoured of God.' The margin perhaps gets nearer to the true meaning: 'Hail, thou that art endued with grace'. That is the beginning of every new birth—*endued with grace*. If there was one person in that little country in those days who was aware—and this comes out so clearly—of the wonder of this, the condescension of this, and her own unworthiness of it, it was Mary. 'How should this thing be?' He never comes to the proud, the self-sufficient, the self-confident; He never comes to those who are unaware that His coming would be an expression of infinite grace. Before this wonderful thing can happen to us, we have often to be brought to the place where the only word that suits the situation in our consciousness is *grace*; it is God's grace; it is all of grace. 'Thou art endued with grace.'

That is simple, I know, but that is the beginning of everything for the Christian life, for this wonderful miracle of God: that we must see and be deeply impressed, as she was, with our own utter worthlessness in this matter: that this could never be to us if we, in ourselves, in our own state, were the deciding factor. It is only God's infinite mercy, His infinite grace. That is a humble and a contrite spirit, and God is with that. But the new birth is but the beginning. This which is of God and of Heaven, has to grow and grow; more and more there is to be an increase of Him; but it is all on the same basis—the emptying of ourselves, the pouring out of all that is selfhood, to make way for the grace of God.

SUBMISSIVENESS AND SIMPLICITY

The next thing about Mary is her simplicity and her submissiveness. There is something very beautiful about her simplicity, is there not? We are often too complicated about all these things. We make the Christian life far too complicated—projecting our mentalities and our arguments, our contentions, and our demands for explanation, and what-not—and we are standing in our own light as we do so. The Lord cannot get on; that is all rubbish in the way. He needs a heart like

Mary's (and I am not setting up Mary to be worshipped): a heart that is simple, in this sense, that there is nothing argumentative, querulous, awkward, about it. It is an open heart: perplexed, it is true; not understanding; wondering how it can be, and saying so. Nevertheless, because of the simplicity, honesty, purity of her heart, she arrived at this: "Be it unto me according to thy word"—absolute submission, even to the mystery, and what it would involve. The trouble with so many of us is that we are so slow in our submission, our surrender, our giving way, our letting go. We will argue; we will demand an explanation. We go round and round this eternal circle, getting nowhere, because we will not let go—we just will not let go; and so we come back to the point from which we started a thousand times. Mary put her whole life into this: "Be it unto me according to thy word." And the angel departed. That was what he was working toward.

It involved Mary in suffering—it involved her in suffering immediately. And then, forty days after the birth, Simeon told her: "A sword shall pierce through thine own soul; that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed." I think there is something there that is very helpful. When the Cross is at work in a life, people begin to betray themselves; their thoughts begin to accuse, to make charges; to say, This is because of so and so . . . When someone is having a bad time, thoughts come out: people divulge what they are thinking and feeling about the one concerned—some are sympathetic and some antagonistic. "A sword shall pierce through thine own soul; that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed." It was necessary that men should show themselves, show where they stood, on that day of the Cross; and Mary's suffering was a part of that.

This may seem to us something of a mystery. But the point is that this kind of thing that happened to her, and which happens to us, involves us in suffering. It involves us in the offence of the Cross; it involves in much misunderstanding, even much ostracism. The angel left her. She knew what it meant then. But later on Simeon told her what was coming, along the line of this child. What it amounts to is this: that to be a child of God is no ordinary thing. It is something unusual, something different, something of God. It is the result of an intervention of God from heaven.

T. A-S.

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THE WAY OF GOD'S SUFFICIENCY

Reading: Amos vii. 12-15; Joel ii. 12-27; Zephaniah i. 12.

THESE portions from the three Prophets are not necessarily linked up in any continuous Bible theme. But the Lord has brought them very much alive to me, connecting the three books through those portions, and I would like to pass something of this on to you.

FROM HERDSMAN TO PROPHET

We begin with the portion from Amos. Surely this passage wonderfully expresses what the Lord is able to do for a man. This little fragment of autobiography throws a great deal of light upon the working of God. Amos tells us that he was not a prophet by origin, so to speak, neither was he a prophet's son or a son of the prophets. He neither inherited a prophetic gift along a natural line so that it was easy for him to preach, nor was he the product of the schools so that he was made a prophet by training. He was simply a herdsman and a dresser of sycomore figs, occupations which tended to keep him remote from the affairs of the world, keeping him out in the open country away from men, rather than making an astute man of business, moving in and out of the busy throng. He would seem to have been the last man naturally to have any expectation of finding himself in royal cities, preaching to kings and priests and people, but here he is. This man God took up, and said: "Go, prophesy unto my people Israel"; and you know how he, a man of Judah, went into the northern kingdom of Israel and there denounced the sins of king, priest and people alike.

But we may well suppose that this was not just some sudden miraculous act of God. There was no doubt much of heart pondering going on in those lonely hours in the 'wilderness' with the flock. When his business or his interest did cause him to move amongst men, he took note of what he saw. His heart was grieved by the moral depravity of the people called the people of God. Growingly the burden of their state came upon his heart, and no doubt in the days and months of his loneliness out there with the sheep there was many an inward groan, many a prayer that forced itself out of his lips. 'What can I do, Lord, about this? I see it all, I am troubled by it, I feel the burden of it; but,

Lord, here I am, a helpless man—what can I do to touch the situation? I am just a herdsman! If I were a prophet, if I were in the king's entourage, if my father had been a priest, I would have had some chance to touch it; but here I am—a herdsman and out of it! Lord, what can I do about this?'

I stress this, and dwell upon it: because here is the making of a prophet; this is the way God's servants develop. A prophet is not by mere heritage a prophet, nor by mere academic training. A man is a prophet because God has wrought in his heart on the one hand a concern, a travail of desire, a distress of soul; and on the other hand, a conception of what things ought to be for the satisfaction of the Lord, which means some seeing of the Lord's mind about this; and these two sides of exercise go on in a man until, as literally pressed out from his inner being, there comes a message, a cry, a ministry. That is what went on in Amos, and when the exercise had reached a point which the Lord saw to be sufficient, the Lord said: "Go, prophesy unto my people Israel"!

IN CHRIST—A NEW CREATION

I want to press one fact which can be very simply stated. *In Christ there is a new creation.* Are you outside of Christ, are you a stranger to Christ? Then, whatever you are—consciously a sinner, groaning under the sense and burden of your sin, or in your own estimate a righteous man, having no need to be exercised about your state—I want to emphasize this, that, whilst all that you are in yourself is there, what a man is when he comes into Christ is something completely other.

You may be a vile sinner in yourself; in Christ you are holy. You may be dogged persistently with the anguish of your miserable moral condition, in yourself; but in Christ God sees you perfect, without a blemish; so apart are these two things, so contrary the one from the other. Perhaps we are not strangers to the Lord, we know Him; but oh—allow me to tarry a moment for our encouragement and for our reminder—we need to take fresh heed to this fact: that what we are in Christ is other than what we are in ourselves. Do not dismiss that by saying 'We know all that.' We do not know it in practice as we need to know it. What you are in Christ is other than what you are in yourself on every ground.

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IN CHRIST—NO CONDEMNATION

First of all on the ground of righteousness. In ourselves, whether we think ourselves righteous or agree that we are not righteous—in ourselves you and I are sinners worthy of death.

There is no arguing about that: from the Word of God that statement can be categorically affirmed. As to what we are in ourselves, we are worthy of death and the judgment; but in Christ we are justified. Are you in Christ?—then you are justified. Are you in Christ?—then there is no condemnation. The Word says it: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. viii. 1). Take hold of it anew, with fresh fervour and praise, that in Christ we are justified.

For on that very ground Satan sets up some of his major assaults. On every fresh occasion that we know that we sin—and we do sin daily—Satan says, 'There you are!' and unless our standing in Christ is sure, we say, 'Yes, there I am—I have sinned again and forfeited the Lord's blessing again; I am not fit except to be outcast from His presence, and out I had better go!' The man who comes on to that ground proves he does not yet know experimentally that in Christ he is other than he is in himself. We are "justified by his blood" (Rom. v. 9). The fact that we have sinned may have grievous effects upon our immediate fellowship with God, but He still sees us righteous in Christ. Oh, this is blessed Gospel to bring to a man labouring under accusation. If it seems to you un-called for, never mind. There may be someone who needs this pressing home—that on the matter of righteousness he is altogether other in Christ than he is in himself.

IN CHRIST—
OTHER ABILITIES FOR SERVICE

But we go on. To us who are in Christ, in the matter of all ability, of all capacity and all ministry, in Christ we are other than we are in ourselves. I believe the Lord wants us to awaken in a new way to the fact that there is ability and capacity and opportunity and ministry and service that may be for you, for me, for each one of us; and there may be no service being rendered in those matters because we say, 'I am only a herdsman, I am only a dresser of sycamore trees; You cannot expect me to be a prophet!' Yes, God expects us to be prophets if we are only herdsmen, He so wills; and, more than that, He guarantees to make us prophets, though we be only herdsmen, if that be His will for us. We should regard it as

sin against God to say, 'I am only what I am—You cannot expect me to do what others do!' God does expect you and me to do this or that—whatever may be His will—though we be just what we are, the little insignificant nothing that we know ourselves to be. God expects Amos to go and prophesy, though he be but a herdsman.

Are you working on the principle, anywhere in life, that 'I am only what I am and so neither the Lord nor the brethren nor any of my friends must expect much of me'? I say let us regard that henceforth as sin against the Lord. If the Lord has chosen you in His sovereign grace to be a prophet, though you be nothing but a herdsman, then a prophet you may be: because it is what you are in the Anointed One that governs this. It has nothing to do with your ability and capacity in yourself, though there may be points where the two seem to be alike; but it is not because you are this in yourself that therefore you are this in Christ. In Christ, Amos is a prophet; in himself he is a herdsman, with no ability, no capacity.

But how does he become this? Because of a heart exercise about the things of the Lord, a concern about the Lord's interests; the joy of the Lord as the aim and goal and reward of the servant. On the same principle that Amos became a prophet, we may become whatsoever the Lord our God chooses sovereignly that we should be. It may not be a prophet—it may be a housewife—it may be anything in the will of God. But let me say here: Do not stretch out beyond the measure. It is what the Lord chooses we should be, not what we would like to be. Each man in his measure—but what is his measure? His measure is the full limit of the will of God, and for Amos the Lord's measure was a prophet, the ministry of a prophet. Whatever your ministry and mine may be, in the will of God, to that full limit we may go, on the same basis as Amos.

THE LORD SAID 'GO!'

But it will call for just that which was called for in his case. Think what it meant to Amos. The call to him was to go to the city, where the king and priest were, the royal city, the city where the idols were, and there publicly denounce. That was not lightly undertaken; that was not an easy task for a herdsman. One of the royal courtiers might have found it an easier job; but for a mere countryman, out of his element, to be found in that company—! Who is he to begin to denounce king and priest? His whole being would say, It is silly to send me, I have no influence, they will not listen to me! Never mind; the Lord said, 'Go,

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prophecy to my people Israel!', and he went. It was not easy.

What is the background of thus entering into this way of ministry? It is the losing of that awful sense of what I am in myself, and standing on the ground of what I am in Christ, the Anointed One. Then I am capable of anything into which He sovereignly commands me and leads me; my strength is the strength of my Lord. The boldness that I need to obey is found in Him. I am quite sure that for some of us there would be much more using of our talent if there were a little more of this spirit of holy daring: 'If I perish, I perish!—but I go at His bidding.' Let me exhort you to stir up zeal in this matter. Oh, how timidly and carefully we move! 'I do not think it is any use my going there', and so I do not go. If in the best sense we could fling discretion to the winds, cast off the restraint of our own fears and awkward self-consciousness, and go! Go—why? Just because the Lord says, 'Go, prophesy!'

Let us seek grace from Him for this. I dare to believe that we shall find springing up amongst us ministries—not necessarily platform ministries—but ministries, the profitable exercise of ourselves in matters desirable to our Lord, an increase and interest for Him. We shall find a great deal more coming to Him, as you and I dare in this matter to do what Amos did. I beseech you, seek the Lord for this—a new spirit of daring, a new holy boldness, a new readiness to cast ourselves from the ship on to the sea. Mark you, Peter said: "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come to thee upon the waters", and the Lord said, 'Come!' (Matt. xiv. 28, 29). That was the secret. It was not just Peter leaping out, thinking, 'I can do that!' The Lord said, 'Come'; therefore he leapt into the water. There ought to be more 'launching out into the deep', because He says, 'Launch out and let down your net!' If He says it, you can dare to trust Him.

But let us beware. So often we say, 'If the Lord will take me out, I am ready to go; if the Lord will give me the courage, I am ready to go!' No, the Lord has said, Go! Why do you tarry? He has said, Go! 'I am waiting for Him now to . . .' To what? 'I don't quite know—I am waiting for Him to do something!' He has said, Go, and as you go all the rest will be found there. He has said, 'Go, prophesy!' All that you have got to do is to go; not to wait for something to happen, but to go. It is as we go that the Spirit of the Lord comes in and makes us sufficient, not while we are waiting, then feeling sufficient we start out full of boldness. He has said, Go. The only thing to do is to go.

Here is the liberating power of the Spirit of the

Lord in a man who is ready to see the difference between what I am in myself and what I am in Christ. Stand on that ground and you are capable of anything that may be in the sovereign will of God for your life.

But again I say, beware lest you fancy some exalted ministry for yourself. Not along that line does the Lord's sufficiency flow. How does it flow?

THE RESTORATION OF WASTED YEARS

Let us move on to Joel. Perhaps you are saying, 'This is happy Gospel, but in my case I have forfeited all that. Many years ago the Lord said, Go, and I did not go, and now what Gospel have you for me?' Well, the Gospel of Joel to my heart is: "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten" (ii. 25). But first of all there comes that lengthy passage about repentance and humbling. "Turn ye unto me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments" (ii. 12, 13). This comes before 'I will restore the years'. It is for want of a humbling, a breaking, a bowing, a confessing before the Lord that the restoration part of the promise is so often withheld. The restoration will come on the basis of real breaking down in heart before the Lord, because of failure and sin and disappointment to Him—having served ourselves rather than Him, having had our own good and gain in view rather than His interest and glory; the rending of heart before Him thus, and 'weeping between the porch and the altar' (ii. 17).

You notice what he says: 'Gather the people, the congregation, the old men, the children, the priests and ministers: let them all come and break down before Me and say, We have failed!' (ii. 16, 17). What can you do with a man who is a confessed failure? Are you a self-confessed failure before God? I mean that from the depths of your soul you feel you are that, not that you make some sort of pious confession of being a sinner. As you stand before God in yourself, are you deeply impressed with your failure, as a man, as a woman who ought to have lived for His glory? If you have not failed, if by any chance you can see stages where there has been blessing, the confession of your heart is, 'Well, if there has been any blessing, all glory be to the Lord's mercy! For myself, it is failure all the way along the line!' Rending the heart is a deep thing, a meaningful thing; not an easy-going confession. That is what the prophet means by 'weeping between the porch and the altar.'

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HOPE FOR FAILURE

If there is an unsaved one reading this, is your heart in that mood before Him, as you think back over the record of your life and you write over it all 'failure' because of sin? If you are, then, says the Lord, 'Fear not, be glad, rejoice, and I will restore to you the years that the locusts have eaten.' There may be facets of this where cautionary words might be needed, if we were attempting to give a full-orbed dissertation upon this matter. I merely want to press the fact that, if there is a real rending of the heart in the presence of God, there is not only the 'forgiveness of sins, that He may be feared' (Ps. cxxx. 4), but there even is the restoring of the years that the locusts have eaten. Can you find encouragement, hope? You say, But how can it be? I answer gladly, I have not the slightest idea! But the Word of God says: "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten".

You know the book of Joel. It is the story of a terrible locust plague that ate up every green thing. Do you know how the Lord could restore the harvest the locust had eaten? I do not, but here is His Word. There is a marvellous recovering power in the saving ministry of our blessed Lord Jesus, that can take a wrecked and wasted life and somehow recover things in that life. But, you say, they are past, they are irrecoverable! That may be the human view, but He can restore things, recover dead things. Things that are not He takes as things that are (Rom. iv. 17b). Can you believe it? For those who in brokenness before Him are ready to confess the failure, He is able to restore. But this confession of failure demands a truly broken heart, a broken spirit, on my part, if He is to restore my years. It is not for me to stand superior to another. Let me get down alongside of him, and confess with him and say, Lord, we have sinned! That is what Daniel did, that is what Nehemiah did. Oh, to know this breaking! We need it, this rending of the heart. It is the way to restoration, to power with God.

What comes after this? "I will pour out my Spirit" (ii. 28). Do you want to know the Spirit in power? Well, begin by rending your heart and claiming His marvellous restoring ability. This is the glory of what it means to be 'in Christ'—that is the "land" mentioned here (Joel i. 6). I am in Christ, that is why I can look for restoring mercy. If you are so oppressed with the poverty of your miserable record; if you are under the burden and oppression of failure and wasted years and lost opportunity, until you are so sick at heart that you

wish you could go out and disappear for ever from human sight; I tell you, He can, *if you will*, restore the years that the locust hath eaten.

NO 'SETTLING ON THE LEES'

How does this happen? Turn now to Zephaniah. It happens on this basis.

"And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with lamps; and I will punish the men that are settled on their lees, that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil" (Zeph. i. 12).

"Men that are settled on their lees". What sort of men are these? Everything in the tumbler has just settled down; there is the deposit at the bottom, and the rest is clear liquid. Everything is perfectly still; no movement, no shaking, no revolt against existing things. These are the men who are saying: "The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil." 'The Lord has just ceased operations—He has gone out of business; and I am just in my little corner, and I am what I am and I can never be anything else; so I have just settled down, and that is where I am!'

You get the point. That is not how the Lord restores the years. How does He restore the years? By putting into the spirit of man the conviction that, 'Though it has been thus, I have met a Saviour in Christ who can undo the past, recover what has been lost, raise the dead!' So far from simply settling down and saying, 'God has ceased operations', this man says, 'I have found a Christ who can change all that!' In Christ, God has not gone out of business: in Christ God has started a new line of things—the resurrection line! In business, if a man can start a new line, he advertises it, and there is a roaring trade if it is good. God started a 'good line' when He raised His Son from the dead. God is not out of business, and the particular line in which He excels is in taking poor, broken things, poor wasted lives, and transforming them. But He does not only transform them into future usefulness. He can do a lot better than that. He can go back into the irrecoverable past of failure, and somehow make even that to be to His glory. Do you believe it?

But this is how the restoring matter goes on, by a living faith in such a God. He can restore on those terms. Oh, if your heart is sick with the sorrow of disappointment and failure, I beg you to rise up in faith and say, 'Lord, you can make things different: henceforth I can be what I never have been, and, better than that, the very failures that have been can somehow wonderfully be

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turned to make their contribution too.' Blessed be the Lord, what wondrous power there is in the resurrection of Christ! "The restitution of all things" (Acts iii. 21)—what a large phrase that is! Things that have been marred by sin are going to be restored. "Elijah . . . cometh, and shall restore all things" (Matt. xvii. 11). I love that word 'restore'. It means the thing that has been a marred failure can be restored; the broken vessel can be 'made again another vessel' (Jer. xviii. 4).

But the thing that the Lord is wanting to stress is just a warning against this business of settling down on the lees. Have any of us taken this final position—'This is my measure: do not expect me to be more than that!?' Why not, if the Lord wills that you should be more? 'Well, I am just me—I am not one of these great people!' There is a great peril along that line of reasoning; of saying, 'The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil: I am just in my little corner, and you stay in your little corner, and let each of us shine with our own little light!' Is that your attitude on any matter? Can you see, either in your life generally, or in your life with your own company of the Lord's people—can you see the peril of your just being in your own little niche? 'That is my little niche!' I would be the messenger of a great spirit of revolt, to overturn every semblance in any heart of satisfaction with the place and the measure and the ministry that we are individually fulfilling. Will you rebel against that to-day? I preach the gospel of revolution against settling down on the lees!

"STIR INTO FLAME"

What does Paul say about this? Paul writes to Timothy: 'On a certain occasion, when men

prayed over you, a certain gift was deposited in you. What happened to that gift?' You deposit something in a glass; it will bubble its way to the bottom, and in a few moments there is perfect calm. It lies gently on the bottom of the glass. You have just made a momentary stir, and now the thing has settled down. How will you cause that thing which is there to be active? Paul put it this way—it is changing the figure—'Stir into a flame the gift that was given you—stir it up!' (II Tim. i. 6). Has not the Lord deposited in us some gift of His Spirit? Are we stirring it up, or is it just lying there nicely and quietly?

That is what the man did in the parable. He dug a nice little hole and put his gift in it. He had a gift, but he failed to stir up that gift, and he met condemnation, wrath and indignation. That is a more solemn note, but I think it is well to say it. God has deposited in every saved one among us the gift of His Spirit. That very fact has laid us under solemn responsibility, that we may one day have to face Him—not to hear Him say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant', but to say, 'What have you done over that spiritual capacity, that gift I gave you?' 'Lord, I have kept it safe all the time—I have still got it!' 'You might as well have been without it, and so might I: you have robbed Me of all that was intended to work to increase for Me!'

Ask the Lord for grace to stir up the gift, and we shall find our life undergoes a complete change. We shall find silent lips opening, lives that were in a certain realm inactive becoming busy. The Lord help us to do this, and thus minister to His satisfaction.

G. P.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

RIGHT ON TIME

WHEN Jackson Minor was asked to play in the School Orchestra he could hardly believe that it was true. It may be added that the news caused both mirth and unbelief among his friends. For a year or two now he had played the trombone in the School Band which every day except Sundays played a march in the Quadrangle while the rest of the School filed into the Dining Hall for dinner. That was easy enough and even his crony, Forbes, had got so used to it that he no longer troubled to crack jokes about Jackson's rendering of famous marches.

But the Orchestra! That was quite a different matter. For the Orchestra played classical symphonies at the big School Concert, and while it had some senior boys in its ranks it also had masters, and even masters' wives. This year, so it seemed, they were playing music which required a trombone, and so it was that Jackson Minor was asked to come along with his instrument to the first rehearsal. When the evening came, he presented himself rather nervously, and in due course was given his seat and handed his music score.

For him it was an evening of surprises. The first

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

was young Hurst. Now this boy was no good at games, and in consequence was rather despised by Jackson and his friends, who neither knew nor cared that he played the violin. It so happened that he played well, and he was in the first violins, which meant that he sat right up in the front. There he was, hobnobbing with all sorts of important people in the school, and even seeming to be at his ease among the exalted company. He had never taken any notice of Hurst, and took it for granted that everybody else felt the same, but clearly he was well received here. Jackson had to admit that Rugger was not everything, and that there might be more in Hurst than he and his friends had realised.

His amazement was even greater when he looked to the back of the platform and saw there Mr. Fortune, the master who was his special hero. Mr. Fortune was very brainy, had won rank and distinction in the war, and had played cricket for his county. Yet instead of being given the lime-light, he was pushed right to the back, and he didn't seem to mind. Moreover when the music was being played and young Hurst was fiddling away with all his might, the great Mr. Fortune was either standing waiting meekly for his turn, or just strumming quietly away on his double bass. Jackson was learning some new lessons about values.

However he did not have long to meditate on these discoveries, for the time soon came when he was called upon to try over his part. He had not looked very carefully at his score yet, for there was so much else to attract his attention, but he had seen enough to know that it was fairly short—mercifully short it seemed to him. Here, though, he made a mistake. For the long intervals between the bars which he had to play, although called 'rests', were so far from restful that he could only wish himself back with the Band. There was no mercy about those rests!

In the Band he rarely had rest bars; he mostly had just to keep on playing. It was true that one had to learn the music and keep time, but on the whole it was straightforward. In this symphony there were long periods when he did not have to

play at all. He just had to wait. He couldn't look round. He couldn't even think of anything else. The one thing to do was to concentrate on counting bar after bar, sometimes dozens of them at a time, in order to be ready to come in at the right moment. The most absurd thing was to call them 'rests', for they were worse than hard work. How he envied the others, young Hurst among them, who only had to go on playing away without a care in the world, while here was he, waiting and counting—'One, Two, Three . . . Thirty four, Thirty five, Thirty six . . .' and so on.

As to the parts which he had to play, well, he needed practice to get them well enough to satisfy the Music Master who was conducting. At least he could practise those parts, and finally master them, but you cannot practise waiting, neither can you master it. Every fresh time when they rehearsed he still had to concentrate as much as ever. Once he thought that he knew the section well enough to come in at the right moment, but suddenly he had a horrible fear that it had passed, and then he panicked and came in too soon. This brought a frown from the conductor, and from a few others too, and Jackson, blushing furiously, rather thought that he could see a grin on the face of the once-despised Hurst. They had to play the passage all over again, so he decided never to repeat his mistake but to stick to the counting. When the great night came he succeeded and played his part well. It was a humble part, but a necessary one, and no doubt helped to make the concert a good one.

The lesson which he then learned was the one which all Christians need to know, and which is one of the hardest to learn. It is the lesson of waiting. Not just lounging about, leaving things to other people, but holding yourself ready at the right moment to play your chosen part in the Lord's service. Waiting to come in right on time. We can spoil the Lord's plans by being too soon, just as we can spoil them by being too late. We need to know how to wait for Him. "They that wait for me shall not be ashamed" (Isaiah 49. 23). 'Wait thou *His* time'.

H. F.

from page 67

Lapwai, Idaho \$2; Los Angeles, Calif. \$10, \$5; Manhattan Beach, Calif. \$2; Minneapolis, Minn. \$1; Mobile, Ala. \$5; Montclair, N. J. \$7; Orange, N. J. \$4.40; Orlando, Fla. \$1.32; Oskaloosa, Iowa \$5; Port Jervis, N. Y. \$3; Runnemede, N. J. \$2; St. Paul, Minn. \$3; San Antonio, Texas \$1.70; San Francisco, Calif. \$5; Tulare, Calif. \$5; Water-

town, Mass. \$5; Wheaton, Ill. \$3; Winchester, Mass. \$3.

| | | |
|-----------------------|-------|--------------|
| | Total | \$155.07 |
| Coboconk, Ont. | | C.\$2.00 |
| Amsterdam, Holland | | Gld.10.00 |
| Wolhusen, Switzerland | | Sw.Frs.20.00 |

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THE OCTAVE OF REDEMPTION

V. THE ASCENSION AND GLORIFYING OF THE LORD JESUS

"The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day in which he was received up, after that he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit unto the apostles whom he had chosen" (Acts i. 1, 2).

"We behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour" (Hebrews ii. 9).

"Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name" (Philippians ii. 9).

WE have not attached sufficient importance to the ascension. We make much of the birth of the Lord Jesus; a great deal is made of His resurrection; something is made of Pentecost: but the ascension, while mentioned, is given very little attention, almost passed over. Yet it has immense significance: it is, in fact, one of the major features in the scale of redemption's work. Drop it out, and the scale is not complete.

We have been speaking about the octave, the rising scale. Sound, as we know, is caused by vibrations in the air, but it is discerned by a wonderful mechanism in the ear. In the human ear there is a minute structure, like a little harp, which has no fewer than 10,000 chords. When a sound reaches it, a chord corresponding to that sound vibrates, and the vibration is transmitted to, and interpreted by, the brain, so that we are able to distinguish different sounds and recognise their origin. Now in the scale, or the octave, the higher we go, the more vibrations we get. There are only comparatively few vibrations on the lower notes. But the higher we go, the more vibrations there are, and the more alive and atune the ear needs to be. There are some sounds that are so high that the human ear cannot hear them.

My point is just this: that the higher we get in spiritual things, the more sensitive we have to be in order to discern. Perhaps the Lord had that in mind when He said: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. xi. 15, etc.). There needs to be a corresponding response to what is being said. And when we come to the ascension, we are getting well up on the scale. Here is something of very great importance in the whole octave of redemption. It is a great turning-point, upon which every-

thing revolves. We have to try now to answer in some small way the question: Why the ascension and glorifying?

THE DISCIPLES' JOY

It is surely one of the strongest arguments for the resurrection of the Lord Jesus that the disciples, and those who had been with Him during His earthly life, were so glad at last to let Him go. As we pointed out before, whenever He had referred to His coming departure, the idea of it had struck terror and consternation into their hearts. Indeed, those words of His recorded at the beginning of John xiv—"Let not your heart be troubled"—were uttered because of that very thing. He was speaking about His going, and they were filled with perplexity and dismay. If He went, they saw no hope, no future: everything for them simply disintegrated. They could not bear to think of His departure. How much of His time, in those last days with them, was occupied with this matter of His going, and with His efforts to allay their fears and to reassure them! They could not accept it. It was a dark shadow on their horizon.

But here, when it came to the actual departure, what a change! No sign of gloom whatsoever. He lifts up His hands and blesses them, and, as He does so, is received up into Heaven, out of their sight. There is no suggestion of terror, or even of loss. If we can rightly discern the atmosphere, that moment was anything but one of sadness. Something had happened to make them realise that all that He had said about it was true. This was no change for the worse, but a change for the infinitely better. They "returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Luke xxiv. 52). Something has happened. I repeat: I think the fact that such a change should take place in them is one of the strongest arguments for the resurrection. And I feel that you and I, and all the Lord's people to-day, need to catch something of that which was in their hearts. We need to capture something of that joy—that the Lord has "gone up" (Ps. xlvii. 5)! We have not lost Him; rather by His going up to the Father have we greatly gained. Our gain in His going up is something upon which to dwell.

A NEW BEGINNING

Let us come to our question again: Why the Ascension and Glorifying? To begin with, it was

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a turning-point in the dispensation ; it marked a new beginning of things. We catch a glimpse of what was happening from some of the Psalms. Psalm xxii: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"; Psalm xxiv (which is surely a prophetic psalm): "Lift up your heads, O ye gates ; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors : and the King of glory shall come in" (v. 7). It is all of a piece. And if that Psalm xxiv begins, as it does: "The earth is the Lord's . . .", and continues: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?" (v. 3), we look back for the answer to Psalm xxiii. It is the Shepherd of the sheep—*such* a Shepherd—who will "dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (v. 6). It is He who ascends into the hill of the Lord, who has 'clean hands and a pure heart, not having lifted up His soul unto vanity' (xxiv. 4). This is He. And now the "everlasting doors" are waiting for Him.

So we can catch the picture. It is as though Heaven is in suspense, and earth is silent. There is a pause. Psalm xxii has all been enacted—the awful Cross, the terrible forsakenness, the desolation. He has been laid in the tomb. And now God has raised Him from the dead. But Heaven is waiting for something. And then the cry goes up: He is coming! The angels and the heavenly hosts break forth: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates ; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors : and the King of glory shall come in." 'He is on the way, He is coming: open the gates for Him!' It is the picture of His ascension, His exaltation, of His return to Heaven. The point is that everything was waiting for that. Nothing more could happen until that took place. Yes, the preparation has been made down there on the earth ; all that work has been done by the Cross ; everything is ready. But in Heaven the mood is: 'We are waiting—we cannot go on until He is back here, until He is in His place, His rightful place.' All waits for that. Everything is in suspense until that happens. This ascension, this exaltation, this glorifying of the Lord Jesus is something momentous. It must therefore have some very great meaning for us.

EVERYTHING NOW CENTRED
IN HEAVEN

I was saying that it is a new beginning, for which all the preparation has been made in the Cross. What is the new beginning? Well, a tremendous change has taken place in the character, the nature of the dispensation. In the old dispensation, under the old covenant, everything was centred in a spot on this earth and in a nation amongst the nations : Jerusalem the focal point, Palestine the country,

the Jews the nation. All centred there ; it focused upon something earthly, something temporal and something transient—something, indeed, that was capable of completely breaking down, as it has done. Now the whole thing is taken away from the earth, and the focal point of everything is in Heaven. *Heaven* holds the centre of all Divine interests, the source of, and resources for, all Divine activities. Heaven is the place now—for *He Himself* is there! The new dispensation is marked by this: but oh, that the Church had neither forgotten it, nor failed to see it! The centre, the headquarters, the seat of government is now in Heaven, beyond the reach and the touch of time and earth and change and the possibility of breakdown! Are we too familiar with the teaching to be reminded that the Church is now a heavenly people and not an earthly, and that all our spiritual blessings are in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus (Eph. i. 3)? But that does have some very valuable practical meanings.

Consider this about the Lord Jesus, for instance. When He was here on this earth, He was, in a manner of speaking, at the mercy of men and things ; He was governed very largely by earthly conditions. Men could treat Him as they would—and they did. It is a truly amazing thing, is it not, that they should have treated God incarnate as they did? And at length they ushered Him to His death. That is how they treated Him, how they handled Him—speaking from the standpoint of the world and men. But no one can do that now: no one can touch Him now, no one can in any way handle Him now. He is right above all such conditions and possibilities. Does it not bring tremendous rest, satisfaction, comfort to our hearts to know that? He is outside the reach of all these things that are against Him. He is beyond the touch of all the antagonistic forces set upon His destruction. He is right above them all, above all rule and authority and principality and power (Eph. i. 21), absolutely safe, and we need never have one moment's fear for Him, never have a moment's unrest.

THE TRUE CHURCH NOW WITH CHRIST
IN HEAVEN

Why am I saying that? Because it is of very great practical application and value. For *the Church is a heavenly body, seated with Him* (Eph. ii. 6). We therefore need have no moment's worry about the true Church. Come down to the earth and see how men worry about their 'church' and their churches, and their 'things'. They have got to look after the 'thing': they have got to

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take care of it, they have got to keep it. They are the custodians of this thing, and they watch jealously and fiercely over it. What a lot of worry they have, and what a lot of trouble—just because it is something on the earth that has got to be looked after. What a grand thing it is, then, to be in the realm of the heavenly Church, where there is no need to worry about trying to preserve something and keep it going and see that it does not pass out! There is nothing of that at all about a work that is a heavenly work, that is united with Christ in Heaven. There is all the difference when you are on heavenly ground. You need not worry or fret to try and keep the thing going, lest it should break down, and you would be left without your 'pet', without the thing for which you spent all your time and your resources. A heavenly thing is in the custodianship of One who—thank God—is above all these things, and at rest.

This is what the Lord said: "In my Father's house are many *resting-places* . . . I go to prepare a place for you" (John xiv. 2). When you get on to heavenly ground you come to rest, just as He has come to rest. You need not to worry—only keep on that ground. If you are going to worry at all—if you *must* worry—worry lest you get down on to earthly ground, for that *is* the realm of worry. Keep above. Heavenly things are in safe keeping—in the keeping of the One who is "far above all".

But it means more than that. "Every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ", and we seated there with Him. That heavenly union with Christ means such abundance, such fulness, that we need never worry about spiritual supplies. It is just marvellous what resources, what supplies will come, if only we get on to the right ground, into the right position. If you are spiritually down on this earth (a contradiction in terms!), you will have to worry over your supplies. If you are down on the natural level of ministry, just see how hard you have got to work in order to get something to pass on. But get up into the open heaven, on to heavenly ground, and every spiritual blessing, abundance, fulness, follows. These are no abstract things; these are realities. It is one of the miracles of heavenly sustenance—the never-ending supplies all the way along. You feel you have come to the end, and there is nothing more, and then there comes another fulness; and again you seem to have exhausted everything, you have not got another crumb—and yet another fulness is forthcoming. Every time He wants it and there is a need for it, it is like that. And so you go on through the years.

This is all a part of His being in Heaven and the

Church being joined with Him in Heaven. This is a part of the answer to the question: Why the ascension and the glorification of our Lord Jesus?

GOD'S ATTESTATION TO A HEAVENLY VICTORY

But further, His ascension and His glorifying are God's own attestation of His Person and work. That is what the Scriptures say. That is the meaning of such passages as: "No man hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven" (John iii. 13). This is the attestation of His Person. We have noticed Psalm xxiv as following Psalm xxii. Psalm xxiv is the attestation of the One who in Psalm xxii cried: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Heaven breaks forth in attesting that One and His work in the Cross. At the beginning of this chapter we read Philippians ii. 9: "Wherefore"—through 'obedience unto death, the death of the Cross'—"God highly exalted him". That is the attestation of Him and His work. The same is true of the passage that we read from Hebrews ii. 9: "We behold him . . . because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour". His exaltation and His glorification proclaim His victory. "Who is this King of glory?" "The Lord mighty in battle" (Ps. xxiv. 10, 8). He enters in, He proclaims His victory.

Now, although we may be familiar with this, and it may be no new information to us, it is very necessary for us always to keep in mind that the real conflict and the real victory was in the heavenlies. The conflict was not with flesh and blood, it was not with Jewish rulers and leaders, it was not with Roman officials, or with the Roman Empire itself. Behind all these things was another, a spiritual empire, unseen, but very, very real, and we know it. It was in that realm that the real conflict took place. It was the encounter between two spiritual kingdoms and empires, and it was there that the real victory was won. It was a victory over those 'principalities and powers and world-rulers of this darkness and hosts of wicked spirits'. He went behind this outward world-system and dealt with everything lying behind what is here; it was in that realm that He established His victory.

It is true that difficulties arise in our minds when we see things going badly—a James killed, a Stephen martyred, thousands cast into the Roman arena and butchered; when, as to-day, we see countless homes and families broken up, and servants and people of God cast into prison. It is not difficult to wonder—Is He on the throne? is it true that He is over all? But this Kingdom of His

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

is a 'long-term' thing, if we may use the expression. Perhaps you have watched a race of crack runners in which there is one outstanding famous athlete. They start off on the race, and he seems to be the most indifferent of them all. He lets them all get ahead of him, and as they pass him there is not the slightest trace of anxiety on his face. He lets them get on with it. Everybody thinks that they are winning and he is beaten. But—wait until the end. He has such a store of energy that, at the last minute, when they are all spent, he calls upon his reserves and takes the race quite easily. It is the tremendous victory of competence and reserve.

