

"A Candlestick of Pure Gold: of Beaten Work"

Exodus 25. 31.

**A WITNESS
AND
A TESTIMONY**

"The Testimony of Jesus"

Rev. 1. 9.



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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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THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

Reading: Revelation i. 4-18.

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ . . ." (Rev. i. 1).

"And out of the throne proceed lightnings and voices and thunders. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God" (Revelation iv. 5).

THERE is, perhaps, no book in the Bible that has resulted in more confusion than the book of the Revelation. To mention alone, by name, the many conflicting schools of interpretation that it has produced, would be but to open the door to the confusion. And yet it is quite certain that God never intended any part of His Word to lead to confusion. Confusion is not a characteristic of the Lord; He is not a God of confusion. It therefore becomes necessary that we seek to reduce the message of the book to some simple conclusions; and I think the first three chapters, which form a distinct section, may help us to see how the whole book can and should be reduced to such a simple conclusion. We can leave the place names, for the

moment; forget Ephesus and Smyrna and Pergamum and the rest, as names, and as places; we can, indeed, leave much of the symbolism—not all of it, because some of it is so obvious—but what we cannot understand we can leave, and we can resolve the section in this way:

ETERNAL SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES

We have to recognise, firstly, that we are here, in these chapters, in the presence of timeless spiritual principles. It is true that they are being applied to particular conditions, situations, and places, but there is something more here than the place and the time and the particular situation. There is a *spiritual factor* that is governing everything. We are in the presence of those factors which are more than local, more than geographical, more than of a time setting: they are age-long—indeed they are eternal. The very first thing, therefore, that we have to recognise and grasp as we come to this book, and to this section as an example, is this: Here we are being presented with

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something that is in the mind of God, which touches all these situations that are set forth here ; and what we have to do is to get hold of what that is in the mind of God. It is *one* thing, though it may have many aspects ; and to get hold of that one thing is the key both to this section and to the whole book. I will not mention, for the moment, what it is, but we shall come to that presently.

THE LORD CALLS TO ACCOUNT

Secondly, we are in the presence of one of those critical points—it may be the last—when the Lord calls to account for all that He has given. That is, of course, quite clear in this section, and in fact it governs all the rest of the book. The Church and the churches had received much from the Lord through His apostles and other servants: they had a great wealth of spiritual inheritance. And when the Lord has done anything like that at any time in history, it is as though, at given points, He comes back and says, 'Now, what about it? I have given ; I have revealed ; I have made known ; I have entreated ; I have implored ; I have besought ; I have exhorted ; I have warned: now, the time has come when some reckoning has to be made, and an answer given.'

The Lord has, as we know, done that more than once in history ; but here we are in the presence of such an occasion, of such a crisis. I say, it may be the last, because this book does stand in relation to the end—to the Lord's coming—does it not? Here is a principle, as well as a time application of the principle. The nature of the crisis is this. The Lord is saying: 'How do you measure up to all that I have given you? How do you stand in the light of the whole deposit that has been made with you?' This crisis is a very serious one, since it involves the issue of continuance or discontinuance: of whether the vessel, the lampstand, remains or is removed. It is a crisis that involves the whole future.

THE LORD'S DESIRE IS TO BLESS

Thirdly, we are here made aware that the Lord's desire is to bless. His is a positive attitude, not a negative one. While He has to put His finger upon the things that are lacking, the things with which He does not agree, you notice that He invariably ends His inquest with: 'To him that overcometh will I grant . . .' The Lord's desire in every case, with every situation, however bad it is, is to bless. He is on positive lines. There may be rebuke ; there may be exposure and uncovering ; there may be

warning ; there may be exhortation: but there is a promise suspended before everyone—a wonderful promise. None is obliged to face doom, since all are offered the alternative of the good pleasure of the Lord.

He may condemn, but His condemnation is to clear the way for blessing. He may have to judge ; He may have to break ; but that is to provide the ground for blessing. He may warn with a solemn voice, but His warnings are coupled with His desire that these people should come into something more of His grace, of His goodness. And we cannot read these promises to 'overcomers' without being profoundly impressed with this—that it seems that the greatest delinquents, those who have failed most, are offered the highest blessing! So it was with Laodicea. You cannot get any further than 'to sit with Him in His throne'; yet that is the offer to Laodicea. All the things that are judgeable are found there, but the highest reward is offered. It is from the very depth to the very height—that is His thought for His people.

Finally, and supremely, we are confronted with that for which the Lord is looking, and, it must be said, that without which He cannot justify the continuance of a vessel of testimony. That is the point upon which our message turns. What is it that the Lord is looking for? Now, many things were thought, by these churches, to be the things that the Lord was looking for, and they were not. It turned out that they were just not the things that the Lord was looking for. He had His own object before Him, and He could not be satisfied with any lesser or other alternative.

That is a summary of this first section, in the first three chapters. I hope that you can see what is the supreme thing—that only, that essentially, for which the Lord is looking when He has given so much to His people.

THE METHOD EMPLOYED

From that point we come to the method employed by the Lord, by the Holy Spirit, for reaching the end upon which the heart of God is set. That is seen, in its completeness, in the presentation of the Lord Jesus which we have in chapter i. That is always God's method ; it is always the method of the Holy Spirit: to bring Christ in His supreme fulness into view. No one, meditating upon that vision of the Son of Man, given in that chapter, could doubt that you have there a presentation of the fulness of Christ. How full! I confess that, after meditating upon this for many days, I find the greatest difficulty in knowing how to

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compass the fulness of every fragment. It is no exaggeration to say that into almost every fragment of this presentation of Jesus Christ, you could crowd a mass of what is in the Bible. Here, then, the Holy Spirit's method, comprehensively, is to bring back Christ, not partially, but in fulness.

CHRIST PRESENTED IN FULNESS

We find here a seven-fold characterization of the risen and governing Son of Man. It is into those seven aspects that everything is crowded. Here is a brief summary of what they are:

- (1) The garment, with which He is clothed down to the foot.
- (2) The girdle of gold about His breasts.
- (3) The head and the hair, white as wool.
- (4) The eyes as a flame of fire.
- (5) The feet as burnished brass.
- (6) The voice, as the sound of many waters.
- (7) The sword, sharp and two-edged, proceeding out of His mouth.

Who can comprehend all that? This seven-fold characterization of the Son of Man is presented, projected, in this case, before the churches—that is, before the Church as a whole, representatively. And this seven-fold characterization, in every detail, is to be the basis of the examination which is to take place, and of the judgment which is to be declared. These details are the features that constitute His quest. What is it that the Lord is seeking? The answer is: That which corresponds to these features of Christ. If we can understand what they signify, then we shall know exactly what He is after.

This presentation of Christ is, first of all, personal. But then we find that it becomes corporate. He is holding the churches, representatively, in His hand; He is moving to and fro among them; He and they are, in a sense, closely identified: and what He is really seeking is that that which is true of Himself shall be true of His Church in every place, in every location, in every expression.

THE SPIRIT'S MINISTRY

In chapter i, verse 4, we find this phrase: "The seven Spirits that are before his throne"; and in chapter iv, verse 5, you have another reference to those seven Spirits, but in a particular form: "There were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God". Seven lamps of fire burning before the throne.—Of course, 'seven Spirits' is another way, a symbolic

way, of speaking of the Holy Spirit. It denotes a seven-fold expression of the Holy Spirit. It is One Spirit mentioned here, as in the symbolism of the 'seven lamps of fire before the throne'. The Throne, we know and understand, is the symbol of government, of authority; and so the whole expression symbolizes the Throne functioning by the Holy Spirit. We know what 'lamps of fire' signify—the word originally is 'torches'. The function of a 'lamp of fire' is, first, to reveal; then, to test, and to determine. We shall have more to say about that presently. This means the expression of Christ, by the Holy Spirit, in a seven-fold characterization. Let us keep in mind that they are before the *Throne*; it is the *Throne* that is here in action. It is the Throne that has come into action, by the Holy Spirit, in relation to the fulness of Christ in all the main features of His character.

The picture is quite simple, even through the intricate symbolism. The Throne is the seat of government. The ministry of the Spirit is denoted by the seven-fold 'what the *Spirit* saith to the churches'. Notice that seven times repeated 'what the Spirit saith . . .' He is speaking as from before the Throne of government; and what He is saying is, that this One, who is brought into view, is this, and is that, and is that . . . the seven major characteristics of Christ. Christ is that: the Throne of government stands by that: the Spirit challenges concerning that. That is what the Throne is looking for, requires and demands. The ministry relates to those Divine features which are the features of the Son of Man.

SON OF MAN

"One like unto the Son of man" (i. 13). (The margin corrects 'a son of man', because in the same writer's Gospel, i. 51, you cannot mistake the fact that it is "*the* Son of Man": Jesus saying to Nathanael: "Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon . . ." (and it cannot be 'a son of man') ". . . *the* Son of Man"; and so it is here.) This One is presented. When you read this description of the Lord, in all its details, and then hear what He says about Himself, does it not impress you that this One is described as 'The Son of *man*'? Why! you would expect that here, of all places in the Bible, you should find 'The Son of *God*'. He *is* the Son of God, but that is not what He is called here, in this particular connection. The *Son of man*—what does this mean?

It is a title which comprises, firstly, God's original, first thought as to this special creation

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called 'man', God said: "Let us make *man* . . ." (Gen. i. 26). He was doing a new thing; He was embarking upon a particular kind of creature, a special creation; and, in so doing, He had large thoughts bound up with *man*-kind. 'The Son of Man' embraces that original thought of God in *man*. Secondly, it embraces, in the case of the Lord Jesus, God's loss as to His purpose and desire in man. For when man departed from the way of God, God lost in *that* man what He had intended. And in *this* Son of Man, God's loss—that of which God has been deprived by man's sin and wilfulness and Satan's interference—is taken up.

But this term 'Son of Man' is also related to God's redemption of man, and, therefore, of that which He had lost. Further, 'Son of Man' includes the Divine perfection of the man which God made. We are getting very near to the vision, now, are we not? And finally, 'Son of Man', as relating to the Lord Jesus, is God's model for all His further acti-

vities where man is concerned. There we have the five-fold component of this title, 'Son of Man'. Now we can see what the Lord is after; what the churches and the Church are intended to be, in the mind of God. What God is seeking, what the Son of Man is seeking, what the Holy Spirit in His seven-fold activity is seeking, is one thing—correspondence to the Son of Man! That that Son of Man shall be found repeated in character in all men—the Church is chosen for that.

The 'seven lamps of fire' reveal how far that is true, and how far it is not true. They test everything on that ground: Does this answer to what Christ is like, what the Son of Man is like? and, having found the answer, they judge accordingly. That is the quest—to illumine and search; to discriminate between what is Christ and what is not Christ; and to establish what is. That is the sum of these three chapters.

I. THE FIRST LAMP—'A GARMENT DOWN TO THE FOOT'

"Seven lamps of fire burning before the throne". Lamp One. What is the first aspect of Christ with which we are met? What is the ground of the Holy Spirit's quest and activity? "A garment down to the foot" (i. 13). This is not the priestly robe, and this is not the kingly robe; this is just a garment. It is not described at all; it is just stated that 'He was clothed', and 'with a garment down to the foot'. He was *clothed*, and fully clothed, wholly clothed. You remember that the very first effect of man's sin was the consciousness of nakedness. It was sin that brought about that consciousness. We are told precisely, immediately that man had sinned: "they knew that they were naked" (Gen. iii. 7). They had a realisation of it; their consciousness was changed, because their nature was changed. And their changed nature was first marked by a sense of *shame*. You notice that the first genuine work of the Holy Spirit, toward redemption and recovery, is to produce a sense of shame. I am afraid that many supposed, professed, conversions lack that sense, or lack it sufficiently. But any true, genuine work of the Holy Spirit begins there: we cover our face with shame—with the consciousness of our undone-ness, of what the Bible means by our 'nakedness' in the sight of God—with *shame*.

Now look at chapter iii of this book, verse 17: "*Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one, and miserable, and*

poor, and blind, and naked . . ." Few more terrible judgments could be passed upon anybody than that—to have no sense of need, or to have no consciousness of how you really stand before the eyes that are a flame of fire! You think you are all right! you think you are covered! "*I counsel thee to buy of me gold refined in the fire, that thou mayest become rich; and white garments, that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest* . . ." (v. 18).

SUITABILITY TO THE LORD'S PRESENCE

This is symbolic language related to spiritual truth. When the first man fell, God immediately proceeded to *make clothing* for him, to cover him, to put away from His own sight man's sin. When we come to the Son of Man, the Last Adam, we see Him *clothed* down to the foot. Surely this means that He has a fine, keen sense and sensibility as to what is fitting to the Presence of God. Is that not searching? In so many matters in these churches, that was the trouble—that they had not that due, fine sense of what is suitable to God, what is right for God, what becomes God. They were putting all sorts of things forward as ground for commendation, but this one thing was so often missing.

This is a principle that is capable of very wide application. Clothes are usually the expression of the person who wears them. Untidy clothes, un-

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brushed clothes, careless clothing, betrays the person. What a searching word for the whole question of clothing or not clothing, *before God*, in these days! But the symbolism is spiritual. It is what we are in ourselves before God, as producing shame, self-abasement: but then, thank God, it is what the Son of Man has secured and provided for us in 'a garment of righteousness', that we may stand in the Presence of God. I said a little way back that you could crowd into every one of these fragments a mass of the Bible. Into that one word 'clothed' you crowd the whole of the letter to the Romans, and the letter to the Galatians, and much more. It is this question of the 'righteousness which is through faith in Jesus Christ'—the 'righteousness of God' (Rom. iii. 22), 'I counsel thee to buy of me white raiment . . .' and "the 'fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints'" (Rev. xix. 8). It is the righteousness of God given to us in Christ, the Son of Man.

OUR STANDING BEFORE GOD

You see what a large realm that opens up. How do we stand before God? Are we projecting ourselves before God? In our life amongst the Lord's people, or alone, or anywhere in this world, are we walking as before the Lord? Or are we in any way obtruding our natural life upon the eyes and the consciousness of those around? What a lot of that there is, even in our religion—of feigned spirituality, making an impression of meekness, and so on!—and behind it there is the impression of ourselves. We are right at the foundation of everything here: What is our standing before God? what is our standing before our brethren? our standing at all? It can only be what we are in Christ. It must never be anything other than what Christ has been 'made unto us', as 'Wisdom from God: that is, Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption' (I Cor. i. 30). In Him we are 'clothed'! "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. xiii. 14)! "Ye have put off the old man" (Col. iii. 9), and in the original language the figure is there quite clearly that of a garment: one garment being put off, and another being put on. 'Ye have put off that garment of Adam, the old man, and ye have put on Christ'—another garment, another clothing.

So the first challenge of the Holy Spirit is this: How much of 'us' is appearing? Are 'we' making an impression? May the Lord save us from wanting to make an impression—from trying to be outstanding and singular and different, in order to draw attention, or to register something that

brings us into view. The Lord have mercy on us! It is Christ, as our clothing, who gives us our only fitness, seemliness, for the Presence of God. For indeed, the ultimate question of all these searchings is *the Presence of God*—standing in the Presence of God. "That ye may . . . stand before the Son of man" (Luke xxi. 36). We cannot do that in ourselves, because our natural condition is 'nakedness' and 'shame'. You know how much the New Testament says about this matter: when 'we appear before Him' (cf. II Cor. v. 10), and when 'He appears' (Col. iii. 4; I John ii. 28, iii. 2), whether we shall be 'naked before Him in that day' (cf. I John ii. 28). Again, this is a symbolic word. How searching it is! But how blessed it is; how it will drive us again to our most blessed of all blessings—the clothing of a righteousness which is not our own, but the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ. It deals with every aspect of self, of ourselves, coming into the picture. The Spirit as a Lamp of Fire, exposes, searches, determines, with this one end—the Presence of God—in view.

May the Lord lead us to seek more and more that we may have this fine sense of what is proper to God. You will see what that means in the natural. Come into the presence of a person of honour . . . I remember reading of the 'Seer of Chelsea'—Carlyle—going on a visit to Queen Victoria. Being what he was—philosopher and recluse—he never bothered about how he dressed, and he appeared at the Palace most shabbily. What a scandal it was to Queen Victoria! she never got over it. All his philosophy, all his genius, and everything else, went for nothing: the man had no sense of what was fitting for the presence of a Queen. That is only a side-light. But if it works like that in the natural, how much more for the Lord! When we come together, what is fitting for the Presence of the Lord? But we would be in His Presence at all times. May the Spirit check us up continually on that which is not suitable to abiding in the Lord's Presence. May He say, Now, that is not consistent with the Lord: you will have to 'change your clothes' a bit in this matter!

Is that practical? Is that just teaching—a subject, a theme? Very little could be more searching than that. The Lord lead us to the same quest as that which is in His own heart; for on this matter, remember, He, on the one side, puts the highest value; and on the other side, utters the most scathing denunciation. Listen to Him with the Pharisees—their fine clothes; their garments; their pretences; their outward adornments: He was right through to their nakedness! How scathing He was to hypocrisy, to pretence! God sees! But there is

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a blessing for those who will seek continually to cultivate that sense of the honour, the glory, that

"Worship the Lord in holy array" (Ps. xxix. 2, xcvi. 9).

belongs to the Lord. The Old Testament fragment comes back to us with new force:

T. A-S.

THE EYES OF HIS GLORY

Some 26 years ago we printed in "A Witness and A Testimony", the following messages given by our brother Paterson, who is now with the Lord. We feel that they have a real value for to-day, and we are therefore reprinting them in the present and ensuing issues.

Editor.

Reading: Isa. xxxiii. 13-16; lxvi. 1, 2. Zech. ii. 3-5, 8. Heb. xii. 18-24. Matt. xxv. 40, 45. Rev. i. 12-14; ii. 18; xix. 11, 12. 1 Peter iv. 12-14. 2 Cor. viii. 23.

Isa. iii. 8: "For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen; because their tongue and their doings are against the Lord, to provoke THE EYES OF HIS GLORY."

THIS is a phrase which obviously requires analysing in order to get at its value. Standing just by itself it does not perhaps convey a great deal, but it is round the thought contained in it that we shall dwell for a little.

Commencing with the word 'glory', in order that we may know in some measure what the glory of God involves let us read Ezekiel i. 22, 25-28.

"This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord." Here is language which seems to betray the completely indescribable character of that which the prophet saw, suggesting that the glory of the Lord is something that cannot, in precise detail, be set forth in words. Here is a man who, by the Holy Spirit, sees, and all he can say is: "This was the appearance of the likeness . . ." There is vagueness, and yet sufficient detail to show us the constituents of that which the prophet saw. Surely we, too, shall find, in any attempt to speak about that glory, that we can but use words to convey an impression, an atmosphere, and we shall seek nothing more than this in the words that follow.

Let us first of all remark what were the constituents of the prophet's vision. First of all there was a firmament, suggesting that which separated what was above from what was beneath. There is the thought in the firmament of separation from the earth. Then there was a throne of sapphire. The throne, of course, speaks of sovereignty, government; and sapphire speaks of its heavenly character. Then there was a man in the throne. We hardly

need to explain that, save to say that it is Christ, the Man in the glory, upon the Throne. Then there was fire in the midst like the colour of amber. It is a throne of holiness, the burning fire of holiness. There was a rainbow round about, so it was also a throne of grace. There was a voice, the word of Him who sat upon the throne. Then there were the living creatures beneath, suggestive of the Church related, and subject, to Him who was on the throne.

Those are the elements, broadly speaking, making up the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.

THE DIVINE END—
FELLOWSHIP IN GLORY

Let us note again what it says in Isaiah xxxiii. 14:

"The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling hath surprised the godless ones. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"

Obviously Isaiah is there presenting in a phrase or two something of what Ezekiel saw in his vision of the glory of God. Ezekiel saw the burning flame of holiness right in the very midst of—almost as if coming out of—the Man in the throne; the burning fires of holiness coming right out from the Being of the Man in the glory; and now the question is asked: "Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" Who indeed? And yet, in his vision, Ezekiel saw a company in fellowship with that throne; a company brought into association with burning holiness. We know from all the Scriptures that the end of God, so far as concerns this age in which we are living, is to secure a people, out of the ranks of sinners like ourselves, a people in fellowship with Him in His Throne. That means of necessity a people in fellowship with the everlasting burnings, the flaming holiness of God. "Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" And if the story was simply left there, and we were bidden to have fellowship with a God of blazing holiness, we know that we should all cry out: 'This is not for me, nor for any other who is a partaker of a sinful nature like mine.'

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BECAUSE OF THE BLOOD OF THE CROSS

Instantly there comes into view the necessity for some other element to be introduced to make possible our dwelling with the everlasting burnings, and at once we remember (and with what gratitude to God!) that precious element of the Blood of the Lamb that, as it were, tempers the fires for us who come in the value of the Blood, and makes possible our dwelling with the everlasting burnings. And so, in the vision of Ezekiel, there appears the element of grace in the rainbow round about the throne. The rainbow brings into view all that the incarnation and redemption through the Lord Jesus involves.

When you read Hebrews xii, you are reminded of the burning holiness of Sinai, so that even Moses said: "I exceedingly fear and quake"; and then you read on: "But ye are come unto . . ." this, and that, and something else, ". . . and to God the Judge of all." Not yet have you reached the point when your heart comes to rest. But the last word is: ". . . And to Jesus . . . and to the blood . . .", and your heart sighs with relief, as if to say: 'The fires of holiness need no longer be feared—I have come to Jesus and the Blood of sprinkling!' So essential in the very heart of the glory of God is the precious fact of the Blood. That makes possible fellowship between a God of infinite holiness, and sinners like us.

There is the glory of God in all its blazing holiness. There are the everlasting burnings. There is One into whose company we are bidden to come, who is emanating holiness, His very being like a fire of holiness, and we know that anything of a sinful sort coming into touch with that fire must be instantly consumed. Yet we are bidden to come. First of all, if we dwell upon it the reaction could almost send us fleeing from the whole thing, saying: 'If fellowship with God in His glory means fellowship with the burnings of that holiness I must keep away.' That has always been the reaction in those of the Lord's servants who have come into the presence at all of the burnings of His glory. Moses met it at the burning bush. Isaiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel met it. John met it, and fell as one dead. And when you and I meet it in any measure we could almost say: 'Lord, this is not for me; keep away from me.' But immediately the incarnate Lord says: "It is I; be not afraid." He whose Blood was shed for us offers us, by reason of that Blood, everything necessary to make possible our dwelling with those burnings of His holiness. So, the Word says: "Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace"; "Having

therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by . . . a new and living way . . . let us draw near . . . in full assurance of faith". But, oh! how utterly essential it makes the Blood! How beyond all believing does it make the value of the precious Blood of Christ!

THE GLORY IMPOSES ITS OWN CONDITIONS ON ALL

The reaction of all this upon a heart thus awakened is surely this: 'In future I must walk more softly than ever I walked before; everything in the nature of my standing erect before God is impossible if I am to have fellowship with that Centre of blazing light.' And oh! the bowing and the humbling, and the falling upon the face resultant from a new recognition of the awfulness of that, and that only the Blood intervening makes fellowship possible. So the Lord says: "To this man will I look, to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word."

Is not this precisely the experience of those servants of God whose history is given in the Word, and who conspicuously became channels for the revelation of the glory of God, because they were brought conspicuously into fellowship with it? This being so, we recognise that we need to consider the effect of that glory and the value of the Blood not only in the case of the unbeliever "who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant . . . an unholy thing", but in the case also of the believer, who has come into vital touch with the Lord by faith in the atoning work of the Cross. For the unbeliever we know what the end will be. He who more than any other will dishonour the Blood—the man of sin—will meet the brightness of His holiness. We know that to-day the glory of God, these infinite burnings of holiness, are all in Christ. The Lamb is all the glory of Immanuel's land. And when He appears in His unveiled glory the man of sin will be brought to naught by the brightness of His presence, and so also will He take vengeance ". . . in flaming fire" upon all "that know not God and . . . that obey not the gospel" (2 Thess. i. 8). The very brightness of that glory will work out in judgment. They will touch the fires of the glory of God, and that touch will mean their consuming. But in the case of the believer there is a twofold aspect to be noted—the one relating to the ordinary disciplining of a child of God, of which we read in Hebrews xii, 5–12, and the other a very solemn warning against presumptuous continuance in a way which is contrary to the revealed will of God. It is clear that

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the very nature of the glory of God imposes its own conditions upon all that would come into association with it, and that if those conditions are not present there must inevitably be the impact of the glory against that which is unsuitable to its character—an impact in grace and mercy, though, where the precious Blood is truly honoured.

Jacob met God like that. He was a man who had before him God's end for his life. The first recorded incident in his life shows his jealousy for the Divine privileges of the birthright, that he might possess them. But oh! how he acts! How repeatedly he goes in a way which certainly denies the meaning of the Cross of the Lord Jesus with its declaration that man is utterly ruled out, and can do nothing. Jacob is at work in the flesh all the time. Yes, but the very nature of the case brings him presently, if we may put it this way, to reckon with the glory. If a man who is out for God's uttermost approaches God in the flesh, the burnings of those fires of glory will touch that man sooner or later, and his thigh, as in Jacob's case, will be crippled. He has come near to the burnings, and the burnings have touched him. But because of his humble dependence upon the atoning work of the Cross he was chastened and not consumed.

We turn to consider the other aspect mentioned earlier in the case of the believer—that of presumptuous continuance in a way contrary to God. Let us beware of making light of sin and assuming more than is justified in relation to the Blood. The matter of the eternal security of the believer is not in our thought here—we are thinking in the realm of the word that says: "The time is come for judgment to begin at the house of God". It is sadly possible for believers to act, consciously or otherwise, in a way which is contrary to the interests of the Divine glory. The Spirit of glory will faithfully bear witness against every such act in the heart of the one concerned, and from the moment of such witness responsibility for continuance in that way devolves entirely upon the individual. The Blood may, in the mercy of God, secure from the eternal punishment due to the sin, but beware how we hide beneath this fact and shirk our responsibility to adjust our way in accordance with the truth. We are touching the Divine glory—and its fires will burn, as they did in the days of Ananias and Sapphira, Nadab and Abihu, Korah and Dathan—though their operation may be less startling and rapid in expression. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God—for our God is a consuming fire.

You see what all this lays upon the heart. The reaction is this: 'Oh, Lord, empty me of every

vestige of pride; bring me down lower and lower in the presence of that glory, to a place where I dare approach it; and give me such confidence in the precious Blood, in the meaning of the Cross, that I can approach it unafraid.' There is the twofold reaction which it would be exceedingly healthy for all of us to know in deeper measure: 'Hide me, Lord; put me out of the way; make the meaning of the death of Christ more utter in me; but, oh, draw me on, with deeper confidence in the meaning of Calvary, and with full assurance of faith, to know that I have a place there right at the heart of that glory, that I dare to approach it, and that that is my place in the desire of God.' If we are partakers of His sufferings so shall we be of the glory.

Such is the character of the glory of God. Its very nature makes necessary certain conditions, and if those conditions are not there then its nature becomes destructive. Paul said: "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men". He had seen the character of that glory, and he knew that if man touched that, met that, as all men one day will meet it, but met it apart from the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus, that is terror. Knowing that terror he beseeches men, pleads with men: 'For God's sake save yourselves from meeting that glory.' The more we share the same consciousness of the character of the Divine glory, the more shall we know that passion for other souls. The terror of the Lord is a very good spur to urge us to run with greater speed in the proclaiming of the Gospel, both to the men who are out of Christ, and to those who are in Christ.

THE GLORY A DEFENCE

There is another side to the whole matter. The Lord says in Zechariah: "I . . . will be . . . a wall of fire round about, and I will be the glory in the midst . . ." Then He goes on to say: ". . . I will dwell in the midst of thee . . ." Three times in a few verses He says that. The Lord of glory in the midst of them, and they dwelling happily, contentedly, prosperously. The dwelling-place for the Lord of glory is in the midst of His people. What that means for His people! Here are we to-day in the midst of a world full of antagonism, and the Lord says: 'I will be the glory in the midst of you; I will dwell in the midst of you.' All that burning glory is for us if we are for it. Remember the Word of the Lord through the prophet to Asa: "The Lord is with you, while ye be with him". If you are meeting the conditions demanded by the nature of that glory, then all that glory, in all its

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awfulness, as well as in its blessedness, is for you. That is something worth gripping in these days. Increasingly we shall meet with the antagonism of the Devil, and of men stirred up by the Devil against the Testimony of the glory of the Lord, if we are in fellowship with that Testimony. The joy is this: all that that glory is, is for us against them. It seems that there is in that single fact all the assurance that any heart can want. That does not mean, of course, that the glory will be such in its activity that nothing of evil is ever able to approach unto us, or lay its hand upon us physically, or to do us any hurt; so that we seem at times to be worsted by it. But it does say that that glory is for us.

“The eyes of his glory.” There is the glory of God; Jesus Christ in the Throne; in effect, there are those eyes like a flame of fire, watching the Lord’s people, like a little flock in the midst of wolves. We thought when we were out that we were all alone! No! The eyes of that blazing glory were watching us! Yet our enemies were able to touch us, and molest us and drive us. Why did He not intervene? We do not know, except this: He is only waiting to break forth at the most suitable moment, when by so doing He will accomplish the maximum good. But let us get the thought that the eyes of His glory are watching. They have been watching all the time, and not simply watching as a casual spectator. He has said: “He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.” Remember that the vision of the glory was of this One upon a sapphire throne, above the firmament, a heavenly Throne, above the earth, and it is this Throne that rules even in the affairs of men; and though there may be seemingly no interventions by the Lord, the eyes of His glory are watching and recording all that is going on.

Has He not said: “Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye did it unto me”, and “inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these ye did it not unto me”? That is the One whose eyes are like a flame of fire. That which happens to the least of His little ones here on earth He says has happened to Him. He says, in effect, ‘I have to answer that; I have registered that; that is a deliberate act against Me; they have touched one of My little ones, and they have touched Me.’ That is what Saul of Tarsus met. “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” Why did not the blazing light of that holiness destroy him? Just for this reason, that Saul verily thought he did God service, and up to the light he had he was moving toward God’s end. In effect it was this, that Paul was not knowingly flying in the face of that

glory; he thought he was moving toward it and serving it. So when he touched the glory the precious Blood shed for him intervened, by the mercy of God, to prevent those everlasting burnings from withering him up, and he instantly humbled himself before the light so startlingly shed upon his way. But when Ananias and Sapphira in the midst of the Church came and with deliberate purpose of heart lied against the Lord, that burning met them and judged them. They presumed upon, or else ignored, the real implications of the precious Blood. Let us say solemnly again that it is sadly possible, even for one who is a child of God, to act wilfully against the interests of that glory—perhaps because of something that they were not prepared to yield in their own heart, some humbling of self that was called for and the price was too much. If the Lord wakens us to see that some attitude of ours has actually been against His interests, wisdom dictates a humbling before the Lord, not a persisting in that way, that the Blood may speak for us, our iniquity may be pardoned, our folly put aside, and we may be drawn on again in fellowship with that glory and not against it.

There is immense consolation in the knowledge that the eyes of His glory are upon us. They are often referred to in the Word, and always with the suggestion of a tremendous protective or providential power operative through them in behalf of His own trusting people. Hagar was in the wilderness, and the angel of the Lord met her, and her conclusion was: “Thou God seest me.” The eyes of the glory were upon her in the wilderness. In Ezra v. 5 we read that the eye of the Lord was upon the Jews that they should not be made to cease the work. The Lord was looking (He is the Lord of glory always) and the full effect of that look was that He said: ‘You shall not make My people to cease the work.’ Again in Exodus xiv. 24 we read: “. . . the Lord looked forth upon the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire . . . and discomfited the host . . . and he took off their chariot wheels . . .” What is it? It is the eye of His glory that is intervening in the behalf of his own people and causing their enemies to drive heavily. When the Lord, with His eyes of glory, looks upon the enemies of His people it is always hard work and heavy going for those enemies. Of course, the circumstantial intervention depends upon the sovereign wisdom of the Lord. If the end does not come in any other way, it will come when those enemies meet the revealed glory; or He may, as in the case of the Israelites fleeing from Pharaoh, instantly bring circumstantial deliverance. But in either case the eyes of His glory are watching. He

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is taking full account of everything. "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous . . ."

Can we get the meaning of that? The eyes of His holiness, the eyes of His glory, are upon us who are righteous in virtue of a humble walk in dependence upon the precious Blood. If we seek to go the way of the Lord His eye is upon us. It is the eye of that burning, terrible, mighty glory that is upon us, and the terror of that holiness will blaze for us against them that are against us when the Lord's hour for intervention comes. There is encouragement, and a ground for cheer.

THE GLORY SEEKS ITS OWN REFLECTION IN THE CHURCH

When Solomon had built the Temple, his cry to the Lord was: "That thine eyes may be opened toward this house night and day", and the Lord's answer was: "I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually." That place in its entirety spoke of the perfections of Christ. We see what those eyes of glory are looking for. If you like, the Lord is seeking here upon earth the reflection of Himself—the expression of His own attributes, His own nature, His own character, and He rests those eyes of glory with pleasure and blessing upon all that is of Himself, and He is utterly *for* that. Hence, the degree in which those eyes of glory will be for us here is the degree in which Christ is wrought in us, manifested in us, the degree in which He sees His own nature in us. The contrary is the effect where His own nature is not revealed; that glory is against such.

That brings us to the thought in II Corinthians viii. 23: ". . . they are the messengers of the churches, they are the glory of Christ." The suggestion here is of those eyes of glory seeking Christ's likeness here on earth, and it says of certain men that these are "the glory of Christ." It does present this challenge to us; we see what that glory represents, what its essential character is, what its effect is. Now we read of certain men that they are the glory of Christ. Supposing He said to you and me: "You are My glory!" It would mean that where we were concerned there were present, at least in measure, the elements that Ezekiel saw in the glory. First of all a holiness that burns like a fire, so that in our presence sin is immediately made conscious it has touched something contrary to itself: men who are sinners, regardless of God, would know when we approached them the burning conviction of sin. Then the other elements—the Man in the

Throne, ruling from Heaven, and His Church subject to Him, cut off from earth, everything governed from Heaven by His Word. If we are the glory of Christ, then the effect we register upon people is this: Here is a man who is living a heavenly life, whose whole life is ruled from Heaven, so that he is a servant and not a master; he has the appearance of obeying all the time. Is that not true of men in whom more than in others you see the revealed glory of Christ? Think of such a man. Is he not marked by something which leads you to say: "He gets his orders from somewhere else"? Though he may rule a situation in a masterful way, the impression he registers upon you is that he is getting his orders from somewhere else. He would confess: I can do nothing of myself, but I do all that I do by the grace of God working in me. He is one who obeys; not one who rules in his own right. He defers to a greater Master. He is not a little dictator in his own realm, to lay down his own laws. Other people may of necessity have to look upon him as their own leader under God, but the impression he gives is that he has another who is Head, and that Head is not an earthly one, but a heavenly.

There are features of the glory that Ezekiel saw: Holiness, heavenliness, government; and on the part of man, submission, subjection. For such as walk in that relationship the Word says: "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye." Here is one on earth in fellowship with One in glory. Let anything touch that one on earth and it has touched the apple of the eye of His glory.

That eye of holiness is watching you and me, requiring consistency with its own nature. Hence let us walk humbly with the Lord. Even though the least of the little ones is a very poor specimen of what they ought to be, it is not given to us to take our tongue and whip them with our words. "Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least . . . ye did it unto me." Let us seek grace to walk softly, very humbly with the Lord, bowed ever lower at His feet; and then to walk with renewed boldness, knowing that just in the measure that we take our place thus humbly, in exactly that measure may we run to Him with boldness, to the Throne of Glory and of Grace, and enter into the closest and most intimate fellowship with Him; so that, like Moses, because of the Blood shed at the foot of the Mount, we may go right up into the Mount where is the glory of His flaming holiness, and yet be unconsumed. And then, as we are occupied with that glory, it will be reflected from our faces, and we shall become the glory of Christ, the messengers of the glory, those partaking of its very essence.

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those revealing its very nature. That is the Will of God.

All that glory is for us. God knows how we are going to need that kind of assurance in the days that lie ahead, and how multitudes of the saints to-day are needing it. If some knew that, in spite of what is happening, the eyes of the glory are upon them, saying: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay", "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm", they would surely be "strengthened according to the might of his glory unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness", and in faith be able to await the day of His vindicating, when the fire of His glory should break forth in judgment against their enemies. They could afford to say:

"All right, Lord, You have noted all this; in due season the fire will burst forth and You will vindicate, You will deal justly and mercifully, and all circumstances which to us are hopeless problems, baffling puzzles, when the time comes not a single iota of the whole charge will be forgotten, every whit will be remembered against the enemies."

We do not say that vindictively against the human enemies of the Lord's people, but we do say that the Lord will, in due time, mete out upon the head of the Devil and of all those who have been his willing instruments, that final judgment which will be vengeance for all that His saints have suffered.

G. P.

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

I. THE KINGDOM OF GOD

"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew xxiv. 14).

OVERSHADOWING and encompassing all else in the Bible, and especially in the new Testament, is the phrase: "the kingdom of God". "John the Baptist [cometh], preaching . . . saying . . . the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew iii. 1, 2). Jesus preached it and taught it and said that it had come nigh (Matt. iv. 17). Before His transfiguration He had said that there were some there who would not see death until they saw the Kingdom coming in power (Mark ix. 1). After His resurrection He spoke with His disciples about the Kingdom (Acts i. 3).

This was the theme, too, of the apostles. Paul himself spoke of it to those in Rome as late as his imprisonment: right up to the end, it would seem, it was concerning 'the Kingdom of God, and the things of Jesus Christ', that he spoke (Acts xxviii. 31). The letter to the Hebrews is summed up in one phrase: "Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken . . ." (Heb. xii. 28); literally, 'being in the course of receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken'. That explains all that is in that letter. And the book of the Revelation itself can be gathered into one sentence: "Now is come . . . the kingdom of our God . . ." (Rev. xii. 10).

All this amounts to a very full, strong and comprehensive statement, and it is therefore surely necessary for us to acquaint ourselves with the

meaning of the Kingdom of God. At the outset, therefore, let us spend a little time in defining the Kingdom of God, for we must be clear on this matter of definition.

A DEFINITION

What is the Kingdom of God? It is generally agreed that the word 'kingdom' is not a very good translation of the Greek word which lies behind it. The root meaning of the original word translated 'kingdom' in our English Bibles is 'sovereign rule', or 'reign', so that it should be more correctly translated 'the sovereign rule of God', and we must keep that in mind all the way along. We shall go on using the word 'kingdom', for we shall find it difficult to get away from it; but let us be very clear that, when we are using the word 'kingdom' in this connection, we are thinking and talking about the sovereign rule or reign of God.

Now, in the light of the teaching of the New Testament, this has three aspects.

Firstly, it does mean the kingly rule of God. Then it leads on to an order or nature of things characteristic of the One who rules. Note how it is to be: the one *leads on* to the other. The latter condition is not always present. God rules: that is a fact in itself; but that is sovereign rule where over a very large area there is nothing characteristic of God, nothing which sets forth the nature of God. But the fact and truth of God ruling *leads on* to the next thing, and that is an order which takes its character from Him who rules. That is what it is intended to lead to, and in the New Testament you

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will find that that has a large place, as we shall see later.