The Lord Jesus is like that. That is exactly what is happening to-day. It looks as though His rival is having it his way, is getting ahead, and it does not seem that the Lord is very worried about it. We can discover no trace of anxiety or fret or feverish concern in the Lord. It is not that He is indifferent, but He knows what His reserves are—He knows what He can do. And again and again it has proved like that. In the end He has come in first—He has taken the race. He did it over the Roman Empire at the beginning, and He has done it repeatedly since. He has just let the enemy get ahead, seeming to have it all his own way, and then in the end, with His infinite reserves and competence, He has got it in His hand—He has collected all the prizes.

THE ASSURANCE OF FINAL VICTORY

It is like that for the Church. We may feel to-day that the enemy is having things a good deal his own way. It seems sometimes as though the Lord is a long way behind the enemy. But wait! He said to His disciples, as the last word: "I am with you . . . unto the consummation of the age" (Matt. xxviii. 20): "I will be there at the end." The Lord Jesus will not be out of it at the end, He will be there. It will be the enemy who will be out.

In a day such as ours, I think that we need to gather something of the strength and consolation and help of this. We could easily be oppressed. A few years ago we heard, from the Far East, of the arrest and imprisonment all over the country of over a thousand brothers and sisters and leading workers, who had so faithfully and fully served the Lord for many years. We may not be having the same story of actual physical suffering and imprisonment, but we are in the same battle, and the spiritual pressure is terrible. The atmosphere is just full of antagonism. We need help, encouragement. And from where can we derive that help, more than from the fact that He, the Lord, has gone up on high, and is there on the throne?

That is only the first thing about it, but it is a mighty thing. This is presented to us in the record, out of the so manifest effect that it had upon those who were there. And we must remember that Luke was a very meticulous historian. He tells us that he took pains to look into and gather the data correctly, accurately. Luke would never have put this in his record if he had had any question or doubt about it. He had plenty of evidence for everything that he wrote in this book of the Acts. Here you have these men, under circumstances and conditions which would naturally have resulted in something so much the opposite, just like this—triumphant, positively triumphant! Their Lord has gone from them, He has been received up in a cloud out of their sight. He has gone: what ought they to feel like? But they are not in sorrow. They go triumphing, and to triumph, because He has gone up!

The exaltation of the Lord Jesus is here presented to our faith as a great note in the octave of redemption. The knowledge that the Lord is up there is intended to redeem us from fear and uncertainty, to redeem us from overwhelming depression and oppression in the day of apparent calamity. It is as though the Holy Spirit would seek to say, if not in words, in effect, in those who are thus suffering: "It is all right—He is on the throne! Jesus reigns—He is on the throne—He has gone up on high!" I believe they will come through because of this truth. It is a great factor in redemption.

A REPRESENTATIVE MAN HAS REACHED THE GOAL

But I said it is only one part of the great truth. There is another large part which can only be hinted at at this time. "What . . . if ye should behold the Son of man ascending where he was before?" (John vi. 62). 'The Son of Man ascending . . .' That very title is indicative of a great and wonderful truth. It brings us right into the Letter to the Hebrews. "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou . . . didst set him over the works of thy hands; thou didst put all things in subjection under his feet . . . But now we see not yet all things subjected to him" (Heb. ii. 6-8). Man has not yet come to that for which he was made; it is not all realised yet. "But we behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour" (v. 9). What does it all mean?

Here is the Son of Man, in whom, as a First

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One, is realised all the Divine intention concerning man, His very creation. It would be profitable at this point to enter upon a detailed study of the Hebrew letter, especially in its first chapters. "*For not unto angels did he subject the inhabited earth to come, whereof we are speaking. But one hath somewhere testified saying, What is man . . . ?*" (ii. 5, 6). The subjecting to man of the future inhabited earth is what is in view. We do not yet see all things in subjection under man; but we see his Representative in Heaven, with all things in subjection under *Him*, for man. It is secured for man in the representative Man in Heaven.

The writer continues: "*Wherefore, holy brethren, partners of a heavenly calling . . .*" (iii. 1). It is all of a piece, you see. The "heavenly calling"—what is it? To be in fellowship with Him, in partnership with Him—"For both he that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren . . ." (ii. 11, 12). 'Wherefore, holy brethren, partners with Him and with one another in the heavenly calling . . .' What is it? To have dominion over the inhabited earth to come. He is there, having secured that purpose of God in His own Person, representing the people, the 'many sons' whom He is 'bringing to glory' (ii. 10). That is why He has "ascended up on high" (Ps. lxxviii. 18; Eph. iv. 8). It signifies a Man installed, in full possession of the eternal intention of God concerning man; installed there as a First One of the many sons being brought to glory.

Perhaps you ask: What is the difference between the heavenly rule and government now, and that in the old dispensation? For the heavens did rule then. In the days of Daniel the heavens were ruling (Dan. iv. 26; cf. vv. 17, 25, 32). Yes, they were ruling in the old dispensation. But what is the difference? That question throws open an immense door, and this whole Letter to the Hebrews will answer it. It is the great difference between a purely earthly and temporal dispensation, and one that is eternal and heavenly and spiritual. It comprises all the differences that are mentioned in this very letter—the letter of the "better" things. In the heavenly government of the Son of Man you come into something so much better than the general

sovereignty of God in the old dispensation. That is far too big a matter for us to consider here, but it all centres in the question of why He is there in the glory—why He has gone up, why He has ascended and is glorified. It implies some very great and challenging things that Jesus is in Heaven.

PRACTICAL TESTING

Now let me close with this. It is one thing for us to know the truth about the Church being a heavenly body, a heavenly people; to know what the Word says about being 'seated together with Him in the heavenlies', and being 'blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies'; perhaps even to be able to give Bible readings on it; and a very, very different thing to be in the good of it! Remember that it is a law throughout the Bible that you are always tested right up to the hilt, to the last degree, on every position that you take. Your testing corresponds to the position that you have taken and declared. So that, if you say, 'I take my heavenly position', you are going to be tested right up to the hilt on your heavenly position. You will have nothing down here on this earth to support you; you will have to get all your support from Heaven. You will have nothing here to protect you; you will have to get all your protection from Heaven. You will have nothing here to champion you; you will have to get all your championing from Heaven. You will be tested on your position. But, praise God, that position is an eternal, impregnable one. It is a position that can stand the test.

This whole matter is very searching. The disciples came into the joy of it at the beginning, and much of that joy remained throughout; but it is clear that sometimes they had a real battle on this question. They had to fight to hold that ground—the ground that Jesus is Lord. Conditions demanded a very strong affirmation of it, a digging of the heels in and saying, in spite of everything: 'He is Lord!' This is no romantic kind of thing—this is desperate. So the Apostle says: 'Stand . . . withstand . . . having done all, stand!' Where? "Our wrestling" is "in the heavenlies": stand there with Him!

T. A-S.

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A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

"WE KNOW . . ."

Reading: Romans viii. 31—39.

"We know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose" (Romans viii. 28).

I rather prefer what the margin of my Bible tells me is according to some ancient authorities. It is this:

"We know that, to them that love God, God worketh all things with them for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose."

ALL things do not of themselves always work together for good, and we do not need telling that what the Lord meant by this verse is very far from the ordinary kind of cheery optimism which says that everything is for good. It is not. There is a great deal of evil in this world, but God can make things that in themselves are evil to be for the good of those who love the Lord and who are called according to purpose. It is not always easy to believe that everything that comes to us is especially planned by God as being for our good. There is a sense in which that is true, but I say it is very hard to believe it sometimes. But this we must believe, that the Lord not only permits, but lays hold of, everything that comes to us, and, evil though it maybe in itself, makes it to be for our good. What a God we have! And that is the point of this verse which says, "We know . . ."

Now, what do we know? If we have been Christians many years, it would be an interesting task to make a list of the things that we have found out we did not know, after all. We thought we knew many things, but the more we go on, the less inclined we are to be dogmatic about them; we are not so sure now that we know. But there is one knowledge that surely must be deepening and strengthening in us all the time. We know, not so much what is happening, but we know who is in control of what is happening. We know that God works all things for good, and that is the knowledge that is to come to us with encouragement; and God knows the saints need encouragement. For our enheartening, let us remember and let us lay hold of this: the thousand things that we do not know and that perplex us—and that will, if we are occupied with them, dispirit us, dishearten us; that are insoluble problems to us—we can afford to put them on one side and say, I do not know why this or that is happening, but I do

know my God, and I know that He is in control of them all!

GOD FOR US

Now, there are three relationships with God that are mentioned in this chapter that surely lie as the very foundation of the strength of such a knowledge of God, and the first of them is that we know that God is for us even though everything seems to be against us. That was what the Apostle was saying in this chapter when he gave the list of the kind of things that the saints were suffering. It is a fairly complete one and, taken on its face value, seems very strongly to contradict the fact that God was for them. If God is for me, why tribulation? if God is for me, why anguish, why persecution, why famine, why peril? why this, why that? Well, we do not know why; we shall only get in a muddle if we try to sort it out. We have to come back to what we do know. We know that, in spite of all this that seems to be against us, through all this, God is for us, He is on our side.

So the Apostle does not mean to say that, because God is for us, we have a smooth time and nothing comes against us. What he says, looking round on it all, is, It is against us, bitterly against us, but if God is for us, who can be against us? The ultimate issue is certain because God is for us, even though—and this is the strangest mystery of it all—even though at times God Himself seems to be against us. Take the history of Job. It looked as if God was against him. There are times in which God does seem to be against us. He does not prosper the way that we wanted to take; He brings disciplinary trials into our lives, He chastens; and yet, even when God seems to be against us, we have this assurance back of it all, He is for us! He may be against something in us, but He is for us. You remember Jacob who, at the end of his life, made this rather petulant and yet very bitter cry, "All these things are against me" (Gen. xlii. 36)—and they were. That was the history of Jacob's life. Everything that seemed to promise good turned out to his wounding and crippling, and there is a sense in which that was not just things happening to him. It was God who was standing across his path all the time; God, in a sense, was against him. And yet we know, because we know the end of the story, God had set His love upon Jacob, God was for Jacob, and the discipline that came to him was itself the surest

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proof that God so loved Jacob and had such a plan of love for him that He would never let him go his own way. Thank God when He stands against us, for we know that behind His so doing there is a love that is for us.

God is for us. What was true of Jacob was true of Jacob's people, and is true right to this day. How often the Lord seemed to be against them; how often the Lord sent trials and punishments to them, and yet God was for them as He was for no other nation. To-day the world looks on and says, God is against the Jews (and if they take things at their face value, we can quite understand people saying that God is against us). In a sense He is against them in their carnal state, against them in their flesh, against them in their earthliness; but "the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. xi. 29), and one day an amazed world will stand and say: All the time, after all, God was for this people! We shall see, the world will see, the amazing fact that, in spite of centuries of persecution, anguish, trial and suffering, God was not against them in the ultimate sense, God was really for them—and He will prove it.

Now God can take centuries to do that when He is dealing with a nation. It is a smaller world when we come to our own: particular little lives, but, blessed be God, the same thing is true. Do lay hold of this. God is *for us*; when everything is against, God is for us; when it seems as if even He is against you, He is, in fact, for you. "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?" God is for us.

GOD WITH US

Then there is another great truth that comes out very clearly in this chapter. God is with us. It does not say that, but it says a great deal about the impossibility of separating between God and His people, and in positive terms it means just this, that God is with us. There was a man who, in his own eyes and in fact, was the weakest of the weak among God's people. In a day of great oppression, when everything seemed to suggest that God had deserted His people, an angel of the Lord came to this least member of the least of the tribes, and said, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour" (Judges vi. 12). Now, if ever there was a man who felt weak, it was Gideon; if ever there was a man who *was* weak, it was Gideon; if ever there was a man who, once he stepped forward in faith, had to go through further processes of weakening, it was Gideon. The little that he seemed to

have, the Lord took away from him, until, humanly speaking, he was left with a pitifully inadequate band. But in that strange encircling of the enemy's camp, when they blew their trumpets and displayed their lights in weakness, it was proved that, in the hour of their apparently most futile stand, God was with them (Judges vii. 19 - 23).

The trouble with us is that, maybe like Gideon, we are all too inclined to say: When I feel strong, I shall know that God is with me; when He has so answered my prayer that I feel adequate and sufficient for the situation that confronts me, then I shall know that God is with me! Well, if we maintain that attitude, we shall never know, as Gideon would never have known if he had waited for that feeling. The angel came to him in his greatest weakness and said, "Go in this thy might" (Judges vi. 14), and Gideon had to step out with no proofs that God was with him, with everything increasingly suggesting how hopeless was the task which he was facing. How often it is like that; but this is the assurance, that we *know*, we know *God*; we know God is *for us*; we know, as we humbly seek to walk before Him, that God is *with us*.

It is a very sad thing that so many of God's children do not get the joyful experiences of finding, almost to their surprise, that God is with them, because they never step out in faith; they are waiting to *feel* that He is with them, and they never will and they never do. They have never had the joy of opening their lips in testimony to some other person as to their Saviour. Maybe you say: I am so weak, and so on. Exactly, but God is with you. You say, If God were with me, I could do it! God is with you. As you humbly walk before Him, you will find God is with you. It is the same in public utterance in prayer among His people. Oh, this is the assurance that the Lord would bring to our hearts, that in our greatest weakness and most conscious frailty, if we will step out, we shall, in new ways, make the blessed discovery of the fact that God is with us.

I know that needs qualification. The little story of the New Testament that most carefully guards this assumption that the Lord is with us, is, I think, the story of how Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the Temple when He was twelve years of age. Returning from Jerusalem, confidently and in a carefree way, they went upon their journey, as it says, "*supposing* him to be in the company" (Luke ii. 44). Well, it is quite easy to do that, just to go on our own way and take it for granted that the Lord is with us. But at the end of the day, they found the Lord was not with them, and they

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had to go back to the beginning ; and it took three days for them to find Him. **How true to experience that is ; some of us know it. We have taken our way—our own way—counting on the fact that the Lord was with us, and then at last we have discovered we were wrong, and we have had to go back, and it has taken much longer to find Him than it did to lose Him. That is the covering, guarding note, and it is a very necessary one.**

But the encouragement is this—however faulty we are, however weak we are, however ignorant we may feel ourselves to be over spiritual things, as in humbleness of heart we walk before Him, we can have this assurance, that, whether we feel like it or not, *God is with us!* And as we step out in our frailty, we find the blessed fact made real in experience, *God is with us, praise His Name!* *God is with us. Oh, to believe it and to act upon it more.*

GOD IN US

And then the other truth which runs so clearly all through this chapter is: *God is in us.* That is the remedy given for every need. As you read the eighth chapter of **Romans** you find that this is the secret all the time—**Christ in you.** Oh, blessed truth, oh, wonderful fact! **God is in us.** That is a fact. That is why the **Apostle says in such a downright, positive way, “If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom. viii. 9).** If you can put yourself into that place of utter separation from the Lord, so that it can be said of you that you are none of His, well, you have not the Spirit, but none of us is going to say that about himself. When the worst is said, and there is plenty of bad to be said, we know we are His. Praise His Name, we are His!

Well then, we have the Spirit of Christ in us. That is a fact. But it is a fact that needs to be reckoned on, that calls for the exercise of faith. On the one hand, there are those who make the easy assumption that, because they are Christians, they have the Spirit, but they never seem to bother any more about it. That is wrong. On the other hand, there is that constant crying to the Lord, as though we had not the Spirit, that He would give Him to us. That is also wrong. There is a mid-way truth : what is that? It is the patient, persistent exercise of faith before the Lord that God is in His holy temple, that God is in us. It is a fact, but it is a fact that demands our faith's appropriation.

There is one picture in the Bible that gives this so very clearly that it surely will repay another glance, and that is the story of the widow to whom Elisha brought deliverance (II Kings iv. 1 - 7). Her

husband had died and her sons were going to be taken into slavery. Have you realised that there lies in the story this truth, the fact that God is in us? Everything that provided for her help and deliverance, she already had. “What hast thou in the house?” asked Elisha ; and you know what she answered: “Thy handmaid hath not anything in the house, save a pot of oil.” Well, you know how oil speaks of the Spirit. The great lesson of that story to me is this: Elisha brought nothing into the house for her deliverance, he simply showed her the way of appropriating what she had. **It was as good as nothing to her ; and so, alas, can be the presence of the Spirit of the Lord in us, as good as nothing. It is necessary first of all to recognize the fact, and then to find the way of appropriating and experiencing it.**

Now, doubtless when the widow cried to Elisha, she had some thought that he would interest some influential person on her behalf, to intercede with the creditor, or produce some resources from somewhere. That is just how we feel about the matter. If the Lord would do something for me, I should be all right! If the Lord would change the circumstances, things would be all right! If the Lord would raise up somebody to help me ; that is what I want! And so often the Lord is saying : Just a minute ; what have you in the house? This is the crux, I believe, of Romans viii. 28, the crux of God working all things together for good, the crux of our victorious life in Him—**What hast thou in the house? Lord, I have nothing that is adequate! Have you not My Spirit?** Yes, but in such small measure ; that is no good, that is not sufficient.

Well, you know the story of how Elisha impressed upon the woman that first of all she must gather into the secret of her home a new, more extensive and enlarged emptiness ready to receive the oil when it should come. There is not enough emptiness, perhaps, or if in a vague way we are conscious of emptiness, there is not the faith-bringing of the emptiness to the Lord with the assurance that He can fill it. That was the first thing.

And then—and this is most important—in the quietness behind the closed doors ; in the secret, with no eye to see, with no outward manifestation to encourage ; in the quietness there with the emptiness, as it were, spread out, she was to take the flask of oil, not Elisha, she was to take it and pour out, and as long as she poured, so long the oil flowed ; as long as there was emptiness to receive it, there was oil available to fill the emptiness.

Christ in you! Now, the question is not, is Christ in us? The question is, are we, as was that woman,

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in despair and distraction because of our circumstances, with the little oil there, the pot of oil, as though it were of no value? Are we like that, or, in the midst of the most severe demands, are we learning to shut the door and come to God in faith, to take the promises and the truths that are so familiar to us—so familiar that, alas, they mean nothing. When you come upon a text hanging on a wall—"Christ in you"—does it make your heart leap with joy? Alas! it so seldom does. Therein lies the need for new exercise daily, in face of every new situation—a new exercise about this matter.

The Apostle contradicts the idea that if we are full of the Spirit we shall feel strong and find things easy and opening up before us. He says, "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmity" (Rom. viii. 26). Well, if you are a live Christian, full of the Lord, you should not have any infirmities! The Apostle says, I have! But praise God, I have the Spirit who helpeth my infirmities; I know how to shut the door and bring the empty vessels and pour out

the oil! That is it! Christ in us, not as an automatic means of solving all our difficulties, by the use, as it were, of a magic wand; but as the Divine resource which, as we learn the secret of drawing upon Him, shall make us able to bear and to endure and to triumph; in all these things to be "more than conquerors".

Now, we may not know very much about what is happening, how things are working together, what is the solution to our problems, what is the way that the Lord will take. We do not know. The further we go on, the less we know, the less the Lord allows us to know. But we have a very strong and sure basis of confidence that ought to mark our very step, our very face, our very being. We know! What do we know? We know God; we know that God is for us, praise His Name! We know that God is with us, though everything seem to contradict it. And, blessed be His Name! we know that God is in us. "The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him" (Heb. ii. 20).
H. F.

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CONFERENCE IN SWITZERLAND

We have decided—in the will of the Lord—to have another conference in Switzerland this year, and have accordingly booked the same hotel in Aeschi. The date is 16th to 26th September.

We advise those who desire to come to write early.

Full particulars from:

The Conference Secretary (Switzerland),
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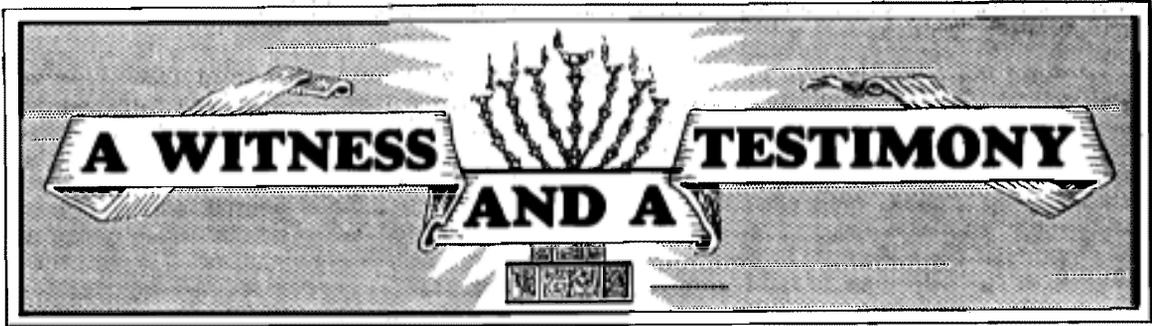
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EDITORIAL

‘DO IT YOURSELF’

READERS in England will recognise that the heading is borrowed from that popular creative enterprise which has been growing so extensively in recent years. Behind the title there seem to be a number of implied questions, such as: Why not have all the interest, pleasure and satisfaction of making things yourself? Why pay all the extra cost of having others do for you what you can do for yourself? Why live only on the creativeness, skill and ingenuity of others when these very abilities may be lying latent in yourself? Why be solely objective in your possessions when, having ‘done it yourself’, you can have the inward joy and knowledge that comes from originality? Why live a secondhand life, when a whole realm of reality may remain in yourself, unexploited? Why not ‘Do it yourself’? If you do ‘Do it yourself’ you will, at least, know the genuineness, the value, of the article, and how much it can be depended upon.

All this opens a door to very much real thought and possibility, and if we transfer the idea to the life of the Christian, it at once presents us with some very vital considerations. May I suggest some of these to you?

Is it not true that a vast amount of our Christianity is secondhand, in the wrong sense? Of course, we know quite well that, in the matter of our redemption and all that goes with the grace of God, there is nothing that we can do; it is received as God’s gift, made by Him. But it is not of that that we are thinking. The substance and form of Christianity for very many is not the original, deep, heart-relatedness, but is a tradition, a creation by men, a product of history, a crystallized system. It may be the work—even hard work—of our preachers, teachers, parents, churches, schools, but—in the deepest and most vital sense—it is not *ours*; it has not been wrought in the travail, the ‘sweat and tears’, of our own souls. Shaped by others, we have taken it ready made. We have taken it for granted, as a matter of course. There is a challenge which, sooner or later, will be a life-or-death issue as to our spiritual life. That challenge is: ‘How much of what you have is really your own? How much of

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

your faith, *i.e.* belief, is really yours? How much of your position stands true to that historic declaration: 'Here I am—I can do no other. God help me!'—in other words, 'I have no alternative; this is my very life!'

There are other aspects of this 'Do it yourself' matter. When Jesus challenged Pilate with the interrogation: "Sayest thou this of thyself, or did others tell it thee . . .?" (John xviii. 34), He touched a key to a vast amount bound up with the same issue. The issue was that Christ was being handed over to crucifixion on the uncertain and dangerous ground of mere report. We know that the whole case was false. It rested upon the words of suborned false witnesses, upon distortion and misrepresentation of things that He had said, upon fear of the consequences of allegiance to Him, upon policy, upon *prejudice*. Jesus was an inconvenience to their way of life, to their religious system, to their ambitions. So, Jesus must be got out of the way, and 'the end justifies the means'. But Pilate was offered this ready-made report, and, finding it a convenient way out of a predicament or embarrassment, he was ready to use it. His retort only shows how it pierced his armour and stung him. He only confirmed the truth and genuineness of the implied charge. "Thine own nation . . ." (v. 35). So Jesus went to the Cross because (at least in this particular) Pilate did not 'do it himself'—track this thing to its source and ascertain its real nature and cause.

Is it not true that our Lord is suffering shame, reproach, and rejection now because of an immense amount of falsehood and misrepresentation in Christianity itself? If Christianity, rather than being a mere 'religion', were really a *life*—that is, Christ as an indwelling reality checking us up on our behaviour, conduct, manners, speech, appearance, influence, courtesies or discourtesies—would He not be saved from the hands of many who want a case against Him and find it too easily in those who bear His name? This kind of life is not to be purchased in religious stores. It is not procured cheaply and from others. It is not something 'put on'. It is wrought in the very souls of those concerned, so that others are able to say—'Something has *been done* in that one'; and to this we have to give ourselves. There is infinite value in a firsthand knowledge of the Lord.

We venture to press our point into another realm, and here it is a venture indeed. But its importance calls for boldness.

Is it not true that a very great amount of the weakness, shame, dishonour, and even disgrace, characterizing Christianity, is due to the ease with which Christians can take up and retail rumours, reports, insinuations, suspicions, and the like? 'Information' is passed on, and, without investigation, substantiation, or verification, it is accepted as true and repeated.

Is it not true that the ever increasing number of divisions and alienations among Christians can be laid to the account of this failure to verify at first hand the criticisms and judgments that are current? Surely we are being forced to realise that this whole world—secular and otherwise—is wrapped around with a growingly dense blanket of suspicions, misrepresentations, distortions, insinuations, and lies! Confidence is well-nigh obliterated. Loyalty and mutual trust have almost entirely disappeared. The last precious thing in fellowship is assailed. Unless we constantly draw our breath from Heaven, this evil atmosphere gets into our own spiritual lungs, and we too breathe it out. Scepticism, mistrust, suspicion, from which very little indeed escapes, is the evil ether of this world. It wrapped itself around Jesus when He was here, so that He could only live and do anything at all by constantly resorting to the pure atmosphere of Heaven. The same spirit of prejudice and discrediting dogged the steps of Paul wherever he went. Attach a question-mark to anything, and the object is at once suspect.

The most poignant and tragic aspect of this sinister campaign of the evil powers is the facility with which Christians sponsor it. That destructive and blighting 'But' is the common pitfall. 'Yes, there is a lot of good in it (or him); *but*—you know . . .' That 'But' does not rest upon the solid ground of investigated and verified proof, but upon mere hearsay, or, at best, the prejudiced judgment of someone who has some private interest to protect.

We are zealous for the inspiration of the Scriptures, but we are not allowed to be selective in this. Not only are the glorious Scriptures of our salvation and the grace of God inspired, but equally such other Scriptures as: "Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?"

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He that slandereth not with his tongue . . . nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour" (Psalm xv. 1, 3). Or: "Prove all things" (I Thess. v. 21). Satan's workshop is kept busy night and day making what Paul calls "evil report" (II Cor. vi. 8), and his business is thriving. The Lord save us all from being accessories to that prosperity.

Here is a realm where we should not be cheated with the cheap wares of this nefarious business, but, in the matter of being sure and 'knowing the truth'—'Do it ourselves'.

EDITOR

MEN WHOSE EYES HAVE SEEN THE KING

VI. THE GLORY OF THE LORD

Reading : Ezekiel i.

"Above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone : and upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man upon it above" (Ezekiel i. 26).

"That working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenlies, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come : and he put all things in subjection under his feet" (Ephesians i. 19 - 22).

"We behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus . . . crowned with glory and honour" (Hebrews ii. 9).

LET us focus, for the moment, upon the twenty-eighth verse of Ezekiel i :

"As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was THE APPEARANCE OF THE LIKENESS OF THE GLORY OF THE LORD."

That fragment seems to me to sum up all these prophecies. Not only does it apply to the first chapter in particular, but it can be taken all the way through ; for everything in these prophecies is being governed by *the glory of the Lord*.

There is a very practical and immediate relationship between this word and ourselves. I am quite sure that most of us have a deep and strong sense of the need for the Lord to do a new thing. I believe that is felt very widely. What that new thing is may be given different interpretations. In the evangelical world there is much prayer and talk about 'revival' ; that is perhaps only another way of expressing this sense of a need for the Lord to move in, in a new way, and do a new thing. Others

would put it in other ways. But it is there amongst Christians everywhere : the Lord must do a new thing ; the Lord must take a fresh step.

GOD'S END IS GLORY

We need to be very intelligent and understanding about this matter. The Lord has His ways and His means, and we need to know something about them if we are going to be in line with the Lord in any movement that He purposes to take. This word is therefore very appropriate to the situation. For whenever God has moved in a new and further step in His Divine purpose, He has prefaced that movement by bringing, first, an instrument, and then, through such an instrument, His people, to a fresh apprehension of His glory.

That is a statement which will bear investigation and confirmation. *God's one end in all things is glory*. Make no mistake about that. If you want to know what God is after, what He is moving toward, in all things—and that compasses countless details in every realm ; in personal life and corporate life ; in the nations—the answer is that God's end is *glory*. That being so, it is to be noted that He always establishes that principle at the outset of every movement. He sets it there as the thing which is going to govern the step, or movement, or whatever it is, that He is about to undertake : it is going to be governed by the end which He has in view, in this as in every new beginning.

That may sound a little difficult for the moment. But let us take some instances.

SOME EXAMPLES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

(a) ABRAHAM

We would all agree that, when God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, and separated him to Himself, that was a new movement of God. There is no doubt about that. It was a clear-cut

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

and defined breaking-in to human history on the part of God, with a further stage in the Divine programme in view. Now Stephen tells us that "the God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia" (Acts vii. 2). Why the God of *glory*? The end toward which God was moving was *glory*—His own glory in a people, to be manifested among the nations. And so, as the God of glory He appeared to Abraham. He put the glory there as the principle, the law, the basis upon which He was taking that step, and upon which He was going to follow it through.

(b) MOSES

Some centuries later (revealed to Abraham even to the very period: see Gen. xv. 13, 16; Acts vii. 6), the Lord had that people out of Egypt. He brought them to Sinai; and there He changed them from a rabble crowd, an unconstituted and unorganized multitude, into a corporate nation. That was the new move at Sinai. By the law and the testimony and the revelation given in the mount, the people were constituted a nation. And it was done in *glory*. Moses went into the mount, and saw the God of Glory, and came down with that glory on his face. Again God had put the principle at the beginning of His new move: He was moving on the pathway of glory.

(c) DAVID AND SOLOMON

A further step in the Divine plan was reached in the days of David and Solomon. The temple was indeed a development of the Divine thought in representation; and it is all in *glory*. The issue there is *glory*: "the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord" (I Kings viii. 11, etc.). It was a glorious time; it was a glorious place. It was all just enunciating and preserving this principle: God is moving all the time with this thought governing—*glory*!

(d) EZEKIEL

But we are told that the day came when the glory departed from Jerusalem. We know why. And that brings us to the prophets of recovery, and to this prophet Ezekiel in particular. Here, at the opening of these prophecies, in the day when the glory is eclipsed amongst the Lord's people, as lifted up and departed from Jerusalem (ix. 3, xi. 23), the Lord of Glory appeared to Ezekiel: "This was the appearance of the likeness of the *glory* of the Lord." It is impressive that that comes right at the beginning of the prophecies, is it not? Now everything that follows is going to be but the outwork-

ing of that law of glory. God is more concerned, and in these various ways He is showing His concern, for the end of *glory* to be reached.

SOME EXAMPLES FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

(a) THE INCARNATION

So much for the Old Testament. When we come to the New, we shall all agree that the Incarnation—the birth of the Lord Jesus into this world—is a new movement of God. That is indeed a great step forward in the Divine programme. And therefore it is accompanied with glory—heavenly glory: 'Glory to God in High Heaven!' (Luke ii. 14). We sing it in our Christmas hymn. There is glory again at the inception of this new, mighty movement of God, because the end of that thing is indeed going to be glory: He has come for the recovery of the glory of God in this earth. That is Heaven's psalm.

(b) PENTECOST

We move on still, and again we will all agree that the Day of Pentecost is another great step forward in the plan of God. God is moving on, and this is a clear mark of that progress of God through the ages. The Day of Pentecost was a step of God from Heaven. And what glory! John tells us quite clearly that the coming of the Holy Spirit was upon the basis of Jesus being glorified. He said: "The Spirit was not given; because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John vii. 39)—implying that when the Spirit was given Jesus was glorified. It was on that ground. God is moving on this basis all the way along.

(c) PETER

And so we could go on. We think of the individual instruments of God's new movement. We will agree that a new movement was in hand through Peter. There is no doubt about it; it is a real new movement. Though Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, we must remember that Peter opened the door for the new dispensation both to Jew and to Gentile, in Jerusalem, and in Caesarea. It is a mighty new movement. But Peter had his ministry set in this glory. He tells us that he was with Jesus in the Holy Mount, and beheld His glory (II Pet. i. 16–18); and that had undoubtedly been a tremendously dynamic thing in Peter's life. The Holy Spirit interpreted everything to him on the Day of Pentecost: he got a new Bible, because he had got a new Lord, and an opened Heaven! It was this great principle of glory which accounted

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for Peter's ministry, and Peter's work, and Peter's endurance to the end.

(d) JOHN

That is clear, too, in the case of John, who was with him for so long as his co-worker and fellow-apostle, in Jerusalem at least. When we come to the beginning of the book of Revelation, we once again recognise that we are in the presence of a new movement—a new movement for the recovery of the *glory*, which has become so limited and obscured in the churches. The Lord comes to John in vision in Patmos; but it is such a glorious thing, and the visions are so glorious, that more than once John is down in utter prostration before the Lord, and has to be lifted up, helped to rise, because of the overwhelming impact of the visions of the glory (i. 17, xix. 10, xxii. 8).

(e) PAUL

And what shall we say of Paul? That wonderful ministry, so full, so rich, so glorious, was all born in the day when he saw the *glory* on the Damascus road.

The point is this. The Lord displayed the glory upon every occasion when He was going to move again with some new step in His purpose. All these things that I have mentioned were steps onward of God in His age-long purpose, and every one of them was based upon a new apprehension of the glory of the Lord by those who were concerned. So that, in the case of the prophets and apostles, their ministry was a ministry of the greatness and the glory of the Lord; and as those to whom they ministered saw that, they became a people with a very great significance in this world. It was this apprehension of the glory of Christ that gave character and meaning and power and value to their being here in this world. All this, then, has but one meaning: God's end and God's object is *glory*, and everything that He does is governed by that.

This is something that must really take hold of us, and of which we must take hold: that God intends that all things—all things, to the minutest detail of our life, should work out, under His hand, for glory; that God, in everything, is working with glory in view. Do you believe that? No doubt you believe it as a statement and a truth; perhaps you believe it in your heart; but it is not always easy to believe that, because we just do not see how it can be. Indeed, what we do see convinces us that anything but glory will come out of this! Oh that the Lord would just grip us with this—grip me, grip you—individually, and as companies of His people where we are: that what He is doing, what

He is allowing, is under the control of this one law and principle—He intends it to be for His glory. That is what He has in mind, and what He will do, for He will not be finally thwarted in His purpose.

EZEKIEL AND THE GLORY

True, everything may seem to contradict this. We come to the prophecies of Ezekiel, and there is plenty that seems to contradict this glory. But you cannot get away from the fact that the glory is disclosed in the very first chapter. It is not reserved to the end, so that you have to wade through all the wearisome tale of judgments and woe, and then at last find that God comes out with things in His own hands—so to speak just manages to survive. You are told right at the very beginning that everything is governed by *glory*. In everything that is going to happen, everything that is going to be said, right on to the end, the governing thing is *the glory of God*; it is there as the very foundation of everything. We must take note of that. What is God's end? Paul has seen it, and has given it to us in a matchless fragment: "Unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations of the ages of the ages" (Eph. iii. 21). You cannot get beyond that! That is finality; that is the end—'unto the ages of the ages, *glory* in the Church and in Christ Jesus.'

We come then to Ezekiel. There is much here to help us as to God's own concern for His glory. We may have a concern for the Lord's glory: the Lord has a far greater concern for His glory than we have. This book is a book just full of God's own concern for His own glory. Notice how precise Ezekiel is, even to the year, and the month, and the day of the month. "The word of the Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi . . ." (i. 3)—where he was, when he was, how he was. It is like the Lord, moving so exactly, so meticulously, in this matter, and laying hold of this man. Remember, it had to be a laying hold of him, because it resulted in a complete change in his whole vocation. Ezekiel was a trained priest; he belonged to the priesthood; he was a young man, who was expecting that through his life he would fulfil the ministry of a priest. This broke in and upset his whole career and his whole vocation: he had to change his whole manner and method of life, from priesthood to prophet. It was something very strong in this man's case. It is interesting to notice that his name, *Ezeki-el*, means 'God will strengthen'. For the glory of God that is very necessary, especially in conditions such as those in which Ezekiel lived.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Ezekiel, thus, as a young man, was carried away with the captives to Babylon, and was "among the captives by the river Chebar", he tells us (i. 1, 3); and, from what we know, and what we read, it was a pretty hopeless situation. We know something of the conditions in Jerusalem from the prophecies and ministry of Jeremiah: it was pretty bad there; poor Jeremiah had his heart broken, as he had ministered in Jerusalem. But there are reasons for saying that, whatever it was like in Jerusalem, it was even more difficult in Babylon—that is, so far as the people were concerned to whom Ezekiel ministered. They were a difficult, recalcitrant people. Read these early chapters; see Ezekiel's encounter with them, and the measures to which he had to resort.

AN UNPOPULAR MAN

I do not want to stay with too much detail, but it is very necessary, for our encouragement, that we should get the setting of the glory of the Lord. Here he is with these captives. Now, a man who has to bring home to a people the reasons for their condition and for the judgments of God; to speak faithfully in the name of the Lord, without compromising on any principle; who will put his own very life and future in the balances of his ministry and be thoroughly faithful—he will not condone any wrong; he will not compromise on any principle in order to preserve their favour and his own position. The man who really has the glory of God at heart at any cost is a very unpopular man.

And Ezekiel was an unpopular man among the exiles—so unpopular that he had to resort to all sorts of seeming tricks in order to gain their attention, to get a hearing. Look at the things to which he resorted, and had to do—spectacular things; unusual things; unnatural things. Sometimes he seemed to act the fool to draw attention, so that people should look in his direction. It was a hard time to get a hearing, to have any attention at all; he was the most unpopular man, perhaps, in the country. It was a desperately difficult situation that he was in amongst his own people there.

THE HEAVENS OPENED
IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

In the midst of such a situation—which I do not think I exaggerate; indeed, I could add much more to it from these very chapters—in the midst of such a difficult and, for the time being, seemingly hopeless situation, he tells us that the heavens were opened, and he saw visions of God! There is no

situation so hopeless as to make it impossible for the glory of God to break in; no situation that can shut God out, and be too impossible for a fresh manifestation of His glory. Do you not take heart from that, if it is true? Well, here it is! It is an amazing thing when you take the whole setting, and the whole circumstances, and the whole provision. You could say, Well, that is altogether beyond any hope; that has broken Jeremiah's heart; that has brought the wrath of God—destroyed Jerusalem and sent the people far away: what can you hope for in such a situation? And, right in the midst of that, Ezekiel says: 'I saw the heavens open, and visions of God.' And he sums it all up: "*This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.*"

Now, difficult as it is for us to take hold of that, really to believe it, this may be a message to us. Perhaps we are sometimes very near to despair over the whole situation. Let it come to us as a message from the Lord. In our own lives, or in the place where we are, perhaps as a company of the Lord's people, things create such difficulty that sometimes we get near to giving it all up. Ezekiel might well have done that, for he had far more occasion for doing it than you or I have; but right in there—*there*—"This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord." "The heavens were opened"!

We have thought and said much about an 'open Heaven'. All we will say about that, for the present, is that, if there is any indication at all that the Heavens are open, that is always the most hopeful thing in any situation. You may be having some difficult times in your company of the Lord's people; perhaps you have some difficult people—well, Ezekiel had some difficult people; you may be having much discouragement; there may be things which you feel to be very wrong, and so on. And yet, when you come together and give yourselves to the worship of the Lord, there is a wonderful sense of unction. You just become occupied with the Lord! For the time being, at any rate, you let the other go, and the Lord becomes your Centre—the Heavens are opened! While that lasts, there is every hope for your assembly; there is every hope for the future. There is nothing more hopeless than a closed Heaven.

Look at Calvary: 'There was darkness over the whole earth . . . and Jesus cried with a loud voice, My God, my God, why has Thou forsaken me?' (Matt. xxvii. 45, 46). Heaven was closed, because of what He was doing there—taking the sin of the whole world. Heaven was closed down, was shut; there was no way through. That is the most hope-

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less situation that could ever possibly be. The hopelessness of that situation killed Him. That was the final stroke to bring about His death. It was not the nails ; it was not the thorns ; it was not the action of men : it was the broken heart, because He had lived all His earthly life with a clear way through to the Father—with an open Heaven. All His days He had been in communication with Heaven, with the Father ; He had never known until then one moment when He could not instantly get through. Here that all ended : there was no way through ; no response ; no answering voice : a closed Heaven. That is hope-less.

If you and I have any answer to prayer, any little indication or token that the Lord has not forsaken, given up, shut down on us ; if we have anything like that, then Heaven is still open, and that is very hopeful for the future. Let us cherish the open Heaven in our times of worship. Many dark things may be about ; many difficult things ; situations, like Ezekiel's, may be full of evil, or perplexities, or problems, or difficulties, or sufferings. Yet when we come together, and focus upon the Lord, we sense His presence : that is our open Heaven ; and an open Heaven is always a sign that there is hope yet ; there is still a future for glory !

The Lord forbid that we should ever come to the time when we are closed down by Heaven, and cannot get through. ' I saw the heavens opened . . . ', and that meant God had not finished with things yet ; God had not closed down yet. There may be judgments ; as the following chapters show. There may have to be judgments ; there may have to be discipline ; there may have to be chastening ; there may be much yet to be done. But whatever it is that has to be cleared up—perhaps by the jealous wrath of God for His glory ; whatever hard things, sufferings, afflictions, have to be gone through, because of the wrong ; nevertheless, it is all governed by this : *a hope of glory—a hope of GLORY*—if the Heavens still remain open.

THE SUPREMACY OF THE LORD ON THE THRONE

" I saw visions of God "—that is, visions given by God. What did Ezekiel see? What was it that comprised those visions of God? Well, as we have seen in chapter i, he saw a throne ; and then he saw " a likeness as the appearance of a man " upon the throne above (i. 26). And then he saw a two-fold symbolic medium of the administration of that throne—the cherubim and the wheels. (We shall hope to return to these things later.) Then, as we know, he saw a 'house'—*the House*—

which he was commanded to show to the people of Israel (xliii. 10). He saw the House in later glory. He saw the river coming from under the threshold, circling the altar, passing through the court, and away down, broadening and deepening, and making everything live whithersoever it came (xlvi. 1 – 9). Then he saw the land and the inheritance possessed (xlvi. 13 – xlviii. 29). And finally he saw the City, and the name of the City: "*The Lord is there*" (xlviii. 30–35). That is the end of it all—the Lord is there!

What I want to emphasize and stress particularly is that all that we see in this book is the result and the expression of that throne, and of the 'Man upon it above'. Of course that is very simple to understand: everything emanates and results from the great, inclusive fact that there is One in the place of supreme government and authority. And for us, and for them, and for all time, by the eternal appointment of God, that One is the Lord Jesus, the Son of God. He has been exalted to the 'right hand of the Majesty in the heavens' (Heb. i. 3, viii. 1). 'We see Jesus crowned with glory and honour' (Heb. ii. 9). 'God raised Him and set Him at His own right hand, far above all rule and authority, dominion and power, and every name that is named' (Eph. i. 20, 21). Everything comes out of that. If that is true, then everything is all right ; it will be all right in the end.

Now, this is very up-to-date, is it not? We have spoken of the conditions in which Ezekiel spent his life and fulfilled his ministry—the time and place and the state of things. Yes, he had a very difficult situation. But the Church has got a pretty difficult situation now ; things are far from easy to-day. There is now, as then, very much that is wrong, and much that is evil. Who will say to-day that the *glory* of God pervades His people? Ezekiel's was a difficult time ; but it was at that time, and in those circumstances, that this instrument, under the government of the throne, was brought in for a new movement of God. Or we might say, that this apprehension, on the part of an instrument, of the supremacy of the Throne and of the Man upon it led to the wonderful result that, in time, the whole situation was changed, and God had something for His glory.

THE VISION OF THE GLORY SAVES FROM DESPAIR

That vision—the opened Heaven ; the throne, and the Man upon it above—had a tremendous effect upon Ezekiel. It saved him, in his day, from despair ; it saved his ministry ; it saved his testi-

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mony ; it saved his life. And it is only that that will save us ; only that *can* save us. Perhaps that sounds a little pessimistic. I do not want to be a pessimist ; but you cannot be acquainted with the state of things on this earth to-day, even amongst what is called Christian, or Christianity, without sometimes feeling fairly hopeless about it. Is it possible that the great revelation given to us of the Church, as we have it in the New Testament, can in any way be realised in our time? Look at the divisions ; look at the quarrels ; feel this awful atmosphere that has grown up and spread. In the United States, for instance, some 35 years ago, there seemed to be such an open, clear way for something new of the Lord : the atmosphere seemed so clear, and hearts seemed so open. But in that land to-day, everybody is suspecting everybody else ; the spirit of criticism has got into the most devoted Christians, both about other Christians and about Christian things. You cannot have half-an-hour's conversation, even with those who are most devoted to the Lord, without somebody being lashed, somebody being mentioned for warning, as suspect. It is like an awful miasma, or fog, that has crept in amongst Christians over the whole world. You cannot go into your religious bookshops without seeing line upon line of pamphlets and books that are occupied with denouncing something. Men are giving their whole lives to this horrible work of trying to expose what they think to be error.

That is strong language, but it is not too strong. It is the state of things ; and you might despair of the realisation of that which you have seen to be God's purpose. And yet you cannot ; the Lord will not let you. If you really have seen the Lord, you just cannot give it up. You may say, like Jeremiah, that you will not speak in this way any more. He resolved that he would never speak again of the Lord. But then—" If I say, I will not . . . speak any more in his name, then there is . . . a burning fire shut up in my bones . . . and I cannot contain " (Jer. xx. 9).

You and I may have often decided that we should just have to stop talking about it, and give it up, because it does not seem to work ; things seem to go from bad to worse, and worse to awful ! And yet we are still here. We cannot help ourselves ; we are back again in full view of God's declared purpose. The Spirit will not give it up, and will not let us give it up, however bad the situation is. The Heaven is not closed yet ; the Man on the throne has not evacuated the throne yet ; there is still hope. We have got to have the mastery of that great reality that He is still there, where

God put Him. And if this is true, difficult as it sometimes is to believe it, or at any rate to see it,—then He *is* ' far above all rule and authority, and dominion, and power, and every name '—world dictators or anybody else—' that is named, in this age or in the ages to come.' Only as that gets hold of us, and we take hold of it in turn, will there be any prospect at all ; but that is the prospect.

STRATEGIC REVELATIONS
OF THE GLORY

To reveal the glory is always a strategic movement of God in a difficult and unpromising day and situation. I think that was the meaning of the Transfiguration. It was a difficult day ; things were closing in on the Lord and His little band of men ; the atmosphere was impregnated with hatred ; and the Cross was there immediately before. How will they meet it? how will they survive it? The strategy was the Transfiguration—they ' saw His glory '. And although for a time afterward it seemed to be eclipsed, nevertheless, when He was risen from the dead, they understood all things. In the light of the resurrection the Transfiguration took on its full meaning.

Things were going very hardly for the church in Jerusalem on the day that that wonderful young man, Stephen, was dragged outside and done to death, with that so vicious hatred of the Lord Jesus. But Stephen saw the Heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (Acts vii. 56). It saved the situation for him, and I think it had a much farther reach than just himself ; I think it handed on something. At any rate, one man there became a very potent factor in the Church for all time. He was tremendously affected by what he saw in the face of Stephen, and heard through the lips of Stephen ; he never got over it. And he never forgave himself. He confessed afterwards : ' And I, I was standing by and giving my vote, my consent!' (Acts xxii. 20). The seeing of the glory was a saving thing in a dark and difficult day.

Paul is in prison ; he is nearing the end of his long, full life and ministry. He thinks of all those many churches—far more than we have tabulated by letters addressed to them—which he had been used to bring into being ; of all his many converts, and of the many who owed everything spiritually to him and his ministry. Now he is in prison, shut up, and he cannot go to them ; the churches are in a state of decline ; many are turning against him and away from him as he is there. He is a lonely man—' only Luke is with me ' ; a man in

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difficulty, if ever a man was, speaking naturally. What a situation, what an end, for a man like that! What saves him?

It is astoundingly impressive, that, in the midst of all that, knowing it all—knowing his own position, knowing his own prospects, which were pretty poor for this life; knowing the state of things far away in the churches; getting news of these secessions; faced with the seeming breakdown of his work; disappointed with believers and with churches—I say that it is an amazing thing that with all that, out of that, in the midst of that, enough to crush a man in despair, he has an open Heaven, and says: ‘Unto Him be the glory unto the ages of the ages!’ (II Tim. iv. 18). He is saved by the glory; he is delivered by the glory. What a different end it might have been but for this apprehension of the glory!

Here he writes then, that this One, this Man, is in the glory on the Throne above, far above all rule and authority. Caesar may be there next door, governing the whole world, bringing it under his mighty and evil heel, and seeming to be able to

carry out all his fell designs against the Church of Jesus Christ. Paul, right alongside of Caesar and Caesar’s city and stronghold, says: ‘He hath set *Him* far above all rule and authority, and every name—Caesar or any other—in this age, or in any other age . . . hath put all things in subjection under His feet . . .’ That is a saving vision of the glory.

It was that that saved John in his difficult and desperate situation in Patmos, for it was indeed something to break a man’s heart and send him deep down in dark despair. John was the one lonely survivor of the whole apostolic band. They have all gone; he is cut off from his beloved church; alone; isolated; exiled; with all the conditions which must have accompanied that exile. That is enough to make a man despair, to feel that he has lived his life in vain, and that there really is no hope at all. But he had opened Heaven, and saw a vision—and what visions he saw! It was the opened Heaven that saved him. The Lord give us that, and a new apprehension of the Throne and of the Man upon it.

T. A-S.

THE ROD OF GOD

Reading: Exodus xvii. 5 - 9.

“*And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod*” (Exodus iv. 2).

FOR forty years Moses had carried this rough stick around with him. This symbol of his work as a shepherd had evidently become almost a part of himself: so much so that even after the amazing encounter with God in the burning bush, after the curiosity, the surprise, the wonder, the awe, he still held it fast in his hand. Only when God drew his attention to it, so it seems, did he realise that he was still holding on to his shepherd’s rod.

THE ROD OF AUTHORITY

This very same rod was destined to become the rod of Divine authority. Moses’ rod became “the rod of God”. In Egypt, when that rod was raised to Heaven, the plagues came and the plagues were removed. When God’s people were before the Red Sea, the very waters had to withdraw under that rod, and so the people were given a way through. It was with this rod that the rock was smitten, so that the waters flowed out to satisfy the people’s thirst; and it was on the hill-top with the rod uplifted that Moses made it possible for Joshua’s

army to get the victory over Amalek down in the plain. For all this, and much more, the secret of power was in the rod of God.

This rod of God was no mere staff of office handed over to him, but something that had become a part of his very self during the forty years of discipline. Spiritual authority is like that. It is not some sort of magic wand which can be taken up, but that which has become inwrought in the life. If we want to release a stream of living water into this thirsty world; if we desire to be in the place of ascendancy, where we can influence the tide of battle for God’s people and bring them into victory, then we too must learn Moses’ secret of how our rod can become the rod of God.

“What is that in thine hand?” Moses had been grasping it all the time, without paying special attention to it. Now he looked at it—perhaps with amazement that God should take any interest in such a detail, or perhaps in shame for its indication of the lowly life to which he had been reduced. In any case he could not have had the slightest idea of how important and how significant that same rod was to become. It became the symbol of Divine power: “the rod of God”. It may be that we can be helped to understand the ways of God with us, His servants, if we take a closer look at that rod.

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A SYMBOL OF SERVICE

It was, of course, a rod of service ; it went with his job. It is most unfortunate that for many Christians there is a division between ordinary life and work and spiritual life and service for the Lord. If that were really the truth, then the Lord would have told Moses to throw his rod away. He would have indicated that the old occupation must be forgotten, repudiated, and that his future work for God had no connection with his daily toil. Throw it away? On the contrary, the Lord needed that rod. It was the most important possession that Moses had, for it showed that he had proved God in his ordinary, everyday life. He would always need his shepherd's rod.

When the first man, Adam, was in the garden, he was there to work. In those wonderful days before the fall, when Adam was in constant communion with his Maker, he was there to dress and to keep the garden. We must not imagine that 'work' is the result of the fall—far from it. The fall made the work harder, accompanied by sorrow and frustration. Because of sin there came briars and thorns instead of blessings. The first man, however, was a worker before he fell in sin. Moreover, when the Lord came to enjoy the fellowship of His creatures, it was after the day's work was done—"in the cool of the evening"—that He came to walk with them in the paradise.

Passing from the first Adam to the Last, we find that the hands which broke the bread to feed the multitudes were not the soft hands of the recluse, but the toil-hardened hands of the carpenter. Somewhere in the background of faithful work in ordinary, everyday life, God discovers the basis for committing to us spiritual power for His service. Moses turned to shepherding because he thought that his days of usefulness were gone, little realising that in the arduous, monotonous, menial work of those years, apparently remote from anything spiritual and unconnected with his call to service, he was providing God with the very thing which He could use. "What is that in thine hand?" 'Don't be ashamed of it. That is essential ; without that you could never do the work which I have called you to do.'

With God nothing is wasted. Moses might have grieved over what seemed like 'wasted years', but the Lord knew better. How often we fret and fume over work that seems to have no connection with our desire to be God's servants. How we long to throw down our 'rod' and write off the years when we carried it as of no importance! Perhaps we have thrown it down and are vainly waiting for

some door to open for us into what we call 'the Lord's work'. No ; when the Lord comes to call us for some special task, He will look to our hands, to see if they are empty or not. It was the rod in Moses' hand which became the basis of his spiritual authority. It had given him something which Egypt could never give—the discipline of proving God in the everyday.

A SYMBOL OF SACRIFICE

If we think again, we shall remember that this man who held the rough shepherd's rod was Moses who had once been a prince of the royal house of Egypt. This was the hand of the man who had lived for years in luxury, who had been greatly honoured, and who had excelled in the world's culture of his day. What did his hand hold now? Not a jewelled sceptre ; not the baton of a famous soldier ; not a symbol of pride and magnificence, but just a common rod. Perhaps, for a moment, when God drew his attention to it, Moses felt ashamed of that rod. But he had no need to be. He held it as a result of a deliberate choice he had made long ago, when he decided to associate himself with the Lord and the Lord's people. That shepherd's rod was the symbol of his renunciation.

It represented his willingness to sacrifice. It is true that, when the time came, he was rash and foolish, spoiling his opportunities and hindering rather than helping the purpose which God had in view. May we not infer, though, that even after he had killed the Egyptian he could easily have put that matter right? He never would have had to flee if he had gone back on his great renunciation. Moses was a royal prince. He could easily have gone to Pharaoh's palace and put right the insignificant matter of having killed a common Egyptian. Human life was not so important as that in those days. Probably half a dozen words spoken in the right quarter and Moses need never have been bothered again. But this would have meant renouncing his championship of God's people, and that Moses would never do.

The fact that he now held a shepherd's staff meant that, although he had blundered badly and lost his opportunity for service, he was still on the side of God's people. He would never go back on his original renunciation. So it was a costly staff, this rough rod ; nothing in itself, but a symbol of the fact that he had sacrificed everything to be the Lord's servant. For that very reason it became a symbol of Divine power. In the New Testament we are told of that "great Shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. xiii. 20)—the One who made a way through

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death itself for the redeemed ; who was Himself the smitten rock from which living waters ever flow ; and who always gives victory to His fighting people by reason of His mighty intercessions in the glory. Christ in truth holds the rod of God. And, in His case, the secret of all His mighty power is the willingness with which He relinquished everything for the glory of the Father and the salvation of His people.

The man of spiritual authority is the man who has let go of everything for God. Moses' hand only held that rod because he had earlier relinquished all other possessions and ambitions. When the Lord calls us to His service He will enquire what it is we have in our hands. Is it personal desire or ambition? Is it self-importance or self-esteem? Or can we answer His enquiry with the confession that, like Moses, all we hold is the evidence of our willingness to lose all things for His sake?

THE SYMBOL OF HIS HUMBLING

Although Moses' intentions were sincere enough when he renounced the treasures of Egypt, it was really his rash impetuosity that reduced him to the shepherd's staff. This rod was the rod of his humbling. The fact is made plain—and it applies to all of us—that, although he was prepared to relinquish everything to be the Lord's servant, he was still not suitable for the task. Something had to be done in Moses which involved a deeper self-emptying than he yet knew. It was a sacrifice of more than outward position and prospects: it was the sacrifice of his own soul. It was to him the depth of humiliation to discover that, in spite of all his imagined and intended consecration, he was in himself a complete failure. This deep inward crucifixion was absolutely necessary if he was to do the work appointed for him. This, for him, was the way of spiritual authority.

Moses was undoubtedly a man of great strength of character. The story of his parents, and particularly of his mother Jochebed, reveals the forcefulness which Moses must have inherited. She it was who took the initiative, who outwitted the king's commandment, who by her skill and energy devised the ark and carried through the whole scheme which saved the baby alive. She must have been a very remarkable woman. The sister, Miriam, seems to have shared her mother's strength of personality. Considering that she was still a child, it was no mean achievement to intervene as she did, to present the case ably to Pharaoh's daughter, and to bring the baby back to her mother to be nursed. This was no ordinary family.

When the Lord called Moses to his life's mission, we read that this was his reply: "And Moses said unto the Lord, O Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant . . ." (Exodus iv. 10). The Hebrew expression translated "eloquent" is really "a man of words", as the margin shows. Does this, perhaps, imply that he was not a man of words because he was a man of action? It usually works out like that. Perhaps Moses was telling the Lord that he was a man accustomed not to words but to acts, a man unused to a lot of palaver, and unable to argue with Pharaoh. In the old days he had been very assertive. Both by his family heritage and by reason of his upbringing and authoritative position, he was used to action not argument. We know also that he was hasty. These were the factors which made him unsuitable to be entrusted with spiritual power. The assertiveness had to be broken by forty years of discipline; the hastiness by the constant demands of tending sheep. So it was that he now held a shepherd's rod in his hand: the symbol, not of his strength, but of his weakness; not of his natural ability, but of his abysmal failure. Here was a man who not only was willing to give up everything for the Lord, but who had been brought so low, even by his own foolish mistakes, that he really was emptied of all self-sufficiency. Then, and only then, was he the man whom God was prepared to invest with His authority.

"What is that in thine hand?" "What are the credentials which mark you out as the Lord's chosen servant?" It is not some staff of office, some emblem of importance, some token of human greatness, but the very opposite. Think of the amazing paradox of a man "instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians; . . . mighty in his words and works" (Acts vii. 22), now standing in lowly peasant's clothes and clasping a rough shepherd's rod. Yet this is the condition to which God had to bring him to assure real spiritual usefulness. It was that very same staff which became the rod of God. The rod of our humiliation is the rod of His power.

THE OUTWORKING

From this time forward, always with the shepherd's rod in his hand, Moses led the people of God through sea and land, faced and defeated their enemies, and supplied them with ample provision for every need. His authority was not in empty words but in substantial proofs of the Lord's omnipotence. He had only one failure. That failure was when he smote the rock twice instead of only speaking to it. Just for that moment he was no

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longer the humble, broken man of the desert, but the imperious prince of the palace. Moreover there are some students of the Word who maintain that on this occasion it was not his own rod which he used, but the almond rod of Aaron which was laid up before the Lord. If that is so, then his departure from the true basis of emptiness is even more emphasized. In any case, it was a contradiction of the humble spirit which was the basis of God's committal to him, and it brought a very great tragedy into his life. How careful we need to be to abide by the lessons which the Lord has taught us, and not to go back on them!

When we turn from the Old Testament type to the reality of the Great Shepherd of the sheep, we find no trace of failure at all. Yet even He passed through the painful process of complete emptying,

and by that very experience came to His place of Throne authority. Without any qualification at all the rod of the Son has become the rod of the Father's power; the symbol of His lowliness and suffering has become the symbol of His universal authority. His is the nail-pierced hand. He exercises His power, not by what He holds, but by that which has been wrought into His very being.

Here, then, is encouragement for all who long to serve God and His people. Our rough, humble rod may become the rod of God. If we bear the discipline, prove the Lord in the everyday; if we are prepared to relinquish everything personal; and if we will not faint nor lose heart when we are being humbled and emptied out, then we can be among those through whom God manifests His power and glorifies His own great Name.

H. F.

THE OCTAVE OF REDEMPTION

VI. THE ADVENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

AS we come to the sixth note in the octave, which is the advent of the Holy Spirit, we approach the matter, as before, with the question: Why the Holy Spirit? We know, of course, that the advent of the Holy Spirit inaugurated a new dispensation here on this earth. It is for us, therefore, as Christians of this dispensation, to know just what that implied, and what it is that particularly and peculiarly obtains in the dispensation in which we live.

Of course, when we use that word 'dispensation', we are using a word that means more than just a time period, although that is the way in which it is generally and commonly used. We think of a dispensation as bounded by certain events and dates, and running from one particular point in time to another. But while the word means that, it means more than that. The word itself means literally 'the running of a household', or 'the job of a steward', and hence 'stewardship'; and thus it comes to mean the order or nature of things obtaining at a certain period—what we mean by the word 'economy'. It is, in fact, the same word in the original as 'economy': that is, how things are done, what is done, what are the principles governing the things that are done, in any given time.

I repeat therefore: it is most important that the Christian should know what is peculiar to this period in the history of the world, in the matter of what is done and how it is done, and the principles governing the 'what' and the 'how'. For you and I—let us bring this very near home—are people of

this particular economy. Failure to recognise that has led, and will lead, to much confusion and weakness. We must know what are the particular features of that dispensation, or economy, of God which was inaugurated on the day which we call the Day of Pentecost. Of course, Pentecost only means 'fiftieth'—the feast of the two wave-loaves being held on the fiftieth day after the feast of first-fruits (Lev. xxiii. 10, 15 - 17). The 'day of Pentecost' was one of very many such 'fiftieth days', but, being the most outstanding and most wonderful of them all, it is marked out and thought of by us as the only Pentecost. However, something happened then which changed the whole economy of God in the government of this world. What that was, it is for you and me to understand, and to understand very clearly.

It was not merely that on that day the Holy Spirit took over the government of things. That was not so. The Holy Spirit had always been in charge of things. He was in charge at the creation: "The Spirit of God brooded upon the face of the waters" (Gen. i. 2); and all the way through the old dispensation the Holy Spirit was active. He was there, not only in types and symbols and figures, but oft-times in actual power and wisdom, endowing men, He was there, superintending, all the way. What we have to understand is not just that He *took over* on the day of Pentecost, but that He took over *on an altogether new basis*. A very big change in the basis of operation by the Holy Spirit took place on that day.

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THE PRECEDING STEPS IN THE OCTAVE

Perhaps the most helpful way of presenting this fact is by drawing attention, first of all, to the sequence of events in this octave of redemption. The advent of the Holy Spirit is but a part of the whole, a part of redemption, but it is a very important note in the octave. As we follow through these stages, these phases, of the octave, it will help us to understand each successive movement in the scale if we can recognise the follow-on, the sequence in it all.

(1) THE INCARNATION

Let us look over it. The first note, or phase, of the octave, was the Incarnation of the Son of God: God's Son coming in human form into this world. You will remember that we tried to explain that there was a three-fold object in the Incarnation—it had three quite definite meanings. Firstly, the *redemption* of man: we saw something of the nature of man, from what it was that man had to be redeemed; secondly, the *re-constituting* of man according to God's original pattern; and, thirdly, the *perfecting* of man. Those three things were taken up by the Son of God, under the title of the 'Son of Man', and in Himself personally they were made true. He was not only the Redeemer, but He was Himself the Redemption. Redemption became personal. It was not only what He did, but what He was as the Pattern of redeemed man. Is it necessary for me to safeguard what I am saying? Let me repeat that. Jesus was not only the Redeemer, and Redemption was not only what He did: He stood there as the personal embodiment and representation of redemption; He was the representation of redeemed man, of the kind of man that would emerge when redeemed.

He, then, was a Man as re-constituted according to God's mind; man, in representation, re-constituted and different. And in Himself He was 'made perfect through sufferings' (Heb. ii. 10). He represented man perfected through sufferings and trials: not, of course, in the sense of being made good or sinless, but brought to completion. We must always remember that the word 'perfect' in the Bible does not just mean a state: it means a measure, a maturity, a completeness, an 'all-round-ness', a 'finalisation' or final realisation of something. In Him the perfecting was not making Him better—nothing could do that—but it could, as man, increase Him. And He did increase. We noticed that it was said twice over about His early

years, first up to the age of twelve, and again afterwards, that He 'grew in wisdom and stature', that 'the grace of God was upon Him', and that He was 'in favour with God and men' (Luke ii. 40, 52). He was growing. And then, as for the three-and-a-half years, what an enlargement of patience, enlargement of faith, enlargement of love. He was the Man perfected, made perfect through suffering; that is, He was made complete. That is the Incarnation.

(2) THE EARTHLY LIFE

Then we considered His earthly life. As we watched Him through the thirty years, and then the three-and-a-half, we summed it all up by saying: Here is the kind of man that God is after. Under every test and trial, in all circumstances of adversity, He is presented to us as the kind of man that God intends to have—a true humanity: not, as we said, a 'theophany', a mere transient visitation of God in man-form, but living from infancy through into maturity of life as *a man*, and standing there as One approved of God, of whom God could say: 'In Him I am well pleased' (Matt. iii. 17, xvii. 5): satisfying God *as a man*. In the earthly life there is presented to us, set before us, the man that God intends to have, the man that God is after.

If only we had eyes to see, and understanding to grasp, all that He was in Himself, and all those laws and principles by which He was governed! How different He was from every other man—utterly different, a mystery to all. "In the midst of you standeth one whom ye know not" (John i. 26). It was not only that He was the Divine Son of God manifest in the flesh. It was proved true again and again that even as man they could not fathom Him. The most intimate friends misunderstood, or failed to understand. There is something about Him as a man that is different and inexplicable. But He is the kind of man that God is going to have.

I should perhaps say here, in parenthesis, that, in a measure—it may be a small measure, but a very real measure—that is, or should be, true of every Christian. The world knows us not because it knew Him not (John i. 10, xvi. 3; I John iii. 1b). There ought to be about a true Christian something that the world cannot fathom, something which it is no use trying to make the world understand, for it never will. There is something different. We have no need to *try* to be different and singular and odd, for we shall certainly be that, if we go on with the Lord!

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(3) THE CROSS

Then we came to the Cross, and in the Cross we saw three things. We saw, firstly, one man, one kind of man, exposed. The Cross of the Lord Jesus was a terrible exposure, uncovering, of man as he is. If ever man divulged what he is like, showed what he is and can do, he did it then. If ever it was made manifest that man is really actuated and driven by the Devil himself, who has a foothold in him and only needs occasion for it to be revealed, it was done then. Don't let us think: 'Oh, they were very terrible people! We are quite different from those people; we would never do that.' Wait until we are put to the test. There is nothing—*nothing*—of which we are not capable, if only the circumstances are such as to uncover the depths of sin that exist in our natures, and draw us out. Yes, man was exposed in the Cross.

Secondly, we saw man classified: man shown what he is and where he belongs, put into his right category. Is it not true in our own case, as Christians, that, as we come, under the light of the Holy Spirit, really to understand something of our own hearts, in some measure to know ourselves—is it not true that we know where we belong? But for the mercy and grace of God, we know where we should be in the end—we should go to 'our own place', where we belong. The Cross classified man and showed where he belonged.

Thirdly, the Cross put all under judgment and death, for "all have sinned". One man exposed, one man classified, one man judged and put away—that is the Cross.

(4) THE RESURRECTION

The Resurrection speaks of another Man brought in and attested. In the words of the Apostle Paul: "Jesus Christ . . . was declared", or 'marked out as', "the son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead" (Rom. i. 1, 4). That sums it all up. The resurrection was God's attestation of the Man who—far from being put away—is brought in in the place of the man that has been rejected.

(5) THE ASCENSION

The ascension and glorifying is all gathered up in this: the installation of the new Man, representatively, as the first of the sons being brought to glory; the new Man installed in Heaven.

THE SPIRIT CAME TO MAKE THESE THINGS TRUE IN BELIEVERS

With this brief reminder of the first five steps in the octave, we come to the advent of the Holy Spirit. You notice that each step must follow on the preceding, each is a part of the other. The advent of the Holy Spirit was to take up all those things that had preceded, to bring them down from the glorified Lord in Heaven, and to make them good in you and in me. The Holy Spirit came to make effectual in you and me the redemption for which Christ came—"the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. iii. 24)—the re-constitution of man that is set forth in Christ. He came to take up that work which was perfected in Him, and carry it to perfection in us—to perfect us also, to make us complete with the completeness of Christ.

So that the basis of the Holy Spirit's operation is nothing less than all the meaning of the Incarnation, in those respects.

As to the *earthly life*, here is the Man, the kind of man that God is after, and the Holy Spirit has come to conform us to that kind of man, to the image of God's Son: in a word, to make us Christ-like. That is the Holy Spirit's work; that is the thing for which He has come. That is a glorious hope for us.

As to the *Cross*—yes, it is equally true that the Holy Spirit's activity is constantly to bear witness against that man that has been put away. If you and I are really indwelt and governed by the Holy Spirit, we shall know when we touch that man. We shall know that that is prohibited ground; we shall know that there is a notice up there: 'No Trespassing—Keep Off!'. Any Christian who does not know by a sting and a kick-back when he or she touches the old man, is lacking in sensitiveness to the Holy Spirit. But there is the other side. The Holy Spirit is to keep us on the positive side by saying: 'Now this is the way, the way of life. Keep off that old ground—keep on the ground of life!' Dear Christian, do take this to heart: do *finish* with that old man! Do not be constantly digging him up and looking at him, going over him and round him, trying to find something good in him—that is, in yourself; for you never will! The verdict of God is that in him there is "no good thing" (Rom. vii. 18); so keep off that ground, and keep on the ground of the new man. The old man has been exposed: surely you know by this time how bad he is. Why have anything to do with him?

The Holy Spirit has come to make us know that there is another ground upon which we must live our lives. He has come to carry into effect the work

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of the Cross, the putting aside of one, and the bringing in of another: in other words, to make way for the *resurrection*. You and I are now by the Holy Spirit called to live upon the ground of His resurrection, by resurrection life. Resurrection is the great feature of this dispensation. These are twin truths—the putting aside of one in order to make way for the other. And the Holy Spirit has come to work on that ground.

Finally, all this is gathered up in *the Man in the glory*. He is the embodiment of all these Divine things. He is installed there beyond any earthly risks, beyond any possibility of interference from down here. He is out of reach of any kind of touch from this world that would seek to alter things. He is right above it all. And then the Spirit comes to take up all this that is embodied in Him, and to work it out in us and in the Church.

That, then, is the answer to the question: Why the Holy Spirit? To make good the meaning of the Incarnation, so far as that Incarnation relates to mankind; to make good the meaning of the earthly life; to make good the meaning of the Cross; to make good the meaning of the Resurrection; to make good the meaning of the Ascension and Glorification of the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit takes up all these things, with the object of bringing them to realisation in believers.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS COMMITTED TO THE LORD JESUS

Thus the Holy Spirit is wholly committed to the Lord Jesus. He has one all-inclusive, all-embracing concern: He is focused with all His attention and all His resources upon the Lord Jesus, to make Him glorious, and that in believers. As we know, the Lord Jesus said: "He shall glorify me" (John xvi. 14). That is His work. Perhaps it is too familiar a thing to create any kind of stir, but I find a good deal of comfort to my heart from every fresh contemplation of the fact that the great advent of the Holy Spirit was centred upon and summed up in this one thing: the making good in you and in me—that is, in the Church—of all that the Lord Jesus was and has done as Son of Man. That gives a ground of confidence in prayer, a ground of assurance of hope. That is how the Holy Spirit has taken over in this dispensation.

This was the very burden of our Lord during those last very full days with His disciples. He stopped His public ministry, withdrew from the multitudes, and for many hours before the end gave Himself with concentrated attention to His disciples. And if you look at those final days and

hours, so tightly packed with this instruction, this teaching, this unburdening of His heart, you will find that His burden at that time all related to the day that was coming. "In that day . . .", "In that day . . .", He was saying; and 'that' day was the day of the Holy Spirit. 'When he is come . . .'; 'In that day, when he is come . . .' He put the greatest importance and value upon the coming of the Holy Spirit, because He knew very well that all that He had come for, as in Incarnation and earthly life and Cross, would be without value unless the Holy Spirit reproduced it organically and vitally in other people.

He gathered that up into one so familiar statement: "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit" (John xii. 24). Now He said that in response to certain people who had expressed a wish to "see Jesus" (v. 21). It was a strange, mysterious rejoinder. "The hour is come, that the Son of Man should be glorified . . . Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone . . .". Surely His meaning was: Though you ask, though you seek, never so earnestly, you will never see the Son of Man glorified, only in His being reproduced in other people, like the corn reproducing itself. There you will see Me, there you will see My glory.'

For there is a sense in which there is no seeing of the Son of Man, the *glorious* Son of Man, except in the Church, in believers. Alas! what a poor, poor showing we make of it! But that is His way. I say, He spent those hours and those days concentrating upon this thing. 'For all that I have come to be and to do, the necessity is that the Holy Spirit shall come. It is far more important that He should come than that I should stay. If I stay, I am like the grain of wheat alone; if I go, I make room for Him to reproduce.' He taught, therefore, that the only way to know Him, the only way to see Him, was this way.

DEATH, THE OBSTACLE TO GOD'S PURPOSE, HAS BEEN REMOVED

What effect ought that to have upon us? Surely, first of all, it ought to give us real exercise about the matter of the Holy Spirit having His rightful place in us, having no obstruction, being free to do His work. Let us remind ourselves that God, from His side, has moved to remove the greatest obstruction of all. When, in the Letter to the Hebrews, the Lord Jesus is presented as the Man installed in Heaven—"We behold . . . Jesus . . . crowned with glory and honour" (ii. 9)—it means that it is pos-

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sible now for God to get on with His work in relation to mankind. God's thought is always concerning *man*. "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (ii. 6). Here is the Man to whom men are to be conformed: but there was a great obstruction, a great obstacle that made that impossible, and that was death. Death was in the way. Man can never come to that while the sentence of death rests upon everything. For when man sinned in his first father, death, the great enemy to all God's purpose, was passed as a sentence upon all men; and so it stands in the way. That man, that race can never come there and be like that.