And then, going one stage further, the sovereign reign or rule of God leads to an actual realm in which that order and nature operates and is expressed. This is something into which you can enter, but you cannot enter it apart from the other two things: the fact of His absolute Lordship, and the fact that you, by some mighty work of God, have become a 'partaker of the Divine nature' (II Peter i. 4)—the very nature of God has been introduced and a new order of things has been set up.

That is the definition of the Kingdom of God. It is very important, because I hope you are going to be led to a new reading of all that is in the Word about the Kingdom, and you will be in confusion unless you have clearly grasped that definition in its threefold aspect.

It hardly needs to be said that the 'Kingdom of God' and the 'Kingdom of Heaven' are not in any sense two different things. Matthew prefers the 'Kingdom of Heaven'. There is a very good reason why Matthew preferred the title 'the Kingdom of Heaven', the sovereign rule of Heaven—or rather of the heavens, for the word is not in the singular, it is in the plural. Mark, Luke and John always call it the 'Kingdom of God'—again, for very good reasons, into which I leave you to dig. But the two titles denote the same thing.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD PRESENT

Now, we are expressly told by John the Baptist and by the Lord Himself that the Kingdom of God or of Heaven was "at hand", was "nigh", had "drawn nigh". On one occasion the Lord put it "... is come nigh unto you" (Luke x. 9); on another, "... is in the midst of you", or "within you" (Luke xvii. 21). And, as we have already quoted, before His transfiguration the Lord said, 'There are some here who in their lifetime will see it come in power'. So we are told that it is present. But we may not perhaps realise what a tremendous amount hangs upon that statement. A whole system of teaching has arisen which says that the Kingdom has been suspended and will come in with the Jewish age later on. But John said, 'It is at hand'. Jesus said, 'It has come nigh'. Jesus said, 'You shall see it come in power in your lifetime', and, 'The Kingdom is in the midst of you'—'is in the midst of you'. It is present.

But here a question arises. If the sovereign rule of God and of the heavens is universal and eternal, as the Bible declares it to be—in the book of Daniel the phrase which governs everything is "the

heavens do rule"—in what way is it more particularly so in this dispensation? God is the Ruler of the universe, and always has been and always will be. How is He more so in this dispensation than at any other time? In other words, in what way is the kingdom at hand, or has it come nigh, in *this* dispensation? And the answer is a very full, a very comprehensive and a very wonderful one.

The Kingdom of God was always, by Divine appointment, the heritage of God's Son. God purposed that Kingdom for His Son as His inheritance. Through Him, by Him, He made all things, and unto Him were all things created (Rom. xiii. 36; Col. i. 16). But, further, it was intended to be man's in union with God's Son. There is much about that. "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the Son of man, that thou puttest him in charge? . . . Thou madest him to have dominion . . ." (Ps. viii. 4, 6). "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke xii. 32). This is not something extra. It was eternally in the thought of God for man, to be realised through union with His Son. Man was in the picture from the beginning—man was created for that very purpose.

And that very truth opens the door for the tragedy. By man's act and by man's consent, by man's rebellion against the expressed will of God, the Kingdom passed into the hands of a usurper. Yes: the dominion over this world passed into the hands of one who is, even by the Lord Jesus Himself, designated 'the prince of this world' (John xiv. 30), and by Paul 'the god of this age' (II Cor. iv. 4). It went into alienation from its rightful Heir—and from man in union with Christ as a joint-heir—it went into alienation, which demanded restoration. It went into enmity against God, which demanded reconciliation. It went into captivity, demanding release. It went into moral ruin, demanding reconstitution. There is the answer to the question as to why in this dispensation the Kingdom has a particular meaning.

THE KINGDOM AT HAND WITH THE COMING OF THE HEIR

Thus, you see, the Kingdom, or the rule, in all its meaning as we have defined it, came to hand with the appearance of its rightful Heir. This dispensation is covered and dominated by the fact of the Son of God having become incarnate. As the Heir of all things, He has come to seek and to save that which was lost—and it was an immense 'that'. So the Kingdom or the sovereign rule has come into this dispensation, in this particular and peculiar way, with the Person of Jesus Christ, God's Son,

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the rightful Heir. It has also come in with Him as the alone Redeemer of the inheritance, the only One who could redeem, the redeeming Kinsman who alone had the position and the right and the resource to redeem—the “Son of man”. And so the Kingdom has come near in the person and the work of the Lord Jesus, and this phrase, “the Kingdom of God”, defines, explains and sums up the whole meaning and purpose of the incarnation and the mission of the Lord Jesus.

Do you say, Why was God's Son made man? Why did He come in the flesh? Why did He come into this world, and then why did He suffer and die and rise again? The answer is: In order that the sovereign rule of God might be recovered, restored, reconstituted, the enmity dealt with and reconciliation made, the captivity broken, release brought in. You will no doubt be recalling much Scripture in support of this. “To proclaim release unto the captives . . .” (Is. lxi. 1): that was His mission—to reconstitute things from their moral ruin. We may consider this more fully later. What is called ‘the Sermon on the Mount’ is, as Dr. Campbell Morgan calls it, ‘the whole manifesto’ of the Kingdom of God: it shows what the Kingdom of God is like—the constitution of it in moral principle.

So, He came, and He finished His work to recover and secure His own God-given inheritance of the Kingdom; and, rising from the dead, He says: “All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. xxviii. 18)—literally it is, ‘has just been given to me’—and from that moment all authority is vested in the Name of Jesus. The remainder of the New Testament is the demonstration of that fact. The book of the Acts, from the beginning onward, sets forth in a very, very concrete and forceful way the authority of the Name. “By what power, or in what name . . .?” was the interrogation. ‘If you ask concerning the Name, be it known unto you that by the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth . . .’ (Acts iv. 7–10). The authority is not only claimed by the Lord Jesus, but demonstrated by Him in the power of the Holy Spirit.

CHRIST'S WAS A ‘COSMIC’ MISSION

This inheritance was something very comprehensive. The mission of the Lord Jesus was, if I may use the word, cosmic: that is to say, it did not just relate to the earth as the beginning and the end. It had to do with the whole spiritual sphere in which this earth moves. Paul defines that as: ‘principalities, powers, world-rulers of this darkness, spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heaven-

lies’ (Eph. vi. 12). There is much more of that kind, and that is what we mean by ‘cosmic’. It is supra-earthly, if you like—the whole spiritual setting of everything here. In that whole realm of the heavens which were polluted and defiled, the mission of the Lord Jesus was efficacious and effectual; it was not only for man on the earth and for the earthly creation. The very heavens had to be purged, we are told (Job xv.15; Heb. ix. 23). Yes, the inheritance is a large inheritance. His rule, His sovereign rule, is a very, very great thing. It moves out into the vast expanses where these hosts of evil spirits have their sphere of operations. His rule is there, it is extended there.

But, of course, it operates also amongst men. That hardly needs to be said, and certainly not emphasized. I refer again to the book of the Acts. But was the book of the Acts ever finished? It is the one book in the Bible which has no finish. It just breaks off. How we would like to know the rest! But no, it just breaks off; it leaves Paul there on his chain in Rome, tells us no more. Ah, but, you see, the book of the Acts was never intended to be finished until the end of this dispensation. It has gone on and on, and it is still having chapters added to it, and it is still on the same lines with the same meaning—the sovereign rule of the Lord Jesus and His securing of His inheritance by His own authority. But for His authority nothing would come to Him. You and I know quite well that we cannot just bring people into the Kingdom willy-nilly. It requires the exercise of the very throne of the Lord Jesus to bring a soul through by new birth. And those who are receiving the Kingdom, that is, those who are still ‘in course of receiving’ the Kingdom, know quite well that every inch of this territory is contested, and that we never come into one extra fragment of our inheritance in Christ without some exercise of His sovereign power.

A REDEMPTIVE MISSION

Christ's mission was also a redemptive mission. How great does that word ‘redemption’ become, when we view it in the light of this whole purpose of God as to the place of His Son universally. Not only men and women, but the whole earth and the whole cosmos, redeemed by the Blood of Jesus. The day will come when the glory of that redemption will be manifested universally.

A RECONSTRUCTIVE MISSION

Then the mission of Jesus was reconstructive. That, of course, is spread right over the New Testa-

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ment. What is He doing with you, with me, with His own who have come under His sovereign rule? What is happening to those of us who have come under the Lordship of God in Christ? We are just being reconstructed, that is all, and we are learning as we go along how much we need reconstructing. Things have all broken down, all gone wrong. We cannot put them right. Something has to be done to reconstruct this whole fabric. Hence, all the dealings with us by the Spirit of God, in trials and testings, in afflictions and adversities and sufferings, are reconstructive works unto the Kingdom of God. They often seem to be destructive works—and it is true that you have got to get rid of the rubbish, of the debris, before you can build; the two things are two parts of the one thing—but, you see, the receiving of the Kingdom comes through afflictions.

Is it not stated quite clearly and definitely: "Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts xiv. 22)? Now go beyond the primary idea of a sphere as interpreting the Kingdom, and see that the tribulations are bringing you into that sovereign rule of the Lord, which is going to prove itself so beneficent, so glorious, so wonderful. You agree with me that it would be a grand and glorious thing if everything were just as God would have it. That is what He is working toward with you and me. 'Through much tribulation we enter the Kingdom': we are coming into the inheritance, we are coming into the sovereign rule.

THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM

So much for the explanation of the term 'the Kingdom of God'. What is the inclusive issue? "This gospel of the kingdom"—'This *good news* of the sovereign rule of God'. The sovereign rule of God is good news! That comprehended the whole message of the apostles and of the Church for this dispensation. It is the good news of the Kingdom—the good news that the Throne exists and is occupied and is dominant. The good news, to begin with, in the most elementary aspect of the proclaiming, is that there is a Throne, and on that Throne is Jesus Christ; that the authority is vested in Him, and that that authority is a very real thing; and that the Holy Spirit is working all things in us and in this world in relation to the authority or Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Take an illustration from the Old Testament—Israel in Babylon, that great, immense world power; a people broken, shattered, crushed, ground to powder, in despair. "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (Ps. cxxxvii.

4). They hung their harps upon the willows in the hopelessness of the situation. But listen! A prophet is speaking. "For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and I will bring down all their nobles" (Is. xliii. 14, R.V. mg.). "For your sake"—"for your sake"—a broken, crushed, hopeless people. This overthrow and destruction of one of the mightiest empires that this world has seen has an explanation in a poor, despised, broken, captive people.

Now bring that up to date, and realise that this Throne is operating now in history. Mighty world powers are going to be shattered and broken and disintegrated because of the Church. Antichrist will be given his tether. He will be allowed to 'exalt himself above all that is called God, sitting in the temple of God, giving out that he is God' (II Thess. ii. 4). How much further can anyone go than that? Antichrist will be given liberty to go even as far as that. But then he will be smitten and destroyed by the very countenance of Christ Himself. For the authority of Christ to be displayed in all its intrinsic power, it is necessary that all this other be allowed. The Devil is allowed to go a long way, but behind there is always the Throne. The Throne is saying, 'Go as far as you can, and then I will destroy you out of hand.' That is the good news of the sovereignty.

What we have said so far is but an introduction, but I trust that it may help towards a new understanding of this wonderful phrase—"the kingdom of God"—and I believe that we shall be thrilled as we look more deeply into it. But let us be quite clear about this. That Kingdom has come, that Kingdom is present; that Kingdom, in spite of all that seems to be working to the contrary, is functioning. That One at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens is Lord, and this is something to be apprehended by faith, and stood upon in the day of ordeal.

For surely it was that assurance and confidence, that certainty, that accounted for the wonderful stability of the Apostles and the Church at the beginning, when it seemed so otherwise. Is it not this that has astonished us, and perhaps perplexed us? Here is all this persecution, all this martyrdom, all this seeming triumph of evil and of evil men and of the Devil, and yet these people do not bow inwardly to it, they do not accept it. Whether they be individuals, or whether it be the Church, they just do not accept that this is the last word and that this is the supreme power. They repudiate it, even to death. Why? There is no other answer than this, that they had come to a fixed and final position about the exaltation of the Lord Jesus to the

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Throne in the heavens. It was a settled thing, and it was so real in their hearts that nothing that this other could do could ultimately destroy them. They go to their deaths singing in triumph.

It is easy to speak glibly of these things: and yet—and yet—is it not true that the Lord has special reserves of grace for special ordeals? If ever you feel that you could not go through a certain trial, that if you had to face that, you just could not go through with it, you are taking on something that

you have no right to take on. If the Lord calls you to go through fire or water, He has a special reserve of grace for you in that. And that grace will be from the *throne* of grace. "Let us . . . draw near with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may *find* grace to help us in time of need" (Heb. iv. 16). It is a throne above, mediating grace for need and suffering as it is required.

T. A-S.

ABIDE UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE ALMIGHTY

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalm xci. 1).

IT is most instructive and inspiring to read the Psalms, when we remember that they would have formed the main spiritual food for the Lord Jesus, when, as a Man, He walked this earth. So many of them light up with meaning and help if we think of them in that way. In most cases, it is perhaps a matter of guesswork or imagination, but with this Psalm there is a difference. We have excellent reason for believing, not only that it was well and thoroughly absorbed by our Lord in His spiritual reading, but that it must have represented a most important message from God to His heart. Remarkably enough, it is the Devil who helps us in making that discovery, for it was from this Psalm that Satan quoted in one of those great temptations with which he assailed the Lord Jesus. He made it plain that he knew that this was the Word on which the Lord was relying; and he revealed, moreover, the true nature of the Psalm, because it was he who said to the Lord Jesus: 'If Thou be the Son of God . . . that Psalm applies to You.' Now, no mention is made here of sonship; but I think you will agree that the whole atmosphere of the Psalm speaks of the relationship between the Father in Heaven, the Most High, spreading out His wings, and the Son, in closest, intimate communion with Him.

THE SPIRIT'S INSTRUCTION TO THE LORD JESUS

You will notice that here, unlike what we find in many of the Psalms, there is practically nothing of the Psalmist's personal testimony. Verse 2 reads: "I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust." But,

apart from that, it is not the Psalmist speaking about God or to God; it is a third person speaking to Him as to His relationship with Heaven. I said 'a third person', but before we get to the end of the Psalm, the Father Himself takes this matter up, and says, 'I will do it; Thou hast set Thy love upon Me' (v. 14). For the rest, I think it is not unreasonable to say that this third Person is the Holy Spirit, encouraging, instructing and exhorting the Son of God, who has now come to to live as a Son of man. In a world like this, how can a man live and triumph and please God? This Psalm, as our Lord Jesus fed upon it, would be Heaven's instruction, Heaven's setting down of principles, of a basis—a rule of life for the Son of God. If we look at it in that way, it becomes obvious, not only from the first verse, but from the whole of the remainder of the Psalm, that the supremely important factor is that of a close abiding fellowship in the secret place. 'Mark this', says the Divine Wisdom, 'watch for this; herein lies the secret: this will be the focus of all Satanic attack, this *abiding* in the secret place of the Most High; dwelling under the shadow of the Almighty.'

If now we take our Gospels and read them with this in mind, we find set forth the story of a life proving that success, safety, fruitfulness, and ultimate glory have but one, all-important, secret—that of keeping close to the Father in Heaven; giving absolute priority to this matter of communion in the secret place. Equally, as we read through the Gospel narrative, we shall be impressed by the fact that, from a thousand different angles, by a multitude of cunning devices, everything was directed upon this one issue: to get the Son out of relationship with the Father. Thank God it never succeeded! How well our Lord had taken to heart this lesson that it is he who dwells in the secret place who is the true son.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

CORRECTION OF OUR MISCONCEPTIONS: (2) AS TO THE INCIDENCE OF TRIAL AND AFFLICTION

(1) AS TO THE NATURE OF 'ABIDING'

Now we must use the life of the Lord Jesus always to check up our imaginary, and often distorted, pictures of spiritual things: for we may well begin to think in terms of a life in which prayer is given the supreme place, and other activities of life are made to stand aside, or are neglected. 'I must dwell in the secret place of the Most High'; prayer must be given first place and used instead of activity. You will find no substance in the life of the Lord Jesus to warrant such a reading of this Psalm. Or again, we may say: 'Well, of course, we have other things to do; but prayer must be the first thing, and by a long time of prayer we may be assured that the rest of the day will be all right. Prayer, not instead of action, but prayer before action.' Well, of course, far be it from me to counter that! But I would suggest to you that, the more you read the life of the Lord Jesus, impressive though it may be with the reminder of the need for prayer, the more you will realise that it was not only in the prayer chamber, but at every turn in the midst of a busy and active life and ministry, that He dwelt in the secret place of the Most High. Not—an hour alone with the Father, and then the rest of the day out with the world, counting on some magical value of that hour to see Him through the day. Oh, no. Time with the Father alone was but the concentration and special feature of a life in which, all the time, He made it the first thing to keep close to God, to maintain unhindered communion with the Father.

It is the spirit, rather than the activity, of prayer—the spirit of abiding; and it is not without reason and significance that twice over in these early verses we are directed to the thought of being 'under': "under the shadow" (v. 1); "under his wings" (v. 4). And all the work of Satan was to try to get the Son out from that 'undet' position, away from that true submissiveness to the Father; if he could do that, then all the rest of his work would succeed. He never did succeed. But we are impressed with this command from Heaven, these directions, these instructions, given to every son of God. This is the way of blessing; this is the way of fruitfulness; this is the way of deliverance; this is the way of victory: to keep that submissive spirit of gentle and yet strong committal to the Father's will.

Now, I have said that the life of the Lord Jesus will correct our misconceptions of spiritual things: and that is certainly true with relation to all the troubles and trials which are described in this Psalm. For it is a part of our foolishness that we vainly imagine that the closer a man is to the Lord, the more jealously he guards his place of communion with the Lord, the easier, the smoother, the freer from difficulties and trials will his life be. We are completely mistaken; that is quite a misconception. And so the Psalm will now stress the adversities that beset the path of the man who begins where Psalm xci begins, "in the secret place of the Most High".

Now it has to be like that; there is a very good reason for it. But without discussing the reason, let us look at the facts. Look down the chapter. What a list is given to us here: "the snare of the fowler . . . the noisome pestilence . . . the terror by night . . . the arrow that flieth by day . . . the pestilence that walketh in darkness . . . the destruction that wasteth at noonday . . ." On and on the story goes. You say, Who is this? And the answer comes back: This is the Son of God. What a long and varied list of every kind of assault upon this Man. We go back to the Gospels, and we have to confess that this is true. Men did not say, 'This is the Son of God', because they saw some majestic person sweeping on easily through life, with no difficulties and no enemies. They found a man in the fires of affliction; they found a man beset—these are figurative descriptions of troubles, but they are very vivid ones if you look at them—by night and by day, with lions in their fierceness and serpents in their subtlety. But the amazing thing about the Psalm is that it is a picture of a man who walks through it all unmoved, unaffected, delivered, maintained. And what is the secret? The secret is not because he has ability to deal with these troubles, but because the Lord has said: "I will be with him in trouble". 'He is with Me; I will be with Him.' What a story of triumph, deliverance, and victory—the story of our Saviour's life!

I have said that these afflictions have to be. For still the question is raised, as it was in Job's time, in the counsels of Heaven, as to whether a man will rejoice in God, and enjoy His love, when he has nothing outwardly at all to prove it. Still Satan goes on saying, as he did in those days, 'Of course those people sing; of course they are radiant; of course they are happy: look what You have done for them—miracles, deliverances, blessings, heal-

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ing, provision, answers to prayer—who would not sing?!" And God has to say, for His own reputation's sake: If I take every one of those things away, and leave that person without a single blessing, visible to himself or to others, I believe he will still say, 'I love the Lord'; because (you notice the expression) he has set his love upon Me—he has *set* his love upon Me. Hell is answered, and Heaven is vindicated, when God is able to say, I have a son who loves Me, not for what I give him, but just because he loves Me, and I love him. And, in the person of the Lord Jesus, we know the Satanic lie was answered, and the Divine truth was seen that it is possible, between Heaven and earth, God and man, to have a perfect love relationship. But it needs all the arrows and terrors and trials and testings—it needs them all, to bring out that great truth. So, there is a reason and an explanation.

SATAN'S MISUSE OF THE PSALM

Now we come to the subtle use by Satan of this very Psalm. He came to the Lord Jesus, as we know, quoting the Word of God; and this was the fact implicit in that quotation—and it is a fact, and it is stated here. It is that Heaven will care for its own sons; that God has undertaken, through all the pestilences and trials and troubles, and everything else that may be sent—He has undertaken to see that no harm comes to them. He will send His angels: 'He will give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee'. It is quite true. The fact was true. But the suggestion that Satan brought along with that fact was this: All right, then: use this truth for Your own ends; use this truth to impress men, to prove to them that You are the Son of God. And since, even with us, crude as we are, Satan usually wraps up his temptations, and makes them look a bit spiritual, how much more with the infinitely sensitive Son of God. He must have argued something with diabolical ingenuity, something that looked right; it must have looked right, or it would have been no temptation.

I suppose the argument went like this: You owe it to Yourself, as a servant of God; You owe it to the people, among whom You are to work and minister—You owe it to prove to them, to demonstrate, to show that there is something exceptional about Your life. If You just walk into the Temple courts, as a humble Galilean, what hope have You that they will listen to You? and how can You expect them to believe that God has sent you? No, Your entry must be a dramatic one; Your appearance must have something of the sen-

sational about it. Arrive in their midst with all the outward signs that appeal to carnal man, of something supernatural and wonderful, and they will say, 'You are the Son of God!' And quite likely they would have done. But the snare, the snare of it all, was that the Lord Jesus could not do that without moving out from under the cover of the Father's wings. It would have meant taking things into His own hands—with the best of motive and intention, maybe; nevertheless, while He did not give Satan the reasons for what He did (it is no use arguing with the Devil), He just gave him a sword-thrust with the Word of God. I think if we turn back to the origin from which this quotation came, and read anew the Psalm, we will say, This is where the Lord Jesus found His deliverance. And it is where we will always find ours, if at every point we make the first thing not verse 11, but verse 1. It is not one of the outcomes—it is the basic principle. The basic principle is: You must abide under the shadow of the Almighty. There is a phrase, that we often hear used, about being 'under covering': there is a great deal of spiritual truth in that phrase, and our Lord Jesus is the supreme example of a Man who always kept under the cover—the 'shadow', as it is called, or the 'wings'—of His Heavenly Father. Thank God that for us also there is deliverance from every temptation, however subtle, as well as from every trial, however bitter; and the deliverance comes by heeding Heaven's reminder: It is he that dwells in the secret place of the Most High who can prove Divine deliverances and Divine vindications.

CORRECTION OF MISCONCEPTIONS

(3) AS TO ULTIMATE VINDICATION

You will notice that this Psalm ends on the note of vindication: 'I will show him', God says, 'I will show him My salvation.' Now that appeals to me, because I want to see, and we all want to see, don't we? We are perhaps wrong in our desires, in some ways; but fundamentally we may expect—and I think it is right that we should expect—that ultimately God will make manifest that we have taken the right course—that this has been right. 'I will show him My salvation'. But, in our desire to see, we want it much too quickly, and we want it our own way. So, once again, we must come back to the Lord Jesus, to have our thoughts checked and measured up against reality and truth as seen in Him.

We see, of course, that God did vindicate Him. All these assertions were fulfilled in His case. 'I

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will set Him on high . . . I will be with Him ; I will deliver Him ; I will honour Him. With long life will I satisfy Him, and show Him My salvation.' That is true. The Father turns to the Son to-day, and points perhaps to a gathering of His people, and says, Look ! I am showing You what has come from Your walk with Me. It was fruitful ; it has proved right. Why was all this done ? Why is the Lord Jesus so highly exalted, vindicated, justified, satisfied ? Well, we do **not** have to guess, because it is written here : ' **Because He has set His love upon Me.**' ' **Because He has set His love upon Me**'—' **Because He hath set His love upon Me**'—not upon the vindication, but ' **upon Me**'!—all this has been made possible. But if you remember, in the case of the Lord Jesus, for quite a time it did not look like it ; **none of these things** was manifest. As a Man here on earth, He did not see a single thing of those mentioned here. He had to wait ; He had to keep on setting His love, right through to Calvary, and wait. On the other side of Calvary, in resurrection and ascension, He has been vindicated and justified.

The Lord says to us : ' You have got to abide in the secret place ; that is your business. There are troubles all around you : you cannot deal with them, but you keep close to Me, and I will deal with them. There are subtle temptations of Satan, which will catch you, however **zealous** you are,

and desirous of serving Me ; but you keep close to Me, and I will deliver you from all the temptations.' And He says to us : ' Are you disappointed ? Are you wishing you could see ? Are you pained and troubled because you do not see ? You must be patient ; you must set your love upon Me ; you must not be governed, **guided**, moved from your pathway by what is seen—whether good or apparently evil ; you must abide under the shadow of the Almighty.'

In eternity, supremely, God will fulfil this to those who have followed Christ all the way ; in time, also, in some very real measure, God does honour these promises and answer them. But they are always, as it were, some resurrection that **emerges** out of a crucifixion, some Divine reward for sustained faithfulness to Himself. Remember, when the Lord Jesus began to talk to His disciples, **one of the matters** which He so greatly stressed, **which seems to me to emerge** immediately from what I have been saying, was : ' Your Father who seeth in secret shall reward you openly!' (Matt. v. 4, 6, 18). How many times did He say that in the Sermon on the mount ? He entered His ministry, He entered His public life, with this conviction : My supreme and only task is to keep close to the Father in secret, and He will reward ; in due time He will reward Me openly.

Let us seek grace, then, to abide in the secret place with Him.

H. F.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

LOVE LIFTED ME.

WE are never actually told that Miriam cried, but I rather think that she did. It is most likely that her mother, Jochebed, cried too. A dear little baby boy had come into their family, and the cruel law said that they could not keep him, but must throw him out into the river Nile, where he would be left to die. It was no use thinking of defying the king's command ; they could not do that. They had already waited longer than they should have done, and could wait no longer. The horrible thing had to be done ; they were forced to cast out their lovely baby.

The parents, Amram and Jochebed, had two other children. The eldest was their daughter Miriam, who was getting a big girl now, and then there was a little son, just three years old. This new baby boy was only three months old. The mother and father loved him and wanted him for themselves. But they also believed that God loved him and wanted him to be His servant in future

years. It was this last belief which made them think and pray more than ever, for they felt sure that God would not let Himself be robbed, even by the most powerful earthly king. They were right about this, and they proved it when they formed their plan to put the matter into His hands.

They could not keep him any longer themselves. They had to cast him out as all the other Hebrew baby boys were being cast out. Yet they found a way of putting him into the river without his being drowned ; they let go of him and then waited for him to be given back to them again. This is how they did it. Father Amram went down to the river and gathered some bulrushes. When he had brought them home, mother Jochebed plaited them into a sort of hamper or basket with a lid. It was important to make it watertight, so while she made the basket, father went again and got some slime and pitch. Miriam shared their secret, but we do not know that she actually helped,

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though we can guess that at least she could help mother line the ark, or basket, with something soft and warm. And if Aaron was like most little boys of three, he quite likely wanted to help daub on the pitch. It was a united work of the whole family, as they all did their utmost to preserve the life of the little baby boy.

They did what they could, but even so it was very little, and if God had not wonderfully answered their prayers, it would have been no use at all. But God *did* answer prayer. He always does! So when the ark was finished, covered with pitch and softly lined, the wee baby was put into it, and the mother laid it in the flags by the river's brink. Sister Miriam was posted a good way off where she could watch without being seen. That part of the river was where the daughter of the wicked king used to bathe, and sure enough, when she went down that day she noticed the ark among the flags and sent a servant girl to fetch it. Now came the critical moment!

Miriam was watching with her heart in her mouth. When she saw the princess open the basket she must have hoped that her baby brother would smile nicely, as he could when he tried. Instead of smiling, though, he began to cry. As it happened this was the surest way to the heart of Pharaoh's daughter, for though she knew that it was a Hebrew baby, she felt so sorry for him that instead of having him put back in the river, she decided to adopt him as her own son. This was indeed an answer to prayer. It was a miracle. God had not prevented the baby from going down into the river, but He had rescued it from the waters. The faith and love of the parents had given him what protection they could. The rest was with God. And God put it into the heart of the heathen princess to love Moses and to spare him. It was she who gave him the name 'Moses', which

meant that he had been lifted out of the water.

When she made known her decision, then the time had come for Miriam to play her part. She walked boldly forward and told the lady that she knew someone who could nurse the baby for her. This pleased the princess, who sent her to fetch the woman, who was, of course, really the baby's mother. The princess did not know this, but as she thought that Jochebed would make a good nurse, she told her to take the baby away and nurse him while he was still little. She said that she would pay good wages for his keep, and then would receive him into the palace when he was bigger.

We are never told that Miriam cried, but we are told that she sang. That was many years later when this same Moses was the great Deliverer of all the people of God. I think, too, that she must have sung on the night when they got baby Moses safely home again, and surely the rest of the family sang with her. Here was their baby; he had been put into the river of death, but he had also been lifted out of it. Love had lifted him.

All babies, girls as well as boys, have to be exposed to the world of sin and sorrow in which we all live. Their parents cannot keep them out of it, even if they wish to do so. What they can do, though, is to weave a protection of love and faith, like Moses' ark, so that their baby is committed to the faithful care of the Lord. In the case of many boys and girls who read this, that was what their parents did for them when they were babies. Now the time has come for you to realise the wonderful mercy of God, and to know that it is time for you to trust Him for yourself. That was what Moses did. He lived up to his name. He knew that his life had been preserved so that he could commit it wholly to the God whom his mother and father trusted. Love lifted him. Can you say that love has lifted you? H. F.

THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST

"Therefore seeing we have this ministry, even as we obtained mercy, we faint not . . . For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Corinthians iv. 1, 5, 6).

IN writing this second letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle is obviously intending to convey to his readers and hearers, and to us, what our ministry is. The subject of this epistle is the ministry. We

have it here in the first verse—"this ministry". It is not difficult for us to see, even with a casual reading of this letter, that that really is the subject. So, if we want to know what our ministry is, then we can read the second letter to the Corinthians. We may have a very vague, an unhappily vague, conception of what our ministry is. It is most important for us to be quite clear as to this. We find people saying, That is not my job, that is not my ministry; and other people saying, This is my ministry—fighting for something, getting into the way of others, getting up against others over this matter of ministry.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

THE COST OF THE MINISTRY

Further, if we want to know what it will cost us to fulfil this ministry, then we must read this epistle. There is a great deal said about ministry, but there is a great deal said about the cost of it. Just take up a few verses.

"We would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning our affliction which befell us in Asia, that we were weighed down exceedingly, beyond our power, insomuch that we despaired even of life" (i. 8).

"... pressed on every side ... perplexed ... pursued ... smitten down ... always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake ... Death worketh in us" (iv. 8 - 12).

"... dishonour ... evil report ... as deceivers ... unknown ... dying ... chastened ... sorrowful ... poor ... having nothing" (vi. 8 - 10).

That is a good catalogue of the afflictions which beset those who are engaged in this ministry.

THE DYNAMIC OF THIS MINISTRY

Then again, if we want to learn what it really is that enables us to go on in this ministry, the best place to read about it is in this epistle which is before us.

"Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (iv. 6).

That is not the only explanation. You can find further explanation of what it was that enabled the Apostle to go on in spite of everything. Here, it is, as it were, gathered up together and put in one all-embracing statement—"God hath shined in"; there has been an inshining.

THE RESULT OF THE MINISTRY

But not only is it important for us to know what our ministry is, to realise what it will cost us to fulfil it, and to know the dynamic of it. We must go still further and see this—how we can judge of its fulfilment. We are entitled to know how we are succeeding, whether we are succeeding in this ministry, or not. How shall we judge of whether we are fulfilling our ministry? I suggest it is here in these verses.

"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" (iii. 18).

"... being made manifest that ye are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in tables that are hearts of flesh" (iii. 3).

This is the evidence that the Apostle has not laboured in vain: "Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ" (A.V.). That is the real subject of the third chapter—letters that commend. Paul said, 'I do not need any letters of commendation, as some do: these Corinthians, in the midst of this sensual city, are a commendation of my ministry; they are the evidence that I am the minister of Christ.' Why? Because they had shining faces. If we are fulfilling our ministry, there will be shining faces all around. If we are not fulfilling our ministry, there will be gloomy faces all around; there will be no light, no glory, no joy, no song.

Paul went from city to city—and what cities they were too! Think of Philippi, Ephesus, Thessalonica, Corinth—what cities they were! But everywhere he went, the result of his going, the consequence of his ministry, was—people with shining faces. That is the difference between a Jew and a Christian. Paul brings it out in this third chapter. He speaks about people with gloomy faces, with a veil over their faces; their hearts had never been touched, they have never had the precious Name of Christ written upon their hearts. Paul says, 'My ministry, by the Holy Spirit, is writing Christ upon fleshly tables of men's hearts. It is transforming work.'

THE MINISTRY DEFINED

"We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (iv. 5).

Here is the ministry defined for us in two simple statements. Christ Jesus the Lord—Christ Jesus as Lord. That was one thing. That takes preaching, you know. It takes a good deal to preach Christ Jesus the Lord. It is so much easier to preach ourselves. Sometimes we meet people in conversation, and it is 'I' all the time, just like a horrible, discharging ulcer. I, I. You meet other people, and they do not seem to have any consciousness of themselves. It is 'the Lord' all the time; ministering Christ. "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord". That is one side of Paul's ministry as defined here.

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Then the other side—"ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake". When we go to the East, the great temptation is to take something of European 'superiority' with us, and to treat these other poor people as 'down there'; not to dare to suggest that we have come to serve them, lest they should expect too much of us. But if a man has had that which the Apostle had, he goes everywhere to be the doormat of everybody, to be the servant of all. That is our ministry; that is how we preach Christ as Lord. We cannot preach Christ as Lord by going round as little lords ourselves. We cannot really show He has conquered us if we are holding any ground for ourselves. It is only by being the dust of His feet, the servants of all men, that our ministry is fulfilled, because it has this great governing thing in it all—He is the Lord.

THE MINISTRY THE RESULT OF A REVELATION OF CHRIST IN GLORY

It was not easy for Paul to come to that position. A great thing had to be done, and he tells us what it was and how it was. He says to us that he saw the glory of God. I wonder if we have had any real breaking in of the glory of God upon the heart? What is it? How would you define the glory of God? It is that He is perfect in every direction. There are men who are very strong in some directions, and very pleasing to us in certain respects, but our God is perfect in every direction; and that perhaps is hardly sufficient. We can say that there is a concentration of perfection in every direction, or that He exceeds in every direction. He is glorious. He is not just good, He is not just perfect, but if we can imagine a plural in the perfect, he is a concentration of perfection in every direction. That is the glory of God. That had broken in upon the Apostle Paul.

But he says that he saw it in the face of Jesus Christ. Where did he see Jesus Christ? There is a hymn that we sing:

'Marvel not that Christ in glory
All my inmost heart hath won—
Not a star to cheer my darkness,
But a light beyond the sun'.

That is what arrested Paul on the Damascus road: not Christ on earth, but Christ in glory. That is what upset all his previous thinking and all his previous theology—Christ in glory. He had to explain Jesus of Nazareth in glory.

'I have seen the face of Jesus:
Tell me not of aught beside;
I have heard the voice of Jesus—
All my soul is satisfied.'

Paul gives us the explanation, tells us what was the dynamic of his ministry and his life, and it was just that; he had seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And he went all through those great cities of Asia ministering Christ, writing that blessed Name upon the fleshly tables of men's hearts with the Spirit of the living God. Christ, the revelation of the Father; Christ, the bond between man and God; Christ, the giver of the Holy Spirit. Christ, the purity for the sinful; Christ the merit of the guilty; Christ the power for all the weak. It is all in one blessed word—Christ! God has revealed His glory.

THE LIGHT OF A NEW CREATION

It is significant that the Apostle takes us, as it were, right back to the beginning. He says: "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness" (A.V.). Why is he going back to Genesis i, to link up his experience with that which God did at the Creation? When God, in a scene of chaos and desolation, first commanded light to shine, what did it indicate? It indicated first that the Lord was there. Though it was chaotic, though there was desolation, waste and darkness, the Lord was there. That is the first thing that is indicated by the coming forth of light. Secondly, it is an indication that God was there with intention—intention to change that situation into something quite different. Further, when the light appeared, other things also appeared—life, life under Divine government, and life all consummated in a man after God's own image.

So Paul, when he is trying to describe something of what happened to him, takes us back to Genesis i. He refers us to the beginning, to a creation which has fallen into ruin, but he is doing that in order to bring us to the threshold of another creation which is going to be consummated and which is going to fulfil the purpose of God. When he brings us to the light of a new creation, he brings us to a Person; and he shows to us how that, in the person of God's Son, there is an outshining of God's glory, that puts into us new hope, new confidence, new direction for our lives, new strength for the way which He has appointed for us to take. The glory of God, he says, had shined into his heart.

THE KNOWLEDGE THAT BRINGS ILLUMINATION

He says—"the light of the knowledge of the glory of God". Not all knowledge gives light. God

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

had intimated that, and it was very soon discovered when He warned the man not to turn away from the Tree of Life to the Tree of Knowledge. He knew it was possible for man to have two kinds of knowledge, and it was very soon proved that man did have, as a result of disobedience, a knowledge which God had not ordained: a knowledge of shame, of fear, of broken communion, of sin and failure; an experience of shadow, not of light; of bondage, not of liberty. Man did have another knowledge, and there are still many to-day possessing that knowledge, which does not enrich, or strengthen, or carry us through.

If a man only has knowledge that he has made mistakes and failed, that there is a doubt about his position and relationship with God, then there is no vitality in his life, no shining on his face. The Lord Jesus Christ brought a knowledge of God and of God's glory which resulted in illumination. It is "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Those who have shining faces, those who have a song in a day of trial, those who are able to go on in spite of many perplexities and discouragements, are evidently those who have more than the ordinary men around them. They are those into whose heart there has been this shining of the glory of God.

OUR MINISTRY IS CHRIST

Our ministry in preaching—yes, and in living—is Christ. I admit that I have had many other desires. I confess that in my work for the Lord I have had other motives. And now I see them all to have been foolish and missing the mark; and I have come to learn from this epistle that my ministry is getting Christ written on the hearts of men by the Holy Ghost. If I do not succeed in that, then I have failed altogether. If I do anything beside that, I am using time and energy on that which does not count for God or man. It is only when the Lord Jesus Christ, the glory of the Father and the satisfaction of all man's need, has been written by the

Holy Spirit upon responsive hearts, that God is going to get His portion in men's lives. There were days when we laboured for a happy congregation, for a well-ordered church, when we looked for the establishing on the earth of a form, a pattern of things which we had seen in the heavens; there were days when we thought in terms of something here that commended itself to men. But those days are past, and we see now there is only one ambition to which we are to be given—and that is that upon men's hearts this precious Name shall be written; Christ shall so be preached by lip and by life that *He*, and nothing else, no one else, is written upon the hearts of men.