But "we behold . . . Jesus, *because of the suffering of death* crowned with glory and honour". He has taken the obstruction, the obstacle, and destroyed it. 'Through death He brought to nought him that had the power of death' (Heb. ii. 14). He has 'tasted death in the behalf of every man' (v. 9). He has taken up the great obstacle and put it out of the way. *Now* we can come to that likeness! From God's side, the greatest obstruction to the fulfilment of this Divine purpose has been removed—and if you deal with the greatest, you have dealt with everything—and so the way is open.

The effect of this upon us, then, ought to be that we see to it that we get off, and keep clear of, that ground of death—the death that rests upon the old man. This may sound mysterious, it may sound abstruse, but in fact it is very real, very practical. If you and I begin to have any truck with ourselves, *as we are in ourselves*, we know that death begins to work. It is always like that. And the enemy knows it too. If he can set in motion this "wheel of nature" (Jas. iii. 6), get it stirred up and get us involved, he knows that he has us again under the power of death. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life, and He works on, and only on, the ground of life. You and I, therefore, should make it our exercise to be always on the ground of life. We need to remember that God's thought for us is life, not death. If we will lay hold on life, God will react: the Holy Spirit will move. We accept death too easily. The enemy is always offering us death in some form or other and trying to get us to take it on. If we start flirting with death in any way, we just provide a playground for the Devil, and he will spoil everything. It is contrary to the Holy Spirit. May the Lord teach us what that means.

The Holy Spirit, then, is committed to the risen Christ, to the realising in us of all that His risen life means, with the end in view of glorification.

PRESENT CHASTENING RELATED TO FUTURE GOVERNMENT

There is in Christ a very full purpose concerning man, a very full purpose indeed. We said something about that from Hebrews in our last chapter. "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands" (Ps. viii. 6); "Thou didst put all things in subjection under his feet" (Heb. ii. 8). 'The inhabited earth of which we are now speaking was subjected, not to angels, but to man' (Heb. ii. 5). That is a tremendous calling, a tremendous vocation: nothing less than government of this world, in union with Christ, in the ages to come. Do you say: 'That is a wonderful idea, a beautiful conception—but what is the practical value of beautiful conceptions and ideas that are afar off in the ages to come?' After this wonderful presentation that we have seen of Christ, and of man in relation to Christ, and of their fellowship or partnership in the government of the inhabited earth to come, there are two things that come out of this letter to the Hebrews.

One is that, in relation to that purpose, God is doing something in believers *now*. Do you remember Hebrews xii? 'We have had fathers of our flesh, who chastened us as it seemed good to them for a season, and we gave them reverence: how much more to the Father of our spirits?' (vv. 9, 10). The whole letter really heads up into this. With chapter xii the writer is nearing the end of his message; he is summing up. What is it all about? "Holy brethren, partners in a heavenly calling . . ." (iii. 1). Government of the inhabited earth to come in union with Christ—that is our calling. But we have got to be trained for it; and what is happening to us now in our spiritual life is our training for that, and it is very practical.

If there is one thing that you and I find that we need to learn, it is how to get spiritual ascendancy. Why does the Lord allow all these things—these adverse things, these trying things? why does He not prevent them? It is in order that we may learn ascendancy of spirit: for this government is not official—it is spiritual government. The real government of this world is spiritual. Behind men and everything that is happening there is a spiritual system at work. But it is an evil thing. God is going to clear that out of His universe and put a good thing in its place. It is going to be a spiritual but *heavenly* government, and when there is a heavenly background to this world, what a different kind of world it will be. God is going to make this world a wholesome place by placing a wholesome spiritual government over it, and that govern-

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ment is going to be put in the hands of the saints.

But with that in view we are going through an awful gruelling, an awful schooling in the hands of the Father of our spirits. It is all over this matter of getting spiritual ascendancy. Every day we have something to get on top of, spiritually ; something that must be put in subjection under our feet. Too often it gets on top and puts its feet on us. In order to bring it under, we have to co-operate with the Lord, and our training is so that we may learn how to bring it under our feet. The Holy Spirit is here for that. All those words about being "strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man" (Eph. iii. 16), 'strong in the strength of the Lord' (cf. Eph. vi. 10, 1 Pet. iv. 11)—all such words have to do with the matter of gaining spiritual ascendancy, getting on top.

NEED FOR ENCOURAGEMENT AND WARNING

The other thing that comes out of this letter to the Hebrews is that so constantly struck note of exhortation, of encouragement. "Let us go on . . ." There is so much of warning and entreaty. Why?

Because of this high calling, because of this great vocation, because of this very purpose in our new creation and union with God's Son. It is our inheritance—the inhabited earth to come and the government of it. We need much encouragement, we need much exhorting, we need constant warning ; it is so big a thing. I believe it is that to which the writer refers when he says: "How shall we escape, if we neglect *so great salvation*?" (ii. 3). The "so great salvation" is not just escaping hell and somehow scraping into Heaven—it is all this that is in this very letter. "Partners in a heavenly calling".

The Holy Spirit has come for the very purpose of making that good. Perhaps the names by which the Lord Jesus called Him do not impress us very much: for instance, when He calls Him, in our language, 'the Comforter'. Of course, that is very good: we need comforting ; but that is only a part of the meaning of His Name. Its fuller meaning is : 'the One called alongside', co-operating with us ; 'the Encourager', 'the Advocate'. He has come to be alongside—to be our Helper and Encourager in this great work of conformity to God's Son and fulfilment of eternal vocation in the ages to come.

T. A-S.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

TRUE RICHES

AS Mr. Fortune was driving past the little cottage which stood on the outskirts of the village, he noticed that someone had moved in. He owned all the property in that area, and liked to know what was going on, so he ordered his chauffeur to stop so that he could enquire about the new tenant.

He found that the newcomer was a quiet, refined man who lived alone. There seemed something familiar about his face, so that when he said that his name was Pilgrim, Mr. Fortune remarked that he had once been at school with a boy of that name. On comparing notes, they found that that boy and Mr. Pilgrim were indeed one and the same person, and remarked how strange it was that he should happen to come to live within a few miles of his old schoolfellow. Two more different homes it would be hard to imagine, for while Mr. Pilgrim's tiny cottage was simply furnished, the large and luxurious mansion of Mr. Fortune contained everything that money could buy.

On his way home, as he sat back in his costly car, Mr. Fortune felt very pleased with himself. The faded poverty of the other made him more conscious than ever of how well he had managed his affairs. A pity, he thought, that Pilgrim should

have made such a failure of his life, especially as he had been a clever boy. To Mr. Fortune it was failure to be poor ; success to him was measured only by wealth and worldly influence. For this reason he felt satisfied, since he had done so well that he was now recognised as the richest man in the district.

During the next weeks he saw Mr. Pilgrim several times, and discovered that he had spent his life in the Far East in the work of the Gospel. Now he had come to end his days in England and kind friends had made it possible for him to rent the country cottage. To Mr. Fortune it seemed that Pilgrim had wasted his life. He had to admit that he seemed happy and peaceful, but money meant so much to him that he could not imagine real happiness without it, and could only feel pity or contempt for those who had little or none.

Then one day a strange thing happened. He was driving past the cottage when Mr. Pilgrim begged him to stop, and with a look of deep concern on his face asked to have a word with him. He looked so very serious that Mr. Fortune felt obliged to alight from his car, enter the humble home and ask what was the matter. With some agitation Mr.

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Pilgrim began to tell him a strange dream which had come to him in the night. He could not remember every detail, but the one thing which stood out in his memory was a solemn voice announcing that before another day was over death would come to the richest man in the district. 'The richest man in the district . . .' This could only mean Mr. Fortune, so that was why he felt he must give him a solemn warning.

'The richest man in the district . . .' Yes, Mr. Fortune was quite prepared to accept that description, but he pooh-poohed the warning, assuring Mr. Pilgrim that he had never felt so well in his life. With that he re-entered his car and ordered the man to drive on. Yet he could not settle. The message had disturbed him. Suppose it meant a car accident! He could get no peace of mind until he had got back into his house. He felt safer there.

'The richest man in the district . . .' The words kept ringing in his ears. He really began to feel ill, and took the precaution of sending for his doctor. Early in the afternoon the doctor called, assured him that he had nothing to worry about and left him some pills. Mr. Fortune, however, was thoroughly alarmed. As the day drew on he began to give way to all sorts of fears; he even imagined that the doctor might have made a mistake with the pills. 'The richest man in the district . . .' Still the words came back to his troubled mind. He grew so restless that he again sent for the doctor to come to help him. The doctor promised to come at once, but strangely enough he did not arrive. Where could he be? The minutes ticked past, they turned to hours, but still no doctor. It was getting late now.

At last he came, and was very quickly shown into the room. Before Mr. Fortune had a chance to express his anger, the doctor himself explained

the reason for his delay. 'Just as I was coming to you,' he said, 'I received an urgent call to a little cottage on the other side of the village. A man called Pilgrim had been taken very ill. I could do nothing for him. He has just passed away.'

Mr. Fortune was silent. His heart grew suddenly lighter; he felt better; a great wave of relief swept over him. So this was what the dream meant. It was not he who should die but Mr. Pilgrim. Poor old Pilgrim! The dream, though, had not said poor but rich. A sudden thought came to his mind, and he asked, 'Wiseman, was this Pilgrim a rich man?' Dr. Wiseman paused to consider. At last he replied. 'Not if you mean money' he said, 'but I know that the sacrificial life he had lived must have meant much spiritual wealth. He was rich in good works. Yes, and he was rich in faith, too. And the best thing about this sort of wealth is that you take it with you into eternity. His treasure was in heaven. Yes, Mr. Fortune, on the whole I would say that Mr. Pilgrim was a rich man, the richest man in the district.'

That night Mr. Fortune lay awake for a long time. He was greatly relieved to find himself still alive, but his pride had received a big shock. 'The richest man in the district . . .' He had thought that this meant him. But no, he was not rich in the true sense; he was very poor. After all, his life had not been a success, for he had failed to find the one thing that matters. It was the servant of Christ who was the true rich man.

And what of us? Do we trust the Lord Jesus as Saviour and follow Him as Lord? Have we begun to "lay up treasure in heaven"? Paul prayed for some of his friends: "that they may know the mystery of God, even Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden" (Col. 2. 2, 3).

H. F.

JEALOUSY FOR GOD

"And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Is it thou, thou troubler of Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house" (1 Kings xviii. 17, 18).

"And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts" (1 Kings xix. 10).

WHEN we bring together those two fragments— "I have been very jealous for the Lord"; "Is it thou, thou troubler of Israel?"—we find two strangely contrasting and conflicting points of view.

On the one side, the claim—truly supported, and undoubtedly true—to have been very jealous for the Lord. And on the other side, this term, this description, used of that same person: "thou troubler of Israel". But the juxtaposition brings out something very significant. To be very jealous for the Lord may inevitably mean that you are a troubler of Israel. Indeed, it usually works out like that. You will give nobody any trouble—I mean spiritual trouble—if you are not jealous for the Lord. But if you are, make no mistake about it, this is how it will come back at you: 'Thou troubler of Israel!'

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THE PROPHET AS 'TROUBLE MAKER'

Now, although Elijah seems to have repudiated the charge, and there was truth and right in his so doing, nevertheless the charge was true. Ahab, for once in his life, was telling the truth, but telling the truth in a way of which he was not aware. It is essentially a part of the ministry of a prophetic instrument, to cause trouble. It is inevitable; it is in the very nature of things. For the very function of the prophet came into view when things were not right. If things had never gone wrong, had never needed adjusting, correcting, or bringing to some greater measure of spiritual fulness, there would have been no need of prophets. We should know very very little about prophets, if things had gone right on as they should have done. The function of the prophets was to keep and hold before the people of God, God's full thought concerning them, especially in the face of certain things that worked very definitely against it. And it is just because of that clash and conflict that the trouble arises.

Elijah's charge against Ahab was a real one; but the 'trouble' to which Ahab referred was not in Elijah—it was deeply inherent in the spiritual condition of the time. Its real root and cause lay there. There would have been no 'trouble', but for people like Elijah; everything would have remained quiescent. When Elijah was there in the country, Ahab knew of it, and searched for him high and low. He was the great irritating, aggravating factor. Though for a long time hidden, nevertheless his very presence in the country was having the effect of dragging this thing out—this spiritual apostasy and corruption, which was, after all, the root of the trouble. It could not go on unchallenged, while such people as Elijah were there. I am not at this moment so much concerned with Elijah himself, as with what he represents: the presence of some living spiritual testimony, embodied; an annoying, inconvenient, aggravating thing, always somewhere about. As you notice in the chapter, Ahab sent throughout the length and breadth of the land, to try to discover Elijah. If only he could get hold of *this*, and destroy *this*, he thought, he could get rid of the 'trouble'.

This leads us to some very definite conclusions. If there is a clash, a collision, between two irreconcilables, there will always be trouble. Given the incorrigible downgrade trend of human nature, and, wherever that is challenged, you will have trouble. That there is such a thing in human nature needs no argument. We know quite well that any kind of turning of that trend upward, no matter

in what realm, is always fraught with hard work, with conflict. It is the nature of things to decline. Leave anything in this creation to itself, and it degenerates; we know that to be true. Every attempt, every effort to improve things, in every realm, is fraught with conflict. That is clearly true of human nature. It hates to be bothered, troubled or disturbed; it wants to have its own way. Morally and spiritually, the trend is always downward; if that is challenged, there is going to be trouble.

ISRAEL EXEMPLIFIES THE DOWNGRADE TREND IN MAN

How terribly true is the working of that principle and law in Israel! Never in the history of mankind has such an experiment been carried out, as that which God carried out with Israel. God did everything that could be done to make possible an upward trend in the life of a nation. He gave it the very best system of laws and regulations, for every department of its life—physical, moral, spiritual. He gave it the very best conditions, in a land flowing with milk and honey; a land that simply leapt to respond to any little effort to make it fruitful. God showed infinite patience and long-suffering with that people. Never was such an experiment carried out in human history, as was carried out with Israel.

They had only to answer to God in any little way, and immediately He blessed. If they did this, in the temporal realm, at once they received blessing for it; at once they were rewarded. They had only got to ask, and He gave. They had only to do, and He came out to them. We often wish (secretly) that we lived in those days, when the temporal responses of God were so wonderful! Yes, even when they were not right with Him, if, in the midst of their criminal attitude toward God, they humbled themselves and prayed, God seemed to forget it all, and to come right out to them. God was carrying out an experiment. Right at the centre of His universe, He was giving an object lesson for all ages, for all intelligences to observe, to read. He put this people there under the most favourable conditions—physically, geographically, morally and spiritually—that He could provide. His attitude was: If you will, I will, and there will be no delay about it.

What is the sum of the whole thing? What is the story when you read it? An amazing story! It is that, in spite of everything, the course is always downgrade, downgrade, downgrade. This is something incorrigible, inveterate. God has shown for all time, for all times, that there is something in

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man, *in* man, that is deeper and stronger than all the upward advantages that God can give him. Put him in a paradise, and he will turn it into a slum! Give him all the best conditions, and, in the long run, the condition will be one of disgrace. And, somehow, strangely enough, man loves to have it so. If you try to interfere with it, you see what you meet. The dentist and the doctor can be the most hated persons in the world! Is it because they are so evil? Oh, no; there is something irrational about it, utterly irrational. The value is altogether overlooked—simply because it goes against the grain! And what is the ‘grain’? How many people would sooner suffer, suffer, suffer, than endure perhaps a few moments’ pain, to have the suffering cleared up! You see what I mean—it is a strange thing, this human nature. But that is really at the root of this whole thing.

Is it not strange, that that which can be, or could be, the answer to all need, the solving of every problem, the clearing up of every evil situation, the bringing in of conditions so much more favourable, can become the most hated thing? Is it not strange? Look at the Lord Jesus: look at all that God has given in Him; look at all that He was, all that He came to bring, all that He came to do! He is a challenge, an abiding challenge. Can you find evil in Him? “What evil hath this man done?”, asked another man once—a man who knew something about evil, wrong and sin; perhaps few knew more about it than Pilate did. Yet, knowing it all, he had to say: ‘I find no fault in this Man’ (Luke xxiii. 22, 14). And yet this One is the object of malice and hatred, unto murder. Strange, isn’t it? He could clear up all the situations, solve all the problems, meet all the needs; and yet—and yet—‘Away with Him!’ Anything that stands in the way of man’s own disposition, or predisposition, or predilection, having its own way, will be a ‘trouble maker’.

Now that touches a principle. You and I, on the broadest basis of the Christian life, are here in this world in this very capacity, to straddle the path of iniquity, of sin—of the very course of man—and to represent a check; and because we are here for that, we shall be called ‘trouble makers’. In a very real sense we shall *be* trouble makers. The trouble will focus itself upon us, and we shall have to suffer for it. The very fact that you are jealous for the Lord will bring you into conflict with that trend that there is in this world, in man. It is going to be a really gruelling business for any testimony for God in this world, because, in the very nature of things, it counters the whole course of this world, which is downhill.

THE SPIRITUAL *VERSUS* THE ‘NATURAL’

That is, as I have said, the broad line of the principle. Let us get nearer to the heart of things, so far as what is represented by this chapter is concerned. When the *spiritual* stands to confront the merely formal, traditional, nominal and ‘natural’, then there is going to be trouble. This is not now merely the reaction from the world: it is the reaction from religion. I would go further, and say it may be the reaction from Christianity. There is a very great difference between formal, traditional, nominal, ‘natural’ Christianity, on the one side, and spiritual Christianity, on the other; a great deal of difference. So much so, that this also becomes a battlefield—the battlefield of a lot of trouble.

Leave formalism alone, and everything will go on quite quietly. Leave traditionalism alone—that is, the set order of things as it has always been; that framework of things as it has been constituted and set up and established by man; that Christianity which is the fixed, accepted system of things—and you will escape a great deal of trouble. But seek to bring in a truly spiritual order of things, and trouble arises at once. And *you* are the trouble maker! The truth is that the trouble lies in the existing condition, the situation, the state; but it is only brought out by your action. And so spiritual men and women, and spiritual ministry, are called ‘trouble makers’, because the two things cannot go on together.

That is where Israel was. They had the traditions, they had the oracles, they had the ordinances, they had the testimonies; they had the forms, they had the system—they had it all; *but*, in the days of the prophets, there was ever this vast gap between the ‘externals’ and ‘internals’ of life in relation with God. The heart is far removed from the lips. The spiritual reality is not found in the formal. You may have it all—but then bring in the truly spiritual meaning of things, and trouble begins in that very realm. It is the trouble which arises when what is external and traditional comes into conflict with something which is truly spiritual.

I used the word ‘natural’ a few moments ago—of course in quotation marks, taking it out of the New Testament: it means, literally, that which is merely ‘soulish’, ‘of the soul’. It is important to realise how very soulish a thing can be, even in Christianity. There can be tremendous passion, tremendous earnestness, tremendous enthusiasm, tremendous arguments and conviction; and yet the thing may be far, far removed from what is spiritual. It may be another world altogether. The con-

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flict arises between those two things. When the natural mind is manipulating Divine things; when the natural reason has taken hold of the Word of God and the things of God; when man's own passions and interests are being served through the work and service of God: that can become the ground of a great deal of spiritual conflict and trouble.

Trouble will arise in the realm of religion, and in 'Christian religion', as such, when what is purely spiritual comes up against the fixed system and tradition of men. It can happen as truly within Christianity, as it did between Christ and Paul, and Judaism. There was the tradition, and, in itself, there was nothing wrong with it; there was nothing wrong with what God had given, with the oracles and the testimony, nothing spiritually or morally wrong. But they had become ends in themselves, things in themselves; and the real meaning, significance and interpretation of them was lost; *they* were the things. The temple was the thing: with God it was not the thing; it was only a sign of something else. With them the sacrifices were the things: with God they were not the thing at all; there was only one Sacrifice that was true with God. And so we might go over the whole gamut. The *things*—the forms and the means—were everything, and it was criminal in their eyes to say otherwise, to give any other interpretation than the historical and traditional. That is where they fell out with Paul. He had come to see the meaning of things, he had advanced from the things to the meaning; and they had not. Therein lay the conflict and the trouble.

'SOUL' IS THE GROUND OF SATAN'S KINGDOM

But now, let us come to the very heart of it. There is the wide circle of the world, of mankind and of human nature; and, within that, the smaller circle of religion, whatever the religion may be. These are realms of conflict when God's full mind is present. But right at the heart of both of those, there is something else, something that is easily discernible right through the Bible: there is the Satanic. Now, if Satan is alive to anything, sensitive to anything, touchy about anything, it is on this matter of the place that the Lord Jesus is to have—and to have, not formally, but vitally; not just historically, but spiritually: so that the Lord Jesus becomes not merely a name in history, not merely a figure in history, not merely a teacher in history, not merely a historic factor, but a vital, potent force in this universe, right up to date. That

is the point upon which Satan and his kingdom are most sensitive. They are alive to any little thing that points in that direction, and they recognise immediately a potential menace to their kingdom.

Human nature is a good playground for that. Hence the story of missionary martyrs: those who have touched the raw material of human nature with the testimony of Jesus, with all the terrible conflict, suffering and cost. The natural man—the natural mind, the natural will; that which is merely the soul of man—in moving and working, exercising itself, asserting itself and drawing to itself, in the realm of the things of God, is a splendid playground for the evil forces. You assert any little bit of your soul life, and see what the Devil will do with it! You uncover any little bit of your soul life, and see what a wreck Satan will make of you! It is the whole story of the devastation that results when self-occupation, introspection and self-pity—all the forms of self-life—assert themselves and become accentuated. Does not the evil one just play havoc with people like that! They have opened the door, and he is not slow to present himself there for access.

Now, set over against all that—the natural man brought into the spiritual world (if that is a possibility), or into the realm of God's things—is that which is purely and truly spiritual, that which is of the Spirit. And when those two things come into collision, there is trouble—for they are both great systems—simply because, in the realm which is truly of the Spirit, Satan has no place at all! 'The prince of this world cometh', said Jesus, 'and hath nothing in Me'—the Man who lived in and walked by the Spirit. In all things, in *all* things, He referred and deferred to the Spirit of the Anointing which was upon Him. The prince of this world had *nothing* in Him.

Poor Peter was just at the mercy of the Devil, because, with all his sincerity, with all his well-meaning enthusiasm, he moved in his own soul. His relationship to Christ was one purely of the soul. When Peter came to be a man under the government of the Holy Spirit, that matter underwent immediate adjustment, and you can almost watch the process of that soul-life of his being brought more and more under control.

Perhaps I should pause to safeguard this, by saying very emphatically that it is not wrong to have a soul. No, God has given us a soul, and it is our soul which has got to be saved. But the point is—what is the base upon which and from which we operate, the instrument that we are using, the ground of our living? Either it is the soul, which

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

is the seat of our *self*-life, in every sense ; or it is the spirit, which is the seat of the *Divine* life.

Here, then, is the explanation of the conflict. Satan works hard to get hold of 'soul'. He can lead everything out on to a false stream in that way. A thing that may start in the Spirit, can at some point, without sufficient watchfulness and prayerfulness, be led right out on to a false trail, and end up as something altogether different from what it was at the beginning.

But, to return to this eighteenth chapter of First Kings—Baal and all the rest of it—the heart of the thing is this. It is not Baal, it is not Ahab, it is not Jezebel: it is the evil powers; and *they* are after this man Elijah. Behind Jezebel, there are evil forces set upon the destruction of this man, because his very presence means a breach in their kingdom. He is the man in touch with God, in touch with the Throne. In him and by him, *that* throne becomes imminent—that throne is present. And these two thrones, these two kingdoms, are against one another.

'TROUBLE' INEVITABLE WITH SPIRITUAL SIGHT

When, therefore, there is the purest testimony, the fullest expression of what is of God, the heavenly over against the earthly, the spiritual over against the carnal or the natural, the enemy gives a turn to things, a twist to things, and lays the responsibility at the door of a spiritual and a heavenly ministry. He says: 'You are the cause of all the trouble—you are the troubler!' But no. The trouble lies deeper than that, and in another realm. The truth is, there is something here that, in its very nature, *must* create trouble, *must* be a source of trouble, so long as God's known will, His revealed mind, is being violated ; while the full expression of God's purpose is being withstood. To bring in something that stands for that, there is going to be trouble.

It is a costly thing to have seen God's full purpose and thought concerning His people. It is always a costly thing. The Lord Jesus set a very vivid example and object lesson of this truth right in the foreground, in the incident of the man born blind (John ix). There is no doubt that the Lord intended that man to represent Israel and Israel's condition at the time. He gave that man sight—and what happened to the man? "They cast him out", that is all ; they cast him out, they excommunicated him (v. 34). That is an object lesson, an instance of this very thing.

If eyes have been opened ; if, in any sense—not officially—you have become a 'seer'—one who sees: it is going to cost you a lot, it will involve you in a lot of trouble. This matter of 'seeing' does that. It was Elijah the *seer*, over against the *blindness* of Israel. It is a costly thing to be a spiritual man or a spiritual woman in this universe. It is a costly thing, yes, very costly, to hold to a heavenly and spiritual position. It is a costly thing to hold for Christ's full place ; it involves you in trouble. It is a costly thing to have light—if it is true light, God-given light. It is a costly thing to have life.

But remember, it is here, in this, that the power is resident. It is with this that God is found ultimately to be committed. You know the story again. God will have no compromise with the thing that lies behind. 'Take the prophets of Baal!' They were all slain. There is no compromise with that spiritual thing. But God is shown as to where He stands, to what He is committed, and where the power is.

For I suppose that, if Elijah represents one thing more than another, he does represent spiritual power. When we think of spiritual power we always refer to Elijah—'in the power of Elijah'. It is proverbial. Why? Not because of anything that he was in himself ; no, not because of the man. He was a man in touch with the Throne ; he was a man who had seen ; a man who was committed, of whom it was true that he was "very jealous for the Lord". God was with Elijah.

John came 'in the power of Elijah' (Luke i. 17) ; he was the Elijah of his time. The Lord Jesus said of him: "If ye are willing to receive it, this is Elijah" (Matt. xi. 14), though John himself denied this (John i. 21). Elijah is a sort of phantom in a certain realm. Poor Herod was scared of his life—he began to see things, to get strange ideas—when he heard about Jesus: some suggested to him that this was Elijah returned to life, but he thought it was John the Baptist risen from the dead (Matt. xiv. 2 ; Mark vi. 14-16). The fellow just lost his mental grasp of things. This Elijah man counts for something. Power is with him ; the verdict is with him.

And—let there be no mistake about it—in the end it will be found that God *is* committed to that which is utterly committed to Him for His full purposes. It is costly ; it causes much trouble ; *but*—the issue is with Him, and He will look after His own interests.

T. A-S.

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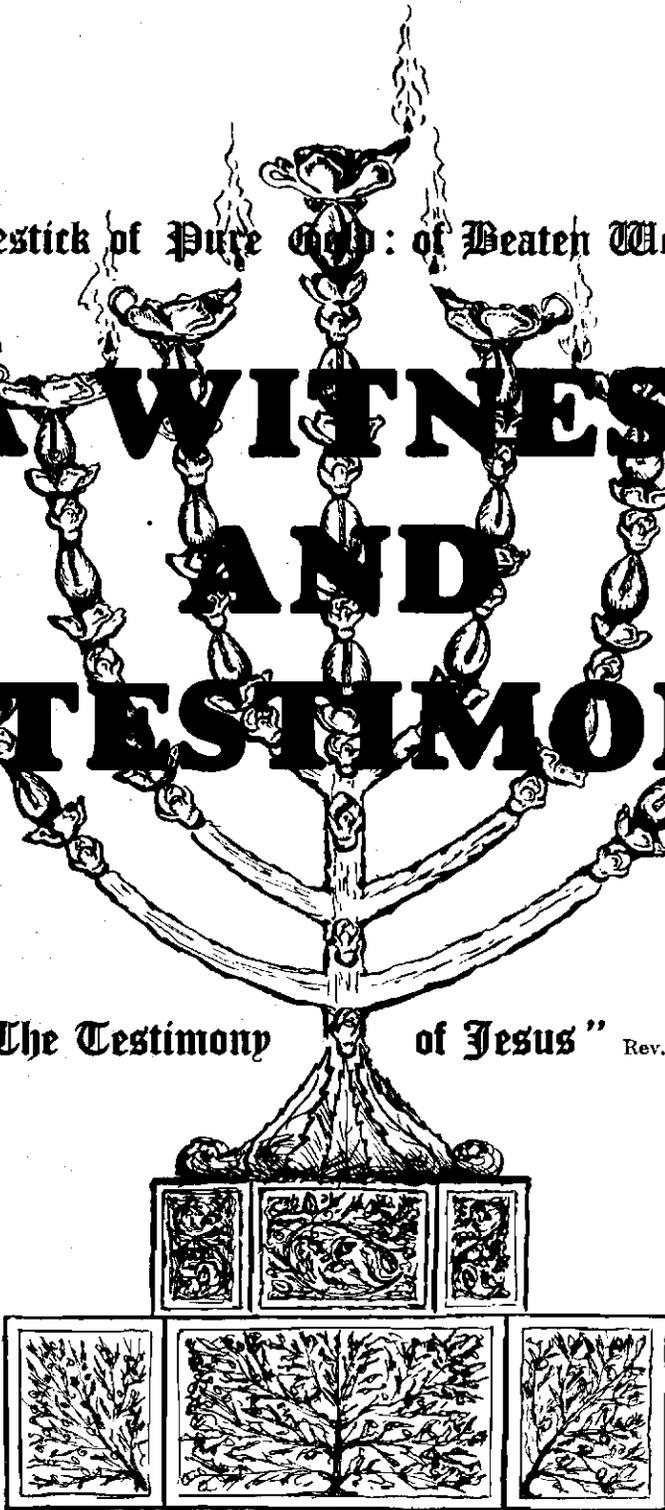
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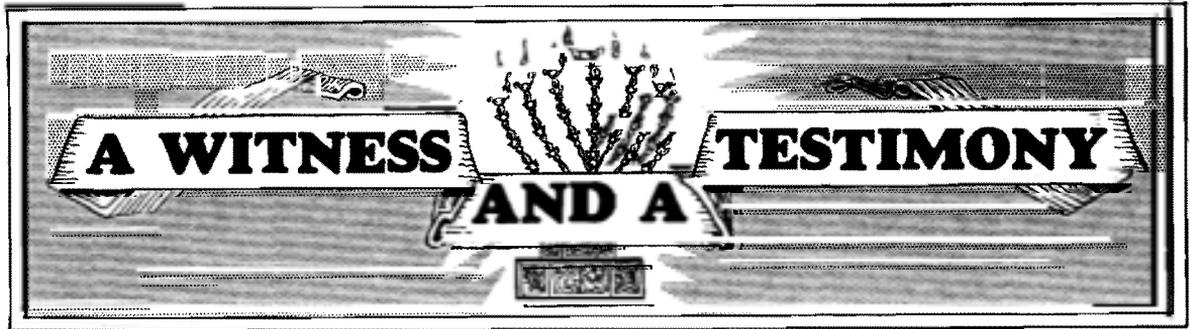
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MEN WHOSE EYES HAVE SEEN THE KING

VII. THE THRONE—THE LIVING ONES AND THE WHEELS

WITH the first chapter of Ezekiel's prophecies open before us, let us note how much it contains that is instructive and helpful in connection with the movements and ways of God in relation to the glory. As we pointed out in our last meditation, the key phrase, inclusive not only of the chapter but of the whole book, is found in the second half of verse 28:

"This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face . . ."

That refers, as I have said, to all that is in that chapter, but it relates especially to the vision of the Throne in Heaven, and to the 'likeness as of a Man upon it above'. It is the glory of the Throne of the Exalted God-Man. And from that, everything else proceeds. All that is here, and all that comes later, right to the end of this very full book,

is the expression of that Throne, of that government, of the meaning of that Man being there, where He is.

In summarising the visions which came to Ezekiel, when he said: "I saw visions of God", we said that under the Throne there was a two-fold symbolic medium of its expression; and that two-fold medium is the four living ones, or cherubim, and the wheels. To both of these quite a considerable section is given. You notice that they are not just mentioned and passed over, but they are very fully and minutely described. You have got to stop with this; you have got to take time and give attention. The prophet is giving us every detail. It is very difficult to understand; I certainly do not claim to understand it, but I think I see some things that are almost on the face of it. Nevertheless, since these things are brought in here in very clear definition, and in very full presentation, right at the beginning of all these pro-

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pecies and movements and visions, they must evidently be taken account of. They must have a place, and a very serious place.

THE CHERUBIM: SYMBOLS OF HOLINESS AND LIFE

Firstly, then, the Cherubim. We need not describe them; their description is here. We need say very little about the detailed features of their make-up: all that will be familiar. We want to come quite simply and directly to the real function of these living ones. Of course it must be underlined that this is oriental symbolism: it is a symbolic representation of something spiritual. People in the East reading these things would have a more ready apprehension of this way of presenting truth than perhaps we have. But God has chosen to convey His great truths in this symbolic and illustrative way; and we have to get through the symbolism and the illustration—if need be forget the forms, forget the characteristics described—and get straight to the heart of the matter: What is their message? what is it that they are intended to convey?

From a reflection upon the many appearances of the Cherubim in the Bible, it can be seen that invariably, on every occasion, they stand related to one thing; their function is ever and always to proclaim that the Throne of God is a *holy* Throne; that His government is a government of *holiness*. It will at once be seen how vital and appropriate this is, standing right at the beginning of the history of judgment contained in these prophecies. For everything that follows, including the large section of judgments, both of Israel and in the nations, under this supreme Throne, is in relation to an unholy state, and a demand that that shall be judged and put away. The glory waits for that, and waits upon that. The glory ever and always waits upon holiness, because it is a Throne of Glory which is the glory of Holiness. The government of that holiness is represented here in this Throne, and in the Man on it.

But that is not all. These cherubim are called '*living ones*'. The idea of *life*, of *living-ness*, is always associated with them. They come up again and again in that connection. At the moment it is this, that *holiness* and *life* are combined in them: the life waits on the holiness; the holiness gives rise to the life. You cannot separate these two things. You cannot have the life without the holiness; you cannot have the holiness without it leading to life. It is always working like that, to

and fro. More holiness, more life; more life, more holiness. These '*living ones*' are, in representation, the custodians of the Divine holiness for the sake of the Divine life. For the things that are in the balances all the way through this book are life and death; that is where the battle is being fought out. It is a question of life and death for Israel, for the nations; but the deciding thing is this matter of *holiness*.

THE CHERUBIM IN THE GARDEN, IN THE TABERNACLE AND IN THE TEMPLE

Now, if you will briefly pass your mind's eye over some of the instances where the Cherubim are in view, you will see that that is the connection each time. When things went wrong in the Garden; when sin entered; when disobedience, through pride, came in and operated; when man was expelled from the place of life, where the '*tree of life*' was: at the gate, to guard it, were placed the Cherubim with flaming swords. Their presence there said, That is a holy life, and that which is corrupt, polluted, tainted, unholy, cannot have it, cannot touch it, cannot come near it, is expelled from it. The Cherubim would say, We are the custodians, not only of that life, but of the essential holiness that it demands.

Then, figures of the Cherubim were interwoven on the screen, the veil between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, and man would pass that veil in peril of his life—it would be death. They were inscribed again there in testimony of the fact that they were the guardians of what is holy, and as such, anything unholy would perish if it passed their way. They, on the veil, declared that things were wrong with man; they were a testimony against the wrong state of man, because of which he cannot come into the presence of the Glory, and the presence of the Life.

THE CHERUBIM IN PROPHETIC VISIONS

But then we remember Isaiah: the features are impressive in this connection. Isaiah '*saw the Lord, seated upon a Throne, high and lifted up*', and the Seraphim (only another name for these, I think) were heard crying: '*Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts!*' Why was this? King Uzziah had forced his way into the temple, to serve unlawfully at the altar, and took the censer in his hand. Man had pressed in to the presence of the Holy God, and had touched holy things. The priests besought him, pleaded with him: '*Go out!*

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It pertaineth not unto thee, King Uzziah!’ But Uzziah asserted himself there, and he was smitten with leprosy, and remained a leper to the day of his death. He died a tainted, corrupted man. And “in the year that king Uzziah *died* I saw the Lord”, and heard the Seraphim crying: Holy, Holy, Holy. The Throne is the throne of holiness and of life; but where there is not the holiness it means death. Life is on the ground of hoimess.

Jerusalem has become grievously and terribly defiled—read Jeremiah. It is a terrible book, a terrible revelation of spiritual condition. In the resultant judgment the people are carried away into captivity. And we find Ezekiel there, with the captives of the southern kingdom of Judah, by the River Chebar. This is a scene of desolation, a scene of death; this is a scene of judgment; they stand in the place of Uzziah, defiled. Judgment has come upon them, and death. If you have any question about that, or if you want that particularly emphasized, just turn to the great chapter in these prophecies about the ‘valley of dry bones’ (Ezek. xxxvii). That is God’s conception of this people at that time. A valley of dry bones; very many, and scattered—that was Israel’s condition as in Babylon, as in captivity. Are these people going to be saved from death, from judgment? how will it be? The Lord will say that He will have to take away their unclean, polluted, stony hearts; ‘a new heart will I give you’. In other words, they will have to be cleansed from their iniquity, washed from their sin, made again God’s *holy* people, and they will *live*. The Cherubim are very active in relation to that matter. See them ‘on the wing’! They are characterized by a deep concern that this people should be saved from death by being delivered from the bondage of corruption.