I wonder if we are engaged in this ministry—for this *is* our ministry, nothing else. Whether we are having contact with the unsaved, or whether we are meeting the babe that has just stepped out of one life into another, or whether we are going to those who have gone on further with the Lord; whether we are going to individuals or to companies, this is our business—to 'preach Christ Jesus as Lord and ourselves as servants' of all men, so that He comes into His rightful place, is seen and is acclaimed; His glory is registered upon the hearts of men. God gives us sufficient resource for all the trials, perplexities, dishonours, disappointments and frustrations which we encounter, if only there has been this inshining upon the heart of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

"Seeing we have this ministry"—and what a ministry we have! maybe in hidden places, maybe in very ordinary circumstances, maybe in the midst of many things that could kill us—but, having this ministry, "as we obtained mercy, we faint not". God help us to see in the face of Jesus Christ His glory, and so to be captured by Him that we go on ministering Christ—nothing else, nothing less. We cannot exceed it, but let us therein be fully engaged. The Lord minister to all who minister to His Son and give Him His rightful place!

A. J. F.

"TO-DAY in the middle of the twentieth century the Christian Church is confronted with challenge and with opportunity in a way and on a scale that it has not known for centuries, perhaps ever, before. This is a time of the emergence of nations, with all the accompanying clash of race and of colour, and all the problems of finding a way of living together. This is the time when humanity is

genuinely faced with the possibility of racial suicide, for men have acquired powers and tapped forces with which they can quite easily destroy each other and destroy themselves.

At such a time our thoughts inevitably go back to the days of the early church, days in which the Church obviously seethed and surged with power.

When Jesus had been crucified and had risen

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again, the sum total of the Church was one hundred and twenty persons (Acts i. 15). There was scarcely a man of wealth or influence or power amongst them; there was scarcely a man of intellectual eminence; they were poor, they were undistinguished, and they were simple. To this little company of people there was given an incredible task: "Ye shall be witnesses unto me", said the Risen Christ, "both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts i. 8).

They were Jews, and they were to bring their message to a world where anti-Semitism was as

violent as it has been at any time in history.

Before they began the task they were bidden to wait. To wait for what or for whom? . . . When the Holy Spirit came, the task which seemed impossible became possible. Within thirty years the message of the Gospel had reached Rome, and far beyond; the members of the Church were reckoned by the hundred thousand.

The New Testament leaves us in not the slightest doubt that the power behind this miracle was the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the same power which the Church of to-day needs to confront the challenge."

SELECTED

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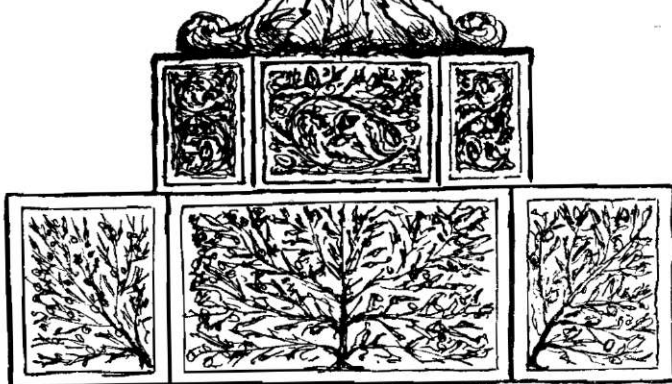
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It is not connected with any 'Movement', 'Organization', 'Mission' or separate body of Christians, but is just a ministry to "all saints". Its going forth is with the prayer and hope that it will so result in a fuller measure of Christ, a richer and 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.

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EDITORIAL

THE SPIRIT IN PRISON

THE history of Christianity from the latter days of the Apostles is the history of prisons. Not literal, material prisons, though there have been not a few of these, but prisons which are the result of man's inveterate habit of taking hold and bringing into bondage. How many times has the Spirit broken loose and moved in a new and free way, only to have that way brought under the control of man and crystallized into another 'Form', Creed, Organization, Denomination, Sect, 'Order' Community, etc.! The invariable result has been that the free movement and life of the Spirit has been cramped, or even killed, by the prison of the framework into which it has been drawn or forced. Every time we seek to express something Divine in word or form we at once limit it, and when that expression or form becomes the established and recognised formula we have in effect put fetters on the Spirit. God gives a vision, and every God-given vision has illimitable potentialities; but all too soon the vision is laid hold of by men who never had it in or of the Spirit, and the grapes of Eshcol turn to raisins in their hands. So very many of the living fruits of the heavenly country have suffered in this way, and have become dried, shrunken, ununctionless shadows of their early glory.

Upon a living movement of the Spirit, born with fire in the heart of some Prophet, successors, sponsors, or adherents build an earthly organization, and imprison the vision in a tradition. So a *Message* becomes a Creed; a "Heavenly Vision" becomes an earthly institution; a movement of the Spirit becomes a 'Work', which must be kept going by the steam of human energy, and maintained by man's resourcefulness.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Sooner or later any real or seeming departure or diversion from the 'recognised' and traditional order of Creed or practice will be heresy, to be violently suspect, repressed, and outcast. Too often what, at its beginning, was a spiritual energy producing a living organism expressing something that God really wanted and to which He gave *birth* has become something which the next generation has to sustain and work hard to keep going. The thing has developed a self-interest and it will go hard with anyone or anything interfering with it, or seeming so to do. The Spirit has become the prisoner of the institution or system, and the people become limited spiritually as the result.

Why is all this so true, resulting, as it does, in strain, divisions, jealousies, rivalries, and often deception? And, if there is any remedy, what is it?

The answer is to be found in an honest—if costly—facing of the fundamental question: Why am I where I am? Did I enter into something objectively? Was it something already formed which was presented to me, with an appeal, an argument, a 'need'? Was it a *something* at all? Or did the Spirit open the eyes of my heart, and give me a *heavenly* vision, which on one side made me cry "Woe is me" and on the other "Here am I"? Was it a life crisis? Did I take up a 'teaching', a complexion of truth, a 'work' or enterprise? Was I right at the very source of life? Was it a definite and overpowering 'apprehending' from Heaven? Is my position that of relationship to something from which I can resign? In a word, is my imprisonment that of a system or order of an outward kind, or am I the 'bondslave' of the Spirit? The Apostle Paul, in particular, shows that the former bondage or imprisonment can even be to what is in the Bible, in the form of what he calls "the letter", and the Bible—in this sense—can be 'death' ("the letter killeth"—II Cor. iii. 6). Not that we can have the Spirit and the life without the Word, but it can most certainly be the other way round.

It is so seriously important that we, and everything, shall be kept continuously in touch with the original source of life. Succession and continuation is *not* ecclesiastical, traditional, or of human choice and decision; it is certainly not policy, expediency, or fear. It is anointing—the anointed eye, ear, hand, and foot. It is a fire in the bones, not the obligations of a profession, association or idea.

The Spirit must have initiated our course and position. The Spirit must be referred to and deferred to all along the way. The Spirit will be a rebel in anything in which He may have His liberties limited; and if He is in us, He will make us such rebels. This does not for a moment mean that all rebellion and bid for what is called 'liberty' is of the Spirit. It just means that we are broken people in the realm of nature, and robbed of a power to fight for our own conceptions.

So it becomes just the issue of imprisonment to the Spirit, or something other or extra. It *must* be, at the greatest cost, and because the Spirit has done a deep and drastic thing in us—

"Here am I; I can do no other. So help me God."

EDITOR

(The above Editorial is largely suggested by the reading of an article (mostly political) by an English Member of Parliament, and published in 'The Spectator' in 1947.—Ed.)

MARCH—APRIL, 1961.

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

II. THE SECOND LAMP: THE BURNING FIRE OF FIRST LOVE

"There were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God" (Revelation iv. 5b).

"Grace to you and peace, from him which is and which was and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before the throne" (Revelation i. 4).

RETROSPECT

WE pointed out in our first meditation in this series that these 'seven lamps of fire before the throne' represent the sevenfold ministry of the Holy Spirit, in relation to the Lord Jesus as He is presented in chapter i. It is, I think, quite clear that the presentation of the Lord given in chapter i is the ground upon which the Church, as expressed in these churches, is being judged, in the light of all that the Lord had given. We said that there comes a time, sooner or later, in the history of the Lord's people, when He comes to draw up the accounts, and to challenge and test in the light of what He has given. A crisis comes, maybe in the individual life, as in the life of the whole Church, or of any local representation of it; there comes a time when the Lord, having given and been very patient, and sought to make His grace known, must say: Now, look here, we cannot just go on giving and teaching; we must know where we are over it all; we must see how much there is that really represents what has been given.

It is a time of crisis; it is a time of upheaval; it is a time of deep searching; it may be a very painful time; very big issues are bound up with such a time, as for all the future. That is what is represented by these three chapters, so far as the Church is concerned. As you go on in the book you find that the same thing is carried into the world and the nations, and everything is being judged in the light of the *fact* of Jesus Christ. The title of the book ought to be its first words—not the title that men have given, 'The Revelation of John the Divine', but "The Revelation of Jesus Christ". That is its title, and that applies not only to the beginning, but right through the whole book. Everything is being brought to the judgment throne by the Holy Spirit.

Now this, as we have said, this presentation of the Lord Jesus is mainly a sevenfold characteriza-

tion; that is, He is presented in seven particular features, and the lamps of fire correspond to those features. These lamps of fire are the burning testimony of the Holy Spirit to the Lord Jesus, heavenward—"before the throne". Later on in the book, you will find the phrase used earthward—"the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth" (ch. v. 6b). So that, in Heaven and on the earth, everything is being judged and determined according to Christ. That is the basis of the final judgment.

We looked at the first of these lamps of fire: I would like to add a word to what we said in that connection. It relates to the feature of Christ presented "clothed with a garment down to the foot" (i. 13). This is the Holy Spirit's burning testimony to the fact that it is only what Christ is, as a covering for all that we are, that can stand before God. That is one of the seven things that 'the Spirit saith to the churches'—to us. It is a *burning* testimony.

How greatly has the Lord taken pains to burn that into the Church, that it must be a Church that is covered as to its whole natural life. If it is not, as at Corinth, and some other places, there is a terrible exposure and a terrible judgment. The threatened judgment of the church in Corinth was, as you know, that all its works would go up in smoke in the testing of the fire, and they would be saved only, and just, 'so as by fire' (I Cor. iii. 13—15), with nothing else, but just getting through—everything else lost. Because they were 'naked'; that is, as we find from that letter, it is what they were in themselves. Paul says: 'When this and that obtains, are ye not men? do you not speak as men? You are behaving as men!' (iii. 3, 4). He is saying: This is not Christ! To behave like that, to go on like that, to do those things, to have those conditions—that is just not Christ! You are 'naked' before God; you need to be 'clothed' with Christ!

That is a burning thing in the New Testament. May we not be found 'naked before Him' in the judgment of the first lamp of fire! How intense is its heat! how searching is its light! how discriminating is its effect! Let us not take this just as words, as 'teaching'. You and I have to stand in the "everlasting burnings" (Is. xxxiii. 14b). The test now is, and the test at last is going to be:

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How much of Christ adorns us, to the hiding of what we are in ourselves? That is something to

think about, to pray about. It is our battle-ground! That is the Testimony of Jesus.

THE SECOND LAMP: STEADFAST DIVINE LOVE

Now we pass to the second lamp. If these lamps—these energies of the Holy Spirit—for a lamp of fire is a thing of energy; there is nothing merely passive about that; it is energetic—if these lamps of fire correspond to those aspects of Christ in the presentation, what is the second lamp? to what does the Spirit direct attention in the second place? Again, look at the vision of the Son of Man, and then look at the churches. You come on it immediately: “. . . clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle” (i. 13).

We know, in Biblical symbolism, what a ‘girdle’ suggests or represents: it is strength for action; ‘girdedness’, not looseness; the garment drawn together so that it does not, in any way, interfere with the work on hand. The girdle, then, is strength for action. ‘Breasts’ ever and always suggest service of love. And the ‘gold’, as we know well, is that which is of God. Putting these three things together, we have Christ in the feature of steadfast and purposeful Divine love, as against the fickleness and impersistence of human love, of man’s love, as shown toward God.

The first address is to Ephesus; and the final word to Ephesus, with whatever commendation there could be, with all possible recognition of virtues—the final word is: “I have this against thee, that thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works . . .” (ii. 4, 5). First love . . . first works . . .

There is your example. The Lord comes in terms of this steadfast, purposeful, consistent, persistent Divine love, to which they and we owe everything. Where would any of us be if He had not kept on loving, persisted in love? if He had been as fickle as we are, as impersistent as is our love? That was the trouble, and that, to the Lord, outweighed all the other values at Ephesus; it outweighed everything else. Indeed, He placed the continued serviceableness of that vessel to Himself upon this one issue—*first love!*

We turn to the Gospel by John; we have this: “Jesus knowing that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end”—‘to the uttermost!’ (John xiii. 1). And the next is the ‘girdle’ of that love. “He . . . riseth from supper, and layeth

aside his garments; and he took a towel, and girded himself. Then he poureth water into the bason, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded’ (v. 4, 5). ‘Having loved . . . He loved to the end’—persistent love!

We all know so well how one man declared that his love for his Master could stand up to anything, even to death; and we know what happened! But I notice this, that when it records Peter’s declaration, ‘Though all should forsake Him, he would not; he would go to death . . .’, I notice that the writer adds: ‘. . . and so said all of them’ (Matt. xxvi. 31–35). So said all of them! We put it all on to Peter, but they all said the same thing; you can almost hear them. Peter said that, and so said the other ‘And so will I’, and another, ‘So will I’, ‘. . . and so will I’—so said *all* of them! Then Jesus said, ‘All you shall be offended with Me this night, for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered . . .’; and in the sequel, when the soldiers came from the high priest, with their torches and their spears and staves, it says: ‘they *all* forsook Him and fled . . .’ (v. 56b).

Well, He knew all about them, how they were made—He told them so; but ‘having loved, He loved to the end’. He was indeed girded with that kind of Divine love that presses through, that suffers long, that does not give up; persistent, faithful love—*faithful* love. We will all agree that that is a characteristic of the Lord Jesus, and we must be impressed with the fact that the very first thing He talks about to the Church is that very thing. When it comes to the seven churches, that is really where it begins.

THE MEANING OF ‘FIRST LOVE’

How needful it is that we should all be before the ‘lamp of fire’, and be searched, and that we see in its light what the Lord is after: that which is here called *first* love. What are its characteristics? Surely it is *faithfulness to the first motive*. Most of us can probably look back to a time in our Christian experience when the Lord so captured and captivated us that He gained a complete committal of our lives to Himself; He was Everything to us. If there is anyone reading these lines who cannot say that that was their experience, it is still

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not too late! You can be captivated by the Lord Jesus more than once in your life, and some of us have known mightier captivations at different times. But those of us who do know that first, wonderful experience when first we saw the Lord, and the Lord found us, how full of Him we were! While we were having to be engaged in other things during the day, how absorbed we were with the Lord, just longing for the other things to be disposed of, so as to be able to get busy for the Lord in a more direct and immediate way. How He filled everything for us!

Now the apostle Paul gives us a marvellous picture in his letter to the Philippians. First of all he says that that is exactly what happened to the Lord Jesus Himself. (It is not stated directly, but there is no doubt that this is what is meant, speaking after the manner of men.) There was a point where the love of the Son toward the Father, in terms of the Father's interests and glory, heart purpose and desire, was so great, when it so captivated Him, that He stripped Himself, 'emptied Himself' of everything in Heaven's glory—what He called in His prayer 'the glory that I had with Thee before the world was' (John xvii. 5). He let it all go out of His love for the Father, and the Father's love for this world. That is one side of the picture.

Turn over the page, and you find that that same love has been begotten in the heart of this man, Paul. He tells us, in strong, full terms, what effect it had upon him. He enumerates all the glories that men call glories in this world—glories of ancestry, of inheritance, of birth, of training, of position, of achievement—all the things that this world calls 'glories'. And then Jesus comes into the picture for Paul, and he says: 'Those things which were gain to me'—in those days, in that realm—'these have I counted loss for Christ. Yea, I count them as refuse for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord' (Phil. iii. 7, 8). Here is a man, following—maybe only in the human terms—but following the way of his Lord, the way of love, and showing that with him, right at the beginning, first love meant the Lord having first place in all things; indeed, nothing else could be allowed to stand in the place or the way of the Lord Jesus. That is first love: what it does, and the effect that it has.

Now we know that Ephesus had had an experience like that. You know what happened when the Word was preached to them. When the Lord Jesus was brought to them, they were devotees of the sciences and of the pagan mysteries, and they had a library which ran into a very great sum of

money for value. When Jesus came, through His servant, they piled up their books, their treasures, their costly things, in the market place, and sent them all up in flames, That is their value compared with Jesus! That is first love! 'Consider from whence thou art fallen'! (Rev. ii. 5).

HOW FIRST LOVE MAY BE LOST

This is what the Lord comes back for. He says: 'I have loved you like that; that is how I have loved you, and kept on loving you like that, at very great cost. But I have not counted the cost for love's sake, for love never does count the cost, in that way. I have loved you like that; I have given you so much; I really have given you so much, for so long. What is the measure of your return? Is it like that now? Was it more like that at one time? Is it less like that now? Is it?' Blessed be the man or the woman who can say, No, it is more to-day than ever! That is good. But it may be that some of us have got to meet this challenge. Oh, the blunted edge, blunted by familiarity with Divine things—how the edge can be blunted by familiarity! 'We have heard it all before! we know it all!' Perhaps that was Ephesus—the tragedy of familiarity, of an easy access to Divine things. When it is so easily obtainable, and there is so much of it to hand, how it just blunts the edge of the appetite! We settle down—well, because it does not matter very much; we will not take the trouble to put ourselves out; it is always there when we want it! There was a time, perhaps, when we would go miles, hundreds of miles, for a bit of spiritual food. To-day, perhaps we might not be willing to walk a mile! It is so possible for first love to lose its edge because of this familiarity, and this facility, and this abundance.

Or it might be the lost freshness of a walk in the Spirit. A walk in the Spirit always has a freshness about it. It does not matter how long you have been on the way, how much you have received, how much you know: the marvel of a life in the Spirit is that you never seem to overtake what there is for you. It does not lie in the past; indeed, you know quite well that your life will not be long enough to catch up on what you have already sensed, discerned, I am not exaggerating. A life in the Spirit has about it a continual freshness, newness; a sense that there is always something more. Now that was the characteristic at the beginning, was it not? We thought: 'What a world we have come into! what a new world! How everything is new! What can we do with it? It is so big, so wonderful, so great! It is such a wonderful world we

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have come into, this world of Christ! Is that true of us to-day in our spiritual life?

It may be the deadly effect of formality, of routine. Perhaps we have made Christian things a routine; we have brought it down to that; it is the form of things—'This is the way it is done!' May God deliver us from the blighting, deadly effect of formality, and make everything live! Now, we cannot do that, mark you, by trying to be original, and change things in order to get out of that difficulty; you cannot do it that way. This needs the burning lamp of the Spirit. If the fire is not there, no methods, or changed methods, or uniqueness or singularity, or anything else, can take its place.

It may be putting 'things' in the place of the Person, even Christian things. Christian work, you know, can be a very, very harmful thing, if it becomes an end in itself. The enemy is very concerned to make Christian workers so occupied with the 'work', and all its demands, and all its many aspects, as to draw away from the Lord Himself. That is the confession, the tragedy, of many a servant of the Lord. The work—you have got to give addresses; very well, very well . . . But there is a subtle snare in always reading your Bible, or listening to messages, with your eye upon people to whom you are going to give addresses. You cannot believe how damaging that is. If you and I do not speak to others the thing that has already spoken to us, and dealt with us, and challenged us, and faced us up, the Lord deliver us from our speaking. Yes, the work, the business demands, can come into the place of the Lord Himself. And the fire is damped down like that!

First love is always characterized by vision and purpose. We know that in the natural; it is even

more true in the spiritual. It means that there is a future; there is something on ahead; there is a tremendous prospect. That is a constituent of first love. Something to live for now; some purpose in life; some meaning in life; something ahead that draws you on. That is first love, quite pure and simple. Are we like that? Vision, purpose—if that goes, we are 'fallen' in the eyes of the Lord; we have 'come down'. First love is preparedness to suffer, to pay a price, to go on with the object of our love, whatever it cost, and whatever people say or do. That is first love.

Many other features belong to this, 'thy first love'. And because of it, 'thy first works'. May the Lord find His appeal to us having some effect in drawing out our hearts again. If this does search us like the lamp; if this does burn us like the fire, may we listen, 'repent, and do the first works'. 'Listen to what the Spirit saith unto the churches.' We know we shall never fully measure up to the Lord in this matter; we shall always fall short of the Pattern. But the question is: There is a lamp of fire—is it burning? There is no hope unless the 'lamp of fire'—in other words, the Holy Spirit—is having His effect in our lives. But that is why He is here; that is His work: to reproduce in us what is true of the Lord Jesus. And we all agree that *this* is true of Him: 'Having loved . . .' He persists in love; He does not give up; His love does not break down and disappear. The Holy Spirit has come that the love of Christ—that kind of love—should be shed abroad in our hearts.

The Lord comes before us in this vision; He speaks; and He says: 'This is what I am like; this is what I want you to be like.'

First love!

T. A-S.

THE EYES OF HIS GLORY

(Continued)

Reading: Ezekiel i. 25 - 28; Exodus xvi. 1 - 15; Psalm lxxviii. 18 - 22; Philipians iv. 11 - 20; 1 Corinthians i. 29 - 31.

THE quest of God is for a people in fellowship with His glory, who here on earth reveal the essential character of that glory—in measure before men, and in fuller measure before principalities and powers.

Though the Lord had a people from the beginning, when He called Abram and from Abram's loins there issued a nation which was His earthly

people, a type of the Church, unhappily that people did not represent in completeness the thought of God; there was always breakdown somewhere. But we can equally say that right through the long history of Israel's disappointments, and of that which is the anti-type of Israel, the Church, though the Lord has not found a people in entirety after His thought, He has always had some, however few, in the bigger company who did represent in a real degree what His thought was. It may be only one or two out of the nation, but still some to whom the Lord could really point and say: 'This

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is after My thought ; I go on with this little unto the final realisation of My end, even if I have to put all the rest aside.'

That principle is seen operating right from the beginning of Israel's history in the wilderness, and we pick up the story at the sixteenth chapter of Exodus and say immediately that that which represents God's thought in a real measure is not the whole of Israel, but Moses and Aaron—at any rate in the portion that we shall be concerned with at present. There is a significant exception in Numbers xx, 1 – 13, but we do not purpose to deal with that at this stage.

They represent God's real thought as over against the company who did not so represent His thought. We shall observe again and again that in connection with these two men—sometimes with one or two others added—we are told that the glory of the Lord appeared, not necessarily to them, but to the rest of Israel. We can say, therefore, that Moses and Aaron represent that which in the New Testament is called "the glory of Christ" (II Cor. viii. 23). God can point to these two on the earth and say: 'These are My thought of glory.' If we can analyse the characteristic features of these two men, we shall see what it is to have the glory of the Lord upon us.

GOD'S END—CONFORMITY TO CHRIST

We may put this question to ourselves: How, in such a day as ours, are we to know which are the people after God's own thought? The answer is a simple one. The more the glory of Christ is manifested through a people, the more are they according to God's thought. That must be a question of degree. You could not point to any man on earth to-day and say: With that man the glory of Christ is revealed in fulness. But of some you can say: There is a wonderful Christ-likeness in them! That is to say, the essential features of Christ are seen in them. Well, the more that is true of a man the more does that man represent God's thought ; and this is an obviously true statement because we know that the revealing of the glory of Christ through a company of people is God's whole purpose in this age. The more the glory of the Lord appears as alongside men and women, in that measure do they represent God's thought. So when we pray that the Lord may make us a people according to His own heart, all that we are desiring really is that more and more may the essential features of Jesus Christ be seen in us, through us, and accompanying us wherever we go. The glory is the attestation which God gives that such a man is after His own heart.

As has been said earlier, the first result of really apprehending the glory of Christ and the meaning of the Blood in relation to it is an instinctive consciousness of our own not daring to approach, and the consequential working in us of the sense of the utter baseness of ourselves and the need of humbling ourselves before the Lord. You will remember that it is said of Moses that he was very meek. Here was a man who went right up, typically, into the glory, and he was the meekest man on the face of the earth. Moses illustrates that side.

Then there is the terror of the Lord, relating to the touching of that glory other than under the cover of the Blood. You will remember that Moses and Aaron spoke ill-advisedly, they got out of their cover in the Lord, they touched the fire of that holiness, and God said: "Because ye believed not in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this assembly into the land . . ." It illustrates that even a Moses, even those who are God's precious witnesses, dare not deal with that glory in any presumption or get outside of the cover of the precious work of Calvary, lest that glory break out on them, and work some consequence which means loss of something precious to them and to God, because they did not regard the holiness of the glory of the Lord.

GLORY REVEALED AS FAITH IN GOD

Exodus xvi. 10: "And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud."

You have here the children of Israel embarking at length upon their wilderness journey. They have come through the Red Sea in good spirit, and now they are out in the wilderness, and no doubt by this time the provision they brought with them has come to an end, and they are beginning to realise a little bit what they have come into. Just as when we came to the Lord we did so with great delight of heart, but very soon we woke up to the fact that we had come into something we did not quite realise before, something which faced us with situations we had never bargained for. Even had we stopped to think what would be the further steps in the way, we could never fully have known, but as we advanced we found ourselves very seriously up against things. These people of Israel are taking their first steps in the life of faith, and they have suddenly awakened to the nature of the thing that they have moved into. They have suddenly discovered that in this life nature offers them nothing at all. They have got into a wilderness, and

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where are they going to get their resources from? Being the people they are, babes as yet in spiritual education, at heart an unbelieving company, they at once begin to murmur. The Psalmist in Psalm lxxviii tells us the kind of language they use, in addition to the words reported in Exodus xvi: "Can God?" That is typical language of the people who are launched out on a life of faith, but who are not spiritually big enough to go through as yet. It is the evidence of their need for being educated. So they murmur.

They murmur against the Lord's servants who have brought them out. The Lord's servants wisely remind them that it was not they who brought them out, and that their murmurings were not against them but against God. Then Moses and Aaron, under the instruction of the Lord, tell the people that the Lord will provide, and we read that the people looked toward the wilderness, the place to which they were going, the place in which this position was going to be still more acute, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. Here the appearing of the glory of the Lord is like the sudden manifesting of those eyes of glory that have been watching, those ears that have been listening, as if in protest against the murmuring and complaining on the one hand, but in attestation of the strong faith on the part of the two men, Moses and Aaron, who by contrast are standing for the Lord's true thought. The eyes of His glory, as it were, are making themselves evident, as much as to say: "I am here with My two witnesses; I am standing absolutely with them." We can interpret it as meaning this, that the glory of the Lord was revealed by the attitude and position taken up by the two men as opposed to the attitude of all the other unbelieving company.

So there you have one element in the revealing of the glory of the Lord by a man or by a company. It is this—standing in a day when nature can offer nothing, when resources are at a discount, when everything counsels hopelessness, impossibility, despair, death; in such a day there is a man who says: God can! And if you and I stand like that we are revealing the glory of the Lord.

The life of faith is in its essence the corresponding thing to that which we saw in Ezekiel's vision—a firmament and a throne above the firmament. Everything is directed from a realm which is cut off from the earth, separated from the earth, separated from nature, everything coming from above.

It is obvious that if the Lord is going to have a people on the earth now to manifest this aspect of His glory, it demands that that people be so located that they have to draw every resource from above.

That is the expression of the glory of the Lord, because not only does the world at large say: "Can God?" but the greater part of the people of God say: "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" As far as we know, all the people except two here said that. That is the typical language of the majority. The language of these two, revealing the glory of the Lord, is: "God can!" It is the reversing of the natural order. It is essential for God's testimony that He gets some people into such positions where they are forced back to this: "We have no resource anywhere else, but we know God can and God will." So perhaps if you are a little surprised that the Lord is so shutting you up that you simply have no resource anywhere, and do not know where to turn except to Himself, you are in the day of demonstrating the glory of God in a way you never dreamed of.

GLORY—NOT REMOTE, BUT FOR
DAILY REALISATION

To illustrate this turn to II Chronicles xxxii. 30: "*This same Hezekiah also stopped the upper spring of the waters of Gihon, and brought them straight down on the west side of the city of David.*"

Sennacherib had not yet come up against Jerusalem, but he was drawing near, and it was evident that his arrival could not be long delayed. Verse thirty tells us what Hezekiah did in advance of the coming of the Assyrians. It is necessary to know the geography of the city to get the significance of his act. The City of David stood upon a hill and the waters of Gihon by nature sprang up outside the city wall and flowed down the slope of the hill away from the city, thus benefitting Judah's enemies in the event of a siege of Jerusalem. Now before ever the enemy came near, Hezekiah so acted that those waters, which would have flowed down to serve the enemy, were turned inside the city. That which would have been strength to the enemy was so turned inwardly that it became sustenance for the Lord's people. This was done before the crisis.

If you study the language of the Assyrians, you will see that it is always along the line of: "Can your God deliver you, when the gods of all other nations have failed before us?" This is the language of sheer unbelief. Hezekiah takes pains in advance of the big crisis to turn to his own account that which would otherwise sustain unbelief. For us the principle is this: If, in the presence of the comparatively small trials of faith that come the way of all of us day by day, we ask ourselves fearfully:

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Is the Lord able to save us in this trial? Can He supply this need of ours? Is not this situation hopeless and had we not better give up in despair?—such language will quickly feed the natural unbelief in us, and when the really big crisis comes we shall be overwhelmed. Turn the waters of your daily trials into the city, that faith and not unbelief may be sustained by them! Cultivate the holy habit of reasoning with yourself thus: ‘Here is a difficulty, but, glory to God, there is a way out of this! God can! I know that all things are possible to Him!’ Supposing that is the acquired habit of our lives; supposing that is the way we look at every thing, big or little, that comes along! Well, in the hour of the big crisis we shall find, for our consolation, that in our hearts there has been developed faith in God’s ability to do the impossible, and when we face the terrible crisis of the Assyrian besieging, our attitude will not be: Can God? but: God can!

Of course it is more than a mere habit. It is the exercise of faith in God, of believing in the victory of Calvary, and the all-sufficiency of Christ, of seeing Christ as the Store-house of every necessary resource, as ALL and in all. The Lord will send us plenty of problems of the minor kind, through the ordinary duties of our life, to encourage that holy exercise. So often the first thing many people say is: We shall never get out of this! That is the spontaneous expression of natural unbelief. The man of real faith would say: Here is a situation for the Lord to prove Himself in! I wonder how He will solve it! You could allow unbelief in your heart to carry you away, and say: “Can God?” But the man who has seen anything of the Lord, who knows anything of the glory, who recognises that the Throne of glory is for him in all situations, though he may say it tremblingly, yet he will say triumphantly: ‘My God shall fulfil every need according to His riches *in glory*.’ The riches are in the Throne of glory. The man who thus walks in fellowship with the Throne is the man who, in the hour of a supreme crisis, is not going to say: Can God? But: God can! You see what it is to turn the waters which could serve the Adversary, so that they serve the interests of the Lord.

This is fellowship with the Throne which is separated from the earth, a heavenly fellowship operating along the line of faith, with Philippians iv. 19 as one of its foundations. It is worth noting that that text, which is so often tritely quoted, demands a revelation of the glory of Christ for anything like its adequate comprehension.

Do you see the character of the witness who is going to reveal the glory of Christ? One feature is,

that having seen that glory, he is able *in all circumstances* to say: ‘It is all right; earth offers me nothing; nature says No. So far as I am concerned, things are hopelessly impossible, *but* God has a way, God can!’ Hezekiah bade his people say nothing to the Assyrian: “The people held their peace, and answered him not a word; for the king’s commandment was, saying, Answer him not” (II Kings xviii. 36). Do you see the spiritual principle? Take on the argument of unbelief and begin to reason with it, and you will go down at once. Let unbelief come and knock at the door of your heart with all manner of suggestions; the man who knows God has his eyes on the Throne and in his heart is saying: “Our God is able . . . and he will.”

Hezekiah’s prayer to the Lord is: “Incline thine ear, O Lord, and hear; open thine eyes, O Lord, and see.” He is appealing to the eyes of glory to deal with the situation. He is not taking on the argument of: Can God? He is resting in the fact that God can, and he says: ‘Lord, let Thine eyes of glory behold this challenge; we are counting on the Throne.’

GLORY IS REVEALED THROUGH THE CROSS

There is a deep principle behind, something which leaves none of us untouched, because we are all called to the life of faith. It is not only those who leave business, who cease to receive a regular income and trust the Lord to supply their needs. That is not the life of faith in its entirety. Certainly the principle should operate in that matter, but the life of faith is just as necessary in the matter of patience as of finance. The Lord may put you down in a provoking situation to lead the life of faith. You say: ‘Lord, I want to glorify Thee here.’ What does it mean to glorify the Lord? Well, this—that in that situation, which is so provocative that you have no patience in yourself to meet it, you have all the patience you need as you hold fast to the Lord in glory, and people are bound to remark: ‘You are very patient under this provocation! How is it?’ And in that moment the glory of the Lord has appeared and others have seen a patience in you which was not of yourself. That is the glory of the Lord appearing in the wilderness. Other people see in you an expression of Him who is in the Throne. The Lord has to put us into circumstances which force us back on Him for the resources we do not possess in ourselves. Hence in every experience that makes a demand upon the children of God for something that they do not have by nature, or that they cannot acquire in any

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way from nature, and which can only be had from God, in so far as they draw from God they are revealing the glory of God.

The way out from the circumstances of difficulty and embarrassment in which you are found is fellowship with the Lord in glory. Of course, that involves this—that you have utterly renounced the world and its resources. There are some realms where you might go to the world, as a matter of physical possibility, and obtain resources; you might have your bazaars to raise your funds; but that is a realm which you have voluntarily renounced. On moral and spiritual grounds you have said: ‘I am crucified to that, and that is crucified to me; the Cross has come in between, and beyond the line that the Cross makes is forbidden ground.’ Equally the realm of the self life is beyond the pale for the spiritual man. His language is: “I can of myself do nothing.” But it may be argued that in certain realms a man is gifted by nature. Is this not a capacity that can be drawn upon? No! In this matter he is as though he had nothing, though he be the most gifted man on earth. Hence the need for the Lord to weaken our strength in the way. But deeper than we realise there may be a leaning upon some sense of enablement which is in us by nature, and the Lord has to allow certain experiences which so find us out that when we do rest upon what was there we find it is not sufficient to bear the weight. And so often breakdown, failure, disappointment, collapse, and sometimes shame come to us, until we wake up to the fact that we were trusting, after all, in something which was in ourselves. The thing which alone glorifies God is that which is from above—in other words, the life of the enthroned Christ mediated *through* us by the Holy Spirit.

GLORY IS MEASURED BY HEAVENLY STANDARDS

There is one other point we must stress. Paul said: “And my God shall fulfil every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” Just before this he has said, speaking of the gift which Epaphroditus had brought in the name of the Philippians: “I have all things, and abound; I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the things that came from you . . .” Oh! then, what Epaphroditus brought was such a large hamper that it kept Paul in provisions for a long time! No! not at all! He goes on to say: “. . . an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God.” That is what has made Paul so satisfied. He has received that which has come to him as the

odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God. You see what it suggests. It suggests that for this man, who was a New Testament counterpart of Moses and Aaron, an entirely different scale of values is operating from that which the world would have; and he is finding his satisfaction and delight, not in the possession of some material thing, as other men would have done, but in the *spiritual* value attaching to it. The gift might have been of little intrinsic value. He values it because of its spiritual preciousness in the sight of the Lord.

We are in a materialistic world, and often the Lord’s people judge everything by its physical, financial, material value. They count the number of people attending your meetings, and if there were three hundred they say it was a good meeting, and if there were thirty they say it was a poor one. This is a scale of values which may be utterly of this world. Paul had a scale of values which was not earthly but heavenly, not material but spiritual.

That is a challenge. What scale of values have we? By what do we measure success? Is it the intensity of our outward activities, the number of meetings we take, or the length of the message we find we are able to give? We can have this wrong scale of values, and it all detracts from the glory. The glory is not in that.

GLORY IN CHRIST

What does Jeremiah say? That which is taken up in 1 Cor. i. 30, 31. In Jeremiah ix there is this:

“Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth, and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.”

The Apostle Paul takes that up, and after saying: “*But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption*”, he goes on: “*that according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*”

What the Apostle is stressing there is this, that there is a far greater reason to glory in what Christ is to us, than in all our riches, in all our wisdom, in all that we have, and all that we are, and all that may come to us in the course of our ministry and our life. The thing that matters most is that we should know the Lord. By that standard how much worth are we? Our true value to the Lord is not in

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what we *do* but in what we *are*. You may have seemed in a given period of time to have done little that can be outwardly viewed and measured, but those who are spiritually discerning may see that you have grown in that time from a spiritual pygmy to a giant. True ministry is not what we do, but the measure in which we express the One in the glory. That is service; that is ministry; revealing the glory of the Lord here upon earth wherever and in whatever circumstances we may be in the will of God. Paul gloried because there was a sweet savour of Christ by the gift of the Philippians. He has just said: "I have all things, and abound . . ." He is not going to be overwhelmed with delight because he has received the gift—the gift was nothing to him in itself. He could go on and trust the Lord without it; but he says: 'I am so full because Christ has been glorified by your gift!' You see the scale of values is tremendously high.

We must put this question to ourselves. What is our scale of values? Where do we stand? What is it that constitutes for us the real measure of anything at all? God's measure is the degree in which He sees the likeness of His Son, the degree in which the Spirit of Christ is expressed, the degree in which those who are concerned with that thing are growing in grace. That is God's scale of values; 'he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.' Christ is 'made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.' What a contrast between the bulk of the Lord's people and the few! The bulk measure everything by its outward effect, its visible dimensions, and the few measure everything by its spiritual value. It is the inward growth of Christ, the measure in which Christ is developed in a soul or in a company, that makes the true measure of that company. Laodicea says: "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing . . ." Ah! there is a wrong scale of values. The Lord's comment is: "I counsel thee to buy of me gold

refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich . . . and eyesalve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see." When your eyes are anointed so that you can see, you will see the eyes of glory up there looking down, and what they are looking for is their own likeness here. That glory yonder is seeking to find some reflection here.

It is the life of faith into which we are called that will be the glory of Christ in us. The Lord will see to it that we are touched somewhere. He will so place us that we are forced to recognise we need something we have not got. It will be some moral grace very likely, patience, love; we shall suddenly discover that instead of being radiant with holy joy we are presenting a miserable face to the on-lookers, and we have said until now: 'Well, I am placed in a very difficult position; you would not enjoy life if you were placed as I am.' Paul was in a prison when he wrote to the Philippians, and the key-note of his epistle is joy! It is the very opportunity for us to reveal the glory of Christ, to obtain from Him the joy necessary to triumph in a hard place. And those who witness us will have to confess that our joy is not of nature—it is from another source; and our testimony is: 'It is the joy of the Lord which is our strength.' That is only putting in another way: "The glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud." All Israel saw the glory in the case of Moses and Aaron, and all will see the glory of God in us, as Barnabas saw when he went down to Antioch—he saw the grace of God in them and was glad. We know that His glory is the glory of His grace. May the Lord see it in us more and more.