THE CHERUBIM IN THE REVELATION

We come over to the book of the Revelation—the marvellous fourth and fifth chapters. Here the Heavens are open again (iv. 1). What did John see? Here are the twenty-four elders, and the four ‘living ones’, and myriads of angels, before the throne of God and of the Lamb; here they are round the Throne, singing their song of redemption. But the four ‘living ones’ are there, not now feverishly, fretfully, hurrying hither and thither, concerned with this matter of getting a people saved and right—their wings are let down, and they are joining in the worship. The work is done! Their work is finished, and now they can worship and join in praise with all the redeemed. That is how it ends:

it is the picture of *glory and life through holiness*.

That is a message not for the days of Ezekiel only. It is an abiding message; the truth and the principle which runs from the beginning to the end of time. That Throne, if we want it on our side, demands that something be done to cleanse us from our sin, to deliver us from our way of wickedness, to bring us into the ‘white raiment’ of His Divine righteousness, sanctified. It is for those who are thus walking with Him in fellowship, and who, as far as they know, are eschewing every evil way, are repudiating all iniquity, are having no truck with iniquity; are not compromising, are not in any way condoning or dabbling in what is evil, what is wrong.

I know that the whole matter of holiness can become very oppressive; it can become very legal and bring us into bondage. But the fact remains that the Lord’s Throne is a throne of holiness; His government is a government of holiness; and His life is *holy* life. We know quite well, in practical experience, that if we do, voluntarily or even involuntarily, touch something that is evil or corrupt, touch this world in spirit, the glory fades! We know within ourselves that, if we even say something that is wrong, the glory fades. We know it by the fading glory in our hearts; a shadow, a cloud, comes over our spirit; and it stays there until we have gone and got that cleaned up in the presence of the Lord.

THE WHEELS

We pass now to the other side of this symbolic medium of the Throne: to the ‘wheels’. You notice that these are quite definitely in union with the ‘living ones’, with the Cherubim—they move together. They are really only two aspects of one thing, but the wheels contain their own particular emphasis and message. What do they signify? What is the impression that is left with you after reading verses 15–21? If you just sit back after reading, how do you feel? Sometimes it is a good thing to put yourself into the Word, and take its temper—take its atmosphere. I venture to suggest that if you read these verses in that way, and sit back, you will heave a sigh: My word, they are moving! There is something doing here! At least you will not be left with a quiet or passive feeling. We have the impression of tremendous energy; of motion with purpose: that is the atmosphere of the ‘wheels’.

Wheels symbolize movement, motion, going; and here the ‘spirit of the living ones’ is in the ‘wheels’. The energy of the Spirit is here; it is

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energy and movement with purpose, is it not, of which they speak? They say to us clearly and simply that this Throne is a very energetic and active Throne in relation to the end which God is seeking. All the energies and activities contained in these prophecies are the expression of that Throne, and are, as it were, the carrying out of the meaning of the wheels. The Throne is on the move; the Throne is not passive; the Throne is governed by a tremendous energy: God is deeply and greatly concerned about this great end of His, to have everything glorious, filled with His glory, for His glory.

SUFFERING WITH THE GLORY OF GOD
IN VIEW

It is no light or easy-going thing with the Lord, to have that end. If we did but know it, if we could only see it and understand it, we should be able to recognise that so many things in our lives which the Lord permits to come in, and which the Lord sometimes even sends into our lives, are the workings of His energy to make a way for His glory. John, the apostle, tells us that the whole of his Gospel which he wrote was written with one object, and that object was *the glory of the Lord Jesus*; that governed all. All the way through, from beginning to end, it is that.

Take one fragment only—Lazarus. "This sickness is not unto death, but *for the glory of God*" (John xi. 4). Strange event of providence; strange ways of God, causing deep sorrow, distress, perplexity. It is a distressing thing for those concerned, but quite deliberate on the part of the Lord Jesus. His attitude and His handling, His tarrying when He received the news (v. 6), were quite deliberate. He has it all in hand, and He says: 'It is for the glory of God, that the Son of God should be glorified thereby.' The end of this strange thing, this painful thing in human life, is the glory of God! Would that you and I could always look at our sufferings and our sorrows like that! Every time when some perplexing, bewildering, heart-breaking thing comes into our lives, if only we could say and believe and stand to it—'God is going to get some glory out of this! There is some glory somewhere bound up with this!' He is working to His end in *all* things. Paul says: 'God works in all things good to them that love Him and are the called according to His purpose' (Rom. viii. 28)—and by that word 'good' he means *glory*—glory to God.

We see, then, that there is an energy of God, of the Throne, toward glory, and to glory through holiness.

PERFECT INTELLIGENCE
OF THE THRONE

Another feature of the wheels was that they were "full of eyes round about" (i. 18; x. 12). Surely this means that the Throne is operating with perfect intelligence, with complete knowledge of everything; an utter apprehension and grasp of all the elements, of all the features, of everything that has to be dealt with. Perfect vision; perfect knowledge: that is how the Throne of Holiness works.

That is a solemn message, as well as perhaps an encouraging one. The fact is that that One on the Throne, whose 'eyes are as a flame of fire' (Rev. i. 14), sees right through, knows all the hidden motives, and acts accordingly. It is not what we see, and not what we are willing to see, but what He sees. The eyes of His glory look us right through; they know all our self-deceptions, and all our deceivings of one another. They know us perfectly, and the Lord is acting with us according to that knowledge, and we are not going to get away with it. If the Lord takes in hand to deal with us in a form of judgment; if He really does take action in regard to us, it is because He has seen or is seeing something: something that is injurious to us; something that is limiting or hindering the glory in us, personally or individually, or in our companies. He has seen something that is against the glory, and so with energy He takes in hand, and He will judge it. He will go to great lengths in order to get that eliminated and put right, in order that the glory may come in, and make way for new life, and that we may go on anew in a fresh phase in His purpose.

We perhaps would not have it otherwise: we do not want to be deceived; we do not want to lose something by some unrecognised wrong; we want to have everything open. The end of the Bible sees a City which is absolutely transparent: God is really seeking transparency in His people—no duplicity, no deception, no questionableness. How we need to judge our motives! how we need to keep in the presence of the Everlasting Burning (Is. xxxiii. 14b)! How necessary it is to abide in the light of His countenance, so that nothing is allowed to go on with us, perhaps unconsciously, that is limiting His glory in our life. This is a message of very great concern.

Let us by all means pray for a 'new thing'; pray for revival; pray for God to move in some great way of power: but remember, all His movements are based upon this—a holiness that corresponds to His Throne; and He just cannot do anything until that holiness has been vindicated in His

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people. Does this not explain much unanswered prayer? "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear" (Ps. lxxvi. 18). It is a very big principle, covering so much. May the Lord give us understanding, in the presence of what could be a very solemn word; and yet it has *glory* in view. The Lord give us understanding that the energies of His Throne are holy energies. His goings, His continuous goings, are in this very connection, that what is consistent with the Man in the glory shall be found in us, and amongst all the Lord's people.

THE THRONE INTIMATELY CONCERNED WITH THIS WORLD

Lastly, notice that these wheels occupy a place between Heaven and earth. They are not wholly of the earth—they do not remain earth-bound, held by an 'earth touch'; there is a kind of suspendedness; they touch the earth, but they are not of it. They bound along in their energy in relation to Heaven, but also in relation to earth, as the embodiment of the Divine energies. What that says, amongst other things, is this: that God's interests and activities, and God's Throne, are not remote from things here on this earth. He is not just reigning on His Throne in remote isolation, somewhere away there in the undefined heavens. His energies relate to things here: His mighty interests are near, are imminent: they are concerned with this world, with this earth, and with what is on it. He wants this earth, and all that is here, to be holy. In Isaiah's vision there is that phrase: "the whole earth is full of His glory" (Is. vi. 3). That is the

conception; that is what the Lord desires. He is working to that. And we know, from the description of the end, that that is how it will be when 'knowledge of the glory of God fills the earth as the waters cover the sea' (Hab. ii. 14). Holiness everywhere!

The fact is, God is intimately, closely, and intelligently associated with the state of things here, both in the Church, and in the churches. He is cognisant of everything that we do not see or do not realise; His eyes see it, and He is active concerning this state, to have it holy, and to be able to bring back *the glory*.

The Throne is not far away after all—it is here, in representation. If the first section (chapters i–iii) of the book of the Revelation means anything at all, it means that this very God-Man, this Man of the Glory, is here; He is imminent, moving amongst the churches, the lampstands. The Throne is fully cognisant of everything; it is not blind; it is never deceived by anything at all. The Throne is active, and its activity may be found in many, if not all, of the experiences into which we come. The Throne is determined to have one end, everywhere, in all things, and that is *GLORY*.

This wonderful symbolism of the 'living ones' and 'wheels' is but a declaration of this activity of the Throne. That Throne has not given things up because they are so bad; it is still pursuing its goal, to have a state that can be filled with *glory*. May the Lord interpret this to us, and write it deeply in our hearts, and keep it every day in our consciousness. This message is intended to be "not unto death, but for the glory of God".

T. A-S.

THE MINISTRY OF MUTUAL REFRESHMENT

Reading: John xiii. 3–10, 12, 15, 17.

THIS is a passage of Scripture which is full of Divine meaning, and in which many aspects of truth are presented. At the present time we want to deal with just one of these aspects—the washing of one another's feet. The washing by the Lord Jesus of our feet is something else—I do not want to enter into that now. We would like the Lord to show us what it means that I should wash my brother's feet, and that my feet should be washed by my brother; why there should be this mutuality in feet washing, and what it is.

The aspect of truth specially emphasized here is refreshment. It is something that the Lord is very

much after, that we should learn to minister refreshment to our brethren, and that our brethren, in turn, should be a means of refreshment to our own spirits. We will come to this presently.

Now the dust, the dirt, that gathers on our feet is something inevitable. But for me to have a fall, to tumble down and catch something in my body, would be altogether wrong. That is not inevitable, because it is not necessary for me to roll on the street in order to get somewhere! I can get there without rolling down. Stumbling and falling down are sin. It is not necessary for us to go on with the Lord like that, and say, 'I must fall once in a while—it is inevitable.' That is wrong.

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THE TARNISHING OF DAILY LIFE

But the point about the dirt on the feet is this. In walking through the world, in touching the world, it is inevitable that our feet will catch something, no matter who we are or how careful we may be. If we do not touch the earth, we will catch nothing. If we do touch it, we are going to catch something. Even our Lord, when He walked into a room, complained that someone did not give Him water to wash His feet. So please remember that the thought of mutual washing is not a question of sins, from which it is possible for us to be saved. It is a question of our walking through the world, during which it is inevitable that we should get something. It is simply the film that comes in between me and my Lord because I am touching the world—touching the business side of things.

If that seems too theoretical, let us come to the practical side of things. Some of our brothers have to go out to work in an office, to work there for—say—eight or ten hours a day. It is not sin to work in an office. But when you come back from your office, you feel quite tired and out of tune with things. It seems as if there is a film. When you meet a brother, you cannot get into Divine things quickly and directly. You feel as though there is something, a coating of something, upon you. It is not sin at all, but you feel your daily work has deposited that something on you; there seems to be an inability to rise up to the Lord at once. That touch which you had with the Lord in the morning seems to have been tarnished, darkened; it is not so fresh. We all know that experience.

Some of our sisters may have to attend to domestic duties. Perhaps the baby will be crying, and there is something waiting on the stove. You run to one and miss the other! After everything is settled, you sit down, and it seems as if you need a power to lift you up to God again. You feel there is something—not sin, mind you—but as if there were a layer of something before you; there is a film between you and the Lord, and you feel you are tarnished. There is not that clear way which gets through at once. This is the meaning of feet being dirty and needing to be washed.

BROTHERLY REFRESHING

Many a time we are tired in our duties, in our work. When we get down to pray, it seems as if it takes us ten or twenty minutes to get to that place where we are really through. You have to wait for a while. If you sit down to read the Word, you find it takes time before you can get that touch again. How good it is if you meet on the road a brother with an overflowing heart fresh from the

Lord! He does not mean to do anything, but he just shakes your hand and says, 'Brother, praise the Lord!' He may not know it, but somehow it is as if he has come with a duster and wiped everything away. You immediately feel that your touch with God has been restored.

Sometimes you may come into a meeting with a heavy spirit, through the effect of your work during the day. Someone may pray, and you still feel the same; and another prays, and there is no difference. But then another brother or sister prays, and somehow immediately you feel the lifting power. You are refreshed—your feet have been washed. What does washing mean? It means to cleanse to the original, to bring to a point where there is such cleanness as if coming out of the Lord's immediate presence. It brings you back to a point where you are fresh from the hand of the Lord.

I do not know how many times personally I have felt low—it was not exactly sin that was troubling, but there has been that feeling of a coating—and I have met a brother or a sister, and they may not have known it at all, but they have just passed on a remark and it has brightened everything. You simply feel all the darkness gone—the film gone. Praise the Lord! You are refreshed and put back into the very condition where you can enjoy touch with God again. That is feet-washing—to refresh my brethren in the Lord; to bring a brother up to a point where it is as if he has just come out from the very presence of God. This is what the Lord is desiring of us.

If we are in the good of things, we can always seek to be those who refresh our brethren. This is one of the greatest ministries. It may be just a handshake. If the Lord has got His way with us and we are in a condition of having nothing between Him and us, we shall find that we shall constantly be used. We may not know it. Sometimes it is better not to seek to know it; indeed, it may be better always not to know it. But still, we are constantly being used to refresh our brother. Our brother, when he is low, in darkness; when he has a burden, a film; when he has been tarnished—he will come. He may not stay long, perhaps just a few minutes. Seek for that ministry. Often we think it would be good if we could give long addresses, but to refresh the hearts of the saints is a kind of ministry which everyone can fulfil. It is very important.

THE CONDITIONS: NO CONTROVERSY WITH THE LORD

In order to fulfil this ministry, there are specific conditions. If you are really going on with the

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Lord, you will be used to refresh others. There will be no limitations to Him. If we ourselves are not in a tarnished condition, if we have not got a film ourselves; if we are bubbling over, so to speak, there is bound to be an overflow, and someone is bound to catch that overflow. So the whole point is simply this. Is there anything about which we are in controversy with God? We have to come down to real issues. If there is nothing special, then there is no need for us to look to find it. The Lord will always see to that. When He wants you to know that there is a controversy, He will always point His finger there and you will know it. There is no need for you to turn your eyes within and try to find out, to check up and analyse every feeling. It is the Lord's business to shine into your heart and show you whether you are wrong or not. One thing is certain. If there is a controversy with the Lord, you can only tarnish others. You can never wash their feet. When they are low, you will bring them lower. When they feel heavy, you will come to them and make them feel heavier. Instead of refreshing them and bringing to them freshness just coming out of God, you simply drag them down. I believe that the greatest manifestation of power is to be able constantly to refresh others. It is the touch—a touch that results in lifting, cleansing, refreshing. It is the greatest thing, the greatest ministry.

Of all the Lord's commandments in the Word, this is—I use the word in its purest sense—a dramatic one. He Himself acted it before them to show them the importance of it. He tried to show His disciples what He meant by *ministry*. It is serving one another in feet cleansing. There is a need of restoring people who have fallen, restoring the weak ones who have sinned. But the greatest need of the saints to-day is refreshment—I mean bringing back afresh. That is power. I do not know whether you see it or not. I do not know whether there is any greater power than being fresh from the Lord before the world. Do you not find it to be the greatest manifestation of power? How we like to meet saints who are fresh! Freshness brings you the direct touch of God.

THE FRESHNESS OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

I thank the Lord for the great privilege of having known one of the rarest saints. I knew her for many years, and found her to have many spiritual qualities; but I think that, above them all, the thing that impressed me most was the sense of God. You could not go before her, sit before her, or just walk

into her room and have a handshake, without feeling a sense of God coming over you. You did not know why, but you felt it. I was not the only one who felt it. Everyone who had touch with her gave the same testimony. I have to confess that many a time I felt very downhearted, and it seemed as if everything had gone wrong. I walked into her room, and immediately I felt rebuked. Immediately I felt I was face to face with God. I was refreshed.

Why should this thing happen—this immediate restoration? The Lord would like every one of us to be like that, to impart the power to brighten our brothers and sisters when they have been tarnished. Please remember that being tarnished hurts the Christian life—worse than sins, maybe. May I say this? The thing next to actual sins is our being tarnished: it puts you out of power, out of real touch with God. We may sin once in a while, some of us; but many a time we have been tarnished for hours, and, because it is not actual sin, we do not care so much about it. Oh, how good it is to have a brother or sister around through whom we feel a touch of God!

There should be no controversy between me and the Lord. That puts me out. If there is any controversy between me and my Lord, I am altogether out for this ministry. I am counted out; I am useless. Instead of being an asset in the assembly, I am going to be a burden. I cannot contribute anything; I can only add to the debit side of the assembly. In order to be on the contributing side, we must not have any controversy with the Lord. When we ourselves have no controversy, when we are in the condition of having constant touch with the Lord, we can refresh our brethren.

In order to avoid misunderstanding, may I add this word? Please remember that this refreshing is *mutual*. Many a time someone may be used to refresh you: the Lord will use someone else to refresh the refresher. You must not think that there is one brother in the assembly who has no need to be refreshed. No. It is something which everyone needs. You may work in offices or in kitchens, and need brightening up. Some of us have been working in churches, and we need brightening up! It is just the same need. Sometimes it seems as if we are working along secular lines. Even in spiritual things, we need a touch. That is the thing the Lord is seeking to do, seeking for you to receive and for you to impart. None of us should come to a point where we think we have no need to be ministered to by anyone. The principle of the Body is here—refreshing others and being refreshed.

Always try to minister to others *spiritually*. It is not something physical, it is intensely spiritual. It

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is the refreshing of someone else's spirit, and at the same time being willing and praying that the Lord may touch my spirit once in a while and refresh me.

May the Lord make this mutuality to be a real thing in our lives.

W. N.

THE OCTAVE OF REDEMPTION

VII. THE CHURCH: ITS BIRTH, VOCATION AND COMPLETION

WHY the Church?

The greatest concern or interest of God is His Son. The second greatest interest or object with God in this universe is the Church. And in the Scriptures those two are put together. Here is the statement:

"He . . . 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. 23).

The Church is the 'fulness' of Christ. If the Church needs Christ, Christ needs the Church.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

We will seek to answer the question: 'What is the Church?', in a few concise sentences.

Firstly, the Church is a particular body of people, chosen in Christ before the world was. That is precisely stated in Ephesians i. 4. There, it is stated that the Church, this particular body of people, was 'chosen in Him'. Just as definitely as Christ was chosen (Luke ix. 35; cf. Ps. lxxxix. 19c; Is. xlii. 1) and appointed (Heb. i. 2, iii. 2), so was the Church.

Secondly, the Church is a body of people called out of the nations to be a heavenly people *now*: not hereafter in ages to come, but now. That is clearly implied in Acts xv. 14: "God did visit . . . to take out . . . a people for his name"; and it is that to which our Lord referred, when He said: "I will build my church" (Matt. xvi. 18).

Thirdly, the Church is a body of people who, although called individually, are not just so many individuals. They were never chosen individually, never chosen separately, but as a whole. It is very important to remember that. And as the work of the Holy Spirit is always to make real that which has been eternally determined and appointed by God, so it is His work—not as an afterthought, but according to plan—to make real and operative this eternal oneness in and with Christ: for that is the purpose of God.

MAGNIFICENCE OF THE DIVINE CONCEPTION

At this point I want to quote a passage from a book published several years ago which puts the

matter in a very much better way than I can, and I reproduce it because it is not mine.

'It is essential to the right consideration of this subject (that is, the Church) that the magnificence of the New Testament concept of the Church be apprehended. In the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians the view of the Church which is Christ's Body is set forth. It is there seen as the ideal, invisible, indivisible, inviolable company of the redeemed of the present age. None but the truly regenerate have part therein; none, save the elect, partake of its blessedness. Failure and defection are unknown to it. Into it the pretender and the hypocrite cannot come. Breach or division it cannot know. Its unity is unbreakable; its calling and glory, heavenly; its relationship to Christ holy and intimate; and its destiny bound up in Him in splendour inconceivable. Through the centuries of our era, each marching generation but brings a contribution to it. While historically its members are being called, one by one, and incorporated into it, in its completeness and glory it is ever before the eye of God. Indeed, it has been in His heart from before all times. From their heavenly vantage points the angelic orders observe it, and are impressed and enlightened concerning the manifold wisdom of its Divine architect. Through the swift ebbing years of this age Christ Himself is its builder, adding stone to stone to this temple exceeding magnificent, Himself the while abiding that day when at last, complete, sanctified, beautiful, spotless and radiant with heavenly glory, it shall be presented to Himself and taken into the full enjoyment of an eternal association of blessedness, the features of which are at present undisclosed.'

I am sure you agree that, on the one side, that is no exaggeration, and that, on the other side, it is a presentation of something that is of tremendous account to God, to Christ, and to ourselves.

Should you find difficulty with some of the assertions, you must remember that the whole statement is made from God's and from Heaven's standpoint, not from ours. That is how *He sees it, eternally*. What He may be seeing as to the present condition of things down here may be another matter; but that is God's eternal conception, and that is how

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God will eternally have it. It will be like that. And, eventually, it will prove to *have been* like that. It may be difficult for us to see; nevertheless, if we could see from God's standpoint, we should see that every sentence of that statement is true.

EVIDENCE FROM THE OPPOSITION

Let us suspend our difficulties for a little while and go on. The Church is a definite object, or entity. It is not just an abstract idea—it is not an imaginary thing. It is a reality—not only in the mind of God, but, when it is seen according to its true constitution, and not man's constitution, a reality in its actual existence also. The Church is of immense value and importance to God and to Christ. As we have read, it is declared to be His "fulness". All the greater values of Christ—His fulness—are for the Church, in the Church, and through the Church. We have the statement of God's Word about it, and we have the history of the Church—in its continuance, its persistence, its very survival—to bear it out. And if we need more evidence as to its importance and its value, we can always get it from a certain quarter, which evinces a very irreligious solicitude for God's interests. Satan hates the Church, as he hates Christ. He has given more trouble over the Church than over anything else.

I want to give one more quotation from the book, and I am very glad that I am not saying this at first-hand.

'All through the Christian age a minority of believers has endeavoured to carry out in corporate life these scriptural principles. The bitterest and most implacable opposition has come to them, not from the world, but from organized Christendom, that is, the system that men call the Church. By this powerful organization they have been in turn oppressed, misrepresented, persecuted, reviled, ridiculed, and ignored. But their persistence from century to century has supplied the proof of the practicability of these principles and of such a Church being in the will of God.'

And a short extract from another book—this is about the Church:

'Against such a transcendent truth, affecting as it does the glory of God and the person of Christ, it is not a matter of surprise that the arch-adversary should set himself with his utmost might and his most persistent and ingenious devices, both by opposition and by imitation . . .'

Yes: if there is one thing, next to the Lord Jesus

Himself, that Satan hates, it is the Church, and any true representation of it. I should like to spend some time on the matter of the representation of the Church—the necessity of it, the possibility of it, the nature of it—and we may come back to a closing word on that later.

TITLES OR PICTURES OF THE CHURCH

We are asking: Why the Church? I think the best way of answering that question is by a consideration of the various representations or pictures of it, the various titles given to it, in the Word of God. There are in the Word perhaps nine main titles or illustrations of the Church. There may be other subsidiary ones, but in the main there are nine. If we consider carefully these pictures or titles, we shall get very near to an answer to our question. Let us run through them with a few comments upon each.

(1) THE HOUSE OF GOD

The first title given to the Church is the House of God. But here it is necessary for us to be clear as to our terms. When we speak of a house, we immediately think of a structure, a building. We pass along the street and we say, 'That is a nice house', or 'an ugly house', or 'an unusual house'; that is how we use the word. It is necessary for us to understand that that is not the full meaning of the word as it is used in the connection 'the House of God'. We should be nearer the truth if we changed the word into 'household', because that is really the thought. It is inclusive of three ideas. One, the structure—God's building; two, the content of the house—what is in it; three, the arrangement or order of the house—how the contents are set out, deployed; their place, their position, and so on. With this, of course, is closely associated the idea of government. The structure, content, arrangement, order and government of the house: that is all contained in this expression, the House of God.

First of all, the House of God is God's building, God's structure. "I will build my church". It is God's. Man does not make this, and it is impertinence to take hold of it and make it man's. The proprietorship of this building is vested solely in God Himself.

Then, what is in this House is there because God has put it there, and nothing can have a place, as a 'living stone', in the House of God, except as put there by God. You cannot 'join' the House of God at your own choice. You may talk about

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'joining the Church', but that belongs to another realm of things altogether. In the New Testament 'the Lord added to the Church them that were being saved' (Acts ii. 47). *The Lord* added. Only those whom the Lord includes are in the House of God.

Thirdly, the order in the House of God is God's order. God is a God of order; Satan is the god of anarchy and lawlessness. God has an order for His House, and He is very particular about it. That is clear enough from the first letter to the Corinthians. If we ignore that order, overlook it, set it aside, it will be to our own loss, our own detriment. We shall find that in our lives there will be frustration, limitation; God will not be setting His seal upon us. The Holy Spirit is the custodian of the Divine order, and so we shall come into that order if we are under the government of the Holy Spirit.

Our placing in the House of God is the prerogative of God by the Holy Spirit. The place that we occupy, the function that we perform, must be God-appointed. If we try to do what God has never called us to do, we shall be misfits in the House of God. But if, under the Holy Spirit's government, we are content with that for which the Lord has brought us into His House, we shall be at rest; it will be ease and not friction. God superintends His own House: it is His government, because it is His House. And, as I said in the other connection, it is nothing other than impertinence to come into God's House and try to upset the order, or to impose our own order. We must ever seek to be subject to the Holy Spirit, and His order, in the House of God.

(2) THE TABERNACLE AND TEMPLE

The second representation of the House is found in the Tabernacle and the Temple. They are identical in purpose. There are in the main two ideas connected with these designations.

Firstly, they are the place where God is, the place where God chooses to be. There is a place where God chooses to be and where He can be found, and, normally, that is in His Tabernacle, in His Temple—in the Church. The Church is supposed to be, intended to be, the place where you will find God, where God is. That is not a building; that is the people of God. He chooses a place for Himself. How much there is in the Old Testament illustrative of this (cf. Ps. cxxxii. 13, 14). But His own Son's words are: "Where two or three are gathered together into my name, there am I" (Matt. xviii. 20). It is but the enunciation of an eternal principle. God chooses to *locate* or *localise*

Himself: He chooses to be in a certain place, and there you find Him. How one is tempted to enlarge upon that! But if you, as a believer, as a Christian, detach yourself from the Lord's people, and go off on your own independent way, you will find yourself, before long, like Thomas—where the Lord is not. And, like Thomas, you will not find the Lord until you come back with the other disciples. God has chosen His Temple, His spiritual Temple, as the place where He will meet us, the place where He can be found.

And, when it is as it should be, when it is according to His mind, it is also the place where He speaks. I venture to go a step further, and say that the more closely the conditions in a company correspond to God's idea, God's thought for the Church, the more fully will you hear Him speak there. You will hear more from the Lord under such conditions than where there is a less close approximation to His conception of the Temple.

The second thought connected with the Tabernacle or Temple is that it is the place where God is worshipped. It is "holiness unto the Lord". God's spiritual House, however, is now no longer a structure, but a people, and so the Temple conveys the thought of a worshipping people. And what is worship? We have often defined worship as the drawing of everything Godward; everything directed toward the Lord. That is "holiness—or 'wholeness'—unto the Lord", everything being for Him. That is how the Church should be; that is God's mind.

(3) A HOLY NATION

From Peter, we learn that the Church is a nation—"a holy nation" (I Pet. ii. 9, quoting from Ex. xix. 6). Much light is thrown upon this in the Old Testament, as we know. As we said at the beginning, it is a people taken out of the nations for His Name, to be made, here and now, a heavenly nation, a nation of a different order—the very word 'heavenly', of course, carries that with it—a heavenly nation out from the nations and yet in the midst of the nations. But there are three things to be noted in connection with this conception of the Church as a nation.

The first thing is the principle or law of *separation*. That is clearly illustrated and in force in the case of Israel, as the earthly type of this Church, separate from the nations. Israel lost its very integration, its vocation, its power, its glory—everything—when it lost that distinctiveness from the other nations, when it allowed a bride to be built

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between it and them, and began worshipping their gods. It was because of its lost distinctiveness as a nation that Israel went into captivity. The Old Testament is a very powerful object-lesson of spiritual principles. If that is true in the temporal and earthly realm, how much more true must it be in the spiritual and the heavenly and the eternal! One thing that has accounted, perhaps more than anything else, for loss of glory, power, influence, and the presence of God, in the Church during the centuries, has been the infiltration of the world into it, and it getting into the world—a lost distinctiveness, a lost separation.

Moreover, the nation was a *constituted* as well as a separated people. It certainly was separated—there was no doubt about its separation from Egypt! Pharaoh tried to parley on that matter; suggested that they should leave a little behind, a little attachment. 'No', said the Lord through Moses, 'not a single hoof of a single animal!' (Ex. x. 24–26). And then look at the breach that God made, the gap that He put between Israel and Egypt. It is all very illustrative. But then, when He got them out, He constituted them a nation. They came out a multitude—we might almost say a rabble; and then God took them in hand to form and constitute them into an entity, with spiritual laws and principles governing every detail of their lives. They were brought right under the direct control of Heaven, where nothing of this world could meet their need. Their resources were all from above; they were a people constituted on heavenly principles, under heavenly government. And that is the Church!

Thirdly, Peter tells us, in this comprehensive statement, that the purpose of our calling is 'to show forth the excellencies of Him who called us'—of the One who 'called us out of darkness into his marvellous light'. The vocation of the nation is to show forth His 'excellencies': in other words, to show how God *excels*, how He *transcends*. That was Israel's calling; and if that was true in a limited, earthly way, how much more true it is, in a heavenly, universal way, of the Church. To show forth His excellencies, how He excels: that is what He is seeking to do all the time. As we have often said, He allows the enemy to go a long way, to have a good deal of tether and leash, and then He shows just how much further He can go. He allows the enemy to do much, and then He shows how He can take hold of the much and turn it to His own glory.

The 'excellencies of Him', shown in the Church and by the Church: this is something to dwell upon. Look at the book of the Acts from that

standpoint alone, and see the working out of what Paul said, many years afterwards: "I would have you know, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel" (Phil. i. 12). Just think of the things which befell him—all falling out for the furtherance of the Gospel! That is one way in which His excellencies are shown forth. If angels are looking on, I am sure they are covering their faces and covering their feet in worship, as they see the grace of God in many a suffering servant and child of His—the excellencies of His grace.

(4) THE CHURCH

For our fourth designation, we come to the very word 'Church' itself. This, as we know, represents the Greek word *ekklesia*, a very rich and full word that was appropriated by Christ and the apostles and applied to this eternally elect body, the Church. The modern equivalent of this word is our word 'assembly', a word which carries in it all the elements of the meaning of the original Greek. In the Greek world, certain people were chosen, elected, to a position either upon the municipal council, or the provincial or national government, according as it was in a city, or in a province, or in a country, respectively. And at a given time, when there was business of state to be attended to, and a session was to be convened, the messengers went out to call the men together, to summon the assembly together in order to transact the business of the state or city. Such a body of men was called the *ekklesia*.

It was not a Church matter, an 'ecclesiastical' matter, as we think of it; it was a purely political matter, whether of municipality, province, or state—the 'Assembly'. It embodied the idea of an elected company, brought together to transact the business of the kingdom. This is the word that was taken over and applied to the Church. How rich it is! An elect company, called together for the purpose of carrying on the work of the Kingdom! An elect company—'chosen in Him before the foundation of the world' (Eph. i. 4), 'called into the fellowship of His Son' (I Cor. i. 9), called 'according to His eternal purpose' (Eph. iii. 11): called together, and, with Him, entrusted with the affairs of His government. Would that we, as the Church, approximated to that more closely, more fully!

(5) THE BODY OF CHRIST

Next we come to 'the Church which is His Body'. We read about it in Ephesians i. 22, 23, and there are, of course, a number of other refer-

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ences to the Church under that designation or title. What is the idea, or the function, of a physical body? First of all, the body of a man is a vehicle for the expression of his personality. Not always can you read the personality through the features and the body, but people usually give themselves away to some degree by their bodies. Even if, as in some cases, you find it difficult to read what is going on inside, the very fact that it is difficult to read tells you that they are not intending you to know—and you have read them! We cannot easily get away from the fact that, whether by gesture, by look, by expression, or in many other ways, we betray ourselves through our bodies. That, at any rate, is one purpose of a body, to be the expression of the man inside, to provide him with a means of expressing himself.

In the same way, 'the Church which is His Body' is the vessel, the 'embodiment', of the Lord the Spirit, in which and by which He is to express Himself. If the Church, as we met it and moved amongst its members, accorded with the Divine idea, we should know what the Lord was like. Let us take this to heart: that our very existence as the Church is in order that people may know what Christ is like. Alas, we fail Him so much in this. It is often so difficult to detect the real character of the Lord Jesus in His people. But that is the very first meaning of the Body of Christ.

But further—and here we are on familiar ground—a physical body is an organic whole. It is not something put together from the outside. It is something that is marked by a oneness, by reason of a life within; it is related and inter-related in every part, dependent and inter-dependent; every remotest part is affected by what happens in any other part. That could be much enlarged upon. But we have much more yet to learn as to the actual spiritual application of this reality about the Church as the Body of Christ. We need to be brought right into that great 'sympathetic system' of the Body. And that demands a real work of grace in us. There are many ways in which that is expressed in the Word. We are to "remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; them that are evil entreated, as being yourselves also in the body" (Heb. xiii. 3); that is, we are to get into their situations by the Spirit. It is an organic whole. 'If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it' (I Cor. xii. 26). It is probable that we suffer a good deal for things that we know nothing about. There is suffering going on, and we are involved in it: the Lord is seeking to involve us in the needs of others, to bring us into their conflict.

But, whether or not we apprehend this truth,

whether or not we are alive to it and understand it, it is God's fact that it is so. Believers in one place are dependent upon believers in another place; they are affected. This is such a whole; there is one sympathetic nerve-system running through the whole body. If only you and I really became spiritually more alive, the expression of the Body would be much more perfect. Our deadness, our insensitiveness, our lack of real spiritual aliveness, results in there being more suffering, more loss, than there need be.

If only we could—not mechanically, and not by information, but on the principle of the Body—be moved into a universal sympathy and co-operation with the people of God! Our moving is so often mechanical; we have to read or hear letters, somehow receive information, in order to be stimulated to some measure of prayer. But I believe that, altogether apart from those means, if we were really in the Spirit, the Spirit would lay burdens for people on our hearts. Do you not think that it is a matter that we ought continually to bring before the Lord? 'Lord, there is someone praying to-day for something: is it possible that I might be the answer to their prayer? If so, show me, lead me, lay it on me.' That is spiritual relatedness, aliveness. The oneness of the Body is a great vocation.

(6) A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD

The sixth designation is found in Peter again: "a royal priesthood" (I Pet. ii. 9). He is again quoting from Exodus xix. 6—"a kingdom of priests". Notice the combination of the two ideas—king and priest, kingdom and priesthood: two functions brought together—the throne and the altar. What does it mean? Surely it means this: that it is by yielding, releasing, letting go, by self-emptying and suffering, that the Throne operates, that Divine power is exercised in this universe. It is suffering and glory, it is weakness and power—seeming contradictions in terms. But here it is in the Word: "in the midst of the throne . . . a Lamb" (Rev. v. 6). Here is the symbol of utmost yieldedness, and, in the right sense, of non-resistance, even to evil (I am not speaking of non-resistance to sin, but to wrong suffering, injustice, unrighteousness): a Lamb led to the slaughter, and through the slaughter to the Throne (Is. liii. 7; lii. 13).

These are tremendous spiritual principles. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. xi. 29). This is the King speaking: it is He into whose hands has been committed 'all authority in Heaven and in earth'

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(Matt. xxviii. 18). See how He received the authority, how He reached the Throne! The Church is supposed to be like that: a kingly priesthood, on the one side involved in sacrifice and suffering, like the priest, and at the same time ruling and reigning on the Throne, as a king.

(7) ONE NEW MAN

The seventh picture is "one new man" (Eph. ii. 14-16; Gal. iii. 28). Jesus called Himself, and it was His favourite title, "the Son of Man". Of course, the 'oneness' referred to by Paul is the result of different kinds of people having disappeared. There is no longer Jew and Gentile: as different kinds, as representatives of two racial orders of men, they have disappeared, they have gone out. They have vanished, and in their place there is "one new man". Taking up all that we said in the beginning about the meaning of the Incarnation, we must say that the Church is a different kind of entity, representing a different kind of manhood, of race, of mankind; of a different order, just as Christ was different.

With Him the difference was inward. Looking on Him from the outside, people did not discern the great difference. There may have been some features that were different from other men, but if so, they were not impressed by them. They could not see the difference between Him and other men. "Is not this the carpenter?" (Mark vi. 3). They talked about Him as they would of other men, looking on Him from the outside. But He was different as a man. The man inside the body was a different man, governed by different laws, different conceptions altogether, from those by which other people were governed; governed from a different realm, and so—in that sense—always a mystery.

Many years afterward, John said, in writing his letter: "For this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not" (I John iii. 1b). We, too, are another kind of being; and that ought to be, if I may put it this way, quite natural. The real secret, the real meaning is inward, is it not? Outwardly perhaps no different from other people—although there ought to be some traces outwardly; not self-conscious, not always trying to be another kind, no pose: just the fact—of which we ourselves are the most unconscious—that there is something there that does not belong to this creation; something that speaks of another world, another order, another life, another nature. We just do not behave, under given circumstances, as others would behave. And the Church, composed of many individuals, is supposed to be like that—a "one new man".

(8) THE BRIDE

The eighth title is that of 'the Bride, the Lamb's wife'. Here we must refer to quite a number of Scriptures, from Genesis, from Matthew and Mark, from Ephesians, from the Revelation. Almost the last word of the angel to the Apostle John was: "Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (Rev. xxi. 9b): almost synonymous terms, and yet not quite identical in sense. Let us first of all recall something of the beginning of that relationship. The first word concerning it came from God Himself: "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. ii. 18). The idea of this relationship, then, at the very beginning, was one of fellowship and companionship: the sublime idea of the relationship between Christ and His Church. "Christ . . . loved the Church and gave himself up for it" (Eph. v. 25). God, so to speak, looked upon His Son, and said: 'It is not good for Him to be alone.' The Church—mystery of mysteries!—is supposed to be in that relationship to Christ: to be His companion, to have fellowship with Him, to have interchange of mind, of heart, to move together.

And then God said: "I will make him an help meet for him" (Gen. ii. 18). 'I will make him someone meet to help him, suitable to help him—a helpmeet'. A very simple idea; but transfer that to the Church. To minister to Christ, to take account of Christ's needs, Christ's desires, to have the whole poise in His direction. 'How can I anticipate Him, His desires and His needs? how can I best serve His interests?' That, of course, is the Bible idea of a wife, but the Bible at least intends the earthly relationship to be a reflection of the heavenly—'even as Christ and the Church' (Eph. v. 25, 29, 32). The point is this: that you and I, if we are of the Church, are to have our poise entirely toward Him. How can we best serve Him, how can we be well-pleasing to Him? how can we anticipate Him in His needs and desires, and what will be to His interests? That is the very first idea bound up with the Bride, the Lamb's wife.

With that, of course, goes the idea of identity: "the twain shall become one flesh" (Gen. ii. 24; Matt. xix. 5; I Cor. vi. 16). They are one: not two now, but one—one flesh. Remember Ephesians v on that matter. Furthermore, the idea of the relationship is His increase. "Be fruitful and multiply . . ." (Gen. i. 28). "He shall see his seed . . . He shall see of the travail of his soul . . ." (Is. liii. 10, 11). How? There is no other way but by the Church. Let us note this: the travail of His soul is to be satisfied by the Church's bringing into being

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of new babes. It puts evangelism in a new light, does it not? It is for *Him*. It is not just the interest of getting souls saved: it is that *He* may see of the travail of His soul, that *He* may be satisfied. The Church is the vessel in which and through which Christ is reproduced—through which, can we say, He is propagated. And any 'church', so calling itself, that is not reproductive, to which the Lord is not adding, in which no spiritual births are taking place, has missed the point of its relationship to Christ.

(9) THE CITY

The last picture is that of the City. At the end of the Revelation, we are told that the angel, after having said: "Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (xxi. 9), carried the Apostle away "in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city . . ." (v. 10). These are not two separate entities. All these titles belong to the one entity, but they are the same entity viewed from different standpoints. If you study it, I think you will find that the title of 'the City' gathers into itself all the elements of the others; they all come together in this.

Note some of the features of this City. First of all, its *greatness*. What a great City it is! It sets forth the spiritual greatness of the Church in union with Christ. Look again at its *strength*—its "walls great and high" (v. 12): what strength there is in this City! It is the spiritual strength of the Church in union with Christ. It has proved true that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. xvi. 18). Hell has been moved from its depths, it

has exhausted every resource against the Church; but the Church goes on—it is a mighty Church. Its strength is not the strength of men. Look again at its *purity*: "her light . . . as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal" (v. 11): everything transparent—its street transparent gold (v. 18), its river of crystal clear water (xxii. 1)—the purity of the Church at last. Look again at its *beauty*: "all manner of precious stones" (v. 19). It is a beautiful city. Its gates of pearl (v. 21) speak of the *sufferings* and the sacrifice of fellowship with its Lord and in His afflictions. Look at its *livingness* (xxi. 1, 2), and look at its *luminousness* (xxi. 11, 23, 24; xxii. 5)—its life and its light. Look at its *fulness of resource*: the trees bearing their fruit all the year round (xxii. 2). Constant reproduction without intermission—something altogether phenomenal and different. And, finally, everywhere the number twelve written large: twelve foundations, twelve gates, twelve angels, twelve thousand stadia: all speaking of *spiritual government*.

Such is the presentation that we are given of the Church as it is to be when, at last, the work is done. Let us take note that it is presented to us as a *fact*. We might very well despair, now, that it could ever be realised, but we have been given this prophetic revelation of just what it will be like at the end. No matter how things are now—it *does* matter, of course, how they are—but in a sense, no matter how things are, that is how it is going to be. To go back to the former simile: He will "present the church to himself a glorious church"—a holy Church, a pure Church, a sanctified Church—"not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph. v. 27).

T. A.-S.

MEEKNESS OF THE MAN OF GOD

"And there hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face; in all the signs and the wonders, which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land; and in all the mighty hand, and in all the great terror, which Moses wrought in the sight of all Israel" (Deut. xxxiv. 10-12).

"Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Numbers xii. 3).

THE prophet Micah described the man who pleases God as the one who loves mercy and

walks humbly with his God (Mic. vi. 8). Moses was outstanding in his humility, not only in his own days but through all time. In connection with this, it is helpful to realise that he was a man who loved mercy. He had reason to do so, since he himself owed everything to the grace of God. There seems to be no greater man in all the sacred record—certainly not in the Old Testament; and the mark of his greatness is that he was very meek.

A CHRIST-LIKE VIRTUE

His meekness was not a superficial guise which he assumed, but a profound characteristic of the

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man. The actual statement about him was made in connection with a period of great provocation. He was tested—tested severely and often; and from it all emerged the Divine verdict that he had passed the test: he was indeed a truly meek man.

Meekness is, of course, a Christ-like virtue—"I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. xi. 29). Perhaps it is one of the greatest virtues, for it was the Lord Jesus Himself who not only pronounced a special blessing on the meek but promised that they should inherit the earth (Matt. v. 5). He knew very well that meekness is not natural to humanity; indeed it was in order that men might be instructed in this quality of life that He called them to come unto Him and to take His yoke upon them. "Learn of Me . . .", He commanded, with the clear inference that we sinners would never be meek or lowly unless we did.

This was certainly true of Moses. Nobody would suggest that the man Moses was naturally meek. Nor would the years of training and luxury in the Egyptian court have taught him such a lesson. He learnt much from the Egyptians, but he certainly never learned meekness. His outburst in Egypt, and the one flash of impatience in the wilderness which cost him so dearly (Num. xx. 8-12), give clear indications of the kind of man he was by nature. The more wonder, then, that this man, of all men, should be meek, and the supreme wonder that he surpassed all others in this Christ-like virtue.

Not that Moses was a mere dreamer. Meekness is not a characteristic of the contemplative; it is a virile virtue. Moses was a man of action. "In all the mighty hand, and in all the great terror . . ." He was the leader of the greatest venture of all history, the pioneer of the Israelitish nation. God was mightily with Moses. When Joshua took over the leadership of the people there was no greater encouragement which God could give him than to assure him that he should have the same backing: "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee" (Josh. i. 5). What was the explanation of the wonderful experiences of Divine power which Moses had? Surely this very fact, that he was meek above all other men. His meekness was his strength.

MEEKNESS BECAUSE OF MERCY

As we have said, the prophet made a close association between mercy and meekness: the man who loves mercy will walk humbly with his God. It may well be that the greatest contributory cause to the supreme meekness of Moses was that

his life was transformed by an overwhelming realisation of God's mercy to him. It is possible, of course, to take God's blessings in a wrong way; to become conceited, as the Jews did, vainly imagining that God's kind treatment of them was due to some innate superiority of theirs. Such men may use the right phrases, and talk of God's grace, but it is only phraseology; they cannot be said to "love mercy". If, however, we do appreciate the amazing patience of God, and His goodness to the utterly undeserving, then we begin not to boast of mercies, but to love mercy. There is surely nothing so calculated to make us truly lowly in heart as a realisation of the greatness of God's grace, even to us.

MERCY AT HIS BEGINNING

Moses' life began with a very great mercy. At that time every other baby boy had to be drowned. He alone was saved, and saved by the mercy of God. We can give every credit to his mother who thought of the plan and executed it, to the sister who watched by the ark of bulrushes and intervened so successfully, and even to Pharaoh's daughter who showed such true and unexpected compassion. But it was not the mother, the sister, the ark, or the princess, who delivered him, but the great mercy of God. Moses himself contributed least of all. When the casket was opened, he just cried—that was all he could do. Probably it was the one thing which his mother hoped would not happen, and it may be that Miriam stood by, tense with concern, lest the baby should spoil everything by not smiling at the appropriate moment. All that the babe could do was to wail in complete weakness and so fail to give any help at all. His deliverance was all of God. The name given to him, Moses (Ex. ii. 10b), was a lifelong reminder of how he had been pulled out of the waters of destruction by the mercy of God. Such a beginning should keep a man humble.

Yet this, too, was our beginning. We would have been swallowed up by destruction had it not been for Divine intervention. Like the baby Moses, we could contribute nothing but a cry, a despairing wail. It was God who showed mercy to us and drew us out of the waters of death. We might well ask, as Moses must often have done, why we should have been the favoured ones when others all around us have no such history. Many have had the same opportunities, the same, or even greater privileges; yet we are the Lord's, and they are not. The grace of God is amazing. 'Tis mercy all!

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

MERCY OF RECOVERY

A time came when the Lord met him at the burning bush, met him with a commission and a promise. "Come now therefore, and I will send thee", He said to him (Ex. iii. 10); and later, "Certainly I will be with thee" (v. 12). It would be impossible to imagine the overwhelming sense of the mercy of God that must have filled Moses' heart as he heard those words.

What a lot of history had intervened between Moses' first sense of call to be the Deliverer, and this present commission! He had begun—where we must all begin—by making a great renunciation. At forty years of age he let go of possessions, prospects, everything selfish and earthly, in order to be a servant of the Lord. This was not wrong; it was right, and nobody can serve the Lord without such a complete renunciation. He let everything go—or at least he meant to do so. This, however, did not make him meek. Many of us have passed through a similar experience, and been most sincere in our dedication, but it did not make us meek. Perhaps it made us the very opposite, giving us a false idea of our superiority to other Christians.

For Moses there followed a complete fiasco. He tried to serve the Lord in his own strength, in his own way and at his own time. Meek men don't do that sort of thing. The result was abysmal and utter failure. Away he fled into the land of Midian, and for forty years he had to live with his own sense of complete breakdown. Perhaps it was borne in on his soul that God's work could not be done by the kind of man he was, even when such a man had made great sacrifices. There must have been a collapse of any imagined ability, a sense of deep disappointment, in the conviction that he had spoiled every chance he ever had, that he had disqualified himself from ever being a servant of God.

We, too, must go this way, though happily it need not last for forty years as it did with him. But there is a spiritually symbolic meaning in that number: it is meant to indicate the thoroughness of the weakening process. He had learned his lesson.

At least, he thought he had. But in fact it was only the first half. He had settled down with his own failure, but now the Lord appeared to him, with this surprising call to go back again to the work which he had ruined by trying to do it in his own strength. He went back, unwillingly, hesitatingly, full of doubts as to his own ability or worthiness, but he went with the new and emphatic assurance: "Certainly I will be with thee". How amazing the grace of God must have seemed to

him, rescuing him from his failure and despair, offering to one who had broken down in the past such high and privileged service. We know, of course, that it was this very self-despair which made possible such power as he had never known before. It was the proof that the forty years, far from being wasted, had done the necessary work of undoing. To receive back his original commission by such a miracle of mercy was calculated to make Moses feel deeply humbled.

There is a sense in which God's true servant is always a defeated man. The one who drives on with the sense of his own importance, who is unwilling to appreciate the worthlessness of his own best efforts and is always seeking to justify himself—that one will not be meek, and so will lack the essential power by which God's work must be done. Our brokenness must not be feigned; we must not be content with the mere language and appearance of humility. We, too, must be as conscious of Divine mercy in our being recovered for God's service as we are of the original mercy which drew us from the waters of death.

MERCY OF THE EXODUS

God abundantly fulfilled His promise to 'be with' His servant: Moses was used in a unique way to do the work of God. This, too, he realised, was pure mercy: "Thou in thy mercy hast led the people which thou hast redeemed" (Ex. xv. 13). Moses did not need the deliverance for himself. He was free; he had never been a slave; he could walk in and out as he pleased. He was sent, however, to his people who were in 'the house of bondage', and was faced with the impossible task of getting them released so that they might worship and serve God. The miracle happened; the great emancipation came; and Moses had been the man whom God used to bring this about. The old Moses, full of his own importance, might have been ready to take some credit to himself for this. Alas! it is all too easy for the servant of the Lord to get puffed up, even if he has been used in only a small way. Even the new Moses, deeply aware of his dependence on the Lord, had severe tests in Egypt which threw him back even more on the absolute grace of God, and he was only able to share in the great Exodus when it had become abundantly clear that God alone was doing the work.

This is the case with every spiritual servant of God. He has to be so dealt with that any tendency to imagine that he is anything in himself, or at all superior to others, must be purged from him. Then,

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to see God working in power and deliverance, as Moses saw Him, to be the instrument of a work which is so wholly and absolutely of God—this can only bring a man very low in humble worship. Really, the man who is most used should be the meekest of all. When Christ turned the water into wine, we are told that, while the ruler and the guests at the feast did not know the secret, those who did the carrying did. "But the servants which had drawn the water knew" (John ii. 10). They knew how gloriously Christ had worked, and that they themselves had been spectators, rather than agents, privileged to be so used, well aware that all the glory belonged to the Lord and none to man.

MERCY OF ANSWERED PRAYER

Think, also, of the wonderful way in which the Lord answered Moses' prayers. There were miracles of preservation, miracles of provision, miracles of progress. Every time when a new crisis of need came upon them, Moses turned to the secret place of prayer and called on the Name of the Lord. And on each occasion there were fresh blessings which could only have come by way of the trials. The people could not pray for themselves. More often than not they doubted and complained. Moses was the man who prayed, and so Moses had the full spiritual blessing which comes to those who see their prayers answered, especially if these prayers are for others rather than for themselves. After all, when the people lacked food, Moses was as hungry as any of them. He, too, could have died from thirst, just like the rest. When they were attacked by their enemies, Moses was as much in danger as any of them—possibly more. It seems, though, that, as a true intercessor should, Moses forgot himself and his own needs in his shepherd-like concern for the people. He prayed for them, not for himself; and, as he did so, he could hardly ignore the fact that they were as unworthy as he. When the prayers were answered—and what a wonderful record of answered prayer the wilderness journey provided!—then anew he would be impressed with the greatness of God's mercy.

There were, of course, deeper spiritual needs than the physical and material perils of the wilderness way. There were times when the whole nation was likely to be destroyed, because of its disobedience and sin. There were individuals, like Aaron and Miriam, whose only hope of survival could be in the mercy of God. Moses was the man who prayed for that mercy, and God graciously responded to his selfless intercession. There are

two ways of receiving answers to prayer. The wrong way is that of conceit, as though we or our prayers had some kind of merit in them. A prayer ministry will not continue for long, nor remain effective, if any such spirit is allowed a place in the heart of the intercessor. But there is the other way, when those concerned are humbled to the dust by the sheer goodness and grace of God. Even more than suffering, even more than chastening, the very abundance of God's mercy can melt our hearts in lowly gratitude. Such people do not have to try to be meek. They do not even have to pray to be made meek. It is the goodness of God, so amazing and so undeserved, which produces such meekness.

THE INFLUENCE OF A MEEK MAN

It was after the people's greatest sin, and God's gracious pardon, that the new promise was given: "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest" (Ex. xxxiii. 14). The 'rest' here spoken of was something more than comfort or easement: it implied that the expedition would reach its successful end, and that the people would be led into the land of promise, which was God's 'rest'. Moses had earlier lost all confidence in himself. He knew that he had failed God. Now, in a very thorough way, he had reason to lose confidence in the whole people who had sinned away all their prospects. Only one hope was left to him, and this was the hope now inspired by God's new promise. It was hope in the mercy of God.

We know that the nation did get through. Although Moses himself was not allowed to lead them in, Joshua, his assistant and successor, led them into their inheritance. On the Divine side, this success was due solely to God's great mercy; on the human side, to the shepherding ministry of the man Moses. What was his secret? We are told: it was that he excelled in meekness. So we are left with this definite implication, that in any people who are in danger of breakdown and failure, the one contribution which has most value among them is meekness. If there be but one truly meek man or woman in that situation there is still hope. "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek he will teach his way" (Psalm xxv. 9). There are various qualifications for the man who would serve the Lord, but this is probably the most important. The one who excels in meekness will be the one who knows face-to-face communion with God, and proofs of the mighty hand of God which are denied to all others. May we, too, learn something of the meekness of the man of God.

H. F.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

WHAT MAKES THE LEAVES FALL?

WE have a little oak tree which cannot cast off its old leaves. It has gone right through a whole Winter and will soon be entering another, but its brown leaves are as firmly fixed as ever. I have tried shaking the pot. I have pulled at the leaves, and pulled them hard, but they still remain. Although they have lost their colour they still retain their grip on the little branches as though they had never heard of such a time as Autumn. Perhaps I can tell you about it.

About eight years ago we planted an acorn in a flower pot. In due time the acorn burst open, the roots began to grow down into the soil, and a green shoot sprouted up. For the first year or two it was all most interesting, but not very beautiful. The dead acorn clung to the stalk, the first little leaf appeared at the top, finally falling off in the Autumn. Next Spring there was another shoot and more leaves.

As the years went on, the plant grew into a baby tree, and gave us much pleasure. The tiny leaves were so perfectly formed, and so fresh, the miniature tree so green in the Summer and so tinted in the Autumn, that we never tired of looking at it. To add to all this there was the mystery of the way it shed its leaves.

You will know, of course, that oak leaves all drop off the trees in the Fall of the year. First of all the leaves lose their freshness, turning from green into all shades of brown, and then at last the dried leaves fall from the branches and twigs, littering the ground all around them. In parks and in some gardens it is a busy time of the year, as the fallen leaves have to be swept up.

What makes the leaves fall? Some people have told me that it is due to the frost, which pinches them off, so that they drop to the ground. Others have said, No, but that it was the wind which shook the leaves off the trees. Of course it is true that in Autumn we do have blustery winds which blow the leaves all over the place. But neither of these explanations could have applied to our oak tree.

It was always kept sheltered from the frosts. The room in which it was kept sometimes got rather cold, but no frosts ever penetrated there. Yet still the leaves fell every year. Other trees and plants might be exposed to north-easterly or south-westerly blasts, but our treelet was protected. The worst winds that ever affected it were little

draughts, which might make a human being feel uncomfortable, but could not blow off the most insecure leaf. Nevertheless, just like the oaks outside, our little tree shed its leaves every Autumn and was left with just bare stems as though it were all dead. At times we even wondered whether it had died, but when Spring came round again it showed how very much alive it was by its fresh little buds and pretty new leaves.

Last Autumn, however, things did not go according to plan. The leaves remained on the tree. True, they turned brown, but somehow the tree was not able to throw them off. The Autumn turned to Winter, the end of the year came, but still not one single leaf had fallen. We feared that something must be wrong. How could we have the hope of new leaves if the old ones did not drop off? As the months went by we tried pulling them, gently at first and then with sharp tugs. But no, they clung on firmly. Our fears were justified; something had gone wrong; the little tree had died. All that we now have is dead leaves on a dead tree.

This seems to show clearly what it was that forced off the old leaves. It was not forces from the outside, but the power of the new life within. When Autumn came and the leaves began to wither, there was life energy inside which began to press them off the tree. At that time there was no sign of the new buds. They only appeared afterwards. However, before they were seen, the new life working in the stems and branches made the old leaves fall away. Now that the oak is dead there is no inner power of deliverance.

In some ways the tree looked more ornamental last Winter than it had in previous years. Then it had just showed dead stalks, whereas this Winter it was a well-shaped little tree. It still is. But in the past, each year has seen growth as well as greenness when Spring came. Now it can grow no more. It is fixed because it is dead. Somehow it has lost its charm for us. We are thinking of throwing it away.

The Word of God often likens human beings to trees. The life of a Christian is pictured as being like a green tree with fresh leaves. We know very well that it is our nature to have many dead things clinging to us—old things of which we are now ashamed, like unkind words and thoughts, ugly tempers and bad habits. Any real lover of the Lord Jesus wants to be rid of these signs of failure and

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sin, so that the new and lovely things of Christ may be seen in our lives. How can we put off the old and put on the new?

The secret can be seen in the trees. It is the new life within which casts off the old dead things. They are tough. It is no use tugging at them. Even if we could pull them off we should be left bare and ugly. Only if they are thrown off from the

inside will there be a way for the fresh life to make itself seen.

“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death” (Romans 8. 2). That is only another way of saying that it is the new life inside which will free us from the clinging faults and sins of the old. And this new life is the Lord’s free gift to all those who trust in Him.
H. F.

GOD’S STANDARD OF VALUES

“For who hath despised the day of small things?” (Zechariah iv. 10).

“Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes as nothing?” (Haggai ii. 3).

“Then they that feared the Lord spake one with another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I do make, even a peculiar treasure; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him” (Malachi iii. 16, 17).

“**W**HO hath despised the day of small things?” This is one matter, among many, concerning which it is very necessary for us to be clear in our hearts and to have our mentality adjusted. Just as a ship, after a long voyage, spends time in having its compass adjusted, because of interferences and variations; so it is with us, on our way. It becomes necessary for us, from time to time, to stop and think again; to get our minds corrected; and to be freed from those influences that upset the balance and the poise, and a right appreciation.

This matter, then, of greatness and smallness is an important one. There is a good deal of confusion about it, and that confusion can result in our missing the way and being found in an altogether false position. We need to know what we mean by ‘greatness’ and what we mean by ‘smallness’. It is quite evident, from the Scriptures that we have read, that, in the case of that remnant of the Jews which had returned to Jerusalem from captivity, a certain kind of appraisal, a certain kind of observation, had resulted in a false judgment, which brought the people perilously near to calamity. The Lord, reading their hearts, used this word as to their attitude and their reactions—“despised”!
“Who hath despised the day of small things?”

And if you look carefully into these prophecies, you will find that an altogether different point of view about the matter was possible, and that the ‘day’ was not as small as they thought.

BIGNESS AND GREATNESS, LITTLENES AND SMALLNESS

We have a way of confusing ‘bigness’ with ‘greatness’, and they are two entirely different things. ‘Bigness’ may be a matter of bulk—of outward physical dimensions—the impression that a thing makes upon the senses. ‘Greatness’ is a matter of moral qualities. You may not be able to take its measure, or even to see any measure in it at all, from human standpoints. Yet from God’s standpoint it may be very great. There is a lot of difference between bigness and greatness from God’s standpoint. In the same way, there is a great deal of difference between ‘littleness’ and ‘smallness’. A ‘little’ person is one whose nature is petty, paltry, mean, despicable—little! But you can be quite small, and yet of tremendous value. You would sooner have an ounce of gold than many pounds of iron! It is a matter of intrinsic value.

You may have read the life story of Madame Curie, the discoverer of radium. If you have, you will remember how tons and tons and tons of by-products from the gas-works were unloaded in her back-yard. Working on this mountain of ‘stuff’, she obtained out of it the smallest particle of radium. That is a comparison of what is ‘big’ and what is ‘great’. In that almost imperceptible speck of radium lay immense qualities, values, potentialities, all extracted from this great mass of stuff. There is certainly a difference between ‘bigness’ and ‘greatness’.

‘Smallness’ we may judge merely in an objective and outward way. We may say of something: Oh, but it is so small! and ‘despise’ it. And yet, a ‘day of small things’ may be a tremendously potential day. “Fear not, little flock; for it is your

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Father's good pleasure to give *you* the kingdom" (Luke xii. 32). Here, of course, we have 'little' used in the sense of outward size. There is something outwardly small which is immensely potential. You have only to run your eye through the Bible, to see again and again what God made of 'small' things, that would have been despised, scorned, overlooked, set aside, by those who had this mentality of 'bigness'.

A DESPISED REMNANT, PRECIOUS TO GOD

Now, if you look at these passages that I have quoted at the beginning, you will see that there was something there that was very precious to God, although the people, in their natural judgment, were calling it so small. The last passage that we read, from the 'end-time' of the Old Testament, finds God saying: "They shall be mine . . . in the day that I do make, even a *peculiar treasure*". "They that feared the Lord"—just that little company that feared the Lord, and thought upon His Name, and were occupied with Him—represented something of such value to the Lord, that our translation does not convey how precious it was to Him.

You notice those two words: "The Lord *hearkened*, and *heard*". That is not just the repetition of the same word in two different forms. The first word signifies: The Lord 'bent down', 'inclined'. The Lord said: 'Here is something to take note of! Here is something to which to listen! Here is something to draw Our attention'—*God's* attention! The Lord inclined, listened, heard. And the picture is: The Lord said: 'Fetch the book, the great book, the Book of Remembrance, and put down the names of these people in it.' "A book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord . . . in the day that I do make, even a peculiar treasure". And that, as you know, was right in the setting of this section of the Bible that includes Haggai and Zechariah.

What was it which made for this 'greatness', over against that which people were calling so 'little', and despising as such? What does the Lord look for? Well, here it is quite clear. This little company was, comparatively, a disciplined and chastened company. They had come out of the fires of Babylon. They had been through all the discipline of those years in exile. They were of those who had hung their harps upon the willows, and said: "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (Ps. cxxxvii. 4). "The Lord's song"

—you can see where their hearts were. And then the day came when the proclamation was made: You can go back—you can all go back to Zion! The vast majority, feeling that their present position was a very much more comfortable one than it would be back there in Zion, decided to stay where they were. And this little company, with all the hardships, difficulties, sufferings, toil, and much more, that was involved in going back, went back, because their hearts were in Zion, and Zion was in their hearts. It was a matter of the heart relationship to the Lord, and of that which was dearest to His heart. And so they were always thinking upon *His* Name, talking together about *His* interests.

They are a little company, comparatively, a despised people. I expect that most of those who stayed behind thought them fools. Well, be it so. What did the Lord think? That was the point. Malachi tells us what the Lord thought. A chastened, a disciplined people, whose hearts were for the Lord. Small? If you like. Read the prophecies of Jeremiah: what a book that is! What a time it takes, and what patience it takes, to work your way through the whole of Jeremiah's prophecies! Malachi and Haggai—we call them 'Minor' prophets—what little books these are! But what have you got for the Lord (where the nation is concerned) in Jeremiah? He is a 'Major' prophet, if you like, but, in his time, there is nothing for the Lord. The others may be little, 'Minor' prophets, but there is something now very precious to the Lord.

The discipline has taken place; the chastening has been carried out; the heart has been searched: the Lord has got something. You say 'small'? Oh, no, not in the eyes of the Lord—it is something very great. That is what is precious to the Lord; that is what He is looking for, and that is what He calls 'great'! Although, looking at it with natural eyes—and the eyes of man always judge by the outward size and appearance—men may despise: from the Lord's standpoint there is much intrinsic value. And, with Him, everything is a matter of 'intrinsic value', not of bulk!

The Lord Jesus puts His finger on that matter in another connection. "If salt have lost its saltness, what is the good of it?" (Matt. v. 13; Luke xiv. 13). You may have bulk—tons of it!—but it is useless; you had better throw it out in the street. A teaspoonful of salt with its savour in it is of more value than tons of savourless salt! It is a matter of intrinsic value. It is the Divine element, the sting of God, the vital quality! And, for that, there has to be suffering; there has to be chastening; there has to be discipline; the heart has to be

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searched ; the work has to go very deep, in order to secure a people in line with God's abiding intention.

CONCERN FOR GOD'S ETERNAL THOUGHT

This people had one object before them: God's Home. The Temple represented God's heavenly, eternal, abiding thought—the place of His dwelling amongst His people. Before the world was, it was in God's mind to dwell with men ; and all the way through the Bible it is just that. Right at the end of the Bible it is—"The tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them . . . and be their God" (Rev. xxi. 3). That is God's everlasting thought concerning His House, His dwelling-place in the midst of His people. We know the *reality*, the spiritual reality of that.

Here, then, are people in line with God's thought. In Babylon God's thought did not obtain at all ; that was not His place.

The Lord always calls it spiritually great, when you are wholly centred on that which He has ever had in mind. When God has a people right in line with His eternal thought ; a people right in touch with Himself as to that which He ever desires to have: when He has got that—let that people be 'small' from outward standards, and 'despised' by men of distorted judgment—God says: 'That is great! and you are not to despise it.' "Who hath despised the day of small things?" There is a rebuke in that interrogation ; a correction. It implies: 'Pause! Adjust your judgment and your standards!'

Here is a people still with the vision in their hearts of what God intended and would have. They may have been greatly discouraged and disheartened ; greatly perplexed as to the possibility of it, and very very tried as to the realisation of it. Nevertheless, it was in their hearts. They wept!—look at the context of this statement (Hagg. ii. 3 ; Ezra iii. 12). They wept over the situation! They were distressed that that which was, was so much less than what they knew the Lord wanted ; they were troubled about this. And their perplexity and their distress even led them to drop their hands in despair, and, for the time being, to suspend operations (Ezra iv. 23, 24 ; Hagg. i. 2).

There was plenty there as a ground for discouragement ; plenty there to give point to saying it was hopeless. But—you never feel hopeless if you have never had hope! A person who has never known what hope is, does not know what hopelessness is! They are just dead things. You can only know *hopelessness* if you have previously

known *hope*. These people were troubled, heart-broken, distressed ; and if they despaired for a time, and said: 'It is no use ; it is no use!'—that was simply because they were, in their hearts, deeply disappointed. And you cannot be *disappointed* unless you have had some kind of appointment!

There, deep in their hearts, was the vision ; and they were suffering in their hearts in relation to the vision. That is what God is looking for! People who, in their hearts, through all trial and testing, still have the vision of what God is after, and are suffering in their hearts concerning it, represent something precious to the Lord. He as it were lights on that, and says: 'We take note of that! Put that down in the Book ; don't let that be forgotten ; have that in remembrance. It is going to come up in the day that I make—I shall have *that* then!'

POINTING TO THE LORD JESUS

So we must revise our thoughts, and get away from these temporal ways of viewing things to the eternal standards and standpoint. For all this leads us to—what? To the Lord Jesus!

Here, in this very fourth chapter of the prophecies of Zechariah, is something that has a recurrence in the book of the Revelation: the two olive trees, standing before the Lord of all the earth (Zech. iv. 3, 11 – 14). You know where that comes in the book of Revelation (xi. 4). There is something here of *eternal* significance. The Lord Jesus is brought into view in these prophecies.

In Haggai (ii. 6, 7) we read: "Yet once, . . . and I will shake the heavens, and the earth . . . and the desire of all nations shall come". That is quoted in the letter to the Hebrews (xii. 26). 'The things which can be shaken'—the temporal things ; the 'big' things, according to man's mind—they will be shaken to their foundations. But the things which cannot be shaken shall stand. The letter to the Hebrews is all centred upon the Lord Jesus, and His heavenly kingdom. "Receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken" (xii. 23). That comes out of Haggai.

As for Malachi, he dwells much upon the Lord Jesus—the very Messenger of the Covenant (iii. 1)—and His forerunner (iv. 5). Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, introduces the Lord Jesus in a very real way ; it is all focused upon Him. And when God sees things focused upon His Son, He is alert and alive, listening and watching and recording. It amounts to this: that, from God's standpoint, 'value' is always a matter of how much of

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

His Son is present anywhere. The test of everything is how much it represents Christ—how much of Christ is there; not how ‘big’ and impressive it is, from man’s standpoint. We need to find the right balance.

Of course, God is a great God, and we expect a great God to do great things. At the great Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, a slogan was introduced: ‘Attempt great things for God: Expect great things from God’. Yes: but be sure that

you know what ‘greatness’ is from God’s standpoint, and that you are not confusing ‘greatness’ with ‘bigness’, intrinsic value with outward bulk. What the Lord is after is the values of His Son. They are the eternal values.

“Who hath despised the day of small things?” But—“they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel, even these seven . . .” (Zech. iv. 10). From that point you are moving on the positive line of recovery!

T. A-S.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We acknowledge with gratitude the following gifts received during June and July, 1960.

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SEPTEMBER — OCTOBER, 1960.

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by

T. A-S.

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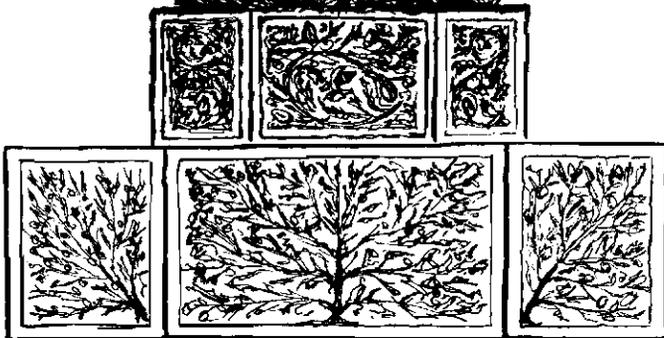
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**A WITNESS
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Vol. 38. No. 6.

November, 1960.

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 (literally—*full knowledge*) of the Son of God, unto a full-grown 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.



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MEN WHOSE EYES HAVE SEEN THE KING

VIII. HE MUST REIGN

“ He must reign, till he hath put all his enemies under his feet ” (I Corinthians xv. 25).

IN these past messages our eyes have been turned to that Throne that was seen by Ezekiel through the open Heaven, with the ‘appearance as of a Man upon it above’. And we have seen, I trust, how everything that follows is just the expression and manifestation of that Throne—of the absolute exaltation of the Lord Jesus above all things.

Now, when Paul wrote these words that we have quoted above, he was not thinking of some future time when Christ would reign and put all His enemies under His feet. He was not thinking of Jesus as waiting for a time to come, when something would be done that would put Him in that position and bring about that result. Whenever Paul—or, for that matter, any of the apostles—referred to Christ’s exaltation and lordship, he and they always regarded it and spoke of it as a present thing. Whilst they looked on into the future and saw something more of its outworking, in its beginning and in its actuality it was not to them a future thing ; to them it was now. And when Paul

said, “ He must reign ”, he meant, ‘ He is reigning, and must continue to reign, until He has put all His enemies under His feet.’

That is something that has to be recovered in our consciousness and in our conviction. That is *the* thing that needs to be restored to its place in the Church’s life and consciousness continually. For, to a very large extent, while the Church adheres to the doctrine of the exaltation of Christ, His Kingship and Lordship, the reality, the power and the consciousness of it has been to a very large extent lost. The Church, in the beginning, lived in the consciousness and the power of the fact—as it was to them—that Jesus was on the Throne ; undoubtedly, unquestionably He was on the Throne ; He was Lord of all. Peter affirmed it : “ He *is* Lord of all ”! (Acts x. 36). Paul said : ‘ God *did* set Him far above all rule and authority ’ (Eph. i. 20, 21). It was something accomplished. That was their view of the matter ; that was their conviction ; that was their consciousness ; and it was so powerful with them as to affect every aspect of their lives.

And until that is as true in the life and realisa-

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tion of the Church in our time as it was at the beginning, the same results and effects will not be found in the Church or through the Church to-day. If the mighty impact and registration of Christ at that time was something incomparably greater than the deplorable state to-day in the Church, it was due to this one thing. If you wish to trace the secret of their power, their influence, their progress, their onward march—for in spite of a world of terrible hostility, persecution, martyrdom and every other kind of adversity, they marched forward 'terrible as an army with banners', and were described as the people who had "turned the world upside down" (Acts xvii. 6)—if you wish to discover the secret, you will find it here: 'He *must reign*—He *must reign*, till He hath put all His enemies under His feet.' He is reigning.

We have said that, for the apostles, the reign of Christ had already begun; it did obtain in their time. How did they come to that conviction, to that knowledge? We will keep, for our purpose, to the man whose words we have extracted, the man Paul. Paul's knowledge of Christ as reigning sprang out of his personal experience of that fact. He had had an encounter in his life with the reigning, glorified Lord; and the Lord from Heaven had had an encounter with him. It had become something in his own personal experience, history and life. It was something very personal; and it has to be that. Until it is that, it can be very theoretical. It has to be personal and experimental. And it was so with Paul. In that encounter, on the way to Damascus, two very personal words had been used, and I think it all centres in that fact.

TWO PERSONAL WORDS

First of all, Paul had been spoken to by his own personal name: 'Saul, Saul!' His own name was called and reiterated. He is being nailed down to this personally; he is not getting away with it; he is not being allowed to mistake what he hears. It is being directed to the man in his own personal name. He is not mixed up in a crowd; he is not just met in a teaching; the thing has come quite straight at him as a man, as an individual—'Saul, Saul!' I am not suggesting that we have all to have the same form of encounter. But we all have to have the same crisis; that is, we are all to have, and can have, a point in our life when we come face to face with the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ; and there is *the* crisis upon which all the future turns. It is a tremendous thing to come face to face with the lordship of Christ; it is a greater thing than coming face to face with His Saviour-

hood. There are many people who are saved by the Saviour, and own Him as Saviour, but whose lives are seriously lacking in the power of His lordship. That is a statement—we leave it.