This is just one phase of the life of faith; everything out from God. Let us urge again the cultivating of that holy habit; saying in all circumstances: God can! when all the rest of the people are saying: It is hopeless! That is the glory of the Lord.
G. P.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

THE REAL THING

MANY years ago there was in Spain a blind beggar who made his living by playing his violin in the various city squares. His name was Pablo; he had no family, but lived all alone in one room in a poor district of the city. In another room of the same house there lived a boy called Marco. He also was very poor, and was glad to earn an odd penny by acting as guide to the old violin player. A kind of friendship sprang up between

the two, a friendship which was made stronger by the fact that Marco loved music, and was never tired of listening to the few simple tunes which Pablo used to play.

Marco longed to be able to play for himself, but he found that the old man kept careful watch over the instrument, never allowing it to go out of his reach. So although the boy spent many hours listening to the music, both in the streets and in

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the home, he was never able to handle the violin for himself.

He thought, however, of a plan by which he could learn to play by himself. He got together some pieces of wood and some string, and with these he made himself an imitation violin and bow. Of course, they made no sound, which was just as well, for although Pablo was blind, he had good hearing, and if he had known about it he might not have liked this idea of a dummy violin.

Now you must not think that Marco was careless in what he did. No, for although his 'strings' were only made of string, there were four of them, and he took great pains to copy carefully the way in which the musician used his left hand. He learned to move his own fingers in just the same way, pressing them, moving them up and down, passing from one string to another, and giving great care to every detail. He concentrated on one tune which the old man often played, and after a time he learned every movement both of the fingers of his left hand, and also of the dummy 'bow' which he held in his right hand. Even when he was alone, he practised in this way, humming the tune to himself as he pretended to play on his makeshift instrument.

He often longed for the day when he would surprise his old friend by his perfect playing of the tune on the real violin. At last that day seemed to have come. When he went to accompany Pablo to the square, he found that the old man was ill and unable to go out. What could he do to get money for his food? 'Do?', exclaimed Marco. 'Why, you must must let me go and play instead!' Laughing, the musician pointed out that it took a lot of teaching and practice for one to play the violin. 'But I can play already', Marco replied; 'I have practised and practised, until I know the tune by heart.' When he explained what he had been doing, the old man was so surprised that he was ready to hand over his precious violin to let Marco prove his words.

Proudly and expectantly the lad took up the real violin with the real bow, and proceeded to follow the movements which he knew so well. What a sad surprise awaited him! Instead of the gay little time which ought to have come, there was

only the strangest mixture of groans and squeaks. Clearly something had gone wrong. It had. In fact it had been wrong from the start. For Marco had imagined that music can be produced by outward imitation, by simply copying the actions of another musician. Music cannot be made that way. It must come from the inside, from the personal knowledge and experience of the one who wishes to play.

It was a very sad Marco who went out that morning to look for other ways of earning money, but he did so with such a good will that by the end of the day he had enough for himself and for Pablo too. What a happy evening they spent together, now that the old man felt better and was able to enjoy the food which Marco proudly brought home. By now he was able to laugh with Pablo over his first attempt to play the violin. What was better, his old friend was so pleased with him that he agreed to teach Marco to play properly on the real instrument.

So Marco had to start all over again. He could not begin with the tune, but had to have the very simplest lessons. It took a lot of time and patience, but in the end the same skill which had been in Pablo was now in him. He was no longer watching another in an attempt to imitate his movements, but was doing what he himself, Marco the musician, knew to be the right fingering and bowing.

Music cannot be imitated from without. Nor can living. Especially the true living which is the Christian life. If we watch others and try to be like them, or if we read good books and try to do what they tell us, we shall still not be Christians. When people expect to hear the beautiful melody of Christ from us, all that will come will be the groans and squeaks of our own nature. No, we too must begin at the beginning. The Lord Jesus will be our Master if we put ourselves in His hands, but He will begin on the inside, and show us how He can live out *His* life in and through us. That is why David prayed: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51. 10). That is a prayer which God will answer if you pray it sincerely.

H. F.

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THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

II. THE OPERATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

IN the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel by Matthew, which we may have open before us by way of reminder, we find the operation of the Kingdom illustrated in a sevenfold way.

THE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

I do not propose to attempt an exposition of that sevenfold way, but will simply lift out from the chapter the salient features of the operation of the sovereign rule of God. We have here that operation illustrated, in what have come to be called 'the parables of the Kingdom'. That is the title which men have given to them, but it is well to remember that the title which the Lord Jesus gave to them was 'the mysteries of the Kingdom'.

THE KEY TO THE PARABLES

These parables, or mysteries, of the Kingdom of Heaven are really impossible of understanding, except in the light of the definition of the Kingdom which we have just given—that is, as the sovereign rule of God. If you interpret them as indicating primarily a realm or nature, then you have gone beyond their warrant, and you will most certainly get into confusion. Few parts of the New Testament have been more subject to controversy than these parables. The various interpretations that have been given to them have divided students and teachers into irreconcilable schools. We shall see something of that as we go along. It is therefore necessary to discover the key to the parables, in order to be saved from this confusion and contradiction; and that key undoubtedly lies in the definition of the Kingdom as *the sovereign rule of God*. Let me repeat: I am not embarking upon an exposition of these parables, but seeking to get at something of very great importance and value to ourselves at this time.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

The first is what is called the parable of the sower (vv. 18–23). The Lord Jesus said that the seed is the word of the Kingdom. "When anyone heareth the word of the kingdom", He said. Now re-translate that as 'the word of the sovereign rule'. The word of the sovereign rule has gone forth. What is the result? Very largely failure. The

success in the positive sense is very limited, comparatively—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundredfold. You see how impossible it is to impart to the Kingdom the idea of a realm or a nature. That would imply that within the realm where God rules you have very largely failure. But that is not the teaching of the parable. The teaching of the parable is this. The word of the sovereign rule is sent forth, like seed; and, no matter if there is a large failure in response and reaction to that word, God is successful in the end with a body that is productive of that which is implicit in the Word.

Yes, man may fail. He may receive apparently with gladness, and then it may all come to nothing. He may respond in a way, and seem to be going to turn out all right—and then, because of difficulties and adversities, just fade out. But let there be failure, disappointment, breakdown: no matter—God gets something in His sovereignty. There is something that this sovereign government of God secures. You see, this is a tremendous word of the sovereignty for labourers. You labour, you scatter, you give, you work, you travail; but, if it is the word of the sovereign rule in very truth, it cannot ultimately fail. There may be much disappointment, but there will be an issue which answers to the intention of the One who gave it. Very simple: but you see how important it is to recognise the all-governing law of the sovereign rule which cannot, fully and finally, ultimately be defeated. A great deal may seem to argue that the labour is in vain; but the Lord is saying here in this parable: 'No! When it is a word of the rule of God, it cannot ultimately return wholly void; there will be something resulting from it.' The sovereignty is governing.

THE WHEAT AND THE TARES

The next is that commonly called the parable of the wheat and the tares—the darnel (vv. 23–30). Here from the word the thought passes to persons. It is not the word that is now sown—it is persons that are sown. Children of the Kingdom are sown in the earth, and then by night the enemy comes and sows his own children, children of *his* kingdom. They are the children of the Devil. His method is suitable to his object. His object being completely to nullify what is of God, his method is to imitate it. That is a wile of that evil wisdom

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of Satan—imitation children of God mixed in with the true children of God in order to nullify. The workers are represented as coming to the owner of the field and telling him what they have found there, and he says, 'Ah, an enemy has done this.' And they say, 'What would you have us do? Shall we pluck up this other thing?'

He replies: 'No—let the sovereignty have its way! Let them both grow together, and the sovereignty, the rule of Heaven, will progressively make very clear which is which, and the end will be an easy and a safe course. If you start doing that now, you have not got the wisdom of Heaven to discriminate. It is not your business, and you have not the faculty or capacity, to disentangle this deep work of the Devil, by trying to mark out what is true and what is an imitation. That is not your job, and you are not qualified to do it. Only Heaven can do that. So let it go on, and the sovereign rule will make manifest what is of itself, and what is otherwise.'

It is the sovereign rule that is going to solve and settle this whole problem. You cannot say that the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of God is like that which is pictured in this parable—an awful mixture. It is not. The Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven, is one thing, and only the sovereign rule of God can bring out into clearness what is of God.

But that will happen as we go on. We can trust the sovereign rule. That is very practical: it works like this. There are those who are truly of God, of Heaven; and then there are those who come in—who perhaps sing the hymns, use the phraseology, carry on the same way, associate with those of the Kingdom; but there is a difference. Deep down, they are really "not of us". They are just imitations; they are not real, not the genuine thing. We may discern, as these men discerned, that there is something here that is not the same thing, something that is foreign, that is alien and strange. What are we going to do? Had we better turn them out, tell them to go?

No, no! Go on long enough, and they will go of themselves. The two things will be self-manifested, and it will be quite easy in the long run. "They went out from us", said John, ". . . that they might be made manifest that they all are not of us" (I John ii. 19). This is a heavenly principle, you see—there is a manifestation. It is difficult to endure patiently those people who you sense have not, as we say, the root of the matter in them—who are just camp-followers. But, as with the mixed multitude that left Egypt with Israel, time and testing will find them out. This is the way if the King-

dom, the sovereignty, operates, and it calls for much faith, and much patience.

THE MUSTARD SEED

The parable of the mustard seed (vv. 31, 32) is one of the most difficult of all, and one that has perhaps been the occasion of some of the worst interpretations and teachings. "*The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is less than all seeds; but when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the heaven come and lodge in the branches.*" Do you really believe, in the light of all these other parables and of His whole teaching, that the Lord Jesus said, 'This is the Kingdom of Heaven—the Kingdom of Heaven is like that'? If the common and popular interpretation is to be accepted, then we are involved in some real difficulties. Admittedly, the parable does seem to mean that Christianity, or "the kingdom of heaven", has very small beginnings and then grows to very great dimensions. There may be an element of truth in that. The beginnings in Jerusalem were small, and in the course of the centuries Christianity has become world-wide. But is that just what the Lord meant by the parable?

There are at least three things that would pull us up and make us think again, and think more energetically.

One is that at other times the Lord definitely used terms of strict and severe limitation in relation to salvation, the way and the issue. So much was this so, that His disciples were startled into ejaculating: "Lord, are there few that be saved?" (Luke xiii. 23). He spoke of the way to life being straitened, and few finding or accepting it: of the gate being narrow, and few entering thereby (Matt. vii. 13, 14). He called His disciples (representatives of His Church) the "little flock" to whom it would be the Father's good pleasure to give *the Kingdom* (Luke xii. 32). There are contrasting ideas between "wide" and "narrow", "broad" and "straitened", big and little, popular and unpopular. All this does not agree with the usual superficial interpretation of this parable.

Then what about the "fowls of the air"? Did He use this metaphor in a contradictory way? In the parable of the sower He had spoken of these in a bad sense: is He employing the same terms in a right and proper sense here? This violates the principle of consistency in inspiration.

Thirdly, is it *commonly* true that the "mustard seed", the smallest of all, grows into a tree so

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great as is here depicted? No, it is positively not true. If our Lord saw such a thing—and He may have done—and drew attention to it, He was drawing attention to something abnormal and not natural. It was sufficiently abnormal and unnatural to attract attention.

This brings us to the factor that is common to *all* the parables and all the teaching of Jesus, and of the Apostles subsequently. In all these parables there is a selective, discriminating, contrasting, comparative, good-and-bad element. The Kingdom of Heaven is like that: the sovereign rule is all-comprehending, but it is very particular, selective, and judicial. Consistency in every direction demands that we interpret this “tree” of Christianity as an abnormal, unnatural development, capable of housing many things that are not in keeping with the true *nature* of the Kingdom. These “fowls” are *not* the born-from-above people who alone can see or enter the kingdom (John iii). They are all the accretions, the camp-followers, the parasites, the various kinds of people and things that take advantages of Christianity, and use its cover, but are not of its nature.

The Lord was letting His disciples know that this is what would happen, and that the sovereignty took all this in its stride. It is as well that we should know that the Lord has foreseen the developments of Christianity and its abnormalities, but it is to great detriment that His spirit of discernment and discrimination does not have a way with so many Christians.

Does the New Testament, to begin with, indicate that there is any such thing as abnormality, or this kind of abnormal development, about the true work of God? It rather indicates that, although ultimately the sum of many, many centuries will be ‘a great multitude which no man can number’, there will be, as we get nearer and nearer to the end, a tremendous sifting out and falling away. It is definitely stated that that day will not come before there is a great falling away (II Thess. ii. 3), and that “judgment must begin at the house of God” (I Pet. iv. 17). Well, then, if this is right—a great falling away—the Bible contradicts itself. As we have said, the teaching of the Lord seemed to be so clear to the disciples on this matter that they exclaimed: “Are there few that be saved?” What is all this about the broad and the narrow way? The broad way—many go by it; the narrow way—few find it. The Bible does not contradict itself; but it says that God takes account of these things, and God in His sovereignty permits them. He does not come out and destroy this freakish thing popularly called ‘Christianity’. That may be

there, but God in His sovereignty is pursuing His own course to secure what He is after. Though all this may be quite true, the sovereign rule of God goes on, the sovereignty is preserved.

THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN

The same principle is implicit in the next parable.

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened” (v. 33).

(a) THE LEAVEN

The popular interpretation is that the leaven is Christianity: Christianity being taken by the Church and put into the world until the whole lump is leavened—the whole world is ‘leavened’ with Christianity. It is suggested that we shall see the world saved by the deep, silent movement of Christianity, working strongly and deeply and hiddenly, like leaven. It is easy to say that sort of thing, but it is superficial reasoning. In the light of history, and in the light of the Word of God, it is *very* difficult to believe.

Look again. The world-population is vastly more in excess of the Christian population than at any time in the dispensation. After these almost twenty centuries of Christianity, an immense number over a very great part of the world have never heard the Gospel yet. Look at this—1,200 million out of the 2,000 million people of the earth are still without the knowledge of Christ. Then what of the unspeakable revelation of iniquity in countries which have had the Gospel for centuries? We could make an immense build-up of facts which would shatter this interpretation of the leaven beyond reconstruction.

What, then, is the meaning of the leaven? I do not believe that leaven here stands in a different category from leaven anywhere else in the Bible. Consistency of Scripture demands that we interpret leaven always as the same thing, in the same light: and everywhere else in Scripture leaven is evil—something that has to be purged out. In the old economy they had to light their lamp on the eve of the Passover, and search the house high and low, nook and cranny, for any leaven and purge it out. The Passover could not be eaten till it was certain that there was no vestige or trace of leaven anywhere. They had to eat unleavened bread in the Passover. The Lord Jesus spoke of “the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matt. xvi. 6) and “the leaven of Herod” (Mark viii. 15). And Paul spoke of ‘purging out the old

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leaven' (I Cor. v. 7). Everywhere it is something evil. The function or effect of leaven is to disintegrate, to break up, to tear apart—every housewife knows that. And it is not different here: still it is leaven and still it is evil. If you say that the Kingdom of Heaven, as a realm, is like that, you are in trouble. But the sovereign rule of God knows all about this deep, secret movement of disintegration, of evil, that has come into the realm of Divine things. It is not the Kingdom of Heaven that is like an alcoholic fermentation, disintegration, putrefaction.

(b) THE WOMAN

It is only necessary to look at such passages of Scripture as Revelation ii. 20-23 ("the woman Jezebel"), and Revelation xvii ("the great harlot") to realise that a "woman" so often in the Bible is the symbol of a system. Again and again it has been a woman, either personally or symbolically, who has corrupted Divine things, or brought corruption into relationship with them. See Samson; see Solomon; see later kings for examples. In the message to Thyatira, this insinuation of evil and corruption into the House of God is the occasion of the severest judgment—for it is called "the deep things of Satan" (Rev. ii. 24). What foreknowledge and foresight our Lord had in these parables! But let us go on.

(c) THREE MEASURES

Three measures. Remember that three is the number of Divine Persons and Divine things. Evil has spread even through the Church, so that within Christianity itself the very Divine Persons have been subjected to questions and doubts. God Himself—the Son, the Spirit—has been misrepresented. With many other things of God, evil has come in to break them up—to destroy their effectiveness and power by destroying their solidity. What are you going to do about it?

The sovereign rule of God takes account of it—the working of evil, the working of falsehood, the working of misrepresentation and misinterpretation of the things of God. History is just full of it, as we know. We hate using terms and labels, but is it not just that which has happened in the last hundred years in the realm called 'Modernism' or 'Liberalism'? Is it not the leaven disintegrating Divine things? The very Person of Jesus Christ is stripped of His Deity; the very Word of God is denied its authority and its finality; the very Holy Spirit is degraded from His dignity as a Divine

Person; and so on. The Lord Jesus discerned the future, saw the way things would go, and spoke like this. He was saying, 'This very generation will not be out before all sorts of heresies and errors will come into the realm of Divine things'—which they did.

But the sovereign rule of God goes on. This does not spell God's confusion and God's defeat. His sovereignty is greater than all this. It is the only way really to be consistent both with the teaching of Scripture and with history itself. Surely it must be sheer blindness that reads history in any other way. As I said, I am not expounding these parables, but lifting out the point that is common to them all. From various angles, for various and differing causes, in differing situations, right down the age: whatever may be permitted by that sovereignty, that sovereignty is equal to it all, and will be fully vindicated in the end.

THE PARABLE OF THE DRAG-NET

We reach the last parable, that of the great drag-net let down into the sea—the sea always speaking of humanity—and gathering a great multitude of fishes. Yes, the sovereignty of God does that: in comes the net, with its multitude of fishes of all sorts, and then sovereignty gets to work and separates the good from the bad, and in the end God has what He was after from the beginning. He has got it at last. That is how the sovereignty works. There is much instruction here for Christians and for Christian workers. If we had our way, we would go to work to see to it that we always and only have the thing that is absolutely and certainly and positively according to God's mind: we would select that, and put a hedge round it, and set up walls about it, and we would protect it and keep it, as an exclusive company. But these parables say, No! The sovereignty of Heaven does not do that sort of thing. The sovereignty of Heaven permits and tolerates very much that will ultimately be found to be not according to Heaven. Yes, it takes account of much; but it is driving its own course, and, in the end, through all, God will have what He set His heart upon.

THE COMPREHENSIVENESS OF THE RULE OF GOD

To sum up—see how comprehensive is this rule of God. The sovereignty of God is one of the most problematic and perplexing things to Christians, in relation to what God will allow even in association with His own work. We would not do that at

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all. We would be very, very particular. But see how comprehensive God is. He allows a very great deal. He not only allows it—He even uses very much that perhaps we would never use, or about which we would have a question. He comes through things in His sovereignty to get His ends. It is *His end* that is the great testimony to His sovereignty. We say: How could God get anything out of this, or out of that? Well, He does, that is all. How could God get anything in that way? He just does! Look at this, look at that, look at all these things: is anything possible for God? The verdict at the end is that God sovereignly did get something.

You see, this is the great heart and core of this whole teaching and revelation of the Kingdom of God. It does not mean that you and I need not be sensitive to the Lord—that is another thing altogether. We may come to that later, when we say something about the Kingdom and the Church. It does not mean that, because we see that God's sovereignty reaches His ends in spite of everything, we are just to be careless and insensitive to the mind of the Spirit; to do all sorts of things that God, if He could have His way, would not sanction. But it does mean that this sovereignty of God is going to cover a lot of ground: it is going to get its end through many, many ways and means which in themselves, intrinsically, are not of Him. It is this rule of the heavens that is, so to speak, 'getting on with its job'.

We, left to ourselves, are so fussy, so particular, that we would not leave room for the sovereignty of God. The great appeal here is: Leave plenty of room for God. That is what it amounts to. Never despair over any situation as being finally and utterly hopeless. In the presence of the spread of this evil thing, this leaven—the expansion of this abnormal, 'freak' Christianity, with its contradictions and disappointments—we are forbidden by this sovereignty to give up and say it is a hopeless thing. We have to come to the place where we say and believe and take our stand: 'That looks a pretty hopeless situation, but God can get something out of it, and He will.'

That is the good news of the Kingdom, the Gospel of the Kingdom. I know that many of you who read these words can bear this out. You have known the most awful and impossible situations of mixture and hopelessness. You have despaired—and then you have seen God do something. What a strength and force that gives to the remainder of the statement! "This gospel of the kingdom shall be proclaimed . . . for a testimony unto all the nations". In His sovereignty, God can turn

the most unpropitious and unpromising situation, the most hopeless state of things, into a glorious testimony. Yes, He allows so much, but He governs all. And He makes use of all manner of agencies—even the Devil himself. That must be sovereignty! "An enemy hath done this." Very well: we will use the enemy to show what is right and what is wrong, to make all the more manifest what is of God and what is not. The work of the Devil shall be employed to that end. That is the rule of Heaven.

All this is borne out in the later New Testament. "The things which befell me", writes Paul (Phil. i. 12)—what were they? They were the Devil's work. Again—"We would fain have come unto you, I Paul once and again; and Satan hindered us" (I Thess. ii. 18). Strange, mysterious statement! Yes, the Devil is busy; "a messenger of Satan" (II Cor. xii. 7)—he is very active. And what is the verdict at the end? "The things which befell me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel"! Under the sovereignty of God the very works of the Devil are being used to reach God's end.

Perhaps that is common knowledge, so often said. But we must come more definitely to this settled position, that *God and Christ are on the throne*. This Kingdom is a present reality. There are many things which contradict it and work against it. God does not consume and annihilate them: He permits them, and then takes hold of them; and the end is that His throne is established and it is made manifest that "his kingdom ruleth over all" (Ps. ciii. 19).

What these parables say to us is this—that God faces facts and has no illusions. He faces the fact that a large proportion of the sowing of the word of the Kingdom will fail. He faces the fact that Christianity will become an abnormal conglomeration, without any distinctiveness of testimony. He recognises that there will be a secret hidden working of error, of evil, of falsehood, all to disintegrate. He faces it all—all the work of the Devil, all the work of evil, all the failure of man—and then He declares His sovereignty over it all. That is what arises here. Let us ask for strength to believe it.

GOD'S JUDICIAL WORK

I have not said much about another aspect of these parables: namely, that there is a judicial, discriminatory work going on all the time. Do not fail to see that. All through these parables, He is cutting a line, He is discriminating, He is acting

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judicially. God is not just saying, 'Everything is all right—do not worry. Sit in your armchairs, ye Christian men; sit down, the Kingdom is coming.' No; rather—'Rise up, ye men of God!' God is not passive, indifferent, careless, saying, 'Oh, it will be all right, this is all right; do not worry about it.' He is not like that. He is acting, and will act, judicially. He is really putting things in their place, and dividing between, as He does with the churches in the Revelation. He is discriminating.

He is putting this here and that there, and saying that they belong to two different realms. That is a part of His sovereignty.

But our chief point is this: The operation of the Kingdom, or the rule, of God is to bring in at last the triumph of that rule. Whatever else may come in, it means the triumph of that rule. The rule of Heaven, the rule of God, comes out in the end triumphant.

T. A-S.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE COMING DAY

"LET US HOLD FAST . . . OUR HOPE"

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope that it waver not; for he is faithful that promised" (Hebrews x. 23).

THIS verse contains the central of three exhortations made in the light of the great day of the glory of the appearing of God's Son: "so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh" (v. 25b). 'Let us—in the light of that day—draw near in faith; let us hold fast our hope; and let us provoke unto love.' You notice that the three main features of Divine life and Christian experience are found there—faith, hope and love. Let us think for a few moments of the second one—"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope".

HOPE ATTESTS THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

Now, you might feel that hope was not so important as faith or love, and especially might you feel that it does not really matter to anybody else, even if it matters to you, whether you are a hopeful Christian or not. So long as your faith is all right, and so long as the Lord gives you love in your heart, hope does not seem, on the face of it, to be so important. But quite obviously the Apostle makes a central feature of it. It is extremely important—and "so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh"—that we should act strongly and unwaveringly in maintaining the confession of our hope. Why? Because the character of God is involved. It is thus that men judge God. Every time we waver in hope, we suggest or imply that He who promised might perhaps not keep His promise.

Now the great Divine side of hope, as the Apostle tells us, is this: "for he is faithful that promised". If you waver in your hope, you draw

away from the testimony of the faithfulness of God, and that is what we want men to have. It is not much advantage to them if they look at us and say, 'I am sure he is a man of faith, I am sure she is a woman of faith.' They may admire us, they may despise us for it, but they will be looking at us. What we really want is that they should look at the Lord, and the man whose life is unwaveringly radiant with hope is the man who is always making people think of the reason for the hope; and that reason is the faithfulness of the Promiser.

DESPAIR SATAN'S WEAPON

That is why one of the most constantly used weapons in Satan's armoury, and one which he often uses to great effect, is the weapon of despair, making us say (or think), 'It is no good—there is no hope.' Jeremiah in his day found that it was precisely with that attitude that his ministry was greeted. Twice over he tells us that, in response to his most urgent appeals and warnings, the people merely said, 'There is no hope' (ii. 25; xviii. 12). In chapter xviii he tells us how God spoke to him through the potter's vessel that was marred. He brought to them this wonderful message from God, that even the marred, spoiled vessel can be made again just as the potter meant it to be. In spite of all their failure, all their sin, all their hopelessness, all their handicaps, in spite of everything, God said, 'I can still make you what I want you to be.' But what was the people's response to that great offer of the grace of God? They said, 'Jeremiah tells us, "There is no hope": we will walk after our own devices, and we will do every one after the stubbornness of his evil heart' (xviii. 12). That is the effect of hopelessness. It slights the grace of God, it re-

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jects the grace of God, and it plunges back into the morass of its own sinfulness.

So Satan is always trying to work upon us that we should be thus defeated. But note that a defeated Christian is not a weak Christian, an unconstructed Christian. The defeated Christian is one who does not expect to get the victory. Lose your expectation and you are defeated.

'Now', says the Apostle, "so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh". This will be one of the features of those difficult days which we believe will precede the coming of the Lord, that Satan will be the more active in seeking to drive the people of God to despair. Indeed, are we not already finding in some measure that this is so? I am not thinking necessarily of people who are naturally of a despairing disposition and so are miserable about everything. I mean despair about spiritual victory, about the purposes of God, about the interests of the Lord, about what can be for Christ. The difficulties are mounting up. The amazing thing is that those of us who for years have believed and even preached that the nearer the Lord's coming is, the more the difficulties would be, are very often the first to say, 'It is no good—I give it up; I cannot take that course, I cannot follow that way.' That is just exactly what Satan wanted! So we see that this is a very subtle onslaught of his against the hope that should fill the hearts of the people of God; and therefore the call of the Lord to us all is to refuse absolutely to be involved in that trap, and 'so much the more' to hold fast without wavering the confession of our hope.

FAITH AND HOPE CONTRASTED

What are the characteristics of faith and hope as they differ from one another? It is not altogether easy to say. Of course, faith and hope overlap. I think, however, that it is possible, without losing your faith in the Lord, to be nevertheless not marked by a virile hope in God. Faith is concerned with the present and with my own personal relationship with God—at least, very often. Hope is concerned not so much with the present as with the future; not so much with my personal relationship with God as with what God will do. I hope God will do something.

FAITH AND HOPE AS SEEN IN JOB

Perhaps the most helpful example is Job. Job never really wavered in his faith, but he did waver in his hope. In spite of every onslaught of the

Devil, and in spite of having to say, as he did, "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope" (Job vii. 6); a man who had no prospect at all; even in the depths of that kind of despair, Job could still say: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him" (xiii. 15). Probably many of us are like that. We will never lose faith in the Lord as our Saviour.

But there were times, high-lights in Job's experience, when, though outwardly it was just as hopeless, he mounted right up above himself and expressed not only a personal faith in the love of God, but a deep conviction that he was yet going to see the glory of God. "I know", he said in one of those great moments, "I know that my Redeemer liveth . . . whom I, even I, shall see, on my side" (xix. 25, 27 A.R.V.). That is hope. In one of those times when he was most perplexed, when he could not find the Lord anywhere, he said, 'I do not know anything, where He is, what He is doing, but He knows.' "He knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (xxii. 10). That is hope. That is a step farther than saying, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." He was in effect saying, 'Though He slay me, He will raise me from the dead and fill my life with glory.'

So we see the importance, not merely of a personal faith in the Lord, but of the Apostle's exhortation to 'hold fast our hope without wavering', steadily, consistently. Poor Job did not do that. But Job had not the privileges, the revelation and the indwelling Spirit that we have; he had not the promises that we have. Let us—if he could not, we can—hold fast without wavering the confession of our hope.

OUR HOPE

Now, what is our hope? You notice that the Apostle does not say 'our hopes'. We all have many hopes based on the promises of God, our own expectations and interpretations of what those promises mean, how they will work out and when and where they will be fulfilled. Now, I am not saying that we must not have those hopes, but I am suggesting to you that more often than not they just do not happen as we expect them and when and where. No, the Apostle is not saying that you are to hold on to those hopes that you have formed about His ways and His will. They are, in a sense, very often side-issues. What he says is: 'Hold on to *the* hope.' That is central.

What is the hope? You will say: The hope of the coming of the Lord; that is the great hope.

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Yes, it is, but there is another side to it. It is the hope that, when the Lord comes in glory, we shall be, by the power of resurrection, glorified with Him. That is the hope. If the Lord came in glory to us *just as we are*, it might be a very nice experience, but we should not be any different: there would be the same weaknesses, the same sinfulness, even in the presence of the glorious Lord. No, our hope is not just based on the fact that the Lord will come into the old situation among us as we are, with His glory. Our hope is not only that He will come down to us, but that we shall go up to Him. We shall be different: we shall be raised and made like Him. That is the hope, and without it the coming of the Lord would be a very poor thing for us. But that is a part of the coming of the Lord to those who are His—the mighty power of resurrection raising us out of our weaknesses and failure and death into the likeness of His glory.

OUR HOPE THE SAME AS HIS HOPE

So you notice that our hope is the same as His hope, for that is what God has been hoping for for a very long time. He is the God of hope; and that means that He has before Him—in, as it were, a vision, an expectation—He has before Him one purpose, and that is that His redeemed creatures should be like His Son. That is His hope. Nobody but God would ever have that hope about us. Nobody but God could ever hope that I would be like Christ, but God does and has promised that it should be so. When I come into the realm of His hope, that becomes my hope too. All those little hopes fit into that. It does not matter so much now whether this particular promise is fulfilled in this way, in this time, so long as in it all I come nearer to Him, become more like Him. It does not matter whether it works out as I think, so long as there is an expression even now of the power of His resurrection, lifting me above myself and my circumstances, and making me more like Christ; and it is to that that we are to hold. That is our hope.

Oh, says the Apostle, you will be attacked about that. The Devil will try to shake you about that. He will try to get you in a see-saw, up-and-down attitude about that. But never waver; never do less than expect that—not only when the day comes, but every day, in the light of that coming—there shall be seen in your life new expressions of His glory. Do you expect that? If you do not, you are wavering in your hope. 'Well', you say, 'mine is a difficult position: if you knew about me, if you knew about my circumstances, you

might believe that one day in the glory I will triumph in Christ; but you would not believe it was possible for me, just here where I am, and being who I am, to triumph.'

The Lord hopes for it. The Lord never says about you, 'There is no hope; when I get him to the glory, I will be able to do something with him, but meanwhile there is no hope.' The Lord does not waver like that. Sometimes we feel tremendously that the Lord is going to do this, and at other times we flag. The Lord does not change like that, nor need we. "Let us . . .", says the Apostle; this is our side of it. We cannot provide anything to bring it about, but we can hope for it and we can hold fast to the hope. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering." Why? Because "He is faithful that promised." Nobody and nothing can undo or contradict the faithfulness of God to His promises. No matter who or what seems to be the occasion of your difficulty, He is greater than them all; and surely that is the secret of true hope, to get your eyes afresh on Him. "He is faithful that promised."

HOPE AND REJOICING

Now, I believe it may be possible to have faith and yet to be miserable. I am not sure that it is, but it may be possible. But it is quite impossible to have hope and be gloomy. Hope shows itself at once. If you are expecting something good and glorious to happen, you cannot but be radiant, and that is why the Apostle passes from the first stage—"Let us draw near in faith"—that is the basis of everything—to "Let us hold fast . . . our hope". Peter says that what will happen to you is this—people will come up to you and say, 'What is the reason for the hope in you?' They will not ask you the reason of your faith. That is between you and the Lord. They cannot see your faith; they can see your hope—that is why they ask you. Be ready always, in modesty and godly fear, not in boastfulness, to give them a reason for the hope (I Pet. iii. 15). They see you so radiant, so rejoicing, when there seems to be no explanation for it, that they will ask for the explanation; and the explanation is this—and you can tell them—"He is faithful that promised".

And so we are faced with the challenge of the Lord's coming: the challenge as to our attitude, not only to that day, but to every day; not only about Him, but about ourselves. Is there hope—hope for me? Well, the Lord says to us: 'Never waver on that point; hold fast. There is hope—hope from the God of hope; hope from the Promiser of hope.'

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So you see that hope is far more important than perhaps we thought it was. It expresses the glory of God in our lives in such a way that those who notice will realise that the faithfulness of God is no mere doctrine. It is not a text that you pull off the calendar or a promise that you pick out of

a box. The faithfulness of God transfigures your life and mine, and makes us what we never could be, carries us through what we never could go through, and brings us ever nearer and nearer to likeness to God's dear Son.

H. F.

SERVING OUR GENERATION

"For David, after he had served his own generation by the counsel of God, fell on sleep" (Acts xiii. 36, R.V. mg.)

THERE is a time for everything—you will remember the preacher said that in Ecclesiastes—'a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pluck up', and so on (Eccl. iii. 1—8). There is Divine sovereignty in the matter of our birth, our beginning, and at other points of our history too; even concerning our end, as to when it shall be. But what happens in between the beginning and the end—whether it be in respect of our individual lives, or the generation to which we belong, or a spiritual work or movement with which we may be associated—what happens in the course of a generation is to some degree determined by the men and women of that time. We cannot wholly exclude the human element. The two things are so plainly in the Word: first, the emphasis on the sovereignty of God, and second, the fact of human responsibility. How important to hold fast to these two sides.

When we were visiting a certain country, we were privileged to be for three weeks with a very lovely bunch of believing people—simple farming folk, but with a very precious knowledge of the Lord, both individually and collectively. There was a beautiful spirit among them. The glow of the Lord was upon them, and there was much eagerness, and also exercise in relation to their neighbours and friends; for many of these had become enemies, because they had followed the Lord, and had also testified to Him. But we were sad to find that, when we returned to them six months later, the glow had gone. Something had been lost; their liberty had largely disappeared; their spontaneity was missing. We found that, in the matter of the six months between our first and second visits, there had come among them a very strong, one-sided emphasis; so much so that now they were unbalanced, having an emphasis that is in the Word, no doubt, that things must be of God; but going too far, so as almost to eclipse, if not to lose altogether, the emphasis that is equally in the

Word upon the side of human responsibilities.

In the history of David, there is much evidence of the Lord moving, the Lord holding, the Lord protecting, the Lord working; but there is equally, of course, evidence of David having a heart for the Lord, moving with Him, responding to Him, inspired by Him, encouraged by Him, and thereby vitally contributing to the outworking of the Divine purpose. In the verse which is before us, we have: 'He served his own generation in the will of God', or, 'according to the counsel of God'.

We might enquire, In what way did David serve his own generation? I would suggest one or two directions in which David left his mark upon the people of his time.

In the first place, he was concerned that they should be for the Lord; that they should be a people for the Lord; that they should take possession and by their lives establish a testimony to His Name in the land which He had given to them.

Furthermore, David set his affection toward the House of the Lord. We read in Psalm cxxxii how David said he 'would not go up into the tabernacle of his house, he would not give sleep to his eyes, until he had found out a place for the Lord'. And we know so well how much that was a motivating factor in the life of David, and how he set himself not only to procure the place, but to procure the material also. He did his utmost, and he inspired others of his own generation to make contribution towards this building. The pattern was given; and all he could do was to make every possible preparation, and inspire others to do the same. Right up to the fullest measure of his responsibility and opportunity he contributed to the House of God. He served his own generation by inspiring them with his own sacrificial giving, and we should take note of that.

But there is another matter which I find so instructive and helpful in the case of David, and that is in relation to the house of Saul, and to the people of God, Israel, under Saul. David suffered much by misrepresentation, by false rumour, and by the working of the adversaries who were only too glad to stir up Saul against David, though

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there was no ground for such constant pursuit of him, and the imperilling of his life. And David in it all behaves in such an exemplary manner. I do believe that David served his generation in this matter: he taught them how to conduct themselves under pressure; he taught them the attitude that they should adopt to those who took exception to them, those who spoke against them, those who even pursued with the purpose of destroying them. I believe that later, when the tribes came to David and said, 'We are thy bone and thy flesh', it was because they had witnessed the exemplary behaviour of David under pressure, and had learned from him how much he loved them, though their attitude and their conduct towards him had been so cruel. David served his generation, and he also helps us to understand what attitude to take, and what our conduct should be like, when we are under pressure. May the Lord help us to learn from him how to treat those who may not agree with us; how to watch against any conduct which would bring us into reproach, lest, in a day when the Lord has purposes to fulfil, we should not enjoy the confidence of those who are now ready to acknowledge their own faults, like Israel after Saul's death.

We must realise that every man lives in his own generation, which has its own significance, its own particular contribution to the counsel or plan of God. Our time may not be like other people's time, which went before, or that which follows after. Our time is now. Our responsibility is not for yesterday, or for to-morrow: our responsibility is for to-day. We have to be true to the Lord in *this* time, in *this* generation, because this is *our* generation. And are we not privileged and called to serve our generation in the counsels of God?

I was once visiting in the house of a brother in the Lord, and he was discussing the work of the Lord, and I was pointing out to him how, at different times, the Lord reacts to the situations that prevail among His people, and may begin again; and he immediately thought I was referring to the work with which we happen to be particularly associated—no doubt I was! And he said this: Will it not, after all, become just like that which is already? Will it not, after a few years, be a repetition of what we have in Christendom to-day? I took him to this verse, Acts xiii. 36—"David served his own generation in the counsels of God"

—and pointed out that our responsibility is *now*. Are we contributing positively to that particular hour in which we are living, and that over which the Lord's heart is exercised? Are we with the Lord for what He wants to-day, for what He needs to-day, for that for which He calls us into fellowship with His Son to-day? Are we making our contribution to the counsels of God in this our time?

We are exercised, and we are sure you are also, for it would appear that our time is running out; we are not as young as we used to be, and we have to acknowledge that. Our time is running out. But the exercise of my heart is this, expressed in the verse I bring to you at this time: How much are we serving our generation in the counsel of God? Can we say, like the apostle, 'I have not been disobedient to the heavenly vision'? David had vision; David had the promises of God; they sustained him in the time of trial and danger; equally so the apostle Paul and those who were of the apostolic band. In like manner those who in subsequent years were given to see, who were recalled by Divine vision and grace to the Lord's thought for His people; those who have suffered through the ages, and those who have contributed to the counsel of God in their own generations.

The apostle said: 'I was not disobedient'. He also said: 'I have finished my course'. That is a wonderful thing to be able to say. Are we true to what the Lord has shown us, and to those with whom He has related us? Are we true to those who may misunderstand us and judge us? Are we exemplary in our behaviour to those who may be offended by the course we take? Can we earn the confidence of those who may now oppose, so that in the day of their spiritual awakening, they may, like those in Israel after the death of Saul, come and say: 'We are bone of thy bone and flesh of thy flesh'?

May the Lord help us, in this time of privilege, to examine our hearts and our history too, that we may perceive more clearly, and apprehend afresh, the privileges that are ours, and the responsibilities that go with them, that we may be positive, and not negative. May we be all the time exercised in grace and a continuing supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, that we may serve all faithfully, fully; serving the counsel of God, and serving our own generation therein, before we fall on sleep.

A. J. F.

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EDITORIAL

IT is a cause of very great encouragement to us that we continue to receive so many appreciative letters from so many far-apart places. Not often do we step aside from what may be called 'the ministry of the Lord' to express to the readers our gratitude and real thankfulness for their inspiring fellowship. This is one of those infrequent occasions. Many stories could be told of how a seemingly 'chance' lighting upon this little paper has brought help and light to those concerned. This is the kind of thing that frequently comes to our knowledge.

The Lord has been pleased to give His seal to this ministry over many years, and is doing so right up to date. The circle quietly but quite definitely enlarges all the time. We know quite well that the ministry contained herein is fairly solid food, and, of course, only the really hungry will appreciate it. But, there, that is just our particular calling. Those who want lighter fare are not without abundant provision, and the Lord has much variety in need and supply.

Most of us who have sought to go on with the Lord to His full end know how, at different stages, certain kinds of spiritual food have met our need. But the time has come when a certain kind no longer helps us and we look for something more. The Lord has His provision along the road suited to the particular point of progress. We do not look upon what He gives us as everything or even final, but just as something provided by the Lord to meet His people at a point and to take them a bit further on.

The spiritual life follows closely the course of the natural: infancy, childhood, youth, manhood, maturity. It is, however, necessary to note that the Word of God makes it very evident that the last

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governs all the others. "Full growth" governs all in the mind and will of God, and it is subnormal or abnormal to stay unduly long at any stage short of that end. A consideration should be given by every normal Christian—not to what he or she likes or fancies, but—to what is necessary to carry the life forward beyond its present measure. All the Lord's dealings with us in discipline and ordering are governed by this end—to increase the measure of Christ in us; and He would have us to be concerned about the food question in this direction.

We should not write off as valueless certain food because at present we cannot understand it. If we go on with the Lord, that which at this stage is beyond us may come to be our very life. The point is, let us be always going on, reaching forward.

The great need is that spiritual life and spiritual truth keep in step as demand and supply. If this is not so, the life will become unbalanced. Let us pray continually that the Lord will be very faithful with us in this respect, that He keep life and experience abreast of teaching and truth, and meet us with light for the maintenance of life.

This is certainly our prayer concerning *this* ministry, and we are deeply anxious that all of our readers shall be on the above twofold basis.

EDITOR.

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

III. THE BURNING FIRE OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

"There were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God" (Revelation iv. 5b).

I want first to say a word as to the occasion of this book of the Revelation, and of these first chapters in particular.

A sufficient period had elapsed from the time that the Lord, through His servants, had first sent His word to the Church, and to these churches in particular, to find out what was their continual reaction to His word. A sufficient time had been allowed for the truth given to find a really concrete expression. The first of these messages is addressed to Ephesus. We know from the book of the Acts how that church came into being, and what the first reactions to the message were. We know that, some considerable time afterward, the apostle Paul, who had ministered long and fully amongst that company of the Lord's people, wrote to those believers a very great letter. He probably wrote it about the year 60 or 61. Now John is writing, at the command of the Lord, probably between the years 80 and 90. We will not argue over dates; there is some difference of opinion on this matter; but I do not think that all the things that had come about in the churches could have developed as quickly as is implied by the date assigned by some people to the book of the Revelation. My point is that, if these dates are

right—60 or 61, to 80 to 90—a sufficient period would have elapsed to provide a very good test amongst the believers of the results of the ministry which had been given.

RESPONSE AND REACTIONS TESTED

Now the Lord, taking account of that sufficient period, in His own mind, has Himself returned to the churches, in this revelation to John, in order to investigate, to search out, to test, and to draw the conclusions. Each message concludes with the words: 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith'—seven times. And here, in symbolic representation, the Holy Spirit is spoken of as 'the seven Spirits of God before the throne'. The Holy Spirit, as a burning lamp, is searching, testing, and bringing about a verdict. As it has ever been—it was so in the life of Israel, and it has been so more than once since—that after a certain time, when we have come into knowledge of the Lord, or of the things of the Lord; when we have been recipients of His grace, of His mercy, and of His truth—the Lord says: 'It is time: the time has come when we should weigh up the result of that; it will not do just to leave it all to some future date when it is too late to adjust.' The time of visitation has come, when we have got to measure up to what the Lord has given, to what the Lord has shown. It is a time of searching.

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a time of heart-burning, a time of Holy Spirit exercise.

I wonder if you are able to recognise the working of that principle in our own time? We need not look far afield, but there is no doubt that that is what is happening in the world. It has happened in an almost terrible way, we might say, in China ; and it is happening in other parts of the world, and spreading. In its own way, it is beginning to work in the west: there is a deep exercise of heart ; wherever we go we find Christians who are troubled about the state of things in the churches, and in their own lives ; there is a sense that things are not all well, not what they ought to be. In some places, of course, we are not able to discern a great deal of exercise and distress, but we do know that something is going on. It is as though the Spirit of God is moving to bring everything to the judgment bar, and judgment is to begin at the house of God.

Well, we need not look out into the world—it may be what the Lord is doing with us. But it is true to His method and to His principle: in His mercy, in His grace, He does not leave things too long. When He sees that an adequate time has elapsed, He comes and He says: Now then, are you sure that you are up to the level of all that you have received? Can you really measure up to the light that has been given? Can you answer, in experience and spiritual history, to all that I have made known to you? How far *are* you that which you know so well, by teaching, preaching and other means? That is what is here, undoubtedly—a time point for judgment.

A TIME OF ADVERSITY

But there is another thing here. As we come into this book of the Revelation, we come into a situation of great trouble, adversity, suffering. These churches, for instance, were existing under conditions of considerable difficulty. You can see the marks of this in what the Lord says ; He takes note of it. It is a very difficult time for the churches here, and for the whole Church—a time of great adversity.

Historically, that had two sides. On the one side, there was the great revival of Jewish opposition, which had been provoked, in its turn, by the action of Rome. Rome had come down with a heavy hammer on the Jews, and they were standing for their very life: so they must have a scapegoat ; they must have someone to blame for the events complained of, so as to divert the trouble from themselves. They therefore blamed the

Christians ; they said it was the Christians who were responsible for this and that. And so there was a tremendous revival of Jewish antagonism to Christianity ; a renewed upsurge of militant Judaism, of which the New Testament is full, with its hostility to Christ. These churches were up against that ; it was everywhere.

On the other side, there was the tremendous hatred and antagonism of pagan Rome. This was the time of the great persecutions ; the time in which ten million Christians were slaughtered, either by the lions in the arena, or else by being soaked in oil and pitch and made living torches for a festival, or in some other way. And the Lord came at that time. We need to keep that in mind as we read those words of His: "I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is" (Rev. ii. 13). 'I know . . .' The Lord knows the conditions in which His Church has to live in this world ; He knows the sufferings of His people ; He knows all their adversities. Let me repeat: We must not always read these messages from the standpoint of the Lord's wrath, anger, judgment. There is the note here all the time of appeal, of entreaty and of love, finishing every time with: 'To him that overcometh will I give . . .' His heart is with them, and for them.

We have pointed out that there is something very much like that in this world to-day. Over a very large part of the earth it is like that. On the one side, the 'Jewish'—that is, the religious—antagonisms ; on the other side, the pagan antagonism of the world. Oh, the sufferings of many of the Lord's people to-day ; multitudes of them! And who is to say that we in the West are not going to pass into the crucible—that it will never come our way? But whether it be in our lifetime, or in the Lord's knowledge lying ahead, perhaps not so far ahead, the Lord comes. With what purpose? Is it to put His finger upon the wrongs, to be saying all the time, Well, that is wrong, and that is wrong, and that is wrong ; just to be condemnatory?

THE LORD IS FAITHFUL IN JUDGMENT

No. This is the point, and this is the inclusive message of this whole section. He is saying: 'You cannot stand up to this world situation ; you will never be able to go through triumphantly unless you are in a condition to do it. You are not going to get through just because you are the 'Church', so-called ; because you are 'Christians', so-called! Your victory, your coming through triumphantly, your ability to stand up to the situation, requires

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

that what you profess to be, you *are* ; that things are *true* about you ; that such things as will weaken your testimony and destroy your life be eliminated ; and that such things as are required for your very life be brought in.' The Lord is saying, in effect: 'Adjustment is necessary for your very life—*for your very life.*'

We know that this is true in our own physical experience. We do not like the doctor's probing and investigation ; it can be painful. But no one in his senses would say to a doctor, 'Please just cover it all over ; make nothing of it ; just take no notice.' The Lord is not like that. There has to be probing ; there has to be a getting down to the root of the trouble. It is very painful, but we know quite well that our very life, our very continuance, depends upon it. The Lord knows that quite well. So, whatever there is here of judgment, even of condemnation or rebuke, it is all with the positive object of securing our very life—the life of the Church. He is faithful and true—so He is described here (Rev. iii. 14 ; cf. xix. 11). It is a good thing for any Christian, going through seemingly painful handling of the Lord, to be able to arrive at that: The Lord is faithful!

What is faithfulness in relationship? Would to God that we had more grace to let people be faithful with us! We like to be faithful with them, but we do not like them to be faithful with us. Being faithful means their not allowing us to go on to our own hurt when they can see the thing that is doing the hurt ; saying, 'Look here, brother, look here sister, I am not taking the position of one superior and better, but I do see that you are hurting yourself, doing injury to yourself ; you are spoiling your own life by doing this or that ; you are limiting your own influence in this way.' That is faithfulness. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Prov. xxvii. 6). The Lord here is a 'Faithful and True Witness'. He must, from time to time, come and say, 'Now, look here, we have gone on for quite a time, giving, waiting, working. There are things that are spoiling, limiting, hurting. We must deal with these ; we must get them eliminated.'

THE UNIVERSALITY AND HEAVENLY POSITION OF THE CHURCH

We pointed out that the opening up of this whole matter was, significantly enough, with Ephesus. And Ephesus is the key to the whole ; for, by His address to Ephesus, the Lord comprehends the whole: "He that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand" (ii. 1). He says that to Ephesus, as

though He were speaking to all. And we know that when Paul wrote his letter to Ephesus—so-called—it was a circular letter for the churches in Asia. The whole is comprehended by this approach to Ephesus. We look at Ephesus ; we remember what the Lord had given there.

First of all, that letter, that marvellous letter of Paul's, presents, as no other writing in the Bible presents, the great truth of the absolute *universality* of the Church: something far more than what is local, something far more than what is earthly, something far more than what is temporal. It is universal. There is a marvellous revelation of the Church there!

Then, as to where that Church really is. The letter was written to the company in a city called Ephesus ; but when you begin to read it, the Church is not all in Ephesus by any means—indeed, you are taken a long, long way from Ephesus. You find, when you are looking for the Church of the letter to the Ephesians, that you have to go to Heaven to find it—it is 'seated together with Christ in the heavenlies' (Eph. ii. 6). Would to God that that had got the grip on us that it ought to have done! Let us get our eyes and our mentality off the earthly aspect of things, and let us be gripped by this truth: If there are people who are really born from above, who are really indwelt by the Holy Spirit, baptized in one Spirit into one Body, no matter where they are, who they are, what their connections may be here on this earth, that earthly connection is not the important thing, the ultimate thing. By reason of their birth, and by their union with Christ in Heaven, they are in Heaven positionally—they are positionally above all that!

We only spoil things when we come down to this sorry earth level with Christians, and look at them according to their designations and titles and so on—let us get above that. If you truly love the Lord Jesus, no matter what you are in, you are my brother, you are my sister ; we are the heavenly family. We do not shut our eyes to all the problems that will arise. Yes, they will arise, but it will be in another realm. And when they arise, do not let us allow them to move us from our heavenly position—that of our true relatedness to Christ in Heaven. If we keep to that, we make for possibilities ; if we come down to earth level, we close the door at once to so many spiritual, Divine possibilities. Where are you looking for the Church? If you are looking for it down here, you will be grievously and despairingly disappointed ; you will have to look higher than that.—Now, you see, the trouble with these churches in Asia was

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that they had come down on to an earthly level. And as you read each message—oh, the earthliness, the wretchedness of what had come in! It had changed their whole position from heavenly to earthly.

THE REAL CONFLICT

Turning again to that letter to Ephesus, we find ourselves in a conflict, a conflict which is above and behind all that is going on here on this earth. These letters in the Revelation, and the letter to Ephesus as inclusive, had a very practical meaning for those who received the message. Is it Nero, that devil incarnate, there in Rome, who is causing all this suffering? is it a later Emperor, not much better, if any? Is that it? Is it all these things which are affecting the bodies of the saints and their situations? The apostle in his letter says: Look further; look behind the men, the instruments; look behind what they are using and what they are doing, and you will see other 'world rulers of this darkness'; you will see 'principalities and powers' that are higher than Nero or any of the others; you will see multitudes, 'hosts of wicked spirits' at work behind it all; and it is in that realm that our conflict lies. We are not fighting Nero; we are not fighting . . . (put in any name that you like!); we are not fighting men or régimes here on this earth: we are up against the ultimate forces of this universe, the forces of darkness.

Forget that, let that slip out of your consciousness and recognition at any time, and what happens? You quarrel with people; you let in all kinds of other considerations where men are concerned; you put this down to that and that; you account for it on human grounds, and what a mess we get into when we do that! If only the Church would look this thing straight in the face, and say: Yes, I know the frailties of people; I know the imperfections of men and of women, and they seem to be the real trouble spots; but back of it there is another force at work to ruin the testimony of the Church. The determining factor here is the testimony of Jesus, and it is against that that these wicked spirits, in their countless hosts, are so terribly at work. You and I have to be very careful that we are not the unconscious and unwitting instruments of those powers to weaken the testimony of the Lord, coming down to earth by our human judgments, appraisements, evaluations, standards, criticisms, and what not. Don't come down there! If you do, it is confusion—and it gives pleasure to the enemy.

That is the meaning of Ephesus. And in at any rate five cases, these messages stand very closely related to that great factor—that they had forgotten that they were in a heavenly warfare, they had forgotten that they were in a heavenly position, and they had come down, and had taken it all on in an earthly way.

RESOURCES FOR THE CONFLICT

But we cannot leave it there. This wonderful letter, which brings those things to light so strongly and fully, also tells us of the Church's resources in the battle and for maintaining its heavenly position. Wonderful things are spoken of in that letter as to our resources.

One wonderful phrase in the prayer of the apostle is this: 'that He would grant you to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inward man' (iii. 16). That is something for position and for conflict. 'Strengthened with might by His Spirit'. He repeats that in his letter to the Colossians in another way: 'that ye may be strengthened with might according to His glorious power' (Col. i. 11).

And then, for the warfare, 'the whole panoply of God' (Eph. vi. 13) is provided—everything that is required!

Now, the Lord had given that revelation long since, and He comes back and says: 'You have left your first position and your first works, as you have left your first love. Repent and do the first works—get back on to the original ground; recover what you have lost as to position.' Clearly He is saying, in effect: 'If you recover the position, I will see to the resources—"He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne"' (Rev. iii. 21); 'to rule the nations' (ii. 26, 27). What promises!

What is the point? We are not through yet; the work is not finished yet; there is still something to be done, and the testimony of the Lord must be preserved to the end intact. The word of the Lord to us is this: Make sure that you are not allowing to come in, for the weakening and spoiling and curtailing of your testimony, those things of this earth, of this creation, that are of the enemy's projecting. Make sure that you are not allowing them to come in. Take a very strong stand against everything of that kind. Stand together against this vicious foe. Maintain your heavenly position, and there you will find heavenly resources, and the Lord with you.

The Lord use this word for our strengthening.

T. A-S.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

THE EYES OF HIS GLORY

(Continued)

Readings : Ezekiel i. 22 - 28 ; Numbers xvi. 1 - 19, 30 - 35 ; Leviticus ix. 23, 24 ; Luke iii. 21, 22 ; I Corinthians xii ; I Peter v. 1 - 6.

CHRISt is the fulness of the glory of God, and in the measure in which Christ is found amongst the people of God anywhere, in that measure the glory of God is there manifest.

THE SPIRIT OF GLORY

It is clear from Leviticus ix that where Christ in His fulness is manifested, as He was typically in the whole range of those offerings, there the glory of the Lord rests in its fulness. So that in Leviticus ix we have typically God attesting Christ, and saying, in effect: Here is Christ set forth in fulness; here is My glory! We find the glory of God making itself apparent; if you like, the eyes of His glory suddenly becoming evident, attesting all that which He approves. So the presence of the glory of the Lord revealed is always God's way of saying: I am for this, and I am against that which is against this. So that, when we find in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ personally here on earth, Heaven breaking forth in a manner discernible to the senses of men, and a voice saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased", we are justified in saying that it is the attesting by the eyes of the glory that this One is utterly according to the mind of God. So Peter says that on the holy mount they were witnesses of His majesty, and there He received from the Father honour and glory. It was the glory attesting the Son of God on earth. Here on earth in a man was that which was the exact expression of God's thought.

In type, again in the Old Testament, the same thing is expressed when Moses, speaking of the land to which Israel were going, says: "The eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it." The eyes of His glory are there all the time, as if to say: This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

If that is true in principle, when we come to the incident of the Lord Jesus at His baptism, and we hear the voice from Heaven attesting the Son, and then, as confirmation accompanying it, the dove representing the anointing Spirit rests upon Him, we come to this conclusion, that the expression of

the glory of the Lord and the presence of the anointing Spirit are virtually the same thing. Peter in effect says this when he writes: "... the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God resteth upon you." (1 Peter iv. 14). The anointing Spirit is Heaven's attestation that here is the glory of the Lord. So the conclusion we reach is that, when we are speaking about the glory of the Lord being revealed, we are in other words affirming the presence of the anointing Spirit. You can immediately gather that up and say that every expression of the Spirit of the anointing, be it in a great and mighty way or in a little and apparently insignificant way, is an expression of the glory of the Lord.

Thus we reach the story of Korah in Numbers xvi. It is worth while noticing just a point before we come to that in detail. Immediately after Leviticus ix, in which we have the narrative of the glory being seen, where Christ is typically set forth and the fire falls from Heaven, we find two servants of God, Nadab and Abihu, functioning in their proper realm, but in the course of their functioning offering false fire before the Lord, and the fire of God comes out and consumes them. This is a solemn thing for the children of God. Nadab and Abihu, though they were in their proper realm, had not true respect to the demands of the holiness to which they had drawn nigh. Here are servants of God who touch holiness, and that holiness consumes them because they are not in accordance with the demands that it makes upon them.

DISPUTING THE SOVEREIGNTY

The particular point in the case of Korah is that he and his company challenged the anointing which rested upon Moses and Aaron. If you like to put it the other way, you can say that they touched the glory of God, which was identified with Moses and Aaron, and their error was a two-fold one. In the first instance, they challenged the anointing upon those who were truly anointed; and in the second instance, they assumed for themselves an anointing which God never gave, and entered into the realm of the operation of the anointing without having its reality.

The principles are the same. We may touch that glory as upon another, or else get into the range

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of that glory not in the bidding of God. The effect is the same: you touch the anointing outside the will of God, and the inevitable consequences follow.

Notice what Korah said when making his protest to Moses. He said, in effect, this: You are taking too much upon yourselves; you are assuming a position which virtually makes you set yourselves up as better than the rest; but all the Lord's people are holy, therefore they are all entitled to what you are and what you have got! Korah was right in making the declaration that a certain state was necessary in a people, a state of holiness, if that people were to enter into the realm of Divine service. The Spirit of the anointing is not something official that people take up and lay down at their will. Men are not made anointed servants of God because they decide to go that way. A certain state of heart is necessary in anybody who is going to touch the anointing in any way, or to know its power. Hence the necessity for us, as a first thing, if we would enter at all into the realm of Divine service, that our walk should be holy. "Be ye holy, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord", is a declaration of the Word. Without that there is no anointing, and if that state fail after the anointing has been received, that anointing ceases.

You find exactly that in Ezekiel. There at the beginning is the vision of the glory, and then the whole story of Ezekiel's vision is of that glory removing stage by stage from the place of its first residence, Jerusalem. You are given to see the filthy state of things in Jerusalem, and the glory withdrawing right away. And then the end of Ezekiel is the glory coming back, taking up its place again, but this time in a model House of God, speaking of Christ in every part. That is Ezekiel's whole story, that the glory of the Lord is seeking a dwelling place but can dwell only in a place suitable to its own character. And the Spirit of the anointing demands a state of Christ-likeness, in accord with its own nature, in order that it may rest anywhere. And since there is nothing outside of Christ Himself that can satisfy this condition the only ground in us for the anointing is on the principle of "Christ in you, the hope of glory". That is the basic condition of all anointing. Let us say again that service under the anointing does not depend upon our decision to take up this piece of work, or our preference for this line of things, and our decision to go in for it. That is an entirely false—but unhappily very prevalent—conception of Christian activity. But it is not on that basis that the anointing operates.

The all-important point is that the anointing of

the Spirit is entirely within the control of the Sovereign Lord Himself. Just as at His baptism the Lord was attested from Heaven by the Spirit, and the coming of the Spirit was within the sovereign control of God the Father, so now to-day wherever the Spirit of the anointing will rest upon any man or company, He will so rest because the Lord, the Man in the Throne, is the One who controls and to whom that under-company is subject. "He hath poured forth this" (Acts ii. 33).

Thus we come immediately to I Corinthians xii: ". . . dividing to each one severally even as he will." Everything is related to the government of the One in the Throne. Christ is the Head of the Church, the Holy Ghost is the expresser of that Headship, and the anointed service of any man or woman will have its measure and its value just in proportion as He who is Sovereign Head chooses to give the anointing, and energy by the anointing, to that one.

So we reach the point where we have established that it is the Lord, that Man in the Throne of blazing holiness (though it be of grace), who sovereignly is anointing a Moses and an Aaron, a Korah, a Dathan, and an Abiram, to their respective ministries. And if you asked Moses: Why are you what you are? he would say: 'I am what I am by the will of Him who appointed me.' If you asked the Lord Jesus: Why are You what You are? He would say: "I came . . . not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me". If you say: How do You do Your work? He will answer: "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing". If you ask any servant of God who is truly related to his Lord: Why are you what you are? Why did you choose this particular phase of Christian activity? if he is wise and understanding he will say: I did not choose it! I did not choose the Lord, but He chose me and appointed me. Every time we shall be brought back to this fact: "No man taketh the honour unto himself, but when he is called of God, even as was Aaron". The Hebrew letter attests Aaron as a called one of God. It is the Man in the Throne and the servant as beneath the Throne and subject to its government, who are brought into view, and that brings us to a number of points that we want to stress.

RECOGNISING THE DIVINE ORDER

We could, of course, at this point be led into a diversion of considerable dimensions, if we were to deal with what is the order which that One in the Throne determines should operate

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amongst His people. That would bring in the whole question of the order of the Church, as appointed by the Throne, not as ordered by man. There is in Christendom a Church order as commonly understood, but does it bear any vital relationship to the order of Him who is in the Throne? All true ordering amongst the people of God is an order by the will of Him who anoints, and who appoints. That is where Korah, of course, made his great mistake. Korah comes to Moses and says: You take too much upon yourselves, Moses and Aaron! Did Moses and Aaron take it upon themselves to be what they were? "No man taketh the honour unto himself, but when he is called of God, even as was Aaron."

The first blunder Korah made was that he assumed that somebody else was what they were by self-appointment; that they were what they were by the mere setting up of themselves to be it. He challenged the basis upon which another man functioned in the service of God.

This brings us to a point of great solemnity. In challenging the anointing under which that man served, Korah and his company were challenging the glory of God. In daring to put their hand upon that man in His service they were putting their hand out and touching that Throne of terrible glory. The consequence of their act was that virtually fire came out from the Throne and consumed them. How desperately solemn this is. We need not think only of Moses and Aaron who were fulfilling a supremely important spiritual ministry. You may think in similar terms of somebody in the humblest rank. Anointed service is not only that of a preacher on a platform. It may also be of a maid in a kitchen, or a bricklayer building a wall, or a dustman removing the rubbish. That one is what he is—if he is in the will of God—by the appointment and anointing of the One in the Throne. Challenge, therefore, the spiritual anointing on the least child of God who is truly and humbly walking with the Lord, and the effect is of a hand put out against the Throne in the glory.

When Korah did this the glory of the Lord appeared to all the congregation. Those eyes of glory have come on the scene again, and they have said: You are not touching a man; you are touching Me and My glory, and the Throne of holiness. This should seal our lips against speaking evil of one another within the family of God's people. Our lips should be mute so far as speaking ill of one another is concerned. But take that out into so large a realm as this in which Korah brought it, the challenge of the anointing resting upon a servant of God; the only thing God can do is sooner

or later to answer by fire unless there comes in repentance and recourse to the Blood of Jesus. That is firstly, a terrible warning, and secondly, a tremendous encouragement. It brings us, of course, to this conclusion, that by the grace of God we will never touch another in the realm of the anointing, even by a word. But, blessed be God, if another should dare to touch us in that realm, we can remember that they have not touched us, they have touched the eyes of His glory, for He said: "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye." That is for our consolation. What, then, is to be our attitude in the day when another does touch us, either by evil speaking concerning us, or by opposing himself to us? Shall we match his methods with similar ones? Remember that the eyes in the glory have taken account, have regarded it, and One whose eyes are as a flame of fire has said: "Vengeance is mine: I will repay." There is consolation as well as solemn warning in a thought like that.

THE ESSENTIAL ANOINTING

If the anointing from the Head is essential to service, and brings in the glory of God, then any service which is not thus anointed cannot be to His glory. That is another mistake that Korah and his friends made. They assumed that they could come into a realm of service other than that to which they had been called of God, and discharge it quite happily and successfully. If there is no anointing from the Head there is no accompanying glory. It is easy for you and me to enter into a self-appointed service, but in such a case there can never be the least hint of the glory of the Lord appearing. That glory is bound up with the anointing of the Spirit. To those who are facing the question of ministry we earnestly say: For God's sake be sure that there is no self-appointing if you want your life to be to the praise of His glory. Though in His great mercy He might be with you as His child, and cherish you, and up to a point save you from disaster, such a condition could never satisfy either Him or you. It must be God utterly with us, as we with Him. There can be nothing else. Watch against a self-appointed ministry. It can never bring glory to God.

But there is something much more terrible than merely that we may not really effect much. Korah and the rest were Levites. The Levite had nothing to do with the blood of the offering; that was the priest's business. They had many proper duties necessary to be fulfilled, and in the measure that they did them faithfully they were essential to the

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economy of the whole ; but these men dared to step out of the realm where they were properly called, into the realm where the vital element in ministry was the precious blood. In effect, without fear or question, they simply stepped brazenly into the realm where the infinite preciousness of the Blood of Christ was in view. Oh! there are some who do untold harm to themselves and other people by lightly coming into the realm of these holy mysteries, and without due reverence speaking of the Word of God, the Blood, the Cross, the glory of God, as if these were common things. These are awful in their solemnity. God save us from speaking of them except in the fear of the Lord and in the power of the Holy Ghost, and in true Godly sincerity of heart. Here is a realm where by a self-appointed ministry you may find yourself landed in a place where these awful burnings of holy things are, and you may touch the burnings like Korah and his company. You may take the censer and march alongside of an Aaron into the place where Aaron might go, and you were never called. For God's sake be sure of your guidance! For God's sake be sure you are called of God as was Aaron! Unless you are sure that God has called you to what is generally understood by the term 'a spiritual ministry'—or indeed to anything else—do not enter into it. Every man must be called of God with a specific call, as every man must be anointed of God with a specific anointing of the Holy Ghost, and to walk into a realm of spiritual ministry without the anointing is to come perilously near to touching the glory without the precious Blood.

That may work out in varying degrees, from the degree of simply no glory attending your ministry, to the awful horror of Korah's doom.

Let us carefully note, for our admonition, that this story of Korah is within the company of the servants of God, not of unbelievers. These are Levites. The Levites had no inheritance, the Lord was their portion ; men separated unto God in a most definite way. These are the men who touched the glory of God apart from the precious Blood, and they met judgment—not in the sense of eternal damnation but in that sense of which Peter speaks when he says: "Judgment must begin at the house of God."

A WARNING AGAINST PLACE-SEEKING IN GOD'S SERVICE

Korah shows us the awful peril of place-seeking in the service of God. Korah and his company wanted a more honourable service than they had,

as they esteemed honour. Why should we be only Levites and you priests? We will be priests too! God smite any spirit like that that might be amongst us. It is easy to be dissatisfied with your particular call ; it seems such an uninteresting one. It is up in a corner, and you have such a tiny world in which to move! You are called just to serve the Lord in the home, and there is someone else of your time who used to be just as you were, and they have gone out into a much more interesting realm! Beloved, it is not a question of seeking something more interesting, seeking something which you think will be more profitable to the Lord. The question is: What has the Lord appointed you to? Where do you find the anointing? If you were to go out into the large public realm outside your little narrow sphere—you who have envied the platform—and find yourself before a company of the Lord's people and God standing back from you, leaving you there, you would cry to go back into your little corner. To get out into the realm of Christian service without the anointing is *awful*. God knows there are times when it is bad enough to be there even with the anointing so far as your feelings go. You may be under the anointing and feel as if you would run miles to get away from the task before you ; but to face it without the anointing, even though you be a servant of God, a child of God, may mean that you will be put to shame, and if it does not do that, you will have such a bad time that you will wish you had never ventured out. Place-seeking is getting out from under the cover of the anointing in the realm of holy things. It is touching the glory of God in a wrong way, and God Himself is against you.

Do you see that, however humble your service, if it is under the anointing your tiny world is the place for the out-shining of the glory of God, simply because it is the place of the anointing? How it would transform many a vision if only we saw that the place of the Divine anointing was the place, and the only place, where we could glorify God.

There are people who are serving the Lord in humble spheres, and are all the time fretting in discontent and lusting for the day when they will be released out into the big thing. This represents a fundamental error and results in incalculable loss. If they are in the will of God now, the anointing is for them just where they are, and their calling is to glorify God there. There is no other spot on the whole earth's surface where they could glorify Him so, because nowhere in the whole world is the anointing for them as there. God requires faithfulness in the present stewardship before

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entrusting to us a greater one, and promotion comes always along the line of redeeming to the full, present opportunities, rather than restlessly straining after something else. The parable of the talents in Matthew xv settles this matter once for all.

DIVINELY CHOSEN LEADERS, AND DIVINELY CHOSEN CO-OPERATORS

There is a necessity for us to recognise that there are some who are set by the anointing in a superior place to others. Their responsibility in the realm of spiritual things is greater. And there are some who, by the anointing, are set in a place where the responsibility is less. God requires that these related positions should be recognised by both parties, and sometimes it is needful for the one to be reminded of this as the other. It may sometimes need special Divine enablement to take the place of subjection, but there are equally times when it needs a special energizing of God to cause you to take your position in an authoritative realm; you would very much rather sit right at the back of the hall than stand up and speak; everything in you says No! But the anointing Spirit says: You speak! We have to recognise the anointing, and those who are set in a position of lesser responsibility in the House of God have to recognise that the anointing gives to certain others a superior place—superior, that is, in spiritual authority. And it is a grievous day when those who are set beneath ignore the anointing of those who are set above.

Younger brethren and sisters, be careful how you ignore the counsel of your elder brethren in the Lord. Remember what we read in Peter: "Likewise, ye younger, be subject unto the elder". Peter has said just before this, concerning the elder ones, that they are to exercise the oversight, to take their superior position, "not of constraint, but willingly, according to God"—that is, because God has anointed them to do so and also in accordance with the manner of the Spirit of God. But then: "Neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves ensamples to the flock." Those who are in a superior position are not given it in order to lord it over all the rest. It is said that Moses was the meekest man on the face of the earth, though set in a position of authority above every other man in Israel. Those with spiritual authority under the anointing are not called to be little lords; but those who are set in lesser positions under the anointing must beware how they ignore those who are set over them.

There are not lacking in the course of history illustrations of the peril where a younger brother chose to ignore the counsel of his elder brethren, decided he was going off on his own in a certain way in spite of their warnings; and for a year or two everything went well. He found himself in a large realm, a new release in ministry, doors widely open to him, and he felt: I have escaped from the limitations of being subject to my elders. But do you see what he has done? He has denied the anointing; he has come, therefore, not into conflict with men but with the glory; the eyes of the glory have noted. The final account will not be between him and the men he has ignored, but between himself and the Lord and His glory. That may take years to work out, though it may take only a brief time. Ignore the anointing; treat it as something that you can sweep aside, although you know it is the Lord's appointing: your final reckoning is not with the individual who was thus anointed, but with the glory of God.

Again remember we are in the realm, not of the unsaved meeting a righteous God, but of servants of God, saved, Blood-washed, but who in this matter rejected the counsel of God. The end is that they touched the glory of the Lord, and to touch that glory is, in greater or lesser measure, inevitably to be touched with fire, and the dreadful examples before us, of Nadab and Abihu, and Korah and his company, show us what may be in the ultimate the result of being involved in such things as this.

THE LORD OUR VINDICATOR

All this is true, and of such solemn import, but we may take this consolation for our own selves. If we are faithful in our stewardship there is no need for self-vindication when others despise us or put us to shame. The eyes of the glory have remarked everything that has happened. The Lord will repay. There is in the Church the judicial ministry of the Holy Ghost, and He will exercise it very faithfully, even though at times in mercy He may delay to act. We may therefore encourage ourselves in the Lord if we are really waiting for Him: "They shall not be ashamed that wait for me." "God worketh for him that waiteth for Him." The anointing will be made manifest finally.

What is the qualification, then, for the service of God under the anointing? To go about priding ourselves on what we are? No! Peter tells us the way: "All of you, gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another: for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves

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therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.”

To recognise what the glory of God really is, is to be brought still lower down at His feet; and the more you humble yourself at His feet, the more true will be the exalting in due time. And for you, in your lowly-heartedness, *for you*, is the blazing glory of God, to be your rearward, to be your guide, as the ark went before the people to find a resting place, to be your shade on the right hand and on the left. The eyes of the glory are noting everything, and storing it all up, and all that you

might, after man's thought, have taken on to do for yourself you may safely leave to Him. And so, as we are brought lower by the Cross, we are brought into deeper, mightier fellowship with the glory of the Lord, and expression is being given to that which Ezekiel saw—a company subject to the government of the Man in the Throne: members of His Body owing utter allegiance to Christ as Head.

Let us humble ourselves beneath the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt us in due time.

G. P.

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

III. THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH

“In those days cometh John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, saying, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew iii. 1, 2).

“I . . . say unto thee, that . . . I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew xvi. 18).

“And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church” (Matthew xviii. 17).

IT is a very significant fact that it is in the Gospel by Matthew, which is essentially the Gospel of the Kingdom, that the Church is first brought into view in the New Testament.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH

The first question which arises is as to what the difference is between the Kingdom and the Church. What is the difference? Are they two things, or one? The attempt has been made, by one considerable body of teaching, to prove that they are two different things entirely: that the Kingdom is one thing, belonging to one age, that it is now in this dispensation in suspense, but that it will come in with the restoration of the Jews in the next dispensation, the present dispensation being that of the Church. If you want to believe that, you will have to do a lot of juggling with the Scriptures—as has been done. As far as I can see, that system of truth is absolutely unsupported by the Scripture itself. However, I do not want to introduce a controversial element or source of confusion. I am simply saying that this is a question that we must face.

What is the difference? Are they two things? The answer is really Yes and No. They are not the

same thing, and yet they are. That does not help you very much, I know, but we must go on to explain.

The sovereign rule of God and of the heavens, which has come to be called the Kingdom, is, in the first place, as we explained earlier, an announcement, a proclamation, a declaration, of a Divine fact: namely, that the sovereignty of God has been established in and through His Son Jesus Christ *in this dispensation*, in a new and immediate way. That fact was proclaimed for the first time, in the power of the Holy Spirit, on the day of Pentecost. God had made Him Lord and Christ (Acts ii. 36). From that time onward, the note was made to ring out through the nations in ever-widening circles—Jesus Christ is Lord! That is the first phase of the sovereign rule or the Kingdom—a proclamation or an announcement.

Then, as we saw, it is an activity. Something is going on. When it is announced, when the proclamation is made, something begins to happen. Heaven is moved, and believing souls are saved. Hell is roused, and the heralds are persecuted. It is an activity—not just a doctrine, a truth, a theory. This sovereign rule or Kingdom is a mighty energy. And so, from a presenting of a fact, it becomes the demanding of an answer, and thereby a sifting and sorting of mankind into two categories, into one of two kingdoms.

We saw, further, how comprehensive is this rule, spreading itself sovereignly over everything, taking up everything into its sovereignty. Even the antagonisms and oppositions are taken hold of by this sovereignty, and made to serve the end which they were intended to defeat. It is all-comprehending, knowing all the course of things through history, as those parables make so clear. That last parable in Matthew xiii brings us right to the end

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of the age ; and from the first—the sowing of the seed, the word of the Kingdom—through all the phases and stages and variations, and everything that arises, to the last, the end of the age, we see that this sovereign rule has comprehended the whole, foreseen and foretold exactly what would happen and how things would develop, and has laid hold of all ; so that at the last the sovereign rule is triumphant. That is the essential meaning of the ‘ Kingdom ’.

THE CHURCH AND THE FRUIT OF THE KINGDOM

What is the Church? Well, the operation, the activity, of the sovereign rule works like this. The effect of the challenge and demand and sifting out, brought about by the proclamation, is that all along certain people are found who make the right reaction and response, and are thus brought right into the meaning of that sovereign rule: people, that is to say, who first acknowledge, and then themselves declare, that Jesus Christ is Lord. The sovereign rule has done its work so far, and then the fruit of that sovereign activity in the nations is gathered into a body called the Church. The Church becomes the vessel, the repository, of the work of the sovereign government of God. It gathers into itself as a vessel the fruit of the sovereign activity: so that the Kingdom leads to the Church, and the Church is the result, the embodiment, of the Kingdom.

It is interesting to note in Matthew’s Gospel how very clear that is, if we can only see it. The last parable of the seven in chapter xiii, the parable of the drag-net, brings us, as I have said, to the end of the age: the angels are sent forth, and the good are gathered into vessels, but the bad are cast away. Now turn over to chapter xxiv, verse 31, and here you find that the Lord is definitely answering that part of the disciples’ question—“ What shall be the end of the age?” (v. 3). “ He shall send forth his angels . . . and they shall gather together his elect ”. Now, chapter xiii is the casting away of the bad fish ; chapter xxiv is the gathering of the good; and between the two, in chapters xvi and xviii, we find the Church introduced.