The other very personal word to Saul was the one that came when he asked, "Who art Thou, Lord?" The answer came: "I am *Jesus . . .*"; and, lest Saul should prevaricate, try to evade, get round it, by saying, 'Yes, but our country is full of men by that name; which Jesus do you mean?'—the Lord safeguarded it by adding: ". . . *whom thou persecutest*"—"the Jesus whom you are persecuting—that is the one!" And Saul knew who that One was, right enough. He had but one Jesus in all his thoughts and in all his plans, and *that* Jesus he was determined to blot out and wipe out from the world's memory; he was out to eradicate every trace of that Jesus. 'I am Jesus—the One that you are persecuting'. You see how personal the Lord made this matter. He brought it right home, first to the man himself, and then to the very purpose of his life—the very object to which he had dedicated all his strength of mind and body for its destruction: 'I am Jesus.'

Something like that is really necessary if there is to be any kind of repetition, in the Church and in us, of the after results in the life of Paul. There has to come a point where, instead of being just one of a multitude, we come, personally and individually, under His absolute personal domination and lordship. Our whole life—all our ambitions, all our enterprises, all our commitments, are now brought under His lordship. It is a tremendous thing, but the glory of that Throne waits upon the acceptance of its government, its lordship.

PAUL'S TRANSFIGURED BIBLE

From that crisis, that encounter, that vision, that 'seeing'—that transaction, shall we call it—everything else took its rise in the life of Paul the apostle. Everything from that moment was transfigured, transformed, seen in an entirely new way, in the light of Jesus as on the Throne. After that, Paul went for a little while to Damascus, and then he went away into Arabia; and he went there with his Bible, I am quite sure; there are all the evidences of it. And he spent a long time there, with the Bible in one hand, and Jesus on the Throne, so to speak, in the other. If you want to know your Bible, that is the way; that is the key; that is the door—Jesus on the Throne, and the Bible. And Paul got a new Bible, a transfigured Bible! He saw his Bible, his Old Testament, with which he was very familiar, in a new and a living light, through

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that great truth—Jesus on the Throne! And as he went back over the Bible that he had, he saw this inherent everywhere. ‘Yes, yes, that is what is here!’ He saw that the Bible was really the book of one thing—God’s intention to have a Man and His kind in dominion, reigning in glory. This matter of the glory of a Man in Heaven interpreted everything, explained everything.

After all, when you come to think of it, it does open the Bible. Why these awful conditions that we see? Because that is contrary to what God intended; it declares it. We look out on the world, and see the awful conditions in the nations, and round about us in our own country—the terrible conditions of suffering, of misery, of evil—and we may feel inclined to ask the question of the doubter, of the cynic: Why? why? Why does God allow it? The answer is here: God allows that which is contrary to Him to shout at men that it *is* contrary—He never meant it to be like that. When something goes wrong, God does not just pass it over, smooth it over, let it go as though it did not matter: he makes it shout its own crime and its own tragedy. The world is screaming with its own tragedy, and it is the tragedy of a missed purpose of God. Interpret that to the world, and you have an effective way of bringing in the Gospel.

But the Bible sprang into life for Paul, and it is an amazing thing how, from that moment, as he took his Bible with him everywhere, the one thing he is preaching is: ‘Jesus is Lord; Jesus Christ is Lord!’ The exalted Lord, the exalted Christ, the glorified Christ, was his theme; and Paul preached from the Bible. It had changed his Bible for him. It was responsible for, and accounted for, his whole mission and work. What was the great business to which he was committed? What was it that constituted him an apostle? Well, his mission and his work was empassioned and motivated and controlled by just this one thing—the absolute glory of the Lord Jesus; that Jesus should come into His rightful place in this world and in human hearts. That was the one motive, the one object, the one dominating thing in all his work, in all his mission. It was not this and that, and a number of other things; it was one central, but all-inclusive passion—Jesus as Lord, to be that in human lives. His work and his mission were both transfigured and controlled by this that had come into his experience.

His sufferings and his endurance were made possible by this vision. Sometimes he makes light of his sufferings. If ever a man suffered, I think that man suffered. I do not know that there were many ways in which he did not suffer; he suffered

greatly; many sufferings, and heavy sufferings. But listen! ‘Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look, not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen’ (II Cor. iv. 17, 18); and amongst those ‘things not seen’, supremely and over them all, was that Exalted One in the glory, ‘whom’, says his fellow-apostle Peter, ‘having not seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory’ (I Pet. i. 8). But the point is—how was it that he was able to endure and suffer triumphantly? It was just because of this basic and central consciousness—the deep, strong conviction that Jesus was on the Throne.

PAUL’S UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHURCH, AND CONCERN FOR THE CHURCHES

I believe that this also was the key to Paul’s understanding of the Church. Paul, as no one else, perhaps, had the greatest comprehension and understanding of the Church ‘from eternity to eternity.’ He goes right back into the Divine counsels ‘before the world was’, and sees it there in the heart and thought of God; he comes right through and sees it in the great consummation of the ages of the ages. He has a marvellous comprehension of the Church. But of all the things he says—the highest things, the fullest things—the most complete expression of the meaning and vocation of the Church is contained and summed up in this matchless phrase: ‘Now unto Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us (the Church), unto Him be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever’ (Eph. iii. 20, 21). ‘Glory in the Church’—what glory? The glory of the glorified Christ! I could stay long with that matter of the Church and its eternal vocation and election, to be the vessel of the glory of Christ. John saw it at the end, in characteristic symbolism, in terms of the City—it is simply the glory of Christ in expression at last. It is that for which the Church was chosen; it is that to which the Church is called—to be the vessel, the seat, of this authority, this government, and this glory. Christ in glory gave to Paul the clue as to the Church, and an ever-growing explanation of its meaning.

This same thing accounted for his concern for the churches. No one will question that Paul had tremendous concern for the churches. He says that

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

he travailed for them; he wept day and night for them; he longed and yearned over them, spent himself for them. But why? what was the motive? what prompted all that? Ah, it was the glory of his Lord Jesus! The churches existed for the glory of Christ: he said so. It was all just for that one thing—the glory of Christ. And if there was any deflection, if there was anything that was not right in the Church, or in the churches; if anything whatsoever could be done to help them, it was all motivated by this one thing, that the Lord Jesus should in all things be glorified.

And if we pass to the end of it all, and look at Paul's writing about the Lord's coming again, what is it that is uppermost with him in relation to that coming? Is it the end of his troubles? is it just his own joy and pleasure in getting to heaven? Oh no, it is the reign of His Lord—the fact that His Lord is coming into His own, coming into His kingdom, coming into His rights, coming into the place that He ought to have, to be ceded that place universally—that is the great thing, the one thing giving birth and giving rise to everything else. "He must reign".

CHRIST IS ACTIVELY
REIGNING NOW

And He reigns. Christ *is* reigning. Christ is active. On several occasions He is spoken of as having, on His ascension, 'sat down' in heaven: He "*sat down* on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. i. 3); He 'sat down'. But if you notice, whenever it is said that He 'sat down', it is invariably related to the finishing of His redemptive work. That is done. On the other hand, He stands. There is no contradiction; it is only an implication of a different meaning. Stephen saw Him—"I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man *standing* on the right hand of God" (Acts vii. 56). He is spoken of as 'standing'. When it is a matter of the work of redemption, it is finished; there is nothing more to do—He can sit down. When it is a matter of the working out of that redemption here in this world, He is on His feet. When there is a challenge to what He has done, He rises up. Stephen is in the presence of that challenge, and the Exalted Lord is on His feet, for the sake of His testimony. He is active, that is the point. He is not just passively sitting down waiting till His enemies are put under Him: He is putting them under! He stands to work this thing out.

Now, the activity of the reigning Lord is seen in several ways, only to be mentioned. Firstly, He

is 'taking out from the nations a people for His Name' (Acts xv. 14). The great illustration in the Old Testament, of course, is that of Israel in Egypt. The taking out of a people for His Name is a tremendous business—you cannot do that sitting down! He extended the prince of this world, exhausted all his power and all his resources and all his endurance, and got them out. We are left in no doubt about it that that was the Old Testament demonstration of the supreme power of God. There is only one demonstration that exceeds that, and that is New Testament—"the exceeding greatness of His power when He raised Jesus from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand." That is *exceeding* greatness of power! But it was a tremendous thing to get Israel out of Egypt as a people for His Name.

And it is no less a thing to get this people out of the nations for His Name. The prince of this world withstands and challenges at every point, in every way. No soul is going to be released from that bondage and that kingdom without a fight. It is often made out to be far too easy; people are put into a false position by it being made too easy. If we did but know, we have got to stand into the Throne for souls, to get them out. Perhaps you have some experience of those parts of the earth where the prince of this world has a terrible hold, a very terrible hold, and so much at his command; and you know something of what it means to get just one soul out of that. The suffering, the travail, the anguish, the cost bound up with getting one soul out of a nation for His Name! It needs the Throne, the mighty Throne. But, in spite of so much, He is doing it. The point is that there is so much like Pharaoh and Egypt—but even greater than that—set against this; and yet He is doing it.

The second thing He is doing is that He is constituting the life of that people on heavenly principles. We wish He had freer, fuller scope to do it. But He is doing it. That is, He is inculcating the life and laws of Heaven into that people. And again the illustration is Israel at Sinai, and in the Wilderness. There the heavenly laws were given, and they were constituted according to heavenly principles. They were tested, tried, proved according to the laws of Heaven. Their very daily bread had to come out of Heaven: they had to live out of Heaven, live on Heaven; their life had to be, indeed, a heavenly life. There was nothing here to constitute them God's people; they had to be constituted on a heavenly basis. And that is what the Risen Lord is seeking to do with His people. If only we understood, again, our experiences, we should see that that is the explanation and interpre-

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tation. He is seeking to re-constitute us on a heavenly basis of life. He is energetically trying to do it. Because we do not understand what He is doing, we are so slow in the change-over. Let us recognise the fact and take it to heart.

The third thing that He is doing is putting all His enemies under His feet. And that takes us, with Israel, over the Jordan, into the Land. See there how those nations were put under the feet of Joshua through the people. The counterpart of that now is that it is through His Church that the Lord Jesus is bringing His enemies under His feet. Oh that we were more efficient in this! Oh that it were more true of us that we, like the people, were putting our Joshua's enemies under His feet! That is a challenge; it is a truth. But He is doing it, putting His enemies under His feet, and doing it through His Church—so imperfectly and with such limitations, but that is His way. Old William Gurnall, the writer of *The Christian in Complete Armour* (1655), speaking of the serpent's head being put under the Lord's heel, pictures the Lord saying to His Church: 'I have put him under My heel, come you and put your heel upon him!' We should be co-operating with the Lord Jesus in this matter.

See how He has done it through the centuries. It is a tremendous story! The very long-term nature of it, the extension of it over time, may rob it of some of its force in our consciousness. But if you could just put it all together, the story of how He has done it through the centuries, what a story it would be!

Israel vaunted itself against Him and His lord-

(Concluded)

T. A-S.

REALITY

"And I will turn my hand upon thee, and throughly purge away thy dross, and will take away all thy tin (or alloy): and I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called The city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with judgement, and her converts with righteousness" (Isaiah i. 25 - 27).

"He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also to walk even as he walked" (1 John ii. 6).

"No man hath beheld God at any time: if we love one another, God abideth in us, and his love is perfected in us" (1 John iv. 12).

THAT message from Isaiah was, of course, sent, in the first case, to Israel as a nation; and in the

ship—where is Israel? Can Israel lift up its head? Through all these centuries it has been bruised, unable to lift itself up; impotent; paralysed; it vaunted itself against the Throne of the Exalted Christ. Rome entered into the battle to try this thing, and there was Caesar, with all his mighty power and resources, determined to destroy that Name and that power. Where is Caesar? where is Rome and all its mighty power? It has gone down into shame and into the dust, and has not been able to lift itself up again. So we could go on. In our own life-time, many of us have seen men who have made a bid for world-dominion, and Heaven says: That is reserved for One only! And what has happened? Man after man has ended his career in ignominy, and worse than that, who made that bid for the place of God's Son, for the Throne, right up to date. And it will be the same thing with the rest of them. It is reserved to Him, 'He must reign till He has put all His enemies under His feet.' And He will do it.

How does Ezekiel put it? Right in the midst of his prophecies, right at the very centre of the book, with Israel in captivity; the captivity itself; the mighty power of Babylon and all these world powers enthralling, holding, seeking this place of absolute supremacy—Ezekiel cries, as from God: 'I will overturn, overturn, overturn . . . until He come whose right it is to wear the crown!' (Ezek. xxi. 27).

'He must reign till He has put all His enemies under His feet.'

May that transfigure the way for us.

New Testament the message is God's speaking to the Church. That is underlined in the messages to the churches in the book of the Revelation, that serious final word of the Lord to His people. To the churches in their varying local settings, He says: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches" (Rev. ii. 7, etc.).

Perhaps we can sum up the word that is with us just now like this: that we find ourselves up against what I would call Divine Realism. That is to say that God, in Himself, is One who deals with things as they are, in actualities, in reality; and His dealings with us are in relation to actual realisation. It is not an idealism; it is a realism; and God is handling us in order to make actual and real, and very deeply established in us, all that He has shown us by His Spirit.

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Now these things that He shows us, however glorious and great they may be, have actually to happen ; they have to have accomplishment in our own life and experience, or else we have no testimony and no impact. The question is: What, supremely, has God shown us? I believe that there are three great, supreme issues that He has shown as His full thought, and they are the things that must be made real. Of course they all stand out in the whole vision and burden and course of Paul's life. We can put them into words, but each word is just staggering in its significance. The three supreme issues are:

- First—Christ ;
- Secondly—The Cross ;
- Thirdly—The Church.

Everything that God purposed for man in Christ is covered by these three supreme issues ; and everything else flows out of them.

THE REALISM OF CHRIST

" According to my earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing shall I be put to shame, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain " (Phil. i, 20, 21).

Here we see Christ, not as an ideal merely, but Christ as an all-consuming reality. You see, Paul knew Christ: he lived Christ, and he preached Christ. His whole life was consumed with the reality of the One who absorbed his whole vision, his whole strength, his whole direction. And our first need is that Christ should begin to mean much to us ; and then that the Christ-life should be being lived where we are concerned.

So that, if Christ is really our life—and the Christian life *is* Christ ; it is not a religion, it is not a doctrine, it is not a system—it simply is the embodiment of the glorious Person in us. Nothing else is really Christian ; it is just Christ in us. But if Christ is our life, what is the practical issue? how will it actually work out?

Recently we here in Los Angeles have been studying together the First Epistle of John, and we have been quite shaken by the realism of this word. You see, it is not what we say, but really how it works. In that verse we read, ' he that *saith* he abideth in Him ought himself so to walk as He walked.' Not what we say, but how it works. The question is, how is that to be much more fully realised in all of us? If Christ is not real to us, our

life becomes dim and defeated and inconsistent. All the light and the love are in Him. If Christ is not becoming real in us in terms of a great change in our personality, then our life fails to glorify God, and fails as a testimony to His reality. So all the time, we are really under God's hand for this weak state to be rectified, and for His Son to be secured in reality. The question is, How is this to be?

I want to pass on what I believe is a two-fold answer to this, transforming everything into terms of life and enjoyment in Him.

First of all, it may be our need is a new encounter with Him—note that—a new encounter with *Him* ; somehow to get away from people, ideas and questions, to Himself alone. You see, the Lord's word to Peter was, ' What is that to thee? Follow thou Me ' (John xxi. 22). On the resurrection morning, when Mary went to the tomb, her weeping, her sorrow, were summed up in this: " They [the two angels] say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord ". (Actually they have not ; no man can take away your Lord!) She turned round and saw Jesus standing, and He said to her: ' Mary '—that was all (John xx. 13 - 16). The Lord Himself is there, and it is just for us to turn in the right direction back to Him. It was the same with Thomas ; he was looking for things, looking for evidences, and the Lord said: " Be not faithless, but believing." And immediately he said: " My Lord and my God " (John xx. 27, 28). Our first need, every one of us, is to get right away, and to get back, and to say, ' My Lord and my God.'

Our second need may be a new thankfulness for His love, for His Blood that cleanses, for His Cross that delivers, and for His risen Life to share—for His indwelling by the Spirit. Let us be thankful for Him afresh. So Christ will daily be more real and satisfying, and daily will be more fully found in us, and formed in us, and manifested through us. I believe that a great secret that we need to know is the spirit of being thankful for the One whom we have, and who is with us continually. A spirit of thankfulness and praise.

THE REALISM OF THE CROSS

The second great issue is what we will call the realism of the Cross. To Paul the Cross was undoubtedly the basis of everything. If there is to be Divine reality in our experience, we need to know the Cross in two ways.

First of all, the Cross is a great deliverance. It is

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the place where God, in His Son, broke the power of every evil thing, and for ever put away a realm that could never glorify Him. In that great historic and eternal event and act we had our place. So we read the words, so familiar and yet so vital: 'I have been crucified with Christ'. There the matter of this old creation life was settled, and we need to be a people on that settled ground—'I have been crucified!' Or, as the testimony comes at the end of Romans vii: 'Who shall deliver me?' And the answer is: 'I thank God!' We ought to be on the ground of thankfulness that the Cross is behind, the work has been done, and we are free—we are risen with Him.

Secondly, the Cross is not only a great past deliverance, which we take and stand upon by faith, and indeed continually come to for its delivering power and cleansing Blood, day by day; but it also means a continual daily acceptance of what comes to us, with joy and unoffendedness. 'Take up the cross daily', the Lord says. I believe a lot of weakness is because of a timidity and a lack of a glad taking up of the Cross. The Lord wants us to be those who, taking up the Cross, are proving how real Christ is as our sufficiency day by day.

Finally, we come to the third great reality—

THE REALISM OF THE CHURCH.

In Ephesians iii. 21 we read: "Unto him be the glory in the church . . ."; and then that word that we read in John's epistle: "No man hath seen God at any time: if we love one another . . ." Without the Church, without the love and the unity and the relatedness of our life in Christ, the world has no God to see. These things are undoubtedly linked together. The testimony in the earth is a Church matter—a life with one another in terms of the love of God. The Cross leads to the Church. The question is, What is God after?

Well, I believe He wants the Church to be realised in every place. This is the great need to-day. There is a cry for it in all who are going on with God. The Spirit is moving to form Christ in

the children of God in terms of the Church. Are we with the Lord for His Church to be real where we are, and for there to be a realisation of it in practical terms all over the world? Our testimony here is that we find ourselves in this process in a real and drastic way. Everything and everyone is being found out, and the purifying goes on, and with it, the building. The Lord is dealing, not in relation merely to personal purity, but in relation to a related life. And this requires the Church in actual local terms, where we can dwell together, and learn together, and be fashioned together. Now, what is our part?

First of all, it is committal to the ground of the Church as a spiritual fact and position; a spiritual fact—we are in the Body, and we are with the Lord for it to be made real. Secondly, committal to one another in a practical life together in the place where He has put us to learn Christ. The realism is in a close related life where we love one another. This will lead to a very blessed three-fold consequence.

First of all, personal emancipation. Every one of us needs to come into a real release in the Lord, delivered from ourselves; joy in Him—Christ our Life. And that will lead to spiritual enlargement, both personal and corporate; there will be the overflowing of Divine life. Thirdly, there will be outward movement. What a need that we should pray for that, and be with God for it. In the early days, the fire was scattered as the saints went out; the thrust of the Spirit into other places took place as those who were witnesses moved out, and the result was the planting of the Church in terms of the churches everywhere. I believe the Lord is calling us to be with Him for these three great realities to be made true in us, and there is no doubt that the Spirit is dealing with every one of us in relation to them in these very days.

May the Lord find us very responsive to Him, that we shall be indeed those who enjoy and give evidence of a Christ who is so glorious, and a love together which sets forth what God is like—that the world may believe.

C. J. B. H.

RESTORATION

Reading: Genesis xxxv.

THE words "Arise, go up to Bethel," contain in them a great practical truth to which we desire to call the reader's attention for a moment or two.

It has been well remarked, by some one, that, "God, in His dealings with us, always keeps us

up to the original terms." This is true; but some may not exactly understand it. It may, perhaps, savour of the legal element. To speak of God, as keeping us up to certain terms, may seem to militate against that free grace in which we stand, and which has reigned through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord. Many, we

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are aware, have a kind of horror of everything bordering, in the most remote way, upon the legal system ; and we may say, we most fully sympathise with such horror. But, at the same time, we must take care not to carry that feeling to such an extent as would lead us to throw overboard aught that is calculated to act, in a divine way, upon the heart and conscience of the believer. We really want practical truth. There is a vast amount of what is called abstract truth in circulation amongst us, and we prize it, and would prize it more and more. We delight in the unfolding of truth in all its departments. But then we must remember that truth is designed to act on hearts and consciences ; and that there are hearts and consciences to be acted upon. We must not cry out, "Legal! Legal!" whenever some great practical truth falls upon our ears, even though that truth may come before us clothed in a garb which, at first sight, seems strange. We are called to "suffer the word of exhortation"—to listen to wholesome words—to apply our hearts diligently to everything tending to promote practical godliness and personal holiness. We know that the pure and precious doctrines of grace—those doctrines which find their living centre in the Person of Christ, and their eternal foundation in His work—are the means which the Holy Ghost uses to promote holiness in the life of the Christian ; but we know also that those doctrines may be held in theory, and professed with the lips, while the heart has never felt their power, and the life never exhibited their moulding influence. Yes ; and we frequently find that the loudest and most vehement outcry against everything that looks like legality is sure to proceed from those who, though they profess the doctrines of grace, have never felt their sanctifying influence, whereas those who really understand the meaning of grace, and feel its power to mould and fashion, to purify and elevate are ever ready to welcome the most pungent appeals to the heart and conscience.

Still, the pious reader may desire to know what is meant by the expression quoted above namely, "*God always keeps us up to the original terms.*"* Well, we understand it to mean simply this, that when God calls us to any special position or path, and we fall short of it, or wander from it, He will recall us to it again and again.* And further, when we set out in the profession of some special principle of action, or standard of devotedness, and swerve from it, or fall below it. He will remind us of it, and bring us back to it. True, He bears with us patiently, and waits on us graciously ; but "He always keeps us up to the original terms."

And can we not praise Him for this? Assuredly we can. Could we endure the thought of His allowing us to fall short of His holy standard, or to wander hither and thither, without His uttering a word to urge us on or call us back? We trust not. Well, then, if He does speak, what must He say? He must just remind us of "the old terms." Thus it is, and thus it has ever been. When Peter was converted at the lake of Gennesaret, he forsook all and followed Jesus ; and the last words that fell on his ear, from the lips of his ascending Lord, were, "Follow thou me." This was simply keeping him to the original terms. The heart of Jesus could not be satisfied with less, and neither should the heart of His servant. By the lake of Gennesaret, Peter set out to follow Jesus. What then? Years rolled on ; Peter had many a stumble ; Peter denied his Lord ; Peter went back to his boats and nets. What then? Peter was thoroughly restored, and when, as a restored soul, he stood by the side of His loving Lord, at the sea of Tiberias, he was called to listen to that one brief, pointed utterance, "Follow me"—an utterance embracing in its comprehensive grasp, all the details of a life of active service and of patient suffering. In a word, Peter was brought back to the original terms—the terms between Christ and his soul, and between his soul and Christ. He was brought to learn that the heart of Jesus had undergone no change toward him—that the love of that heart was inextinguishable and unalterable—and, because it was so, it could not tolerate any change in his heart—any decline or departure from the original terms.

Now, we see the same thing precisely in the history of the patriarch Jacob. Let us just turn to it for a moment. At the close of Genesis xxviii, we have the record of the original terms between the Lord and Jacob. We shall quote it at length. "And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set : and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven ; and, behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac ; the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed. And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth ; and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south ; and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and

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will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land: for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

Here, then, we have the blessed statement of what the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob undertook to do for Jacob and for his seed—a statement crowned by these memorable words, "*I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.*" Such are the terms by which God binds Himself to Jacob.

* * * * *

Let us now hearken to Jacob. "And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel . . . And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God; and this stone which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee."

Thus much as to Bethel and the terms entered into there. God pledged Himself to Jacob; and though heaven and earth should pass away, that pledge must be maintained in all its integrity. He revealed Himself to that poor lonely one who lay sleeping on his stony pillow, and not only revealed Himself to him, but linked Himself with him, in a bond which no power of earth or hell can ever dissolve.

And what of Jacob? Why, he dedicated himself to God, and vowed that the spot where he had enjoyed such a revelation, and hearkened to such exceeding great and precious promises, should be God's house. All this was deliberately uttered before the Lord, and solemnly recorded by Him; and then Jacob went on his journey. Years passed—twenty long and eventful years—years of trial and exercise, during which Jacob experienced many ups and downs, changes and chances, but the God of Bethel watched over His poor servant, and appeared unto him in the midst of his pressure, and said unto him, "I am the God of Bethel, *where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me*: now arise, get thee out from

this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred." God had not forgotten the original terms, neither would He let His servant forget them. Is this legality? Nay; it is simply the exhibition of divine love and faithfulness. God loved Jacob, and He would not suffer him to stop short of the old standard. He jealously watched over the state of His servant's heart, and lest it should, by any means, remain below the Bethel mark, he gently reminds him by those touching and significant words, "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow." This was the sweet expression of God's unchanging love, and of the fact that He counted on Jacob's remembrance of Bethel scenes.

How amazing that the High and Mighty One, who inhabiteth eternity, should so value the love and remembrance of a poor worm of the earth! Yet so it is, and we ought to bear it more in mind. Alas! we forget it. We are ready enough to take mercies and blessings from the hand of God, and, most surely, He is ready enough to bestow them. But then we ought to remember that He looks for the loving devotion of our hearts to Him; and if we, in the freshness and ardour of other days, set out to follow Christ, to live for Him, and give up all for Him, can we suppose for a moment that He could coldly and indifferently forego His claim upon our heart's affections? Should we like Him to do so? Could we endure the thought of its being a matter of indifference to Him whether we loved Him or not? God forbid! Yea, it should be the joy of our hearts to think that our blessed Lord seeks the loving devotion of our souls to Him, that He will not be satisfied without it, that when we wander hither and thither, He calls us back to Himself, in His own gentle, gracious, touching way.

"When weary of His rich repast,
I've sought, alas! to rove;
He has recalled His faithless guest,
And shewed His banner, love."

Yes; His banner ever floats, bearing its own inscription upon it to win back our vagrant hearts, and remind us of the original terms. He says to us in one way or another, as He said to Jacob, "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow." Thus He deals with us, in the midst of all our wanderings, our haltings, and our stumblings. He makes us to know that as we cannot do without His love, so neither can He do without ours. It is truly wonderful, yet so it is. He will keep the soul up to the old terms. Hearken to those touching

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appeals of the Spirit of Christ to His saints, in other days, "Thou hast *left thy first love*"—"Remember from whence thou art fallen; and repent, and do *thy first works*." (Rev. ii.) "Call to remembrance *the former times*." (Heb. x. 32.) "Where is the blessedness ye spake of?" (Gal. iv. 15.)

What is all this, but calling His people back to the old point from which they had declined? It may be said, they ought not to have needed this. No doubt; yet they did need it, and because they needed it, Jesus did it. It may be said, further, that tried love is better than first love. Granted; but do we not find, as a matter of fact, in our spiritual history, that upon our first setting out to follow Jesus, there is a simplicity, an earnestness, a freshness, fervour, and depth of devotion which, from various reasons, we fail to keep up. We become cold and careless; the world gets in upon us and eats up our spirituality; nature gains the upper hand, in one way or another, and deadens our spiritual sensibility, damps our ardour, and dims our vision. Is the reader conscious of anything like this? If so, would it not be a peculiar mercy if, at this very moment, he were called back to the old terms? Doubtless! Well, then, let him be assured that the heart of Jesus is waiting and ready. His love is unchanging; and not only so, but He would remind you that He cannot be satisfied without a true response from you. Wherefore, beloved friend, whatever has drawn you away from the measure of your earliest dedication to Him, let your heart now spring up, and get back at once to Him. Do not hesitate! Linger not! Cast yourself at the feet of your loving Lord, and let your heart be only for Him. This is the secret spring of all true service. If Christ has not the love of your heart, He does not want the labour of your hands. He does not say, "Son, give me thy money, thy time, thy talents, thine energies, thy pen, thy tongue, thy head;" all these are utterly unavailing, perfectly unsatisfying to Him. What He says to you is, "My son, give me thine *heart*." Where the heart is given to Jesus, all will come right. Out of the heart come all the issues of life, and if only Christ have His right place in the heart, the work and the ways, the walk and the character will be all right.

But we must return to Jacob, and see further how our subject is illustrated in his fruitful history. *At the close of Genesis xxxiii. we find him settling down at Shechem, where he gets into all sorts of trouble and confusion.** His house is dishonoured, and his sons, in avenging the dishonour, endanger his life. All this Jacob feels keenly, and he says to his sons, Simeon and Levi, "Ye have troubled me,

among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house."

*All this was most deplorable; but it does not appear to have once occurred to Jacob that he was in a wrong place.** The defilement and confusion of Shechem failed to open his eyes to the fact that he was not up to the old terms. How often is this the case! We fall short of the divine standard, in our practical ways; we fail in walking up to the height of the divine revelation; and although the varied fruits of our failure are produced on every side, yet our vision is so dimmed by the atmosphere around us, and our spiritual sensibilities so blunted by our associations, that we do not discern how low we are, and how very far short of the proper mark.

However, in Jacob's case, we see the divine principle again and again illustrated. "And God said unto Jacob, *Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there*; and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother."

Reader, note this. We have here a most exquisite feature in the divine method of dealing with souls. There is not one word said about Shechem, its pollutions and its confusions. There is not a word of reproof for having settled down there. Such is not God's way. He employs a far more excellent mode. Had we been dealing with Jacob we should have come down upon him with a heavy hand, and read him a severe lecture about his folly in settling at Shechem, and about his personal and domestic habits and condition. But oh! how well it is that God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor His ways like ours! Instead of saying to Jacob, "Why have you settled down in Shechem?" He simply says, "Arise, go up to Bethel;" and the very sound of the word sent a flood of light into Jacob's soul by which he was enabled to judge himself and his surroundings. "Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments; and let us *arise and go up to Bethel*; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went."

This was, assuredly, getting back to the original terms. It was the restoring of a soul and a leading in the paths of righteousness. Jacob felt that he could not bring false gods and defiled garments to Bethel; such things might pass at Shechem, but they would never do for Bethel. "And they gave

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unto Jacob all the strange gods that were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears ; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem . . . So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is Bethel, he and all the people that were with him. And he built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el, because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother."

"EL-beth-EL." Precious title, which had God for its Alpha and its Omega! At Shechem, Jacob called his altar "El-elohe-Israel," that is, "God

the God of Israel ;" but at Bethel, the true standpoint, he called his altar "El-beth-el," that is, God—the house of God. This was true restoration. Jacob was brought back after all his wanderings, to the very point from which he had started. Nothing less than this could ever satisfy God, in reference to His servant. He could wait patiently on him—bear with him—minister to him—care for him—look after him ; but He never could rest satisfied with anything short of this, "Arise, go up to Bethel."

(*Italics are ours—Ed.)

C. H. M.

THE OCTAVE OF REDEMPTION

VIII. THE COMING AGAIN OF THE LORD JESUS

SO we come to the last note of the octave of redemption: The Coming Again of the Lord Jesus. No attempt has been made to give a comprehensive presentation of any one of these aspects of redemption, but only to provide, if possible, a concise answer to the question asked about every one of them: Why this . . . ? Why that . . . ? That is particularly true of this last aspect. I shall not attempt for a moment to cover all the ground of the Lord's second coming.

Why, then, the Coming Again of the Lord Jesus? The coming of the Lord is most commonly thought of as an event ; something that is going to happen at a given time, as an item in a programme ; just an event that will one day take place. Of course, so far as it goes, that is true : but it is quite important that we should know *why* it should take place—*why* He will come again. Let us be clear that God could effect almost all the things associated with Christ's coming *without* His actual coming. For instance, if it is a matter of taking Christians to Heaven, He could do that without Christ coming to fetch us ; and there are many other things like that that God could do directly and quite independently. But the Scriptures show us that they are all bound up with and centred in the *personal coming* of Christ, and it is that fact which gives point to the question. Why should it be like that? Why should it be a matter of Christ coming back again?

THE CONSUMMATION OF REDEMPTION

The answer is really found in all that we have been saying in the foregoing studies. The coming again of the Lord is just His own consummation of all that. To the apostles, He said, as He went

from them: "I am with you . . . unto the consummation of the age" (Matt. xxviii. 20). 'I am with you until the summing up of the age': that is the meaning of the words. Then what is it, in this age, that will be summed up at the end? It will be all that we have been saying about Him in these pages. Let us very hurriedly pass our eye over it, in order to see the summation in His coming.

The first and the final coming are clearly united in purpose and realisation. The first stage of redemption with which we were occupied was the Incarnation of God's Son—His coming in man-form into this world ; and we indicated that in that Incarnation there were three purposes. One, the redemption of man by Man. By man sin came: by Man sin must go. By man came the consequences : by Man those consequences must be destroyed and put away. This is the whole point of His becoming man. Two, the redemption of man: the re-constituting of man, to make him the kind of man that God intended, but which he had so grievously ceased to be. Three, the perfecting of man for glory. Those were the three things bound up with His coming in man-form in the first instance.

The second phase was His earthly life. We summed this up by saying that, being here from birth and infancy, to full, mature manhood, through every trial and testing and fiery ordeal, right up to the last moment on the Cross when the fires were heated seven times, He presented to God a body without a mark of sin, or failure, or breakdown. "A body didst thou prepare for me", He said (Heb. x. 5) ; and, having passed through every possible kind of trial, He presented it back to God, without any taint, without any loss of spiritual

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character. He presented it back to God, a whole burnt-offering (Heb. ix. 14), acceptable, well-pleasing to God. He represented the Man that God is after, from beginning to end living a life that was absolutely triumphant over all that which humanity has to meet; and thus He became the pattern Man according to God's heart, the Man that God is after and is going to have.

"THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S"

There was something of very great meaning in the Son of God, as Son of Man, putting His feet upon this earth. In an earlier study, we quoted the 24th Psalm. You notice that it begins with: "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof". That is the beginning of the first stanza. The second stanza begins (v. 3): "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?" and the answer comes: "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, and hath not sworn deceitfully." *He*—He is the One! Then the third stanza (v. 7): "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors: and the King of glory shall come in." Do you see the movement? The earth is the Lord's: and He has put His feet on the earth, He has actually stood on this earth. He has lived His life here without defiled hands or heart, and therefore He, and He alone, is the One who is fit to ascend into the hill of the Lord. Because He has come here and so lived and so triumphed, the everlasting doors are flung open: He can enter in.

Now the point is this. The earth is the Lord's, and He has put His feet down on this earth, and has said: 'This earth belongs to this kind of man, and Heaven will attest it!' That is the meaning of the 24th Psalm. And that is why, when He had lived the life, gained the victory, and risen triumphant, He said to His disciples: 'Go into all the world: go and put your feet down in all the earth, and claim it. It is My inheritance, by right of creation, by right of redemption. You go and put your feet on it: it belongs to Me. That is all in the course of redemption.'

The Cross was the making effective of that redemption that was the purpose of the Incarnation—making effective the redemption of that earth upon which He put His feet and lived His triumphant life. By His Cross He took the earth out of the hands of the prince of this world, and took it back into His own rightful possession. "Now", said He, "shall the prince of this world be cast out" (John xii. 31).

In the Resurrection He is in possession of that,

and for forty days He is establishing the great fact that He is alive. He is *alive*! He "became dead": He is "alive for evermore": He has "the keys of death and of Hades" (Rev. i. 18): and He is establishing that in the nucleus of His Church, in their very being, for all time.

And then He goes to glory in their presence: and the whole thing—the Incarnation with its meaning, the life with its glorious triumph, the Cross with its wonderful destruction of the work of the Devil—the whole thing is taken and put beyond the reach of anything here, men or devil, to touch it or alter it. It is put in Heaven. You remember what He Himself says to us about Heaven: "where neither moth nor rust doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. vi. 20). It is beyond. "Your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. iii. 3). It is up there; nothing here can interfere with it. That is the Ascension.

The Spirit came as the Spirit of the glorified Christ in Heaven, sent forth to bring—potentially—all those values from Heaven to earth; to take up the work of making them good in believers for this dispensation.

The Church was born as the vessel, the "one new man". Let us be careful, in this connection, that we do not speak of the Church as being Christ incarnate again. The Spirit came to indwell the Church: to make the Church, as the Body of Christ, His counterpart, for expressing all the work that He Himself had done and taken to glory.

THE SECOND COMING

At last He is coming again! Why? To finish it all! To complete the redemption of man! To complete all that He came to do the first time, in every realm. The eighth chapter of the letter to the Romans deals with this consummation of redemption in two respects.

First, the manifestation, the revealing, of the sons of God (Rom. viii. 19). They have been secret, they have been hidden; only among the Persons of the Godhead is it known who are Christ's; but they are going to be revealed, disclosed. That is the consummation of redemption: the bringing out and manifesting of the sons of God; making them known, displaying them in glory. I always think that that is a very wonderful word of the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians on this very point: "When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at in all them that believed . . ." (II Thess. i. 10). There is the completion of the purpose of the Incarnation: redemption, re-

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constitution, perfecting, glorifying, all brought to fulness in His coming. "Marvelled at in all them that believed": that phrase always fascinates me. What does it mean? Surely, that all onlookers, all intelligences looking on, as they look at the saints, will say: 'Look at them! Isn't *He* marvellous?!" "Marvelled at in all them that believe", "when he shall come". It is the consummation of the work and purpose of the Incarnation, and the consummation in believers of the whole meaning of His earthly life.