Is that clear? The work of the Kingdom, the activity of the Kingdom, is the searching out, finding out, challenging, receiving, gathering, bringing into the Church. Strange that nothing is said about the Church coming into existence, other than—“ I will build my church ”! Nothing is said about Church teaching at all. It is simply introduced,

almost as though it were a recognised thing, and then the final picture is of the elect being gathered. The Church is the fruit and sum of that first activity of the sovereign rule of God. And the Church is the ‘ elect ’, the ‘ chosen ’. Peter and Paul speak of the Church in this very language. “ Elect . . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father ” (I Peter i. 1, 2). And “ he chose us in him before the foundation of the world ” (Eph. i. 4).

I trust that we are clear now that the Church and the Kingdom are not two things, and yet they are. They are not the same thing, and yet they are. If you like, they are cause and effect. They are the complement of each other. There is a sense in which the sovereign rule is a ‘ bigger ’ thing than the Church—that is, if you will use the word ‘ bigger ’ in the sense of dimensions and not intrinsic value. It is so comprehensive. As we have seen, it takes up anything—almost everything—even the work of the Devil, the enemy who sowed his children amongst the children of God. This sovereign rule is such an expansive and wonderful thing. But then it focuses down upon certain results, and gathers them into a concrete entity called the Body of Christ. So that we have part and counterpart: they are one, and yet they are not one.

The Church, then, is the embodiment of the triumph of His rule. That is not only a statement of fact or of truth—it is a glorious testimony. It says what the Church is in the thought of God, but it also says what the Church ought to be in itself—the very embodiment of the triumph of the sovereign rule of God. Of course, it is so, if it is the Church in reality at all. Every one of us, if we really are in the Church and of the Church, according to New Testament conception, is an embodiment and an expression of the triumph of His sovereign rule. You can use another phrase, if you like, which only defines that—sovereign grace, for His rule in this dispensation is the rule of grace. We are here by the triumph of sovereign grace, and we shall remain here on that ground alone, and at last we shall be found in that elect company simply because of the triumph of His sovereign rule through grace. That is the Church as the fruit of the Kingdom.

SOVEREIGN ACTIVITY IN RELATION TO THE WORD

Next, the Church is the embodiment of the sovereign activity in relation to the *word* of the Kingdom, as given by the Sower. While there is a large proportion of failure and disappointment, there is the thirtyfold, the sixtyfold and the hundredfold, and the Church takes that in. The Church

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is found to be composed of the triumph of the word of the Kingdom. Some of us are only 'thirtyfold' results, some a bit more, some perhaps may be even a hundredfold. At any rate, something has happened, and the Lord has got something in us. We want Him to have all that He can have. But that is just what the Church is—it is the thirtyfold, sixtyfold, hundredfold result of the word of the Kingdom. It is the wheat as over against the tares, the children of the Kingdom as over against the children of the Devil. We thank God that we can truly claim to be His children.

Again, the Church is the embodiment of the truth of unleavened bread. It 'keeps the feast' with 'unleavened bread' (I Cor. v. 8). Spiritually that means that the leaven has been purged out. Praise God that all the corrupting, disintegrating work of sin and of the world has been dealt with.

The Church takes up the inner principle of the tree—the great, abnormal, 'freak' tree, as we called it—a mustard seed growing into a great tree, which it never does normally and naturally. It must be something absolutely abnormal to do it. But, over against that, the Church is something spiritually normal and healthy. There is nothing freakish about it. The Lord deliver us from all that is abnormal and all that is freakish. Ask the Lord to save you from being freakish! The Church is the true thing, and not the false thing like that great tree.

The Church is also the vessel of the good fish. Perhaps you do not like to think of yourself as a fish! But that is what the Church is. We may not think we are good fish—we may feel we are very poor fish!—nevertheless we are different; there is a difference.

And to crown it all, the Church is the "pearl of great price", and the "treasure hidden in the field".

All this, mark you, is within the compass of the teaching about the Kingdom; it all comes in the same chapter on the mysteries or parables of the Kingdom. They all issue in something positive, as over against something either negative or wrong; and the Church comes in and takes up all that is positive and right as the fruit of the word of the Kingdom. The Church then becomes the chosen, the elect, the holy nation, to whom this 'Kingdom', in this sense, is given. I will not enlarge upon that now; you will recall the Scriptures which I have cited.

THE SEAT OF THE SOVEREIGN RULE

But the Church is not only the embodiment of the fruit and triumph of the sovereign rule—it is

that in which the immediate power of that rule is centred and then mediated. The sovereign rule of God, of Heaven, is centred in the Church. That is the first great truth about the Church in those early days, as it first comes into being. If you want to know where to find this sovereign rule, government, dominion, authority, of God and of Heaven, you will find it in the Church. There it is in Jerusalem, there it is in Antioch; there it is going everywhere. God has put authority and heavenly power in the Church in a peculiar way.

Oh, that the Church were alive to the meaning of its existence, in this sense—alive to the great deposit with which it has been entrusted, as the very vessel of this sovereign operation, this mighty sovereign activity and rule of God. That deposit is there. When things have been as they should be, that is exactly what has been found in the Church. There were times when unbelievers coming in fell down on their faces, and said, 'God is in the midst of you' (I Cor. xiv. 24, 25). While joyous, while gladsome, while very blessed in other respects, there ought yet to be something very awful about the Church. "Of the rest durst no man join himself to them" (Acts v. 13). Oh that that forbidding of Divine holiness might be found in the Church! The Church is the seat of this *judicial* activity of the Divine sovereignty. So it should be.

THE SOVEREIGN RULE MEDIATED THROUGH THE CHURCH

But then this sovereignty is mediated through the Church. It goes out and says: "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth . . ." (Acts iii. 6). 'In the *Name* of Jesus of Nazareth, I command you, I say unto you . . .' Here is the authority mediated, the Kingdom—poor word again—the sovereign rule, centred in and operating through the Church. That is how it ought to be. The authority of Jesus Christ is in the Church and should be exercised by the Church. Matthew xvi makes that quite clear. "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. xvi. 19). If that is not authority in Heaven and earth, what is? But it is the authority of Him to whom it was given (Matt. xxviii. 18) through His mighty victory.

THE EXPRESSION OF THE DIVINE AND HEAVENLY ORDER

The Church is, further, that in which the character of the Divine and heavenly order and rule is

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expressed. If the Kingdom of God and of Heaven has, as one of its essential aspects and components, the nature of Him that rules, then this is not just official, this is not just ecclesiastical—this is spiritual and moral in its very nature. At this point we ought to extend our meditations and go back to those three mighty chapters of Matthew's Gospel, embracing what is called 'the sermon on the mount': for there is a revolution in ideas there. The whole conception of power is changed. Virtue is pre-eminent, character is predominant. The true values are shown to lie in what you *are*, not in that which is official and organized. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit . . ." "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom . . .".

That opens a very large field, which we cannot touch now. But it is all gathered into this, that the Kingdom is, from one standpoint, the expression of the nature, of the character, of Him who is sovereign, and that that is to be found in the Church. We may think of the Kingdom as a great, general thing, operating and active in the whole world, irrespective of anything and everything that is contrary to it; but it is not going to stop there. It is going to work until it has produced an expression of its own character; it will work down and down until it has that nucleus that expresses the character of Him who is on the throne. And it is in the Church that the Divine and heavenly nature is found, and it is that nature that is sovereign.

There is perhaps no greater force operating from

Heaven than the force of meekness. "He humbled himself, becoming obedient . . ." (Phil. ii. 8); but the whole kingdom of Satan was shattered along that line. Men do not like that at all. Here is the revolution. But, you see, it is in the Church that this tremendous power is to be found—this being poor in spirit, this meekness, this being persecuted for righteousness' sake, and all the rest. But therein is power, therein is authority. It is very often not until you get down on your knees, utterly broken as to your own pride, that you get through to God in absolute victory. To be emptied of all self is the way of power, the way of God, the way of Heaven. That is the essence of the Kingdom or sovereignty, and that is all to be taken up by the Church.

THE CHURCH JOINT-HEIR WITH CHRIST

Just one brief word in conclusion. The Church is the joint-heir with Christ of the inheritance, the universal rule, in the ages to come. We know this on the authority of Scripture. The Church is heir to the throne of the world to come—to the administrative place with the Lord Jesus over all that will be extra to itself. For a city presupposes a country, a metropolis presupposes a wider range. The City in the midst of the nations means that government over the nations is *there*, and at the end of the book of the Revelation (xxxi. 24, xxxii. 2) that is where the whole matter issues.

T. A-S.

HIS MARVELLOUS LIGHT

" . . . If ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious; unto whom coming, a living stone, rejected indeed of men, but with God elect, precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ . . . Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (I Peter ii. 3-5, 9).

" . . . To the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Ephesians iii. 10).

GOD has chosen to reveal Himself by means of redeemed sinners. He brings them into His marvellous light, not only that they may enjoy the experience, but in order that the same marvellous

light of His excellencies may shine out through them.

EFFECTS OF REDEMPTION

The showing forth of His excellencies is the outcome of an experience which begins with deliverance by the sprinkled blood. This starting point is referred to in I Peter i. 19 as redemption by the great price of the Blood of the Lamb. The previous verse gives a reminder of the kind of bondage from which the redeemed have been delivered—"the vain manner of life handed down from your fathers". Life without redemption is vain, and it may be hard. In the case of Israel in Egypt it certainly did not mean an effortless life—far from it. It was very busy, but alas! it was vain. They worked hard, but without any value for God. The treasure cities which they built were for others; not for themselves and certainly not for the Lord.

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but for their tyrant rulers. It was a vain manner of life, a kind of treadmill of an existence, which never got them any nearer to their true destiny. It may seem rather an aspersion on the fathers that they could not hand down something better than a vain manner of life. Yet the fathers were not to blame. In any case that which comes by natural inheritance is without spiritual value. It gets nowhere. It is vain because it lacks a vital personal experience of the knowledge of God.

Mercifully that frustrating and empty existence was brought to an end on the night when redemption came by the Blood of the Lamb. The result was a new life—"having been begotten again" (i. 23). This was the day when they began to live, and to have a living hope. In the historical record it was described as the "beginning of days". The past was all left behind. The very calendar was changed. They were being led into an entirely new kind of life.

For them redemption also involved a new relationship. First of all with the Father, a holy Father who expected His children to be holy too, and provided them with His own holiness (i. 15 - 17). It was also a holy relationship among themselves: they had 'purified their souls in their obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren' (i. 22). In addition to the Blood of the Lamb there was also the feast of unleavened bread, which demanded the putting away of "all wickedness, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking" (ii. 1). The life of the redeemed is new, not only in its relationship with the Father, but also in the purity of love among the brethren. All this is fundamental to the outshining of the glory.

One more point emphasized in the Exodus story is described in i. 13—the girding up of the loins. The new life is also a pilgrim life. The people of God have been delivered from the static condition of the house of bondage in order that they might be free to devote themselves to a strenuous journey. They are now on the move, girded up for the march towards the Divine objective.

OBJECTIVE OF REDEMPTION

As Peter passes into chapter ii of his letter, he seems to move straight over in thought from the Passover night, with its sprinkled blood, its unleavened bread and its girded loins, to stress the end which God has had in view. When the Israelites had demanded to be freed from Egypt so that they could worship God, it may have seemed like an excuse, a subterfuge. But they were right, and they spoke better than they knew, for God's end

was to have them as a spiritual house for worship and for witness. This was the purpose of their liberation.

They were to offer up spiritual sacrifices, and they were to show forth His excellencies. These are really two parts of the one objective of redemption. They must, however, be kept in this order. The first task of the spiritual house is not to show the world what God is like, wonderful though that mission may be. The first thing is to provide for the satisfaction of God. Fellowship and worship must come before witness, and must be the power behind it.

Moses himself was the great personification of this truth. In his face there was an outshining of God's marvellous light which could be seen by all the people, but that was due to the fact that he had first spent time alone with God. He served the people best by serving God first; he was able to show forth the Lord's excellencies to others because he first had had a personal experience of those excellencies, and had a life with God in the secret place. This was meant to be true of the whole nation. It is meant to be true of the Church. Redemption has brought us salvation and sanctification in order that we might render true service to God. This service is based on the golden altar and the golden lampstand. From the house there first proceeds the offering of spiritual worship to the Father and then the continuance of that service by the displaying of the light of His glory to the world.

GLORY IN THE CHURCH

This, then, is what redemption is for, that by means of the Church God may be able to express His own glory. It may be thought that this is reserved entirely for the future, that it can only be realised in that "inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled", which is reserved in Heaven. But Ephesians iii. 10 makes it clear that God wants the glory to be seen *now*. Now is the time for something of the marvellous light to be shed forth through the Church. We are, even now, an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a people for God's own possession. In this fourfold description of the Church we may discover what is meant by the call to show forth His excellencies.

1. AN ELECT RACE. THE LIFE OF CHRIST

Racial union is based on a common life, and we are described as "an elect race". This is all-important, this matter of a common life. It is not just a question of our affirming that Jesus is still alive, but of the evidence of that very life of Jesus being op-

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erative in us. We also are "living stones" because we have come to Him who is the Living Stone (ii. 4, 5). The Church was born when the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus began to operate in the people of God. A new race was formed, a race whose life came from the One whom men had rejected but whom God had proved to be elect and precious. Resurrection life came and took possession of them. It transformed those concerned. It rejoiced the angels. It startled the demons. It challenged the world. This life was not produced by the disciples—it came direct from Heaven. They could not produce it, but they had to be careful always to obey it and not to contradict its working.

Satan soon found that he could not quench this life, for it is the invincible life of the risen Christ, and so it is incorruptible. This is what Peter says: "having been born of incorruptible seed" (i. 23). It is also throne life, for Jesus both lives on the throne of Heaven and also reigns in the lives of this new race. The first chapters of the Acts show how futile were his attempts to destroy this life by frontal attack, and they also show how he tried through Ananias and Sapphira to introduce a foreign element, something from another realm, into the community of the saints. It was subtle and unobtrusive, being limited to two ordinary members of the Church who might not perhaps have seemed important to the whole. But even the contradiction of the life in those two people, had it been tolerated, might have turned the marvellous light into tragic darkness. For this reason the Holy Spirit acted so promptly and so fiercely. It was fundamental to all the purposes of God that there should be no contradiction to the true life of Christ in this elect race.

What was fundamental at the beginning is still just as important. The one thing which matters supremely, and which is more important than size, form, procedure or ministry, is that the Church should be animated and sustained by the very life of Christ. The flesh need not be an ugly form of life, indeed it can be apparently very nice, but it is alien to this new life in the Spirit. It belongs to another race; it is not the life of Christ. So we are told that the Spirit is in open conflict against it (Gal. v. 17). It is equally true that the flesh lusts against the Spirit, but the Spirit is well able to take up the challenge. He will not quietly accept this rival to the rule of Christ, so He stands, with His great weapon of the Cross, to slay everything which is a menace to the life of Christ. He calls us to co-operate with Him in this matter, for only so can the excellency of Christ be displayed in the redeemed new race.

2. A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, THE LOVE OF CHRIST.

The second description of the redeemed people is that they are "a royal priesthood". The unity of the elect race depends not only upon their common life but also upon a ministry of love. When Satan's attempt to corrupt the life of the Church failed, as described in Acts v, then he made an even subtler attempt to dim the glory by an attack on brotherly love. With the opening words of the next chapter, "Now in those days . . . there arose a murmuring . . ." (Acts vi. 1), we might almost imagine that we were back with Israel in the wilderness.

Before the great divide between Jew and Gentile began to disturb the Church, there were threats of trouble by reason of a division which already existed in the Jewish nation itself. There was a deep cleavage between the Palestinian Jews, who were descendants of the original remnant which had returned from Babylon, and the more prosperous Jews who belonged to the Dispersion, with many suspicions and antipathies between those who spoke a corrupt Hebrew and the more numerous cosmopolitan Jews who spoke Greek. This was not even a religious division—for the Grecians were devoted to the Temple—but something due to past history and upbringing. It is, however, precisely this kind of natural element which can wreck the testimony of the Church. The complaint was that the Hebrews were not treating the Grecian widows fairly. Though it concerned what was apparently only a small item of the life of the Church, a matter of the administration of charity, yet it was seen by the apostles to be a menace to the testimony. Their reaction was prompt and wise.

The answer was seven men. Seven men filled with the Spirit. There is only one way of dealing with the divisions which come from natural ideas and prejudices, and that is to have a full expression of the mind of the Spirit. The grievances may have been real. The apostles made no attempt to excuse or ignore them. They faced them frankly and answered them with complete impartiality, and called for the appointment of a group of men whose only interest was to express the mind and the love of the Spirit. This was done not to pacify or appease the grumblers, but because even a little rift would have been fatal to their testimony. The whole multitude was pleased, not for any sectional triumph or advantage, but because they had been saved from disunity, and once more the marvellous light shone out.

The testing went on, and it is important to realise that this unity must not be confined to a local group, but that there must be a right spirit towards

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all saints. This is vital; if the excellencies of *Christ* are to be shown forth, then there must be a priestly concern for all the people who bear His Name.

In the end Jerusalem seems to have failed in this very matter. The believers there were tested when Saul first came to that city. "He assayed to join himself to the disciples: and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple" (Acts ix. 26). He was not a convert of a few days, since he had now been saved for some years and had both witnessed and suffered for his Lord. Why did they not wish to receive him? Was it because he had not been converted through any of them, because he owed no allegiance to them, and in some ways was not like them? They *all* feared him, so it seems that even Peter was included. Thanks, however, to Barnabas, another man full of the Spirit, this difficulty was surmounted.

A further test arose later about Peter himself. If he had been suspicious about Saul, then the time came when he learned what it felt like to be so treated, for after his visit to Caesarea he himself came under suspicion (Acts xi. 2). It is an undoubted law, though at times it may seem a harsh one, that ultimately a man reaps what he sows. Suspect your brother, be hostile or cold to him, and the time will come when other brothers will treat you in the same way.

Happily, on this occasion, too, there was a triumph of the love of God. But later the Church at Jerusalem seems to have lost its royal priesthood. How else can we explain what took place on a further visit from Paul? After he had brought his generous gift and told his thrilling story, they could hardly wait before reviving the one issue which threatened the unity of Christians in those days: "... they glorified God; and they said unto him, Thou seest, brother . . ." (Acts xxi. 20). There is not even a full stop between! They concocted an elaborate scheme in an attempt to appease human prejudice—with what results? A near disaster for Paul, and in the end full disaster for themselves. That seems to have marked the beginning of the end of the Jerusalem church. When suspicion, lack of care for other saints, and contradiction of the essential spiritual unity of all believers, are tolerated, then even the chiefest of the apostles cannot prevent the dimming and final extinction of the marvellous light.

3. A HOLY NATION. THE RULE OF CHRIST.

The third description applied to those called to display the excellencies of Christ, "a holy nation",

may be said to refer to spiritual order. The marvellous light is seen by the Church's life—it is an elect race. It is also seen by the Church's love—it is a royal priesthood. Now it is seen by its obedience—it is a holy nation. Spiritual order means complete submission to the rule of the Holy Spirit. We notice that Christ is not only the first stone, but He is called the "chief corner stone" (ii. 6). The building is composed of many living stones. They take their character from the great Living Stone, but they only make an edifice as they depend on Christ as their keystone, being rightly related to Him and to one another in Him. The testimony to the Lordship of Christ demands a people who are functioning together under His one government.

If, as Scripture teaches us, this spiritual order is represented by the many members of one body, then any failure of co-ordination among the members will reflect on the head. If the hand does not operate as it should, then the blame will probably be attributed to the brain. Now there can be no fault in our glorious Head, for He is perfect; but when there is a lack of united and co-ordinated functioning among Christians, it is the reputation of Christ which suffers. The marvellous light is dependent on spiritual order. The early Church of Peter's beginnings was free from officialdom, but it was amazingly efficient because the rule of Christ was maintained in its midst by the Holy Spirit.

There is not much teaching about spiritual order in the book of the Acts. But Paul's letter to one of the churches sets out what at least ought to have been their procedure: that is, the free functioning of all the members, with unity in variety. This can only be when the Spirit is allowed to govern. Indeed the section begins with the statement that it is only by the Holy Spirit that men can say that Jesus is Lord (I Cor. xii. 3). The Church can never affirm the Lordship of Christ in a convincing way unless it is ordered and governed by the Holy Spirit.

The theory of spiritual order is not dealt with in the book of the Acts, but the narrative makes it plain that such order was everywhere in operation. This no doubt explains the marvellous power of those days. Think of the movements of the various servants of the Lord: of the way, for instance, in which Philip was moved first to Samaria, and then away from there to speed the Gospel into Ethiopia, and of how finally he was taken to Caesarea to follow up what the Spirit had initiated through Peter. This is but one example of the many movements which made a perfect pattern and revealed wise planning, but the secret

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of the government was obedience to the rule of Christ.

What was true of individual workers was also the case within the churches. Even when the leaders in Jerusalem were either in prison or in hiding, the Church still functioned, and functioned most effectively (Acts xii. 5). As the apostles moved onwards in pursuit of their world mission, they were able, even in churches which had little experience in the things of God, to appoint elders under whom the churches could discover and experience the will of the Lord (Acts xiv. 23). When, later, we read the letter to the Philippians, we may well wonder how such a virile and spiritual church could have been formed, maintained and developed, when Paul was not allowed to stay long enough to shape or govern it. The answer is clear. This 'nation' is holy, it is different; its headquarters are in Heaven and its Leader is Christ.

4. GOD'S OWN PEOPLE. GROWTH IN CHRIST.

Finally, the Church is to express Christ's excellencies by its continual growth in spiritual quality. If the Church were a mere institution, it might well remain static, or go on repeating its procedure according to some established formula. Since, however, it is a people, a live entity making its own personal history, it must surely develop and progress. And since it is this special kind of people, namely, one for God's own special possession, its growth ought to be of ever-increasing pleasure and value to the Lord.

The fulness of Christ's life can only be expressed in development, in movement, in exercise and in increase. Even the newborn babes are to teach all the saints a lesson, for we all should be longing for the spiritual milk by which we may continually grow unto salvation (ii. 2). The aged Peter left this as his last appeal to the Church, that we should "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (II Peter iii. 18), making it plain that such growth is the only antidote to spiritual declension. How strikingly Peter himself grew, through the years! What depth, what spiritual maturity, are discernible in these letters of his.

When any man stops growing spiritually, there is in his case all the making of a tragedy. And if any church stops short and either cannot or will not move on into more of the will of God, then its essential function of showing forth the marvellous light of God's glory is frustrated. In vain such a church may recount the glories of its past history, and in vain endeavour to repeat what has happened before. God is always calling us to move on with Him, to recognise that we are not our own but His own special possession, and to learn new lessons which He is waiting to teach us.

There is no doubt that we have been brought out into His marvellous light. Some of us may be convinced that we have been entrusted with marvellous light. The question is as to whether the marvellous light is shining out through us. This is what we have been redeemed for.

H. F.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

HIS STRONG HANDS

JOSEPH was still quite small, and his brothers often made fun of him. They were unkind as well as rough, those big brothers of his, and they took pleasure in scoffing at him. In those days men used bows and arrows, so naturally young Joseph wanted to learn to use them like the rest. The bows were made of wood which was hard and tough, and it was difficult to bend them enough to make the arrows shoot straight and swift to their mark. Joseph tried hard to do this, but he had not sufficient strength in his arms, so that his attempts to shoot were very poor. The brothers laughed at him all the more. They pulled their own bowstrings back very taut, sending their arrows whizzing away into the distance, and then they urged Joseph to do the same. He tried. He tried very hard, but he just could not manage it. The bow was so stiff

and unbending that he could not draw out the string to shoot.

As the brothers were standing around laughing at him, with Joseph feeling very foolish and unhappy, he realised that somebody had come up behind him. He could not see who it was, but he felt an arm come from behind, along the length of his arm, and a hand closed over his left hand. It was a big and strong hand, which completely covered his, holding the bow very firmly as well. At the same time another arm came along his right arm, and a hand held both his right hand and the bowstring with the arrow pressed against it. Slowly and very surely, the hands began to pull the string to its very limit. Joseph's hands still held the bow and arrow, and yet his small hands were firmly held in other and stronger hands than his.

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When the bow was fully stretched, then a well-known voice said, 'Now!' He let the arrow fly. Away it went, swiftly and perfectly straight, and when it finally reached its mark it had gone farther than any of those which his brothers had shot. Little Joseph, the one whom they all mocked, had shot better than all the rest. The reason why the voice which had spoken to Joseph was well-known was simply because it was the voice of his own father, Jacob. It was Jacob who had come up behind, and it was his strong arms and hands which had really fired the arrow. Yet they were also Joseph's hands. So it was that with his father's help he was able to silence the unkindness of his brothers and hold his own with the strongest of them.

When Jacob was an old man he gave a parting message to each of his sons. When he came to speak of Joseph, he remembered that incident of so many years before, and it gave him an idea for describing the victories which Joseph had gained in his later life. For as Joseph grew up he had still more enemies, and they were much too strong for him. Again and again he would have been defeated if it had not been for special strength given to him. This time his earthly father could not help him. No man could help him. But his Father in Heaven held his hands, and made him strong to do the right and get the victory.

It was not the mighty Jacob who had helped him this time, as it had been when he was a lad. It was someone better than that—"the Mighty One of Jacob"; that is, the Lord God Himself. So

this is what the old father said in his last message about Joseph:

*"But his bow abode in strength,
And the arms of his hands were made strong
By the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob . . .
Even by the God of thy father, who shall
help thee . . ."* (Genesis 49. 24, 25).

Some might think that I have imagined this story in the life of Joseph. If I have it is because I once saw something like it happen among the redskins of the Amazon forest. A little Indian boy, who was so anxious to shoot like the rest but had no strength, was made to do it in the very way which I have just described. His father stood behind him, covered the boy's arms with his own, held the boy's two hands in his, and so pulled back the bowstring and shot the arrow right to its mark. The little lad was delighted. Until then he had only played with toy bows and arrows, but now he had shot a big arrow from a big bow. He had done it with his own hands, and yet it was really his father's help and his father's strength which had done the work.

And what about us? When we are called to fight for the right, we often feel weak and ready to give up. How can we, who have so little power, face our foes and gain the victory? Only if the 'arms of our hands' are made strong by the strength of the Lord. The Mighty One of Jacob is our Heavenly Father, who is always ready to stand behind us and to share His power with us. He will make His strength perfect in our weakness (2 Cor. 12. 9).
H. F.

SUBJECTED . . . IN HOPE

"For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God" (Romans viii. 20, 21).

THE creation was subjected to vanity . . . in hope . . . It is impressive that, although the writer of this letter set out, in the first instance, to reveal a state of utter hopelessness, which he very thoroughly does in the first chapters, the letter itself is strewn with this word *hope*. Beginning with Abraham, it says: 'Who . . . against hope, hopefully believed' (iv. 18); again, 'we rejoice in hope of the glory of God' (v. 2); 'patience worketh experience, and experience hope; and hope maketh not ashamed' (v. 4, 5); 'the creation was subjected . . . in hope . . .' (viii. 20); 'rejoicing in

hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer' (xii. 12); 'that through patience . . . we might have hope . . .' (xv. 4); 'Now the God of hope fill you . . . that ye may abound in hope . . .' (xv. 13). The letter abounds with this word *hope*, although it set out to show how hopeless everything really was.

Now here is this statement: 'The creation was subjected to vanity'. If you like to change the word there, you would be quite right in changing it to 'hopelessness'—'the creation was subjected to hopelessness'. A later version puts the word 'futility' there, which I think is a very good translation: 'the creation was subjected to futility . . . in hope . . .'; 'to hopelessness . . . in hope'; 'to vanity . . . in hope'. A deliberate act of God is this. We will gather it all up in this way: The Law of Vanity, or Futility; the Law of Hope; the Way and the End of Hope.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

THE LAW OF FUTILITY

Why did God deliberately act—for it says ‘... by reason of *Him who* subjected it...’—why did God deliberately act to bring the whole creation under this law and reign of futility? I am not staying to enlarge upon the fact of futility or vanity; we may say something about it as we go on. But it is the fact that it is an established law; it is something in the very constitution of things, this something called ‘vanity’ or ‘futility’. Why did God establish that law?

(A) GOD’S PURPOSE FOR HIMSELF

Well, His act related to three things. Firstly, it related to God’s purpose for Himself: for He created all things for Himself, and, in creating all things, He had a personal object in view. All things were to derive their value and benefit from His having what His heart was set upon—it is always like that. God, then, had in view something for Himself, and that something was to have a place for Himself in honour, in pleasure, and in complete satisfaction. The Bible gathers itself entirely around that one, primary, supreme thought—God having a place for Himself in His creation, amongst men: a place where He can come; where He can walk; where He can talk; where He can be received with pleasure, and acknowledged with the heart; where, without grief, without restraint, without reserve, He can just be free to dwell with men. He made all things for that. And when He had made all things, and pronounced them very good, God walked in the garden, in the cool of the day; and we are led to believe that He came to converse, to have fellowship, to enjoy Himself, to find His pleasure there. ‘The Lord God planted a garden...’, and did not leave it, but came to it, to the man in it, for fellowship. That runs through the whole Bible.

But, you see what happened. God’s place was given to another—a rival and a rebel. Man gave God’s place to another, and God withdrew. And because that thought of God, that purpose of God, that He should have a place for Himself, as the all-governing thing in this whole creation and universe, was set aside, God said: The very object of the creation has been removed, has been ruled out, has been violated; the whole creation must be subjected to futility. It is the natural, the logical outworking: when purpose ceases, that is futility; when governing purpose is set aside, what is it but vanity? God moves in purpose, firstly for Himself, to have a place. When He no longer finds His

pleasure and His satisfaction, a state of vanity and futility enters in; nothing goes right, nothing realises its destiny and its calling.

(B) GOD’S PURPOSE FOR MAN

When God created man, He had a great purpose for him. That purpose was not realised when the man first came from the hand of God: that was only setting him on a course, in the way of Divine purpose. If you ask what that was—and still is—it can be summarised from what we have now in the Bible, and particularly in the New Testament, like this. God intended that the man should graduate from the stage and the state in which he was made, into something else, into something more. God made him what the New Testament calls ‘the natural man’. Paul says: ‘... first that which is natural’ (I Cor. xv. 46), and there is nothing wrong about that. The word, as you know, in the original, is ‘soulish’, ‘soulical’, ‘of the soul’—he was made like that.

But God’s intention for that man was that he should become a ‘spiritual’ man. The New Testament draws that great distinction between the ‘natural’ and the ‘spiritual’. The ‘natural’ is that in which we are born; the ‘spiritual’ is that into which we are born again. And God intended that there should be this graduation from the ‘natural’ to the ‘spiritual’, that the man should become a ‘spiritual’ being (with all that we understand from the New Testament that that means); beginning in his own spirit, growing up into spiritual maturity, and consummated with a spiritual body, ‘like unto the body of His glory’ (Phil. iii. 21). ‘Not that which is spiritual is first’, says Paul, ‘but that which is natural; then that which is spiritual’. That is the order. But man cut short his own intended way, and he remained just a ‘soul’ man, a ‘natural’ man—that is how we find him, and ourselves—and did not go on to full growth, to become a spiritual being. And so God says: ‘Man has defeated the very purpose for which I have created him. He has turned aside’ (there are many ways in which the Bible speaks of this arrest); ‘he is less than I intended him to be.’ God said therefore: ‘Therefore, futility!’

Looking away from the story, is it not true in experience, right up to date, that if you and I, as the Lord’s people, live on the natural basis, there is frustration and futility? It is only as we emerge (if I may put it that way), and become more and more spiritual, that the seal of God is upon us, that the pleasure of God is found in us. He is saying, It is very good; I can accompany that; I can

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associate Myself with that ; I can go on with that. Spiritual men, spiritual women, are those to whom the Lord can commit Himself, with whom He can speak, commune, and have fellowship. The purpose of God lies *there*, and if *it* is in any way arrested, or diverted, or violated, it is futility. It is the tragic story of much in Christianity, in what is called the Church, and in Christian lives—futility, vanity, confusion ; not arriving, held up, waiting for something. And there is a good deal of groaning in this creation, for something that is not, that we know ought to be.

(C) GOD'S PURPOSE IN CREATION

In the next place, this law of futility related to God's purpose in the creation. He created it for Himself, as His own dwelling ; He created man, to be a man after His own heart—a spiritual man ; for ' God is Spirit, and they that worship must worship in spirit.' God created the creation with an object in view. What was it? It was for the fullness of His Son, in whom, through whom, and unto whom He created all things. And we are told, through the apostle, that the end, the goal, in view is that He should ' gather together all things in one ' in Christ, and that He ' whom He appointed heir of all things ' should fill all things—Christ, the Heir of the creation, in which He was to find His fulness, and express His fulness. Well, the rival knew something about that, apparently, and stole the place of God's Son, and tried to steal God's Son's inheritance. He has become the ' prince of this world ', the ' god of this age ', taking what belongs to the Lord Jesus. There is much about this in the New Testament. But God has not let go His intention. He holds to it, and the time will come when ' the kingdoms of this world shall become the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ ', and He shall fill all things. But, until then, everything is in chaos, in confusion, in futility, in vanity ; and it is only as Christ comes into His place that the law of vanity is removed, and there is release and liberty—the liberty of sons.

THE LAW OF HOPE

As the Law of Vanity, of Futility, is in the very constitution of things, it is equally true that there is in the constitution of things the Law of Hope. ' The whole creation groaneth and travaileth '—in despair? No, waiting ; waiting! And the word there is a strong word ; it is a picture word of someone stretched out eagerly in anticipation, for ' the creation itself shall be delivered from the

bondage of corruption.' ' The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain until now ', waiting, stretched out, eagerly anticipating. The creation has a consciousness—it may be a dull consciousness—but it has a consciousness, in every part, that something is wrong ; this is not what it exists for ; there is something better than this! God is blamed, of course, by many. Nevertheless, there is this sense that things ought to be different. And it looks for that difference ; it waits for that difference.

This law of hope is in the constitution, everywhere. No one is naturally ready to surrender to the situation. Whenever a person gets to the point where they surrender to the situation absolutely, they take their own lives ; it is an end of all things ; they cut themselves off. But, normally, no one is prepared to accept this state of things ; they will strive against it, work against it, groan against it. There is something of hope in the very nature of things.

Now, what this passage says is that this law of hope, by the ordaining of God, governs the very judgments of God. He subjected it *in hope*. It was a judgment, a pronouncement ; it was a terrible thing that the whole creation should come into this state of futility : ' thorns and briars shall it bring forth '—everything to make life hard and difficult. Yet it says, He did it *in hope*. All the judgments of God upon the creation were in hope, and are in hope. If the Lord has to pronounce futility upon something—that is, to say, Now, we are not going on ; I am not going on with you ; bringing in confusion and arrest and frustration—is it because He is making a full end? No, there is something there which is out of line with the purpose for which He brought that into being. It is not in a straight line with that. Therefore we must be brought to realise that there has to be a fundamental adjustment to God's intention. And therein lies the hope. God has done it in order, not to destroy and finalise, but to secure the thing which He ever had in mind. God is working on positive lines always, with hope. ' Subjected . . . in hope!'

The supreme example and demonstration of this, of course, is the Cross of the Lord Jesus. It includes the whole thing. Yes, see Him, and hear Him. It is a picture and a cry of utter hopelessness : ' My God . . . Thou hast forsaken Me. Why? ' There is no hope, because He gathered up this whole hopelessness in the creation into His own Person ; took it to the Cross ; received God's full and final judgment : No way through for that creation ; no way through for that kind of man. The door is closed. But—' Blessed be the God and

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' (I Pet. i. 3). Yes, it is a picture of despair, and a cry of despair, but it is *in hope, in hope*.

The Lord Jesus, before He went to the Cross, knew what it was going to mean—that is the meaning of the broken heart; that is the meaning of the terrible cry, and the sweat like drops of blood—He knew what He had got to face of forsakenness on the part of the Father; He knew. But while He was moving toward that, and fighting His way into and through that, He was always speaking about the beyond. 'I will come again'; 'the third day He shall rise again'. Terrible despair, but *in hope*; terrible judgment, but *in hope*! The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is the great proof that the very worst judgment that God can bring to man, in this life, is intended to be with hope, and not to annihilate him and destroy him.

THE WAY AND THE END OF HOPE

We close this brief survey with a reminder of the Way and the End of Hope. You see the immediate context of our verses: "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed to us-ward" (Rom. viii. 18). Suffering—what is it for? It is just to dispose of this false thing that has come in. Suffering is to dispose of a false state, a false condition, a false position, that has come in. Everything is false, you see; it is not what God intended. It was a lie, an untruth, a falsehood, that brought about all the vanity and the judgment. It is a false world, a false creation now. The suffering that the Lord brings into our lives has this one object—to dispose of that which is false in us,

and to make way for that which is true in Christ, who is the Truth. We are not the truth, and this creation is not the truth; but Christ is the Truth, and the false has to be disposed of, removed, and it is only done by suffering.

This selfhood is the root and spring of all the trouble, is it not? By the suffering or the discipline under the Lord's hand, the selfhood is set aside, and the way is made for Christ. Through suffering, the virtues of the Lord Jesus are inculcated in the believer and in the Church. It is the only way. We only learn patience through demand for it—and what demand! We only learn faith by having to have faith. And all the virtues of the Lord Jesus—meekness, and all the others—are only inculcated in us through suffering. The sufferings of this present time—what is the goal? Well, the original purpose is still the goal. It is a humanity conformed to the image of God's Son; a world cleansed and purged by fire from all this falsehood, and ground of vanity and futility, and then peopled and filled with those who are an expression of the Son of God—conformed to His image.

The Lord has to pronounce vanity upon all else, or there would be no going for His object at all. And as we go on with the Lord, the one thing that we become more and more aware of is that there is *nothing else but the Lord*. We are losing all hope in every other direction, all expectation; it must be the Lord, just the Lord! And our hearts, through disillusionment, through disappointment in many directions, through much that we shall just have to call 'vanity', futility—our hearts are being drawn to the Lord as our only object, our only goal, our only hope. So it becomes true: "He is thy life, and the length of thy days" (Deut. xxx. 20). Towards that the law of vanity works, and therefore it is 'in hope'.

T. A-S.

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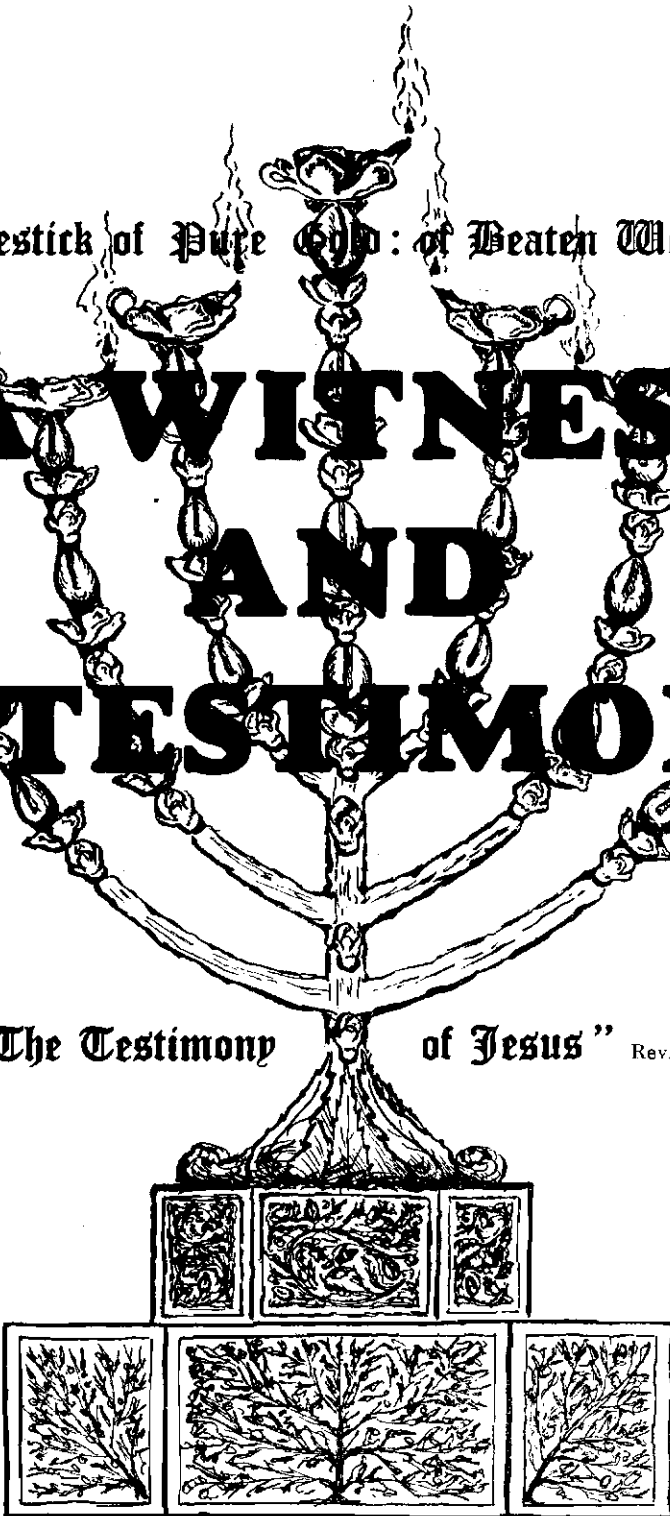
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THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

IV. 'CHRIST IS THE END, AS CHRIST WAS THE BEGINNING'

IF we are to understand the book of the Revelation, the best way is to read its closing chapters first, and then move backward to the beginning. As in so many matters, the end explains all, for the end—the goal—governs all; so it is here, in the all-inclusive purpose and movements of God. These closing chapters, in their sublime symbolism, gather together all the elements and features of the Divine intention, and see them consummated in full and final ascendancy and glory.

If we were to try to concentrate all the symbolic meaning into one definition, we should put it somewhat in this way: The end to which God has always moved, and is moving through all that the Bible—as concentrated in the book of the Revelation—contains, is to have a certain expression of His nature and character, His virtues and excellencies, represented and expressed governmentally

in this universe. To see that organic representation is to see what God is like and what God ever intended should be in His creation.

That statement immediately demands a contemplation—if not exhaustive, certainly sufficient—of that consummate representation. So, we begin at the end.

The final feature in the Bible corresponds to the first in Genesis; it is—

THE SUPREMACY OF LIFE

“He shewed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal . . .” Life, Divine Life, has been the supreme and all-dominating issue of all time. The battle of the ages has been between life and death; their respective causes and sources, and their ends. To see how true this is we only need to note

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

what is the connection here in Revelation xxii.

1. It is the consummation and finality of all that has gone before.

2. It is associated with the two major factors in history—

- a) The Throne ; i.e., supremacy, dominion, authority, government ;
- b) The Lamb ; i.e., redemption, salvation, sin's destruction, righteousness triumphant, and love victorious ;

also with—

- c) The Tree of Life ; i.e., health, sustenance, reproduction or propagation "after its kind" ;
- d) The removal of every barrier to perfect fellowship with God (vs. 3 - 6).

We can never make too much of Eternal Life, for, amongst and including all other things, this is what Christ is, what He came to give, and what He died to secure.

The next step back (chapter xxi) brings into full view—

"THE HOLY CITY, NEW JERUSALEM"

Here we have a perfect galaxy of symbolisms.

The concept of a city is that it is the governmental centre and heart of the kingdom. In it there are to be found all those features and characteristics which are true of the kingdom. It is the summation and representation of all the elements which constitute the realm over which it reigns. In this symbolic representation of God's end we have the nature of world-dominion as God ever intended it to be.

Here we must pause and carefully adjust our mentality to the fundamental reality. We must escape from the finality of symbolism in our imagination and come down with both feet on what lies behind that symbolism. We are not really dealing with *things* as such at all. We are in the presence of spiritual character, and God's character at that. Albeit, it is the character of the Lord disseminated, distributed, inculcated, and manifested in as many aspects as a universal metropolis can contain. A few of these we can note.

a) *Heavenliness*. "The Holy City . . . coming down out of heaven."

Into this clause and its implication we need to gather all that weight of emphasis laid by the Lord Jesus on His essential heavenliness of origin, mission, nature, relationship, direction, government

and resource. So largely this is characteristic of John's Gospel.

Then we need to note His teaching on the essential heavenliness of the Church, as not being of this world. John, Paul and Peter have a great deal to say on this truth and fact.

"They are not of this world, even as I . . ."
(John xvii. 16).

"Seated together with him in the heavenlies. . ."
(Ephesians ii. 6).

"The Jerusalem which is above, which is our mother" (Galatians iv. 26).

"Ye are come to . . . the heavenly Jerusalem"
(Hebrews xii. 22); and so on.

This City is the embodiment of the heavenly nature, order and way of things.

Yes, the City is not a thing, it is a nature!

b) With this nature there immediately goes its *Stability*. Read the description in general and note how substantial this city is. How massive, weighty, strong, dominating, and immense. It is indeed the *Eternal City*. This says simply and forcefully that the enduring, time-outlasting, impregnable, indestructible thing is *Divine* character. No wonder that God is more concerned with conformity to the image of His Son, with heavenly nature, than with anything else. This explains so much of His dealings with His spiritual people.

c) *Costliness*. "Costly stones".

If the stones mentioned suggest beauty and glory, this is the fruit of a great cost:

The cost of redemption. The cost of sanctification. The cost of service. The cost of souls. The cost of "the fellowship of his sufferings".

The pearls which form the gates—the ways in and out—bring this costly anguish into concentration, for the pearl is something formed by the vital fluids of the organism.

d) *Universality*.

From the Tree in the City the *nations* derive their health. 'The nations walk in the light thereof.' The gates are on the four sides, and four is always the number of creation. Paul prayed that the Church might know "what is the breadth and length and height and depth" of "the love of Christ which passeth knowledge" (Eph. iii. 18, 19). Here, indeed, that prayer has its answer. All-comprehending and no exclusion, when things are for ever as God will have them. Then, all that cannot be will have been banished for ever. Here we have the many times repeated "all things" of Paul's revelation.

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e) *Transparency.*

The city is as “ a jasper stone, clear as crystal ”. The river is clear—or bright—as crystal. And “the city was pure gold, like unto pure glass.”

What is spiritual is transparent. What is carnal is opaque. “ Nothing that maketh a lie ” can come in here. The Liar and the lie, with all deception, insincerity, dishonesty and duplicity, will have been burned up. The people of God who form this City will have been purified and refined. The Spirit of Truth will work to produce this feature of singleness, purity and crystal-clearness in our hearts. We must be suitable to the presence of God. The above are but a few hints and pointers regarding the so-much-more at the end, to which God is working. If the City speaks of eternal government, as the number twelve indicates, then, shall we repeat, the eternal Kingdom will be

governed by what is true to God’s nature.

It is not our intention to trace back through this great book all the movements and activities which have this end in view. It will be seen—in the light of the end—that the judgment of Satan and his kingdom, the destruction of satanically energized world-hierarchies, and then, as a first realm of purification, the interrogation and arraignment of the churches—as representative of the whole Church—is governed by that end.

That first sphere of judgment is shown to permit of no merely comparative or partial rightness. The good is noted, but the activity of “ the seven spirits ”, i.e. the Spirit in sevenfold expression, is on the line of spiritual completeness, perfection.

Thus we return to the first message in this series, and see how God’s end answers to His beginning. Christ is the First and the Last.

T. A-S.

THE EYES OF HIS GLORY*(Continued)*

Readings : Ezekiel i. 25 – 28 ; Numbers xiii. 26 – 33, xiv. 1 – 24 ; II Corinthians iv. 16 – 18 ; Matthew xi. 12.

IT has been remarked earlier that God’s quest is for a people in fellowship with His glory, through whom the essential character of that glory is revealed. The vision of Ezekiel gives us the components of the glory, and Moses and Aaron constitute, generally speaking, typical witnesses fulfilling God’s purpose in relation to it. The appearance of the glory of the Lord—“ the eyes of his glory ”—again and again to the children of Israel was God’s attestation of His witnesses.

In the incident recorded in the portion of the book of Numbers now before us we have a further instance of this. At the crisis of the experience, when things were apparently reaching an *impasse*, and were upon the point, humanly speaking, of revolution, when something terrible must happen, then those holy eyes made themselves evident, as if God were saying: Here are you down here debating this matter, but remember I am an Auditor of your words and a Spectator of what is going on, and I am stepping into this scene to rule it. And so in the tenth verse we read:

“ But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the Lord appeared in the tent of meeting unto all the children of Israel.”

FEAR, THE CHILD OF UNBELIEF

Here we have the people of God missing the way of the Lord through fear. Had there been nothing to be afraid of they would have gone cheerfully on, as they had been doing for some months, but here fear enters upon the scene to rob them of their inheritance. But that fear has a background. It did not possess every man. It did not possess Caleb and Joshua, nor Moses and Aaron. It sprang from a cause, and so it is not merely with the fact of the fear that we need to be occupied, but with the cause from which that fear sprang. We could have sympathy with men who were lacking in natural courage, but if we analyse the reason for that lack and find that it was in effect rank unbelief in God, then we lose our sympathy with them. God has not left Himself without witness, and if fear springs from unbelief, then that fear is culpable and must not be condoned, however much our natural mind might desire to be sympathetic.

From what did their fear spring? It sprang first of all from the fact of their noting the natural elements present; from looking only at the things seen, and from leaving out of account altogether the things not seen. Then, as a part of that, it sprang from the fact of their measuring the things seen by the standard of what they themselves were. It is quite clear. If they had found that the

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occupants of the land were little dwarfs, without any strength, they would have said: We can deal with them. They themselves were the standard of their natural judgments.

All inclusively, of course, the ground of their fear was that they left the Lord entirely out of account. That embraces everything. Using New Testament language, we may say that they ignored the victory of Calvary. If they had stood in the value and spiritual meaning of that victory they would have known no fear, they would have gone through. And that is precisely what the other men did. Joshua and Caleb, Moses and Aaron, did stand by faith in the fact of the ascendancy of the Lord over all the power of the enemy, and that was the reason why they were men without fear.

Here you get to the heart of the story. Four men, against a multitude, stand in the spiritual meaning of the victory of Calvary, and those eyes of glory make themselves immediately visible, as if to say: I am bearing witness to the position of these four men.

We do not need to go any further by way of reaching our conclusion, and can say that, as illustrated in this case, a feature of the glory of the Lord revealed in His people is that that people stand in the value of the victory of Calvary.

MARKS OF GLORY

(1) FAITH IN THE MAN ON THE THRONE

That brings us at once to Ezekiel's vision—a Throne in Heaven, and a Man upon it. Is not that the victory of Calvary? Our Lord Jesus Christ has gone up on high, having stripped off principalities and powers, and is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. You come very near to the heart of the glory here. Four men on earth stand for the meaning of that victory, and the eyes of the glory shine out before the congregation and say: I am with these men; I identify Myself with men who stand in this position.

There are other elements in the story which are worth noting, but that is the central thing. It carries with it at once this implication—that for the experiencing of the victory of Calvary it is imperative that we do not take account of things that are seen, as constituting the final ground of judgment. It is while we look at the things not seen that there works the eternal weight of glory. The victory of Calvary only becomes spiritually operative as we have utterly set aside any thought that what we are is the standard of measurement. It involves this, that all that we are has been put out of the way; another standard of power and capacity has been

brought in, and that standard is Christ. But unless those factors are borne in mind continually we shall never know the meaning of the victory of Calvary. The eye that is dwelling upon the things seen, and appraising the possibilities of success on that level, can never know that victory. That victory demands eyes fixed upon the Person of the Man in the Throne, and if that line of vision fails at all, and we come down to look at things horizontally once again, then the same fear will overcome us as overcame them. If you are to know the victory of Calvary your vision must be first upward and then downward, and the visible things that appear before the eyes must of necessity be discounted.

That sometimes demands a very real measure of faith, a very great experience in the heart of the fact that the Lord is on the Throne. The very exhibition in practice of that faith, the faith that upon the Throne is One greater than all the power of the enemy, and because of that victory to abide in rest and in assurance, is to reveal the glory of the Lord.

Do we pray that the Lord may be glorified in us? The answer to that prayer may be to find ourselves set down very quickly in the midst of forces which are overwhelmingly too great for us to face; or to be set in a line of advance and told by the Lord: Now that is your course, go ahead. And you find giants, and lions, and every kind of wild thing in the way. To pray that the Lord may be glorified in us may be the short cut to finding ourselves in embarrassing circumstances. But it is the Lord's occasion now to glorify Himself by us, and He says: Now, in the presence of your enemies, count on the fact of Myself as Victor in the Throne, your union with Me; count upon the operation of those forces and resources which are Mine on your behalf, and in quietness and confidence go forward.

It is not a light thing to pray that the Lord may be glorified through us. Oh! how it is to His glory when He finds a man or a woman or a people whom He dares to put in the presence of impossible circumstances, and to have confidence that, by reason of their union with Him and the knowledge of the victory of His Cross, they will go steadily on without being held up by fear. If the Lord sets us in a pathway which has giants and lions and other mighty obstacles in it, it is not His purpose that we should be defeated by them, but that we should overcome them.

(2) ZEAL TO GAIN CHRIST

Here the whole of Israel except four men took a lower level, and you see what the consequence was. They lost the inheritance. So there is brought into

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view in this incident very prominently the inheritance, that into which God is seeking to bring us. The book of Numbers is full of the inheritance. The daughters of Zelophehad reveal the principle when they come to Moses and say: "Our father died in the wilderness . . . and he had no son . . . Give unto us a possession among the brethren of our father." The Lord was well pleased, and gave them their request. There was a zeal for the inheritance, which in their hearts they desired to possess. Zeal for the inheritance, which is Christ, is something that the Lord looks upon with great favour, and delights tremendously in. And so here, amongst other things, you have the question of the inheritance, of entering in. It seems that there is terrible condemnation against these people when they use the language that they do. These people that are called to possess a land into which twelve of them had moved for forty days—the Biblical period of full testing—so that they know its treasures as well as its difficulties, and as to the prosperity of which they have just borne their testimony, say in the next breath: "Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt." Do you not think it betrays an utter absence of any real passion to possess that good thing that the Lord has set before them? Do you see the suggestion? There is One on the Throne ruling from Heaven, and they say: "Let us make a captain . . ." Ignore the Heavenly One in the Throne, dispense with the inheritance, and go back to the place from whence we came! Oh! the utter failure to see the value of the inheritance into which they are called! No wonder the Lord's words are hot against them. He says: "How long will this people despise me?" The word "despise" was used of another man who did not care for what God put in his way—"So Esau despised his birthright." There is a failure to have the heart set upon possessing that good land into which the Lord is bringing them, "a land which the Lord thy God careth for; the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year" (Deuteronomy ix. 12). There are the eyes of glory dwelling upon the land from the beginning of the year to the end of it, with all that that glory represents, and here is a people who, in the presence of such, say: "Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt." No wonder the Lord says that as they so little value the inheritance they shall not enter into it.

It brings us to Paul and the Philippian letter: ". . . that I may know him . . ." On what terms? "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Paul's

quest was to inherit the land. The cost of that inheritance was the abandonment of everything that was his by nature, however good and fair it was—his natural abilities and accomplishments, the result of his natural endowments, and the result of his hard work by which the natural endowments had been enlarged. He says: All that I count as refuse that I may inherit the Land—gain Christ!

Do you see one of the things that constitute glory for the Lord in us? It is that there is found in us that which yearns to possess Christ in His fulness, and that says: In order to do that, let everything else be counted as refuse, but oh! I must know Christ! There is glory for the Lord in this. That does not necessarily need to be thought of in very high terms of spiritual endeavour. If in the heart of the least child of God there is the cry: Oh! that I may know *Him*! and the whole life is directed by that purpose; if that is the end toward which everything in life is set, and in the pursuit of which there is a shedding of everything else, herein is glory. The world looking on may despise us for our folly, as in the case of the woman who brought her alabaster box of ointment and broke it at the Lord's feet; but when He has become the possession, the goal, the inheritance, the very breaking of the alabaster box glorifies Him. That woman's purpose was to reach out to Him and show her love for Him. It is a question more of the heart and life than it is of that kind of faith that is spoken of in I Corinthians xiii. 2. There may be little glory for the Lord in that kind of faith. The faith that glorifies Him is that which springs out of, and leads into, the knowing of Him, honouring of Him, possessing Him; when the heart is occupied with that kind of faith which "worketh by love", then the Lord is glorified. The thing that we should seek at the hand of the Lord, the gift of His grace, is not so much faith as faith, but faith as the expression of a deeper devotion to Him and knowledge of Him. That glorifies Him. The faith that is the mere exhibition of power, the removing of mountains, at least comparatively speaking does not glorify Him like the other. So here we see this point amongst others, that a zeal for the inheritance, to possess Christ, glorifies Him.

(3) DESIRE FOR THE FULNESS OF CHRIST IN ALL HIS MEMBERS

But here a point must be observed, which also is beautifully illustrated by Moses in the story before us, and to which the eyes of the glory may surely be said to have given their attestation. The Lord said to Moses: "I will smite this people with the

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pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a nation greater and mightier than they" (Numbers xiv. 12). But Moses was not concerned merely for his own personal enjoyment of the inheritance—his concern was that all the Lord's people might enter in, and so he sweeps aside the offer of personal advancement and intercedes for the people. There is especial glory for the Lord in this. His purpose is to bring many sons to glory with Himself, and a true passion for Him in our hearts must inevitably mean fellowship with Him in His purpose for the whole company of His people, and thus express itself in a longing that all His own might know Him in His fulness. And so we find the man who wrote: "That I may know him", also writing: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church . . . that we may present every man perfect in Christ; whereunto I labour . . ." (Col. i. 24, 28, 29). Beloved, when your heart is crying out to God in intercession that His people may be brought into the fulness of their inheritance in Christ, the glory of the Lord is being revealed, for is not this on your part the giving expression to the very longing in the heart of God Himself?

Listen again to Moses: ". . . would God that all the Lord's people were prophets . . ." (Numbers xi. 29). Here is a man who longs that all that God has for any might be enjoyed by all. It is that kind of passion for the inheritance that supremely glorifies Him. And the individual will not be overlooked by the Lord in the more general company. For after dealing with the principle of all inheriting, then the Lord says: ". . . my servant Caleb . . . him will I bring into the land . . ." (Numbers xiv. 24). The Lord puts first the greater thing, the principle of a desire for all His people to come to the fulness of Christ, and then He says: Here is one man who was faithful; he shall arrive at that fulness.

POSSESSION OF CHRIST REALISED
THROUGH CONFLICT

In the foregoing, we have dwelt upon two principal elements—first, the testimony to Calvary's victory, and second, the zeal for the fulness of Christ. These two are brought together in a phrase in Matthew xi. 12: ". . . men of violence . . ." Here is an emphasis which has to be renewed for us again and again—that though our hearts may be, by His grace, set passionately upon possessing Him, we are not going to arrive at that simply by a process of sighing and yearning and hoping and wish-

ing. The Lord wants His people to know in experimental reality the meaning of the victory of Calvary over the powers that hold the land. Therefore, the zeal for the inheritance must be accompanied by a spirit that was a triumphant warfare over the power of the enemy. It was just there that the children of Israel broke down. They saw the people who held the land and shrank back in terror. They were not sufficiently set on the end to be attained, and the Lord says of them: "How long will they not believe in me, for all the signs which I have wrought among them?" (Numbers xi. 11). God holds people responsible for the light He has given them. He requires an account of our actions in the light of what He has revealed to us. These people had been living in daily experience of Divine miracles, so they ought to have come by this time to see that nothing is too hard for the Lord, but here in the presence of a different kind of difficulty the Lord meant nothing to them—they had learned nothing.

It is just as the Lord said to His disciples: "Do ye not yet understand?" (Matthew xv. 17, xvi. 9, 11; Mark viii. 17, 21). These people had not learned their lesson. God has indicated to us the fact that by His Cross He stripped off principalities and powers, making a show of them openly. He has caused us to know that upon the Throne sits a Man who has overcome. Let us emphasise the fact that it is not God as God upon the Throne in Ezekiel's vision; it is a Man. That fact for us guarantees the possibility of our arriving there too. If it were God there as God, what guarantee for us? But it is our Representative there, and that shows the place God has in His thought for us. God holds us chargeable for that truth, and requires that our possession now of the fulness of Christ, our coming into the good of things, shall be by the exercise of that truth in our experience. Hence what the Lord is saying is this, that if we would possess the inheritance we have to fight a holy warfare.

What glorifies the Lord in a people? The Lord is glorified in a people here on earth when they, in their spiritual warfare against principalities and powers, take the kingdom by force; when they meet, in His triumphant Name, the powers that are in the way of their progress; when they dare to stand in the Name of Christ who is on the Throne, and claim the victory through His Name. In order that we may be exercised in the matter, the Lord sets us in places where there are enemies, and allows us to meet principalities and powers. He shows us something of them in advance, and lets us see that along such a way there is going to

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be battle. What is our reaction? Shall we turn back and seek an easier path? No other pathway will lead to the fulness of Christ.

You who are called to the foreign field of service, do not expect to get through without conflict. You know that out there, as well as for those who stay at home, there are going to be spiritual forces of enmity increasingly ranged against us, and we have to take the Kingdom by force. We shall never get it in any other way. It is the Lord's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom, but this is the practical word for us: ". . . men of violence take it by force" (Matthew xi. 12). God is going to require of us a faithful discharge of the truth that we have received. He will call us into the warfare, and give us the privilege of triumphing in His victory.

Now for us to say that we are having a peculiarly difficult time, our way seems to be peculiarly hedged about with spiritual antagonism, must not introduce in us the thought that we are a martyr people. That is the way the Lord is going to bring us into fulness. The very conflict is causing us to inherit Christ, is causing us to possess the Land. Every new phase of victory that we experience is a new possessing of the Lord, and it is that that is glorifying Him. So that we shall not be surprised if the fiery trials overtake us. Peter urges that we are to "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial . . . which cometh . . . to prove . . ." (I Peter iv. 12). That brings us to Paul again: "That I may know him . . . and the fellowship of his sufferings . . ." (Phil. iii. 10). It is going to lead ultimately to the glory, and there will be a present manifestation of the glory also. It is all in line with the word spoken concerning Moses: he 'accounted the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt' (Heb. xi. 26). He had that inheritance all the time before his eyes, and, in order to its possession, every lesser thing was allowed to fade out of the picture. Nothing counted with him by comparison with it. The Lord is glorified in a people whose heart is set at any cost, by any road, upon the goal which is God Himself.

'My goal is God Himself, not joy, nor peace,
Nor even blessing, but Himself, my God;
'Tis His to lead me there—not mine, but His—
At any cost, dear Lord, by any road.'

When that is uttered out of the heart, when the Lord finds a man whose true testimony that is, then in him God is being glorified.

That is the seed-bed of faith. A man who is thus minded says: By any road! Here is a very difficult road, a road beset by enemies, but the passionate

desire for the goal will hold him steadfast in the way. It is the man who lacks the yearning to know Him that will easily be turned aside. Along that road the Man Christ Jesus has already gone before, and at every point has overcome for us. We have not to climb up; we are to be brought through in the train of His triumph. Every enemy has been met; every foe has been overcome; there remains nothing that has not been put potentially beneath His feet, and there remains nothing in this universe that is able to overcome the least child of God who has taken the hand of the Lord and said: Lord, bring me through to the place where Thou art, in virtue of the Blood which Thou hast already taken through in victory. There is great glory to the Lord in a quiet, confident walk in a day of adversity, a day of dread, when things about us are shaking and trembling.

THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY — TO WITNESS TO THE ENTHRONED CHRIST

There is a little touch in John's Gospel that is a reflection upon this:

"And when they found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither? Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves, and were filled" (John vi. 25, 26).

What was the Lord's disappointment with those people? They had something that had filled them, and they wanted more. It was not that they had seen through to some conception of His true nature and personality, and had come after Him. No! they had eaten of the loaves and were filled, and thought they would go and get some more of that which would give them some present satisfaction. It was some *thing* they wanted, not Himself. And so He goes on to say:

"Work not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which abideth unto eternal life, which the Son of man shall give unto you; for him the Father, even God, hath sealed."

And then there is this interesting word in verses 28 and 29:

"They said therefore unto him, What must we do that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."

Strange words! They are utterly incomprehensible to the one who is not initiated into the secret

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of them. "This is the work of God"! What is? To believe! To believe on Christ, the Sent One of God. But, let us remark—to believe on Him as and where He is; not to believe on Him merely as a Man who walked the earth, but as the Man in the midst of the Throne. As the heart, in that kind of believing which has love as its basis, reaches out to Him, to apprehend Him, to hold Him, the value of His Throne finds expression. That is the work of God. That is the work you and I are called to do. We are called to work for the Lord. Well, the nature of our work is to believe on Him in the Throne, so that there may be down here, just in the realm where we are, the expression of His enthronement. Our work is not to go out and get very busy doing things. Our work is to believe on the triumphant Lord in the Throne in all circumstances, despite every seeming contradiction. That requires faith, real spiritual energy, and something of violence in denying the conditions which are adverse. But that is doing the work of God, and we all know a little in experience that as we thus hold on, as we thus refuse to deny the fact that He is the Lord, He works on the ground of that testi-

mony and there is a manifesting of His glory which others may see and which is assuredly for the discomfiture of the power of the enemy. Conditions may not immediately change, but as faith remains steadfast in its testimony to Christ's victory, in spite of all appearances, the way to manifested triumph is being made, and in His time emergence comes. But the very exercise of heart thus made necessary is all the time bringing into a fuller knowing of the Lord. The grief of the Lord in the narrative before us is: I have dealt with these people all this time, *and yet they do not know Me.*

We are called to testify livingly to Christ enthroned, and that necessitates adverse conditions, against which and over which the enthroned Lord must be manifested. Hence, we are called to a pathway of conflict, of difficulty, of trial, of pressure—but, praise God, of victory. May we so know the Man in the Throne, in the power of His resurrection, that we shall abide always in the strong consciousness that if He is with us, who can be against us?

G. P.

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

IV. THE PRIORITY OF THE KINGDOM

"Be not anxious . . . which of you by being anxious . . . ? . . . why are ye anxious ? . . . Be not therefore anxious . . . But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew vi. 25, 27, 28, 31, 33).

LET us remind ourselves once again, and keep it clearly before us, that the fundamental meaning of the word which has been translated into our English word 'kingdom' is *sovereign rule*. It will then immediately be apparent that this verse 33 that we have read takes on new meaning and value: 'Seek ye first the sovereign rule of God, and then it follows that all these things will be added.'

You note the context. This verse is found right in the heart of what has come to be called 'the sermon on the mount', which covers three whole chapters, v, vi and vii—one hundred and eleven verses. This is the first of five discourses by the Lord recorded by Matthew. You will notice, further, that what is here was given primarily to His disciples, who were the nucleus of this sov-

ereignty, this rule, this Kingdom. "Seeing the multitudes, he went up into the mountain: and when he had sat down, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth and taught them" (Matt. v. 1, 2): so that it is evident that this has to do with those who are immediately and essentially within the compass and meaning of this sovereign rule. Dr. Campbell Morgan calls this section: 'Jesus the King, His Propaganda and Enunciating of Laws'. It is the enunciation of the laws of the King and His Kingdom, of the Ruler and His rule.

THE LAW OF HEART REST UNDER THE SOVEREIGN RULE OF GOD

Here, then, is a law of God's sovereign rule: "Seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." We see, from the context, that it has to do with fretful preoccupation over ways and means in this life, especially the cares of to-morrow—incidentally getting right to the root of many a nervous breakdown, of a good deal of neurosis. But we shall

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not attempt to deal with that. We are enunciating a law, a law of the sovereign rule, which stands over against this constantly reiterated word—*anxious, anxious, anxious*. It is therefore the law of heart rest under the sovereign rule of God—heart rest because you are in the Kingdom. Our mentality at once visualises a sphere, a realm; but that comes second. Because you are within the sovereign government of God, “all these things” are there.

A POSITIVE LAW

But note—it is not a passive law. The Lord Jesus does not say, here or anywhere else, what kindly people often say—‘Oh, don’t worry, the Lord will take care of you, and will look after that. It will all come out all right.’ He no more says that than He would say, on the other hand: ‘Substitute an insurance society for God and all is taken care of.’ Nor, to bring it into the realm of religion, does He say: ‘Hand it over to the priest, and he will take care of that’; or: ‘Hand it over to the church, and rid yourself of all responsibility.’ I put it in that way, in order that we may get right at what He does say. Somehow or other, we must get to the real heart of this thing, the meaning of this, and so we strip off any mistaken or false ideas, and any wrong courses. There are many people who think that, if only they could adopt some policy (insurance or otherwise!), or some expedient, by which responsibility and liability could be taken off their own shoulders and placed for them somewhere else, they would come to rest—and it does not work that way. You may be the most heavily insured person in creation, and still be the most anxious person, the most worried, the most fretful. There is no guarantee of heart rest along the lines of shelving of responsibility, nor along the line of a false passivity which says, ‘Don’t worry, it will all come out all right.’ The law is not passive.

But notice—it is positive. The Lord does not say, ‘Oh, don’t worry.’ He says, ‘Seek first . . .’ The law is a very positive one, you see. ‘Seek first . . .’, and then responsibility will be taken, then the other will be looked after. ‘Seek ye first the sovereign rule, the government, of God, and His righteousness.’ It is the positive principle of viewing everything in the light of how it serves God’s rule. If you will only do that, you come into the good that is here. Our own interests come second or last. His interests come first, and when life is arranged on that basis—*arranged* on that basis—and kept on that basis, then the other follows; God looks after the other things.

DELIBERATE ARRANGEMENT OF LIFE

I said, when life is *arranged* on that basis. The fact is that it takes some of us a long time to get life on to that basis. It is only after having lived a long time that we begin to re-arrange life in this way. Well, better late than never! But here is a word for young people and for young Christians—especially to young people who are in a position to arrange their lives in any way. Perhaps you have just started married life together, or are contemplating doing so. Now is the time to arrange it on this principle of the sovereign rule. Now is your opportunity to make it quite unnecessary in after years either to undo much or to regret much. All these laws of the sovereign rule are very practical, as you see, and this is a very practical one. Where shall we live? What kind of a home shall we have? These are practical questions. You must arrange everything on this principle. The thing that matters and governs, and in relation to which everything now has to be arranged, is: How does this serve the interests of the sovereign rule of God?

Put that first, and you will escape many a tragedy, such as we see in many places. Oh, a nice house and a nice home, maybe, but altogether out of relation to the interests of the Lord, both in distance and in other ways. It is going to be an incubus, a hindrance and a limitation; the things of the Lord are going to be made to suffer. And there are many, many spiritual tragedies—lives that have lost out with the Lord, both in spiritual measure and in usefulness to Him, both in service and in a related way in His Church; and so we could spread it out. The whole matter of getting on in the world, of success or ambition—what a range this covers! Now the law and principle of this rule of Heaven is that life must be arranged in the first place in relation to God’s interests and God’s rule. This must come first, and if it is, you may rest assured that God will look after your interests. You will certainly not suffer in the long run. God will be true to His side of the undertaking.

And then there is the maintaining of the arrangement, the remaining on that basis. It is so easy to be drawn out by a thousand and one things. In fine points, all the way along, the enemy is trying somehow or other to divert, to draw away, to put something in that takes the place of the interests of the Lord. This is a serious and earnest business, calling for all diligence and watchfulness and steadfastness. It is, as I have said, not passive by any means. It will not just happen willy-nilly. “Seek ye first . . .”

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM

Now that word 'seek' is emphatic. "Seek, and ye shall find", said the Lord elsewhere, "for . . . he that seeketh findeth" (Matt. vii. 7, 8). Here is the picture of someone applying themselves with diligence. *Seek*: set yourself upon this thing, make it your business and keep at it. Seek *first*—and keep on seeking first—the sovereign rule of God. Take the alternative course—put your own affairs and interests first—and the inference is perfectly clear, though the Lord does not say so explicitly. For He is saying: 'You are anxious. *Why* are you anxious?' He is dealing with people who are 'up against things', and the inference is that, if you adopt the alternative of putting your own interests first, then you must take responsibility for the consequences. You have to reckon with life without the sovereign rule of God. It is a terrible thing never to be able to appeal in the court of God, never to find that the Lord is really working everything for good, never to know that there is no need at all to be anxious. Take the burden, carry the weight yourself, work life out yourself, and sooner or later you will come up against some tremendous situation with which you cannot cope, and that is the alternative which many have so grievously found.

"*But*"—on that word there is a turnover, a turn round, a change of position—"But seek ye first . . ." It is just the question of God's sovereign rule in our affairs, in our life, which we may know and enjoy and prove and find to be real. It is a wonderful thing at long last to find that it has been real, even when we thought that it was not working that way, and that God was not at work in things in our interest; to find at long last that where He seemed to be least active He still had the situation in hand. Yes—to live long enough with God to be able to look back upon situations which at the time seemed to deny that the Lord was governing, was ruling, and to be able to see that those were the very things which worked out to good. It is true. Perhaps you who read these words find yourself to-day in a situation where it is difficult to trace the sovereign hand of God; but God's word stands and God's undertaking is sure. He says: 'You put first My interests, My rule, and I will look after the rest—all these things shall be added'.

Let us make sure that this has got home. We have to make this a personal matter—for anxiety is a personal matter, is it not? It is *our* anxiety, it is *our* troubles and bothers, it is *our* complications and difficulties. It is all just *ours*. May it not be

that a lot of it is unnecessary?—unnecessary because, as we go here or there, proceed on some errand, some purpose, to transact something, or carry out some project, we do not stop to ask: 'Now, what interest of the Lord can be served in this?' Impulse, whim, fleshly desire—what we would like—all these things arise and govern the course of our lives, and the Lord says, 'Stop! The first thing is: Where do I come in? How are My interests going to be served?' Perhaps that might seem very exacting, even legal; but it is not so—it is the way into this beneficent rule of God.

'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.' Here are two things. First the Kingdom—the sovereign rule of God. Seek ye first, in other words, that which relates to God's place in life: that is, His sovereign rule. He is Lord, He is Sovereign: then seek first that which relates to His place. It sounds very simple and elementary, but God's place is a most important thing. What place has God in this? Where does He come in? His place is as Sovereign. His sovereign rule is His right.

SEEK FIRST HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS

And then His righteousness—that which relates to God's character. Seek ye first that which is like God—God-like. The whole Bible is taken up with this matter of righteousness and unrighteousness, and righteousness is what God is like, what belongs to God. "Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of his throne" (Ps. xcvi. 2). Unrighteousness is that which is against God, against which prophet and seer pronounce God's displeasure and God's wrath. So when we are told that what we are to seek, as a first priority, is (1) His rightful place in our lives, and (2) that which is God-like, we are getting to the very heart of this law. It means that you and I are to seek in the first place and at all times to be Christ-like, God-like—which is only an extension of 'godly'; to bring the likeness, the nature and character of God into the situation; to seek that there shall be found here some expression of what God is like as He has been revealed in Jesus Christ. It means that it is our first and primary business to see to it that our home shall be a place where God is known in truth, a place characterized by what God is like; and it means that all our interests are to bring Him, as to what He truly is, into every situation in life.

That is not exaggerating this word. His righteousness, His character, His likeness, what He is in Himself: make it your business to bring *that* in first, and then you find the Lord right there in all

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His sovereign rule on your behalf. Forgive the simplicity of this, but we are accustomed to quoting this passage so glibly—'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' Yes, but what does it mean? It is applied teaching, and that is one reason why the Lord Jesus kept it for the disciples. It is sheer nonsense to call upon unsaved men to live up to the Sermon on the Mount. This is not a rule of life for the unconverted. It is an impossible thing to present to them. This is a practical basis of everyday life for the children of the Kingdom.

GOD'S KINGDOM AGAINST THE ENEMY'S KINGDOM

But there is always lurking in the near vicinity another kingdom, another government, another rule, another god, and the object of that other kingdom is to bring the people of God into servitude, into bondage, to hold them in toilsome labour. Your mind will have immediately darted back to Egypt. You remember that it says that *Israel* was in Egypt. Think for a moment. *Isra-el*—a prince with God. The nation were the sons of Israel, and they were in bondage, in servitude, in toilsome, wearisome labour in Egypt. It is a picture. The laws of the rule of God are intended for our emancipation, our deliverance, our freedom, our rest, our prosperity, and there is the shadow of this other rule always near. Not satisfied with bringing the poor world under its abominable rule, it seeks above all things to impinge upon the sons of God and to bring them into toilsome bondage.

Many, many a child of God is there, in the toils of anxiety, in the awful grip of this other kingdom that would rob God of His glory in His people, that would malign God in the very looks of His children—*anxious, burdened, worried, fretful—sons of God!* What a contradiction! It seems that some children of God have entered into a terrible conspiracy with themselves never to smile, afraid that they would be giving away some spirituality. It is a very grievous matter. God's thought for His people is that they shall be an emancipated and free people, and that does not only mean freedom from judgment and condemnation and the penalty of sin, but freedom from this tyranny of the anxious heart and melancholy face.

You see what the Devil is after. This law of the sovereignty is of deep, deep meaning and far-reaching effect. This other is another kingdom, another rule, so different. One of the chief objects of that other kingdom and rule is to bring God's own blood-bought children into anxious care, to deny the very redemption which God has wrought for them in Christ. And so, in order to defeat the Devil himself, to destroy the power of his rule—'Seek ye first the sovereign rule of God, and His righteousness', and He will take responsibility and relieve you of your unnecessary care. Is that practical? Is that important? Well, Jesus came to bring in this Kingdom—this rule and this régime—and to undo the other kingdom.

So it comes surely with the backing of tremendous meaning: 'Seek ye first—give priority to—the sovereign rule of God, and His righteousness—His character, nature and all these things shall be added unto you.'

T. A-S.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

WORD MAKING

MR. FARMER was a Christian, but a very unhappy one. Somehow everything seemed to have gone wrong for him. He had worked hard, but his farm seemed to be a complete failure, and he did not know what to do next. When he first started to farm for himself, he had begun the daily habit of praying about his work. For a time all had gone well, and he was often thankful for the wonderful way in which the Lord had answered his prayers. The weather had been good; the crops had grown well; he had every hope of becoming a prosperous farmer.