But then Romans viii touches the other aspect of redemption. 'The whole creation', we are told, is waiting for this "revealing of the sons of God", and 'groaning and travailing in pain together' as it does so (v. 19, 22). "The creation itself", says the Apostle, "shall be delivered . . ." (v. 21). He put His feet upon the earth and said: 'It is mine'. He has come to this earth, lived on it and triumphed on it, and won the victory for it and over it; and now at His coming *it* is redeemed, as the consummation of redemption. "The creation itself" is "delivered from the bondage of corruption". But it is not only the creation that is to be delivered. *Our bodies* are to come into the benefit of this consummation of redemption. "We ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for . . . the redemption of our body" (v. 23). The physical bodies of believers are to be "delivered from the bondage of corruption".

All this is what He came to do. All that He wrought in Himself, all that was true of Him, He is now making good in believers. I know that these words apply primarily to His Deity, yet there is a secondary application of them: "It was not possible that He should be holden" of death (Acts ii. 24); "Thou wilt not give thy Holy One to see corruption" (v. 27). Because He was the Holy One, it was not possible that He should be held and kept down by death, for that is the penalty of sin. As I say, primarily that relates to Him as the Divine Son of God, incorruptible and sinless; but now He delivers believers from sin and corruption, and therefore from death, and makes good in them the thing that was true in Himself. He is not making them into Deity, but through grace He is conferring upon them all the values of His own triumph. And that includes physical redemption.

Do you see why the coming again? To make good all that He came for and all that He did at His first coming. And that is not all. In the Cross, while He was there dealing with the whole sin question—and in Himself He dealt with it fully and finally—He was, even more than that, dealing with the whole Satan question. We have sought to

emphasize the fact that the real battle of the Cross was in that cosmic realm of principalities and powers. That is where the real battle went on; and it was a terrific battle, with every evil, sinister, dark thing of the kingdom of Satan. And it was there that the full triumph of the Lord Jesus was won. His coming again is to make that triumph absolute, final; to bring the Church into the good of His triumph.

We are in the battle; and it is very true that, the more you stand on the ground of Calvary, of the Cross, the fiercer the battle becomes. Satan hates that Cross. If you really stand in spirit on the ground of the Cross, you are in for a battle: he will do anything to move you off that ground. The Lord Jesus will come back just to finish off that whole conflict for the Church as He did it in Himself—or perhaps we should say to finish it *in* the Church as He did it *for* the Church. When He comes, that will wind up, once and for all, the reign of Satan, the kingdom of darkness. That is why He is coming.

"THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN"

Let me just emphasize one point again: it is the "coming of the *Son of man*" (Matt. xxiv. 27, 37, 39). That is how He put it: 'the coming of the Son of *Man*'. I am sorry that Sankey changed those words in that hymn of his that we sometimes sing:

'Oh, wondrous day! oh, glorious morning,
When the Son of God shall come'.

The Lord speaks, and the Scriptures speak, of the coming of the Son of *Man*, not of the Son of God. It is true, it is the Son of God who is coming; but you understand the very real point here. It was *Man* for man, as *Man*, all the way through; and it will be that at the end. The Incarnation has no significance, if it is not *Man* for man. The earthly life has no meaning if it is not *Man* for man. The Cross has no meaning if it is not *Man* for man. The same of the resurrection, the same of the ascension and enthronement: it is the *Man* in the glory. "We behold . . . Jesus"—*Jesus*, that is His human title—"crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. ii. 9). It is *Man* for man in Heaven. The Church is the birth of the "one new man" by the "Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven" (I Pet. i. 12b). And the coming again is *Man* for man: it is *Man* consummating this whole thing in relation to man, and man entering into his inheritance in Christ. All this marvellous thing is for man—for you and for me! He is coming as the Son of *Man*.

There are immense things bound up with that title. It denotes relationship to the human race: all

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His work for the human race, and His representation of the human race in Heaven. The present appeal is to men, on the basis of all that. Oh, what a caricature of it all has come about with 'Christmas'! Think of it in the light of what we have said about the Incarnation, the redemption, the re-constituting and the glorifying of man: where does that come in, in the common Christmas of our time? The Devil has just switched the whole thing over, and made it a contradiction of its real meaning. He has used it as a means to draw out that other man, the old man, into glutting himself for his own gratification. And so in everything else—the thing has been given a wrong turn. In the coming of the Lord Jesus that will all be put right.

But, in the meantime, His appeal to us—to man—is on the ground of this, that He came for our redemption. He came to make us different, to re-constitute us: He came to perfect us after His own image: He came to glorify us. He has shown in His own life here that it can be done. It has been done *in a man*. It can be done, for He has done it. We are told: "To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (I John iii. 8b). He came to destroy the works of the Devil, and He has done it in His Cross. He is appealing to us on a very, very large ground. This is all redemption: redemption is a tremendous thing. We have a great redemption, because we have a great Redeemer. We have been

thinking of the time when He is coming to put the last great touches to it all, to give the final touch to this whole wonderful redemption—of man, of the earth, of the whole creation: "when he shall come to be glorified in his saints" (II Thess. i. 10).

I believe I speak for more than myself, when I say that there seems to be something in the air that says His coming must be near. We seem to feel that it cannot be far off. As the Lord's children, we "groan within ourselves" more than ever; and there is an increasing groan in the whole creation. The travail in this creation is becoming almost unbearable. This earth needs redeeming; God only knows what will happen to it, if it is not redeemed. But however that may be, there is something in the spirit of the true child of God which says that His coming is drawing nigh. It is the only hope—there is no hope in any other direction. Everybody recognises that, saved and unsaved alike. Unless God Almighty intervenes, there is no hope for this world.

Ah, but He is going to intervene! He is going to intervene in His Son, and there is the hope. And so the Apostle speaks of that "blessed hope"—the "appearing of the glory of our . . . Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit. ii. 13). May the Lord fill us with new joy in the very contemplation of His near coming, to complete all that which He has begun.

T. A-S.

(Concluded)

CHRIST JESUS AS LORD

"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (II Corinthians iv. 5).

IT is not our business to make Jesus Lord—He is Lord. As we know so well from Peter's words: "He is Lord of all" (Acts x. 36). But it is our calling and our privilege to proclaim that lordship. We cannot do it if we bring ourselves into the picture, so quite readily we agree with the apostle's reminder, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord". He then goes on to say something about ourselves, which we might take to be just a polite termination to the verse, but which I believe is an essential part of it. Who are those who can adequately proclaim Christ Jesus as Lord? The answer is, only those who are servants for Jesus' sake. Here is the secret of powerful testimony to the lordship of Christ—it is the secret of com-

plete submission and obedience to that lordship.

I do not propose to speak now about the apostle Paul, though his life would bear close examination on this point. What a preacher of the lordship of Christ! Ah, but what a bondslave of Jesus Christ he was! That was what gave power to the preaching. But we will look, if we may, at that other great figure of the book of the Acts, Peter, and consider the significance of the truth which he brought with such terrific impact into that gathered group at Caesarea. It was not merely that people went away agreeing that it had been a good message, and that some new thought, or understanding, had come into their minds, but rather that they went away 'filled with the Holy Ghost'—God had done something in their lives. And what had He done? He had established inwardly in them this great and glorious fact, that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. How happy Peter must have been to be able to give his

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testimony with such effectiveness! Well, I think he *was* happy; it is always a blessed thing to obey the Lord. But if, by 'happiness', we mean something superficial and easy that he enjoyed, we are very far from the truth, for that was one of the most costly acts that Peter ever performed in his life. And the power of his message consisted in the fact that he could truthfully come among that people and say: 'I preach Christ Jesus as Lord, and I myself am His bonds slave, right up-to-date, at this very moment.'

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S DOUBLE EMPHASIS

Now, the Holy Spirit has seen fit to record this story twice, which is not uncommon in the Bible, but it is unusual, to say the least of it, in this book. We may take it, therefore, that He wishes to stress the vital importance of what happened at Caesarea. When God repeats something, says it twice over, we do well to pay extra attention to it. But He has done more than that; He has given a counterpart in the Old Testament to this New Testament story, and in that way has doubly doubled this message—that the only man who can carry an effective testimony to the lordship of Jesus Christ is a man who is completely under the thralldom and government of that lordship, in his own life.

And so our message will centre around two cities, two coastal cities—Joppa and Caesarea. Joppa was the port for Jerusalem; Caesarea a port 30 miles farther north. All this happened, as Peter explained later in Jerusalem, because he was in the city of Joppa praying (Acts xi. 5). Anything that begins like that is worth listening to. This is how the great things of God begin, when a man can say, 'I was in such-and-such a place *praying*.' If it sprang out of that; if that is the beginning of the story, then let us listen to it; there is something worth hearing here. 'I was in the city of Joppa praying.'

JONAH AT JOPPA

Hundreds of years before, another servant of God—a preacher, too, of Divine sovereignty—had found his way to Joppa. Like Simon Peter, he, too, lived near the sea of Galilee; and, as we read in his story which is found in the book of Jonah, he had been commanded by the Lord whom he served to take the message of Divine sovereignty to people whom he did not like, at Nineveh. 'But Jonah . . .', instead of going to Nineveh 'went down to Joppa'—to the seaside. You notice it says about Peter, that he lived 'by the seaside' (Acts x. 6). Amazing

familiarity, similarity—the very place! I don't know that God sets much store by places, but I do find in the Bible that there is an amazing accuracy about God's handling of things; an indication to us of how truly He is Lord of all. And here at Joppa there is a great servant of God (for I believe Jonah was that), but a miserable servant of God—and no servant of the Lord should be miserable! It does not say he was, but I do not believe that a man who truly knows the Lord can run away from Him and be happy, and that was what Jonah was doing.

Now when, in the course of his adventures at sea, the men of the boat called to him and asked him to give an account of himself, this was his testimony (Jonah i. 9): "I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land"—'I believe in God's sovereignty; I am a believer that He is indeed Lord; my life, hitherto, has been governed by that belief; I serve Him . . .' And I suppose, until now, Jonah could truly confess that, in the ordinary affairs and ways of life and ministry, he had sought to express the fact that the Lord really is Lord. That was the normal. But then the challenge came to him. You might say it was a little thing, an incident—it was, of course, a big thing—but in his life, so far as his ministry was concerned, it was but an incident. But is not this the whole truth about the lordship of Christ, that it is some apparently small thing in our lives which becomes an issue, and the question is, Will we obey the Lord? Is He really Lord of all?

JONAH'S CONTROVERSY WITH THE LORD

Now Jonah had many reasons for not wanting to go to Nineveh. He had, of course, all of a Jew's personal distaste for Gentiles; it was something that went against the grain with him. The Lord has a strange way of picking things that go against our grain, does He not, and saying, 'That is what I want of you! Never mind about anybody else; that is what I want of you.' Jonah did not like it. But I don't think it was only that—I would like to think that he was a bigger man, as any servant of God should be, than to be governed merely by his own personal likes or distastes. He was a patriot, and to him it seemed madness that Nineveh should be spared. For the safety of his people, the best thing that could happen would be that Nineveh should be destroyed. Though at some distance, it towered over them, it shadowed them, it threatened them, and—let us be true to history—it ultimately

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did overwhelm them. Jonah was right, if he argued with the Lord, 'No, Lord, it would be better that they should be judged and destroyed.' So much in Jonah was not merely a matter of his own liking or partiality, but a matter of reasonableness—of what, as he might well feel, in the best interests of the Lord's people, would be the right thing to do—and that would be to leave Nineveh to its fate. And though he did not say this to the Lord (we never do!), in his heart of hearts he really thought: Lord, You do not know what You are doing! I know better than You do what is in the highest interests of Your work and Your people!

So, we must at least sympathize with him—forgive him we dare not, for we should be beginning to forgive ourselves: for the Lord is Lord; whether we understand His ways or not, He is Lord of all. For Jonah, this was something which he could not accept; and so he found himself in Joppa, looking for a way out. Joppa is the place where you can find a way out if you look for it. And he found it—found his ship, and set sail. Three times over in that chapter we read that he took that journey to get away from the presence of the Lord! Strange behaviour for the one who believed that the Lord made Heaven and earth, and the sea—he says that—and *the sea!* Had he been a prey to superstitions of local gods, there might have been some excuse for getting out of his territory. He knew it was not that; but also he knew that he could not stay and disobey. And, you know, you cannot! You cannot stand still; you cannot hold your ground when the Lord is saying something that He wants, and you are not prepared to do it. Inevitably this is the result—that you try to get away, farther away, from the pressure and the challenge and the sting of His presence.

Well, Jonah did not get away. You know the story of the near-shipwreck and of his being thrown into the sea. May I point out that, although Jonah disobeyed the Lord, He was still Lord of all! The Lord is not dependent upon His servants to enforce His sovereignty. If His chosen vessel disobeys Him, He is still Lord of all, and the tempest and the winds, and the men on the boat and the fish in the sea, will all give their testimony, that the Lordship of the Lord still prevails, whatever men do. But what a painful experience to have His lordship against you instead of for you. That is the lesson of Jonah—a great warning written up for us all to see. It is a way of painful suffering; it is a way to bring us, as it brought Jonah, down to the lowest depths of utter despair.

JONAH'S DELIVERANCE:
BACK AT JOPPA?

When, in the great fish, he prayed his prayer—a wonderful prayer, by the way—finishing up with the great shout that is always the way out: 'Salvation is of the Lord!' (ii. 9)—he cast himself anew on God's grace, which is limitless—it goes down to the deepest depths. Nobody could go down deeper than Jonah, but even at that depth he found salvation is still of the Lord—praise His Name! But notice what he said; thinking primarily, I suppose, of those who worship images: "They that regard lying vanities forsake their own mercy" (v. 8). He did not himself worship a literal image, but he followed his own will—he worshipped self: and the servant of the Lord who takes that course will discover, as Jonah discovered, that it is a 'lying vanity'; best to get back on to God's ground, if, in His mercy, you can. Whilst it does not say so, I would like to believe, and I think I can, that when the fish ultimately deposited Jonah on dry ground—and that was very kind of the Lord—the dry ground was the sea shore at Joppa! It would be just like the Lord if it was, would it not? Back again! lost your luggage and your fare, and everything, but you are back again!

The narrative goes on to say: "The word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time" (iii. 1). I am not now dwelling on the grace of God, but how many messages must have been given on that text. Thank God! I hope that there will be many more. 'The word of the Lord came a second time!' Where would most of us be if it had not? I like to think that it was from Joppa that Jonah set out with something new burnt into his own experience, which said, 'He is Lord of all! He is Lord of all!' This time he fulfilled his mission, with effects as startling as those that happened at Caesarea—in some senses, more startling—when the whole city, in repentance for its evil, cried mightily to God. When a man comes preaching Divine sovereignty, who is in the good of that sovereignty, it works, every time.

PETER: FROM JOPPA TO CAESAREA

'I', said Peter—and he would know the book of Jonah better than you or I know it—'I was in the city of Joppa praying'. 'It happened to Jonah; now it has happened to me!' And what is written in the Bible has a strange way of coming to us; we find ourselves in Joppa. I do not know whether Peter had ever preached a sermon on Jonah—I

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would not be at all surprised. Those of us who preach find that our own sermons have a way of coming back to us. What you read, and what you say, and what you pray, and what you rejoice in, put down in your note-book, God will bring you back to it, and say, 'Now, *you* are in Joppa; it has come to *you*, this same issue. Am I really Lord of all?'

And so we are passing to Caesarea. Fancy the Lord choosing Caesarea in which to establish His lordship: for Caesarea was named in honour of Caesar, the great Caesar—this is his town! 'All right', the Lord says, 'we will see about that. There is no place on this earth which is immune from the challenge and the power of the testimony of Jesus Christ!' Thank the Lord for that! And it is just like the Lord to make His very first choice in a city that had that name. Caesarea! And so Peter must go to Caesarea. And Peter is a key man; I hope to explain this to you. May I just say, first of all, that we ought to learn from these servants of God, without getting inflated or imagining ourselves to be anything wonderful. But if I say he was a key man, there may be a sense, there must be a sense, there *is* a sense, in which every one of us, at some point, is a key man, or a key woman, in the Divine purpose. That is no cause for inflation or self-importance; it is but one further indication of the amazing wisdom and strategic skill of our blessed Risen Christ. He is Lord of all—He really is!

PHILIP: FROM SAMARIA TO CAESAREA

We shall see at Caesarea how He is working things together. There is a man called Philip who is destined to live at Caesarea—one of the outstanding figures in the early Church, if you remember, next after Stephen in that group of tried and trusted men. God has His eye on Philip; the Lord has a place for Philip; and as far as we can read this book, that place is Caesarea. For something like twenty years, at any rate, Philip lived and witnessed there. But on this occasion he was not there. He had been in Samaria; he had proved the power of God in Samaria; and we often have wondered at the grace with which he obeyed gladly, apparently, the command of the Lord, and left that thriving scene of spiritual blessing to go away into the desert to witness to the Ethiopian eunuch. That is not so surprising, to me, as that he did not come back to Samaria, which I would naturally have expected. I notice also that, when he had finished with the Ethiopian, the Lord did not this time tell him where to go; He took him

up and set him on his way. He does not put too much strain upon our obedience; sometimes sovereignly He does something with us, and we cannot help ourselves. But He did not set Philip on his way back to Samaria, but set him on his way back to Caesarea, as we are told at the end of chapter viii: "Passing through he preached the gospel to all the cities, till he came to Caesarea" (v. 40). If you look in Acts xxi (as I said, something like twenty years later), you will find that he was there with his four daughters, and evidently had a good time of fellowship with the apostle Paul. He is on his way to Caesarea. So the Lord has got him marked out for that situation.

Now, if we are following the book, we know that the immediate matters which preceded these movements of Peter to Lydda and Joppa, and then to Caesarea, were the calling, the conversion and the commissioning of Saul of Tarsus, to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. As far as we know, he was at this time away in Arabia where he spent three years. You see the figures being moved: Philip being taken on his way; here is Paul, the great apostle, being kept for the right moment; and there were others, like Philip, who had been scattered abroad; and as soon as the story of Peter in Caesarea is told, we read on, in chapter xi, of how a group of them came to Antioch, and there broke into a new sphere for the Lord by preaching to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews (v. 20). The scene is set for the Lord's movement out to the nations, with one and another, and others. But there is a key man.

THE KEY MAN IN GOD'S TIMETABLE

The Lord Jesus had said long ago to Peter: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church". And He had said this to him: "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew xvi. 18, 19). We need not read the rest of the verse, because that is also said of the other apostles; but that particular part about the keys is said of no one else. I think the meaning is very clear and very simple. To have the keys means to have the privilege of announcing the opening. To this very day it is like that. A public building is being opened: the key—a golden key sometimes, I believe—is given to some prominent figure, who uses it in a symbolic act to declare that now the building is open. Having the key does not mean that he owns the place, that it is his property; but that he is authorised to declare that it is opened.

Now, at Pentecost, Peter had fulfilled that very function, and declared indeed, to those gathered

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Jews, that the kingdom of heaven was opened. Thank the Lord for that—the doors are opened wide; anyone may come in. But that was only to the Jews, and God's purposes go far beyond the Jews. Yet there had to be a waiting period. After all, you must wait God's time. Usually you find that you have to wait, and they had to wait. I don't believe that those apostles were slothful or slack about world evangelization—I believe that they were governed by the Holy Ghost, and that means you cannot move before God's time. But how necessary it is to move when the Divine hour does strike. And now it has come. All the testimony by Peter and the others, concerning what happened at Caesarea, makes it plain that this was the other half of Pentecost; this was the counterpart; this was the fulfilling of the whole work. And Peter, you remember, is the one destined by the Lord to make the declaration. And so they wait, or rather they move to a timetable, and Peter has a place in that timetable. He has a *rendez-vous* with the will of God at Caesarea. It all sounds very thrilling and dramatic when it is put like that, and the will of God can be painted to be thrilling and romantic. But you go back to that poor man praying on the roof-top at Joppa, and he will tell you that it is not romantic—it is deadly earnest, and it is the biggest problem that he has ever had to face. Is He, after all, Lord of all?

PETER'S RESPONSE, AND THE RESULT

Well, there is no need for me to labour the story, but thank God there is no repetition of the Jonah case here; no running away from the will of God, but a swift and ready response to it. The Lord grant that we may move from our Joppa in that same spirit. Not that Peter understood, not that he knew what was going to happen; the thing was not in his hands. The work of God is not in our hands! It is not in the Church's hands! It is in the hands of the Risen Lord! But oh, how important that every part should be to His hand, to fit into His programme. Shall we say that if Peter had said No, Philip would have been brought in? I wonder! Better that the Lord should not need reserves or alternatives, but that when He looks to His people and says, 'I want you to do this, however hard it is', we by His grace respond. For we are all key men and women, be sure of that.

So he went, and he went with this message: 'He is Lord of all! Not that I found it when He stilled the stormy waters, though I did. Not only that I saw it on the resurrection morning; not only that I knew it last year or last month, but I come red-

hot from an encounter with the will of God! And the will of God has triumphed. I preach Christ Jesus as Lord, and myself, a bondsman of His lordship.' Can you wonder that the Holy Ghost filled the place? It was not Peter's sermon that did it—he hardly got going! He told them, when he got up to Jerusalem to answer their enquiries: 'As I began to speak . . . as I developed my theme . . . I had not nearly got through all my points, when God broke in!' Oh, what a wonderful day that would be, if we could not finish our sermons because God broke in! But what a costly thing for Peter to say those simple words! In my Bible they are given in brackets; just a parenthesis, as though they were thrown in. But it is the key to everything; the key to our lives; the key to our happiness; the key to our fruitfulness; the key to the Church's mission and ministry. 'He is Lord of all!'—and the Holy Ghost came.

THE INEVITABLE CONFLICT

Then there came the inevitable battle. Perhaps you are one who would say, or think: 'I wish you would not talk about the conflict.' But you cannot talk about the lordship without the conflict. As I read this book of the Acts, a great book of the lordship of Christ, I find that the men went from one crisis to another just because they stood on that ground. Very, very soon Peter found a real uprising against his procedure from his brothers and sisters in Christ—from the conservative Christians who wanted things to go on in the same old way, and were afraid of something new. Of course they were unaware of the real issue; but you can serve the devil's purposes without realising what is happening. When Peter, years before, had stood with John in front of those Jewish rulers, and had said, with holy boldness: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts v. 29), I don't suppose it ever dawned upon his wildest imaginings that he would one day have to use that language among his own brothers and sisters. But, in effect, that is what he had to say. 'I am all for fellowship', he would say; 'I took a group of men with me; there was nothing independent about this. I am all for fellowship here at Jerusalem: but, in the last issue, *He* is Lord of all, and I must obey him. That is the ground that we must all stand on—He is Lord of all.' Thank God it did not bring a breach of fellowship, at least not at that point.

As I say, those at Jerusalem were not aware of the issue. But there were others who were aware of it. It is no coincidence, no mere chance, that when you pass out of chapter xi, you find the very first

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words of chapter xii: "Now about that time Herod the king put forth his hands to afflict certain of the church." And Peter, who dared to say and believe that Jesus Christ is Lord of all, finds that this is not just words; this is something that has got to be fought out. Herod took him and put him in prison. In effect, the devil was saying: 'We will have no more of this. A certain amount of religion may be all right, and if Christianity will mix itself in with the other religions, all right, we may tolerate that; but a people who are standing for the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ—never, never!' So Peter was put in prison and sentenced to death. I never read that verse about his sleeping (v. 6) without lifting my heart to God in worship; and when sometimes I do not sleep too well myself with my little troubles, I like to think of this man who, with such an issue hanging over him, went fast asleep like a little child. He knew the meaning of the Sabbath rest, believing that God's power and God's love will never fail.

GOD'S ANSWER TO THE ENEMY

That was right; it was right to trust the Lord like that. He emerged; he was delivered; God answered prayer. But God has not finished with Caesarea yet, and if you will read on in chapter xii you will find (verse 19) that Herod's next action was to go down to Caesarea and stay there. There is no evading the amazing power and sovereignty of our God; you cannot play with God. You do not have to stay up all night wondering and worrying how you are going to enforce His sovereignty. Like Peter, you can go to sleep and leave that to the Lord; He is well able to look after His own Name. Our job is to be true to Him, to be faithful, and He will look after the rest.

So the Lord, in a strange way, brought Herod down to—of all places—Caesarea. At Caesarea, you remember, the crowd gathered, and Herod, arrayed, as we are told, in glistening royal robes, sat on his throne, and made his great speech to the people. And there, where the humble fisher-

man, Peter, had said, 'Jesus Christ is Lord of all'; there, right there, the devil set up his king, in all his shining apparel and earthly glory, with a crowd to acclaim him, and cry out: 'The voice of a god and not of a man!' (v. 22). And at Caesarea God smote Herod. You do not have to read any books to prove that the Bible is the Word of God, or inspired. You just have to read it—just read it. You find the amazing hand of the Lord stretched out with unerring accuracy to sustain every testimony to Himself, and to overthrow every antagonist to that testimony.

So there are Joppa and Caesarea: Joppa, the place of my responsibility; Caesarea, the place where God confirms the testimony. And though the challenge come from such an influential source, and bearing such a name, it does not matter—it just does not matter to the Lord. 'We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord!' God help us to do it, not only from the platform, but in all our lives, and in our life together. And we will preach it by being absolute bondslaves to His will.

May 1, in closing, point out the happy sequel that was brought about by the obedience of these two men. In the first place, as regards those who heard Jonah—Jonah who came to challenge them in their waywardness, their sinfulness, their godlessness, to warn them of judgment: when he came proclaiming, in effect, the lordship of Christ, a great multitude of undeserving sinners found mercy. 'The Lord over all is rich unto all them that call on Him' (Rom. x. 12). The sovereignty of the Lord means that there is pardon for those who are far off. In the other case, Peter went to a group of souls who were hungry and thirsty; not godless, indeed, rather God-fearing; wanting, desiring, but not knowing His life, His love, His fulness. The Lord sent His servant to them with the same message of His sovereignty, of His lordship; and the happy result for them was that their lives were filled with the power and glory of God. The lordship of Christ means that too—'the hungry He hath filled with good things' (Luke i. 53).

H. F.

IN QUEST OF THE BRIDE

THE little message that I would like to send to you at this time centres round a verse which comes towards the end of Genesis xxiv. You will recall the captivating story told in this chapter concerning Abraham's servant: how, at his master's bidding, he took the long journey from Canaan to

Mesopotamia, to seek a bride for his master's son Isaac; how wonderfully he found Rebecca; and how he finally took her to the son who was patiently waiting for her at home. You will know, too, the main spiritual truth which lies behind this story, regarding the work of the Holy Spirit in all

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the nations in this present age, as He seeks out a spiritual Bride for the Greater Son who waits in Heaven to receive her.

It seems to me, as I ponder this story, that there are four outstanding features in the narrative, each one of which has its spiritual significance as far as Christ and His Church are concerned.

THE LOVING CONCERN OF ABRAHAM

We see, in the first place, what we might call the loving concern of Abraham. If you look over the opening verses of the chapter, you will find that Abraham is showing at this point a tremendous concern for his son Isaac. Speaking to Eliezer, he uses the expression four times over: 'My son . . . my son . . . my son . . . my son . . .' He is noticeably consumed with a loving thought in relation to his beloved son. Isaac must have a bride who is truly worthy of him—one who has, in fact, a positive and vital affinity with him; a bride issuing, we may say, from the same stock, and vitalised by the same life as the bridegroom himself. Surely it is not difficult to see the meaning here—the Father's love for Christ, and His concern, from before the foundation of the world, that His Son shall have a Bride who is worthy of Him. How the Lord Jesus loved to speak of His Church, in John xvii for instance, as the people 'whom the Father had given' to Him.

THE FERVENT ZEAL OF ELIEZER

Then, after looking at that loving concern of Abraham, we can see a second outstanding feature in the story, which we may call the fervent zeal of Eliezer. This is, I suggest to you, *the* outstanding feature in this story. I wonder if you have ever noticed it; it comes up again and again. Notice how immediately Eliezer sets off at his master's bidding (v. 10); and how he positively runs to Rebecca when he sees her drawing near to the well (v. 17). Notice too, after he has been brought into Rebecca's home, that he says, when talking to her relations, 'I will not eat until I have told you mine errand' (v. 33); and how, after he has told his errand, he demands an immediate decision from the family (v. 49).

The same fervent zeal appears again a little further down the chapter. He has now secured the assent of the family, and the very next morning he says to them: 'Send me away unto my master' (v. 54). It seems he cannot wait; he must be on the move; he must be on his master's business. The family, of course, protest; they say: 'Let the

damsel abide with us a few days, at least ten; after that she shall go.' I am sure this seems to us a most reasonable request, in view of the severance which was being contemplated, to say nothing of the six hundred miles of travel that lay immediately ahead of the servant and of the bride. But even so the servant says, and here again we see our point: 'Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way. Send me away that I may go unto my master.'

Yes, here is a servant consumed with zeal; one who is characterized all through by what we might call a holy impatience, if there is such a thing—and I believe there is. And how true all this is of the blessed Holy Spirit. I am reminded of what is said of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Do you remember how we read, 'Suddenly there was a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind . . .'? Yes, there it is—a rushing, mighty wind. And then there were the tongues of fire, were there not? We are told that these tongues of fire sat upon each of them—typifying, surely, the burning zeal of the Holy Spirit. That is the zeal we find running all through the twenty-eight chapters of that wonderful book of the Acts. The zeal shown by the apostles, hastening out of Jerusalem to Judaea, and to Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth—whether it were zeal in preaching, zeal in praying, or zeal in enduring countless hardships and Satanic rebuffs—was, in a sense, not their own; it was not inherent. It was all derived—it was because this greater Eliezer had taken hold of them.

We must realise that the third Person of the Trinity is a mighty active force; He is *the* mighty active Force in the universe to-day. Get into the real goings of the Holy Spirit, and you are conscious of mighty movement. The Holy Spirit is earnest and urgent in His task, and He is ardent also in His tireless passion to fulfil His mission—to secure that people, that bride, that Rebecca, that the Father would have for His Beloved Son. We often think of the flesh as being very active, but I believe that those activities are nothing compared with the deeper, irresistible activities of the blessed Holy Spirit. God's Spirit will not be overcome, nor will He rest, until He has conquered men and women for Christ: conquered them with His burning words; conquered them with His own evident devotion to His mission; and conquered them also with His irresistible display of the Father's wealth committed now to the Beloved Son. Really to get near to the Holy Spirit is to get near to mighty, irresistible movement—not movement in the visible and sensible realm always, but Divine move-

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ment ; movement that belongs to deep and fathomless depths. Thank God for the fervent zeal of the Holy Spirit.

THE GLORIOUS DECISION OF REBECCA

That brings us out now to our third point, and to the particular verse that we have in mind. The story goes on to tell us of what we might call the glorious decision of Rebecca. After the servant had refused the delay, and had said to the family, 'Hinder me not ; send me away that I may go unto my master', we are told (v. 28): "they called Rebecca, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go." Surely it is right to call that the glorious decision of Rebecca! 'Wilt thou go with this man? *I will go!*' And surely that is the decision that we are being called upon to make. Will we give ourselves over to the zealous and tireless Eliezer? Will we leave all, and follow, in a spiritual sense, this unresting Servant, and go out with Him, that we may win Christ? We have the ear-rings and the bracelets, we have the jewels of silver and of gold, and the new raiment which He has given. *But*, will we now abandon ourselves in faith to the zealous Giver of these gifts, and go out with Him into an unspeakably glorious union with that wealthy Son who is waiting for us? The question is a personal one: 'Wilt *thou* go with this Man?'

Thank God for Rebecca's glorious decision. She said, 'I will go.' Notice that it meant for her a complete burying of an old life ; and I do not hesitate to say that that is the first outworking of the decision, so far as we are concerned. For us also, it will mean the complete burying of an old life. It meant for Rebecca a long and courageous pilgrimage of faith in fellowship with Eliezer ; and it will mean that for us also. And there was physical expenditure bound up with Rebecca's decision. There is a physical cost in committing yourself to the government of the Holy Spirit, going out

into a full union with the blessed Lord Jesus.

THE SUPPLY AND CONSOLATION OF ISAAC

The fourth and final feature of the story relates to what we might call the supply and consolation of Isaac. The previous chapter has shown both Abraham and Isaac mourning over the death of Sarah ; and now, Isaac, away in the fields, praying to the God of his father, surely has a heart that is still stricken with grief concerning Sarah. He is indeed at this point a 'man of sorrows'. But then he sees the camels coming, and his father's servant bringing Rebecca to him. And we are told (v. 67) that he brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and that he loved her, and thus he was comforted after his mother's death.

One is reminded of the greater 'Man of Sorrows' of whom it is said that 'he will see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied' (Is. liii. 11). What it must mean to Christ to have at last a people who will leave all for love of Him! a people who will not crucify Him, but instead will crown Him! They will not mar Him now with spittings and woundings and scourgings: rather they will marry Him with full and glad surrender, and that for ever. Thank God for those lovely words in verse 67: 'He loved her, and he was comforted after the death of his mother.'

But it comes back, does it not, to that question and that answer in our special verse: 'Wilt thou go with this Man? She said, I will go.' Why should we be afraid of an absolute committal to the blessed Holy Spirit? Let the mighty wind blow through us! Let the fires burn within us! Let us give ourselves to a blessed partnership with this untiring Holy Spirit, cost what it may—and it will cost us everything. Let us go out with Him in holy, happy pilgrimage, until we see the Bridegroom's face. May the Lord help us to do so for His Name's sake.

C. R. G.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

THE LAW OF LOVE

I have just read the last of the elephant stories told by the late Mr. J. H. Williams. The end of the story is sad, but I need not tell it you, for the lesson to be learned comes from the first part, which all will like.

It concerns an elephant called 'Fire Opal', so named because of her beautiful eyes, and her son

who had not yet been given a name although he was five and a half years old. The mother elephant worked in Burma, hauling teak logs, and as was usual in such cases the calf elephant was allowed to run around with her as she was working. Elephants' ages are much the same as those of human beings, so at five and a half he was still a young-

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ster. He was big enough to feed himself, and was getting big enough to wander away from his mother's side. Sometimes he even used to go off on excursions of his own.

So, like a little boy of his own age, it was thought that the time had come for him to go off to school. If an elephant calf does not have discipline, he becomes a nuisance to everybody, and may finally run off to join a wild herd. So the order was given to ride Fire Opal out of the forest to the training camp, where the calf would begin his lessons and also be given a name. Unhappily there was an accident on the way, and as a result the mother elephant lost all the sight of those beautiful eyes of hers. She had to be led into the encampment by her keeper, for she was quite blind.

Mr. Williams did not know what to do. It seemed necessary that the calf should begin his training, but the mother was now useless. She still had her strength, and under the keeper's care could do some work, but she was quite helpless to go in search of the food she needed. To keep her at all would mean that someone would have to carry six hundred pounds of fodder to her every day and water also. Yet she was such a fine animal that it seemed a pity to have her killed. So a day or two passed without any decision being made. The Burmese workers did not want her to die, but they could not make any suggestions. In the end, however, the young calf himself solved the problem.

On the day when Mr. Williams went out to have another look at Fire Opal, well aware that he must make up his mind what to do about her, he saw her calf back himself towards his mother's head. When she felt him, she raised her trunk and rested it on his back, and then, to Mr. Williams' amazement, they began in this way to move around the clearing. It looked just like a little boy holding his blind mother's hand and helping her to get along the street. And a very good little boy the young elephant proved to be, for whenever his mother called, he came to her and allowed her to walk along with her trunk resting on his hindquarters.

So Fire Opal did not have to be killed. She was able to continue working with a group of elephants who did simpler jobs. The calf was soon given a name, although he did not have his training, or at

least he was never in the training camp. The name given to him, and which everybody thought was most suitable, was 'The Guide Man'. From then on he never left his mother, except when she was at work in the care of her rider. He enjoyed himself playing around during those working hours, but as soon as work was over and his mother bellowed for him, he would come along and lead her off to find the food which she needed to keep her strong and well. They would spend an hour or so feeding on the grass. Then, trunk on back, she would follow her son to the bamboos for about two hours' feed there, and then off again for some more feeding in the undergrowth, for rest under a shady tree, and then down to the water to drink. It was just as though he felt a special duty to care for her, and was proud to fulfil it. And he never thought of going off to join a wild herd.

The mother thrived, and the pair became a sight which all marvelled at. The Guide Man did a good work and was never wild, not because he had been in the training camp, but because he was fully occupied caring for his blind mother. In the training his will would have had to be broken, and he would have learned to be ruled by man. This never happened to him. But he had another power which ruled his self-will and made him obedient and disciplined—the power which in human life we should call *love*.

It is that which should govern the life of every true Christian. We are not meant to be in bondage to rules and laws, but neither are we meant to run wild and do whatever we want or think. We need to be mastered by the love of Christ. And how can we show that love to Him? Only by serving one another.

Nobody can say what made that elephant calf so helpful and obedient, but we can all learn from his example. If it was a fine sight to everybody to see how he helped his blind mother, how much more lovely to see Christian boys and girls showing by means of their devoted service to others that the love of Christ has a place in their hearts. Real freedom is not to please ourselves but to help others. "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not your liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (Galatians 5. 13).

H. F.

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