For the last few years, however, things seemed

to have gone all against him. The weather had been bad. Disease had broken out among the cattle. Worst of all, he himself had fallen ill. He was better again now, but it did not seem possible to catch up with the work which needed to be done, and it looked as though the farm must be given up.

The prospect was black indeed. He felt that he could go on no longer. For some reason unknown to him, God had not answered his prayers. Now things seemed so hopeless that he had even stopped praying. To-day he had decided that he must sell up the farm and take his wife and little boy somewhere else to live, but where he could go

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

and what he could do, he just did not know.

As he came in from the fields his heart was made heavier than ever by the sight of his little son, Bobbie, who was playing happily in the living room. He had some lettered bricks out on the table, and as soon as his father entered the room, Bobbie called for him to come and play. The game which Bobbie liked best was when his father chose some bricks and spelled out a word with them, so as soon as his father came over to the table he asked for this game. Father thought for a moment, then chose some bricks out of the box, and set them in a row. 'Is it a word?' asked Bobbie. 'Yes', his father assured him, 'it is a real word.' The letters were **DESPAIR**. This was what was filling the mind of Mr. Farmer, so perhaps that was why he chose them. Of course Bobbie had to ask what 'Despair' meant, so his father just said that it meant when you had no more hope; and went off into another room.

In a little while he came back to the living room, where he found Bobbie still playing happily with the same bricks which his father had chosen. He had changed them about, moving the 'D' round from the front to the end of the line, and taking the 'R' from the end to the beginning. Then he had picked out the 'P' and put that in front of the 'R'. It now read **PRESAID**. When father came over to the table he again asked, 'Is it a word?' 'No', his father replied, 'that is not a word.' Then suddenly he saw that with a few changes it could be made into one. So he made the 'E' change places with the 'AI', and then there was a real word. And with the very same bricks. 'What is the word this time?' Bobbie asked, and his father told him that the word was 'PRAISED'.

When the little boy asked his father what 'Praised' meant, the father began to explain. Then suddenly he realised that this was the one

thing which he himself had not done. He had planned, he had worked, he had discussed, he had even prayed, but he had never praised. It is very hard to praise when everything seems to be going wrong. 'That is a wonderful change we have made, sonny', he said to Bobbie; 'we have changed despair into praised.' 'Yes', answered Bobbie eagerly, 'and without adding a single brick more, Daddy.'

This was true enough. Without the addition of any more letters, simply by placing them in a different order, the dark word 'Despair' had been changed into the bright and hopeful word which spoke of having given thanks to God. Nothing had been added; nothing had been taken away; they were only looking at the same letters in a different way.

So it was that the Lord began to answer Mr. Farmer's prayers. Not by taking away any of his difficulties, nor by adding anything new to his resources, but by helping him to face them in another way. He had never been able to praise while his heart was filled with despair, but now he determined to hope in God and to praise Him even though the way was still so dark.

Recovery was slow. It was uphill work all the time. With new health and a new hope, however, Mr. Farmer was able to turn failure into success. When things had become more prosperous, and the proofs of answered prayer were clear for all to see, then Mr. and Mrs. Farmer often praised God for His wonderful goodness. But the praise which had counted most had been the praise which Bobbie's father had been able to offer even when things were at their worst. His despair had been conquered by praise. He had proved the truth of the Scripture which says, "Whoso offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifieth me; and prepareth a way that I may shew him the salvation of God" (Psalm 50. 23, RVM).

H. F.

THE LAW OF TRAVAIL

"Unto the woman he [God] said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children . . . And unto Adam he said . . . cursed is the ground for thy sake; in toil (sorrow) shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; . . . in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Genesis iii. 16, 17, 19).

"The creation was subjected to vanity . . . For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain . . ." (Romans viii. 20, 22).

THE presence of the law of travail in the whole creation is beyond dispute. That it was something imposed by the Creator because of sin is a fundamental truth of the Bible. That it is something not in the first thought of God, but something running counter to man's nature, is common experience. But we are left to draw from God's act and the Bible's teaching the meaning and necessity of travail. What that meaning is lies at the heart of this present meditation.

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It can be put very precisely in this way: What costs little is little valued. What comes easily is let go easily. What we suffer over becomes precious. What we labour for is not despised, but jealously guarded. And so on.

That brings us to a surmise and a deduction as to the introduction of this law. But note, the law was not established with partiality. Not only was the woman to be subjected to it, but man also. Then we are told that "the whole creation . . . travaileth".

The surmise and deduction to which we are brought is that the behaviour of Adam and Eve in the garden implied or indicated a serious lack of reverence and esteem. Everything was made for them and given to them as a trust and a responsibility. They were the custodians of Divine interests. Nothing was an end in itself; all was full of glorious potentialities, to be sacredly guarded and led out to full realisation. It would seem that all was taken too much for granted and as a matter of course. An adequate and governing sense of values was lacking, and they just looked upon everything in the light of how it served *their* pleasure. This weakness and lack was fully exploited by the discerning tempter, and was made the ground of his assault. Hence, the law of travail was established to counter this disposition. Man must be made to realise that God places a value upon His gifts, and that everything in His mind is costly and precious. What we are not prepared to suffer for we lightly esteem. This is surely and so clearly seen in redemption. Whether it be basic redemption in the Cross of Christ, or the progressive redemption in the Christian's life, or the consummation of redemption in the 'creation's deliverance from the bondage of corruption', and the 'manifestation of the sons of God', all is at very great cost and through deep and anguished travail. Christ sees His seed through the travail of His soul. The Church and true Christians come to spiritual fulness through "the fellowship of his sufferings". The creation itself will come to glory through great upheavals and anguish. The Bible says and shows all this.

But to return to the specific point and its application. If God gives freely and richly He will look for and expect a reverent and serious regard for, respect for, and appraisal of His gifts, as for a sacred trust and responsibility. The presentation of salvation is often too cheap, and that unspeakably costly thing is made a matter of the pleasure of the recipient. The result is that when the true value is involved in a testing ordeal of trial and adversity, many are disappointed and go away. They have not seen that it is something of such value as to be worth suffering for.

If the Lord gives a rich and costly ministry to His people, sooner or later they will pass into a time which will be nothing less than deep and desperate travail, and that ministry will be tested as to how much it really means to those to whom it has been given. The same is true with regard to those who minister. A true servant of God is one in whom, through suffering and passion, that which he gives has been born. His ministry must carry the impress of deep history with God. A merely ritualistic, liturgical, service, however devoutly performed, will not produce spiritual men and women. It may make people religious, but that can be true in realms other than Christianity.

Christ's travail was not because there was no religion. There was an abundance of it in Jerusalem and elsewhere. But there was little or no sense of the costliness of God's gifts. Two thousand years of anguish in the case of Israel is God's way of showing that His greatest Gift—Jesus Christ, His Son—cannot be so lightly regarded and disposed of as Israel thought.

The travail of a mother has much to do with her love for her children, unless she is wholly unnatural and subnormal. When the farmer or gardener has toiled and laboured, and spent anxious days and nights over his harvest, he does not lightly esteem the seed or the soil, but cherishes and cares for it.

Let us look at suffering and adversity as God's way of seeking to bring us into His estimate of what He has given. 'He that has suffered most, has most to give.'

T. A-S.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

THE WAY OF FELLOWSHIP

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John i. 7).

THE First Letter of John is the 'revival' letter; the letter pointing to, and often producing, what, in the best sense of the word, can be called 'revival'. In John's day things had grown stale. How much the churches had had of apostolic ministry and help! How much information was stored up for them in the Word of God, which at this time was almost completed. They needed a new experience of life, and it was John's special ministry, when the time came, to bring God's message that that should be realised, and that new life should spring up. We, no less than God's people of John's day, are hungry and thirsty—not for more teaching, but—for a new experience among us of the welling up and overflowing of the abundant life of the Lord.

I feel we need to keep in mind, concerning this letter, that it was written in the light of all the previous revelation. Many who have found new experiences of blessing by concentrating on the strong, straightforward message of I John, have been apt to regard it as a thing in itself, as an experience on its own—'Revival'—and have been tempted to dissociate this letter from the rest of the New Testament. They have looked on it, perhaps, as an alternative to all the rest that is written: 'Let us get away from all that'—into the simple statements and experience of life and light and love laid down in this letter. How very wrong that approach is! This was written, not as an alternative to the rest of the revelation, but as the means of recovering its power and value.

THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF FELLOWSHIP

May I add, too, that the whole emphasis is missed if we regard it as something purely personal and individual. It can easily be taken like that, and such a verse as this used so that we might feel: 'Well, things are pretty bad all around; there is nothing I can do except walk with the Lord myself, and have a personal life of fulness with Him.' This is a very real temptation, but a mistake. If you read on in the letter, you will find that the fellowship of which John is speaking is something of tremendous significance in the largest possible in-

terests of the Lord. This is the time, says John, that can be called 'the last hour' (ii. 18); it is the time when we are brought very near to what has been told us about antichrist and his coming; it is the time when the return of the Lord Jesus, and all, the very great all, for His Church, bound up with that return, is in view. And this is the time—I speak now of the last chapter—when there comes into view, more than ever, the great cosmic conflict between that which is of God, and the rest. Says the Apostle, as he closes his letter: 'The whole world'—and all that is included in that designation—'the whole world is in the wicked one' (v. 19); and the big issue is: Shall that prevail or shall there be the triumph of what is of God?

'Whatsoever was begotten of God overcometh the world' (v. 4). You may take for your own personal help, the thought that there is victory for you, by Divine life within you; but you will notice that the Apostle does not say 'Whosoever'—he says 'Whatsoever is begotten of God'. My own conviction is that he is taking up the matter, not of an individual life, but of the life together of the people of God, described here as 'fellowship'—"we have fellowship"—and is saying that 'fellowship' holds within it God's secret for ultimate triumph. It is a big thing; not personal, and not to be made a thing in itself.

No wonder, then, that stress is laid here on the importance of fellowship: "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship"! Everything else springs out of that. It is the key to the realisation of the purpose of God. Later on, John will speak of service; he will speak of witness; he will speak even of prayer. These are all matters very much alive in our consciousness and exercise. How anxious we all are, and rightly so, to be a people who serve the Lord; how concerned we must be with the ministry and the witness of the Word; how strongly we feel the urgency of the need to pray! May I suggest to you that an approach along any of these avenues is not the Divine approach. It is rather coming from the outside: in this letter, everything is made to work from the inside. For them, for us, the crux of everything is: Do we have fellowship? and out of that fellowship, service and ministry, and even prayer, find their expression. That is what emerges from this letter of John.

And then, as to the significance of this *functioning* fellowship—not just kind-hearted friendship,

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friendly relationship, but a functioning fellowship. It is of such significance to the Lord that this is the centre, this is the target, this is the focus of all Satanic opposition. Here I do not need to speak from I John, I can speak from our own experience : we know it ; how we know it!—and are going to know it. This is the thing, above all other things, that will provoke Satanic opposition, because it is the key to everything else. Let me put the other side to you, in a very heartening verse: “To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil” (I John iii. 8b). May we prove that! We shall prove it if we fulfil the conditions.

We notice, too, that this verse (i. 7) begins, as do quite a few other verses in this letter, ‘If’, if . . . It is as though God says: I can provide the fellowship ; I will attend to the fellowship ; I will watch over and fight for the fellowship, *if* you will fulfil your condition. It is put here as a challenge to us all: ‘If we walk in the light . . .’ You notice, from the use of the word ‘walk’, how personal and practical the responsibility is. This is no matter of a meeting, or a series of meetings, only ; no matter only of a crisis of fresh devotion to the Lord, though that may be the gateway into it. This is a walk. When the Scriptures speak of a ‘walk’, they speak of that which is determined, that which is persistent, of that which we have to do ourselves—God cannot do it for us. If *we* walk in the light, we have the fellowship—if . . . if . . .

Yes, we are very faulty—the verse takes full account of that ; all our faults and failings will come out in the light. But they are expected. If we walk in the light, there will be something that needs cleansing away ; but the promise is, there is something that will cleanse it away *if* we walk in the light.

THE DEMAND FOR REALITY

The demand here is that we be found in the light of reality, of facts as God sees and knows them to be. The verse is placed among other verses which repeat the phrase: If we say . . . if we say . . . If a man says . . . Obviously the contrast is between a man who says things and thinks that they are true, and a man who comes to the light to find out what the truth really is. Our danger is that by saying things we may come to take it for granted that we are in the experience of what we say. But the light is the cleansing, checking, challenging—what we are in the light of what we say. We all do a lot of speaking about the things of the Lord, either to one another, or in prayer, or even

from the platform. ‘If we say . . .’ The trouble is that our theorizing and our saying has the unfortunate effect of making us imagine that we are what we say. But we are not ; none of us are! Hence the Lord’s call, not so much to go on saying things, but to come to the light, that we may be checked up—not as to our beliefs, but as to our behaviour ; not as to our theories, but as to the spiritual reality. If I may speak for myself, I think I can say that the little that I have learned about myself, I have learned more from my critics than my friends ; more from the things that I have disliked, and perhaps repudiated, than from anywhere else. But the whole point about a man or a people who walk in the light, is that they welcome light wherever it comes from, so long as it is light.

To walk in the light means to walk in the light of the Lord’s Word. John goes out of his way to remind his readers that he is not writing any new things to them. He says: ‘the things that ye heard from the beginning . . . I write no new things to you’ (ii. 7). The whole purpose, I believe, of this challenge as to walking in the light is to people who have a considerable amount of understanding, and right understanding, as to the things of God. John says: I am not going over again the things that you have heard, and I am certainly not going to teach you new things ; I only want to know, how is it working out? how is it tallying with your experience?

It is the light, too, of His presence. ‘If we walk in the light, *as He is in the light*’. How important that is! To know that we are not coming to scrutinies and questions, and criticisms—we are all coming to the Lord ; we are all coming together in humility and simplicity of heart on to the Lord’s ground. Oh, for a new awareness of what the Lord thinks about us ; what the Lord feels ; how the Lord judges things ; how the Lord wants them. Oh, for a new warning, as we have here, of those who have things to hide, and so there is no fellowship—there is a contradiction ; there is a false position. “If we *say* that we have fellowship with him, and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (i. 6). There is a contradiction, not only in word but in fact. *But*—and that is the turning-point of this verse, and it is always the turning-point of greater spiritual fulness—“*but* if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another”.

It is the light of love. Love is very understanding ; love is very patient ; love is very tender ; but love is very faithful. The light that shines to us may be a painful light ; a humbling light ; in some matters a perplexing light. But all I can say is :

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Lord, shine on! However bruised and battered I may feel, Lord, shine on! At all costs, not for my

sake only, but for all that it means to Thyself, not for time only but for eternity—Lord, shine on!

H. F.

A POSITIVE AND PURPOSEFUL GOD

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Genesis i. 1-3).

"I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was waste and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved to and fro. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful field was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the Lord, and before his fierce anger. For thus saith the Lord, The whole land shall be a desolation; yet will I not make a full end" (Jeremiah iv. 23-27).

'*IN the beginning, God . . .*' And everyone will say, That is right; that is the place that He ought to occupy. And so, with these words, so familiar to us, the whole Bible is introduced. From this keynote, the whole Bible runs, and becomes a harmony—God. Here, God, the subject of the whole Bible, is introduced. '*In the beginning, God . . .*' And when God is in His place, which is first and primary, there is always a new beginning. This is a point of departure, and a point which marks a new prospect. It is always like that when the Lord has His place.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

I want to dwell for a few minutes upon the kind of God that is introduced with these words. These early verses of the Bible contain in principle the great truths as to what God is like; the kind of God that He is. We open this Book, and are at once confronted with a state that is wholly negative. Everything about that condition is negative: there was *not* this, and there was *not* that; that is the mark of it. And God, introduced against the background of a negative condition, is immediately shown to be a God who is positive; a God who is not negative, and a God who cannot bear anything that is negative. He is the great 'Yea' God, the Almighty Yes, and whenever God comes to His place, there will be a change from a negative to a

positive character, some meaningfulness. With God all that is negative will just begin to go out.

We shall, in fact, find that, whatever His activities may be—and His activities are many indeed, and sometimes they seem to be working in a negative way—the truth is, that, whatever He is doing, He is doing it with a positive object and a positive mind; His end is not going to be negative. "I will not make a full end", we have just read in Jeremiah. However it may appear that things are being brought to an end, He will not make a full end. It is all with a positive purpose in view. The very first thing about this God, who is the subject of this whole mighty Book, is that He is a positive God, who is set against any negative condition. Take that as a great truth in your relationship with the Lord, in your apprehension of the Lord. These are the foundations of everything.

PURPOSE

The next thing is: "*And God created . . .*" Put that in another way: 'God got to work'. God is a God of purpose, and not passive, inactive. He is a God actuated by positive purpose. We know from the rest of the story how true that is. How much there is in the Bible that just comes back to this truth. God is not an inactive God, a stand-off God, just a spectator, somewhere amidst the shadows. He is right on the scene; He is right *in* things. As Paul says, He is '*working in all things*' (I Cor. xii. 6). He is not a purposeless God, and He cannot endure a state of things that has no purpose. He cannot look upon this 'without form, and empty'. God is not going to tolerate that; He is introduced to us as One who will not bear any kind of purposeless state, and who will do all in His power to turn things to positive purpose. He is the God of purpose; He is not a passive God.

ORDER

"*Without form*". He comes in as set against anything that is formless, or without order. He is a God of order. It is a beautiful story of an order being introduced, evolved, where there was no order. Disorder is always weakness, disorder is always loss. A disorderly person wastes much time

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and energy, and throws away a great deal of vital value. Disorderliness in our person; disorderliness in our home, or in any sphere; disorderliness in the Church—it all means weakness and loss. God is a God of order. So, when the Scripture says that the earth was “without form”, God is introduced as One who is not going to allow that to continue. His activity is to bring about an order—not merely for its own sake, not because He is fastidious or picky, but because, as we all know, economy is always bound up with being orderly, being systematic. And that is the kind of God He is, who does not want to see all the loss that is associated with a lack of heavenly order.

FULNESS

“Without form, *and void*”. The Hebrew word would be better translated by the English word ‘empty’—‘without form and empty’ or ‘desolate’, ‘barren’. God is not a God like that. If there is one thing that the Bible says about the Lord, all the way through, it is that He is a God who believes in fulness; His thoughts are full thoughts; His ends are full ends. The great end that He has in view is when “the earth shall be filled with”—shall be full of—“the knowledge of the glory of the Lord” (Hab. ii. 14). He is working toward that. He cannot bear to have a condition that is not full; He just cannot. He does not like people to be empty; He does not even like us to be partially full: He wants us to know His fulness—to ‘receive of His fulness, grace upon grace’ (John i. 16). God cannot bear vacuums, for a vacuum is always a dangerous thing. He acts against that.

LIGHT

“*And God said, Let there be light*”. God cannot bear a state of darkness. He is the God of light, the God of illumination; and His desire is that there shall be light everywhere, fulness of light. That is the kind of God that is introduced with this word, “In the beginning God . . .”

GOD'S SECOND MOVEMENTS:
'I WILL PLANT AGAIN'

There are those that believe that the state here described was the result of judgment upon a former creation. Whether that is so or not, the rest of the Bible does show, again and again, that God had to act in relation to a state of things that had missed the purpose of its existence, to break it down, destroy it, throw it into disruption and des-

olation. When a thing which He raised up for a purpose, had lost that purpose, He did that again and again. But whenever He did it, He moved again. The Bible is just full of the second movements of God, in lives, in a people, in places. Think of some of the double movements of God that the Bible contains. How thankful Jonah was that the Lord did not leave him in the depths of the sea in his misery! The word is: “And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time . . .” Thank God for that second time! How glad Peter would be that the Lord came a second time into his life, after the chaos, after the blinding darkness of his failure. The Lord came again to Peter. The Bible is full of such examples. “I will not make a full end”. In other words, ‘I will come back again, whatever I have to do.’

Sometimes the Lord does seem to be on that line of pulling down. I read recently in that shortest chapter in Jeremiah, chapter xlv, the tremendous statement of the Lord through Jeremiah to Baruch. He says: “That which I have planted I will pluck up . . . Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not” (Jer. xlv. 4, 5). But we know that, while the Lord pulled up, rooted up that people from the land because they failed to fulfil their Divine purpose, He planted them again. Through the prophet, He says: ‘I will plant again; I will plant again’ (cf. Jer. xxxii. 41, etc.). And He did. Sometimes there does seem to be the pulling up or pulling down business going on; the destroying, the bringing about of a state of chaos and desolation. If it seems like that, may it not be only another aspect of the Lord’s positive line of action? If the Bible says anything at all, it says that even His judgments, in time, are intended to be to His glory, and not to final desolation.

We could take many illustrations or instances in the Bible of the working of this principle, as showing what kind of God He is. There was the chaos and desolation, the barrenness and unfruitfulness and darkness of Israel in Egypt; a condition in the nation, in the people, very similar to what we have here at the beginning of Genesis. It might well be said of Israel in Egypt during those four hundred years: ‘Without form and void . . . and darkness’. The Lord moved into that formlessness, emptiness, purposelessness; and in the wilderness, what a beautiful order He established. From a rabble He created a nation; from a purposeless people, He brought out a people with a wonderful prospect; from the chaos in which they were living, He produced that marvellous system of worship in the Tabernacle. How ordered it all is, to the last detail! He is the God of order. Israel in Babylon was

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in a similar condition—"without form and void . . . and darkness". The Lord moves against that. What about the disciples after the Cross? We could say: "without form and void . . . and darkness over the face of the deep"—awful chaos and desolation. But see the Creator at work after His resurrection, recovering! We know the end of that story.

THE SPIRITUAL COUNTERPART IN THE NEW CREATION

What I want to say alongside of this is the great thing, of course. All this is true as to what kind of God this is that is introduced with the Bible. The great thing is what Paul says about it, that 'all things were created for . . . unto . . . and by Jesus Christ.' What does that mean? It means that all this, of which we have spoken so imperfectly, becomes spiritually true in the Lord Jesus. As it is true in creation, in nature, at the beginning, in the new creation in Christ Jesus it becomes spiritually true for every member of that new creation, every one truly born anew.

PURPOSE

We know how every true child of God, who comes into this relationship with the Lord Jesus, immediately assumes a new sense of positiveness in life. Before that, it is all so negative, is it not? Even the positives of this world—things in which the world glories or finds its pleasure—are all negative, and everybody knows they are. They must have, and have, and have, in order to try to overcome this negative element that is in everything. In Christ that negative gives way to a positive. Most of us can testify that union with the Lord Jesus has given to life a positiveness and a purposefulness. That comes in at once. When anyone is saved, born again, you see them assuming a sense of purpose in life; a new meaning to things has been introduced. "Called according to His purpose"—a sense of mighty Divine purpose comes in with Christ; it is found in Him.

ORDER

Then the life begins to take on a new order. All that uncoordinated state, where everything was as it were disintegrated and unrelated, begins to give place to a co-ordinating purpose; the life becomes united, and united by something quite positive. It is a new order that is brought into life in Christ, a heavenly order, a Divine order.

FULNESS

The same is true of this matter of fulness: how empty after all life is until we find the Lord Jesus! I can never understand really the phrase: 'an aching void'! What is an aching void? A void is a void, and it is void of even an ache! But it is an expression; we know what it means—an emptiness, an ache for something to fill life. That is answered, is it not, in the Lord Jesus. We begin to know something of that when we begin the true Christian life; we know we are on the way to something rich and full. And it goes on and on; there is no end to this fulness. John said: 'Of His fulness have we all received'—*of it!* not 'it'; we have not received His entire fulness; but *of His fulness* have all we received. And the end is 'unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' (Eph. iv. 13)—'the fulness of Him that filleth all in all' (Eph. i. 23)—the fulness of God. That is what we are introduced into. God is that kind of God, but He is now made all that to us in Christ. There should be no vacuum in the Christian life, no emptiness.

LIGHT

And again, is it not true that in Christ there is the true illumination, the true light? He is the light. Paul, as we know well, linked this first chapter of Genesis, these very first phrases, with his own spiritual experience, and said: "It is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Cor. iv. 6). The new creation is a new illumination; the light begins to shine.

Now that we have it—imperfectly, it is true; a little, and more, and more—the measure of light, the measure of understanding of Divine things, will entirely depend upon two considerations.

On the one side, it will depend on how prepared we are to subject *our* wisdom to the wisdom of God. You know, our heads are usually the hindrance to spiritual illumination. We are wanting to get it all through our heads, through our reason; to understand with our natural minds; we are struggling and struggling, and we don't get very far; and we have to say: I can't understand! Well, we never shall that way. Just as the will has to be subjected to the will of God, so the mind has to be subjected to the mind of God. We come up against something that is God's revealed mind, and it does not accord with our minds, and our minds do not accord with it; we therefore put our minds

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in the way, and say: But . . . but . . . but . . . There light is arrested; there understanding is arrested. 'Your thoughts are not My thoughts', saith the Lord. 'As high as the heaven is above the earth, so are My thoughts above your thoughts' (Is. lv. 8, 9). So you have got to surrender your own mental activities to the Lord, and perhaps be crucified in that tremendous reasoning faculty that you have, in humble acceptance of what God says. The light will break then.

That is one side. The other side is this. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of illumination, of revelation, and we must have the Spirit for spiritual understanding. 'The Spirit of God brooded over the face of the waters'. He it was who was the agent in transforming this scene, and bringing in this light, which made all the difference. The Spirit of God does this. It is a simple word perhaps for beginners in the Christian life. It is a wonderful thing how, if we surrender, on the one side, mind, as well as heart and will, to the Lord, the Lord can

get on with His new creation so much more quickly than if we are all the time arguing, or reserving, or holding back, or contradicting. When the Holy Spirit really gets His place in us, how quick the change is; how wonderful the transformation.

But my point is this. All this that comes in by way of illustration (I am not saying it is only illustration and parable, history or not history—that does not really matter for the moment)—all this is God's way of leading us on to His Son. He is saying: What is true in the natural order of creation, under the hand of God, has its superior counterpart in the spiritual, heavenly, new creation in Christ. And this is what we find, or should find, in Christ. This kind of thing: God working against what is negative, to bring about the positive; against what is empty, to bring about the full; against what is disorderly, to bring in the order; against what is dark, to bring in the light. That is the nature of the Christian life; that is what is made true in Christ, in the new creation.

T. A-S.

THRESHING, AND THE LORD'S BALANCE

"Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech. Doth the plowman plow continually to sow? doth he continually open and break the clods of his ground? When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and put in the wheat in rows and the barley in the appointed place and the spelt in the border thereof? For his God doth instruct him aright, and doth teach him. For the fitches are not threshed with a sharp threshing instrument, neither is a cart wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod. Bread corn is ground; for he will not ever be threshing it: and though the wheel of his cart and his horses scatter it, he doth not grind it. This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in wisdom" (Isaiah xxviii. 23-39).

"I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid. . . . They also that err in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmur shall learn doctrine" (Isaiah xxix. 14, 24).

"And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had made many disciples, they returned

to Lystra, and to Iconium, and to Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts xiv. 21, 22).

THIS parable that we have read from Isaiah is related particularly to spiritual understanding, in connection with the meaning of the ways of the Lord with His people. The context of the passage is concerned with the faithful company of the Lord's children, who, in the midst of many unfaithful ones, were suffering for their faithfulness. That is always a difficult thing to understand; it is very testing of faith. It was because of this perplexity, in the presence of such suffering, that the Lord gave His servant the word of this parable.

The general meaning of the parable is clear enough. Men apply to natural processes their in-born or acquired wisdom—wisdom born either of instinct or of experience—as to what should be done with this and that, when it should be done, and how it should be done; but they often fail to recognise two things. Firstly, that the wisdom by which they are so acting has come from God—'This also cometh from the Lord'; and secondly, that, behind the very things that they are doing, expressing the wisdom or knowledge that they have

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acquired, whether by learning, by experience, or by training—behind what they are doing, because it is God-given wisdom, there is a spiritual meaning. They do many things, and they do not see the spiritual meaning of the things they are doing. I have often felt, and sometimes said, that I wish that all the experts in the different realms of knowledge and science—medicine, biology, physics, and so on—could see through their expert knowledge to the spiritual interpretation. Isaiah is saying here, that behind things that are done in nature—in this case, the operations of agriculture—there are spiritual meanings.

THE MEANING OF THE PLOUGH

At the beginning: “Doth the plowman plow continually to sow?” Well, the answer of common sense is, No, of course he does not! He would be a madman if he ploughed, and then went on ploughing all through the year; if he did nothing else but plough, or harrow his ploughed ground. Does he do that continually? No; it is a job that has got to be done—the breaking up, the turning over, the exposing to the elements, the harrowing—it is an essential operation, but it is not continued indefinitely. It is something to be done, but it has its time and place, its beginning and its end.

The Lord is speaking to His faithful people who are feeling that they are under the plough; furrows are being cut deep into their souls; they are being turned up and turned over, laid bare, exposed, broken, harrowed. The Lord says, even to faithful people: ‘This is necessary; we are looking ahead to a harvest, to real values; this is an essential aspect of the work. But . . . take this comfort: this is not going on for ever.’ Under the hand of the Lord it is periodic, and it is timed. It comes into the individual life of the child of God; it comes into the life of a company of the Lord’s people; and, as history shows, it comes into the experience of the whole Church. From time to time, down through the centuries, it seems that the action of God once more is cutting deep, overturning, breaking up. It is the hard way toward some fresh harvest. But the word of the Lord is: ‘My dear people, remember this: I am the Man with His hand on the plough: I have this whole thing in hand; it will not go on for ever.’ It is something necessary—everybody will agree with it in nature; we agree with it, surely, in grace—but it has its time limit; and when that phase is accomplished, the Lord terminates it, and says: Now, that is done and we can get on with the next thing.

THE SOWING OF THE SEEDS

Now the parable goes on with the seed. You notice that four kinds of seed are mentioned here. And it is a very interesting thing, though it is difficult to detect this in our translation, that the verbs used are chosen definitely and specifically in relation to the kind of seed. Fitches, the ‘love-in-a-mist’ or ‘devil-in-a-bush’ of our gardens, the smallest of them all, are sown broadcast. The ‘cummin’ is also very small, but a little larger. The fitches are said to be just ‘scattered’; but for the cummin another verb is used: it is ‘distributed’, sown more carefully than the other. And when you come to the barley and the wheat, it is ‘dropped’ into holes; it is given more particular care as to where it is put. It is not just broadcast; it is planted.

Now, probably you can see something through that. The Lord’s people vary. I do not think that the parable is intended to discriminate in values. Everything has its own value, and everything has its own worth, its own significance. It is all a part of the great harvest. But supposing we look at the fitches and the cummin, not as something of less importance, but perhaps as those who are smaller, shall we say, in the immature or child stage. I think they comprise by far the larger number of the Lord’s people, scattered abroad. They are the Lord’s people in general, scattered broadcast over the earth—“the field is the world” (Matt. xiii. 38)—and because they have not come yet to a point of greater maturity, or to the phase where something more is to be realised, the Lord deals with them in His own gracious way.

THE HARVESTING OF THE SEEDS

Notice what follows: how the fitches and the cummin are dealt with in one way; the wheat and the barley are dealt with in quite another way. To the little fitches and cummin no cart wheel is taken; no threshing machine is employed; it only just needs the gentle tap of the rod. So easily is the work done with these that the harder dealings of the threshing-floor are not called for. They are but children. Now, is this not true of the Christian life? Sometimes you wonder why some people get away so easily; so many Christians get off with it so lightly; the Lord does not seem to deal with them as He deals with others—perhaps with you. Well, all right, their time has not come. Of course all parables break down; you cannot change fitches into wheat; this is where all parables have

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their limitations. Within a certain general realm, where there is the intrinsic value to the Lord, the Lord's dealings, for the time being, are apparently very light and easy-going; it is just the staff, it is just the rod, it is just a pull-up here and there, without anything very drastic. The Lord deals with people according to their measure. At a certain stage their measure is this, and the Lord deals with them accordingly.

A QUESTION OF MEASURE

But, immediately the question of greater measure, and greater value, comes into view (sometimes that comes into view very early; sometimes it seems to take much longer)—as soon as greater values, like wheat and barley, come into view, the handling of the Lord is very much more drastic. "Bread corn is ground". If it is a question of the value of 'bread', then those who are going to be 'bread', that is, food, for the people of God, are going to have very drastic handling by the Lord. If you feel the Lord is handling you in that way, bruising, hammering, using the flail on you, I say it to you emphatically, that is a hopeful sign. The Lord is meaning something more of value in your life for others. It is 'bread' corn that is bruised.

Many young Christians do not understand when we speak to the Lord's more mature people about the difficulties and the sufferings of the Christian life. They think that we are a bit morbid, and making the Christian life something complicated and hard. To any such young Christians I would say: If you are the Lord's, the Lord will deal with you appropriately to where you are spiritually. He will not be too hard on you; He may be very gentle with you; He may just correct you with the rod, quite lightly, because so far you are just in that category of the 'fitches' and the 'cummin'. But remember, it may not always be like that. The Lord who wants the most, and whose heart is set upon 'bread' for His people—that over the whole earth His people should receive strength, sustenance, building up, through your ministry, individually or collectively—if it is going to be like that, to satisfy that desire of His heart, you are going to have a difficult time; you are going through the 'threshing-floor'; you are going to know the 'bruising'.

If the Lord is not able to do that, and He has to keep us on the elementary, easy-going basis, where we are all having a happy time, and the Lord very rarely does anything corrective and stringent, it is not a compliment to our spiritual life. It may just mean that He is not able to do all

that He would do if He could in this great need of bread. So, if He really does turn His cart-wheel upon us; if the hoofs of the horses stamp upon us; if the flail gets to work, it is because He is looking upon us as bread-corn, something by which He is going to serve Himself in the interest of others.

AN EXPLANATION OF DISCIPLINE

That, very briefly and imperfectly, is Isaiah's parable. Now, if you look, you will see how that worked out with this company. The suffering remnant—suffering not because of their own unfaithfulness, but because of the unfaithfulness of the nation as a whole, suffering under the Lord's hand, being dealt with, disciplined—it was that remnant which was the Lord's key to the whole later situation. It has always been like that. The key to the situation of all the Lord's people is a remnant, a company, who suffer together with Him, and who allow themselves to go through the discipline that is necessary.

What is the Lord saying, perhaps to you, in the parable? Perhaps you have had a harder time than many people, and you do not understand it. You have perhaps said: Is this necessary to the Christian life? Look at all these other Christians; they do not have my difficulties and troubles. Well, the parable explains it. The whole point of this parable is spiritual understanding. The Lord deals with His people in different ways. Yes, these others are His people, but, but . . . so far they just cannot serve Him in the way in which He wants to be served, and so He is dealing with them, quite gently, in their category, in their measure; but you may be chosen to something more.

The idea has been very common in Christianity, that it is a great and wonderful thing to be 'mightily used of the Lord'! Oh, to be a great evangelist! Oh, to be a great teacher! Oh, to be a great Christian worker! Let me tell you, that is an entirely false conception. The truth is that those who serve the Lord most truly go through the deepest suffering. The balances are truly kept by God—extra suffering, extra usefulness; little suffering, little usefulness. That is how God keeps His balances, and that is what is here, implicit in this story. You may be having a more or less easy time. I do not want to dishearten you by saying it may not always be so, but if you really want to be of greater use to the Lord, remember it may be by a deeper discipline of the Lord. And if you are having a particularly difficult time, most likely it is because the Lord is going to meet need more fully through you.

T. A-S.

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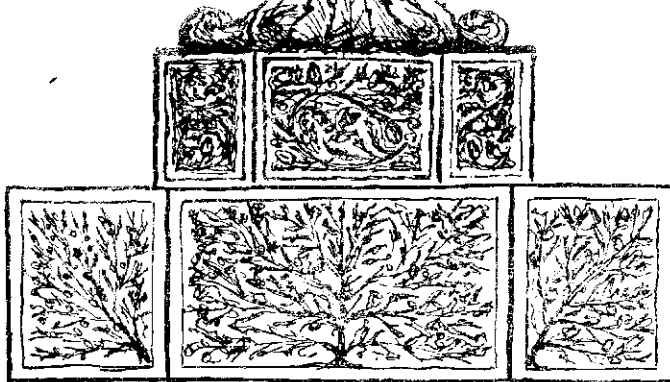
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HORIZONED BY CHRIST

CHAPTER 1

“... this is he which is ordained of God to be the Judge of the quick and dead” (Acts x. 42).
 (“... he is the one who has been designated by God as Judge of the living and the dead” N.E.B.)
 “... he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world... in the man whom he hath ordained...” (Acts xvii. 31, mg.)

THE word ‘ordained’ or ‘designated’ in the above Scriptures is, in the original language, the word from which the English word ‘horizon’ is derived. These are not the only occasions on which the root meaning is employed.

These statements, therefore, are that God has designated His Son—Jesus Christ—as the ultimate Horizon and Criterion of all judgment. That means that Christ is to be the sphere and scope, the realm and the range within whom and according to whom all things will be determined.

To know and consider this statement of Divine fact is to be introduced to the immense and unique significance of Christ in relation to “all things”. It is the key to the great amount of Scriptural revelation which shows that Christ is appointed by the Father, not only officially, but characteristically, the Criterion of all Divine judgment or determination.

This introduces a quite serious element into life, especially the life of the Christian. Sooner or later, every true Christian, i.e. every born-again child of God, will find that the Spirit of God is pressing this criterion against his or her life. We all know that in our spiritual beginnings, as in childhood, everything is fresh, happy, and irresponsible. Most of us know that it does not continue indefinitely like that, but that as we go on the Christian life assumes a more serious aspect, when problems, difficulties, and complications arise. Many think that,

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when this happens, things have gone wrong, but, while it is natural to look back with some longing, it would be unnatural to try to force ourselves back to childhood. What happens is that we come to realise that there are bigger meanings in life than we were aware of, and now we are being confronted with them.

When we go to the seaside for a holiday—if we ever do—we see three classes of people. There are those who never leave the dry land, but keep to the shore. Then there are those who just paddle in the shallows, ankle deep. Finally, there are those who strip and go out into the deeps, beyond their foothold.

Number one class have an easy and uneventful time. They keep to safety and convenience. Number two class have *comparative* enjoyment, and if they get an occasional splashing and things begin to look a bit difficult, they make for the land and escape from the inconvenience. Number three class find themselves contending with forces which make demands upon strength, courage, and endurance, but theirs is the *real* satisfaction and greatness.

The Christian life is very much like this. There are these three classes of Christians, but the Spirit of God constrains to committal to the greater fullness of Christ, and often precipitates us beyond our depth. The Apostle Paul cried, "O the depth of the riches . . .", and spoke of ". . . the unsearchable riches of Christ . . .". The Holy Spirit knows these depths and ever seeks to press Christians to know them, but the process is one which is fraught with almost frightening experiences.

The one thing for which we are ever seeking is that which will be an inclusive explanation or interpretation of the whole difficult history. The question is: Is there such an explanation? The purpose of our present consideration is to answer that question.

At our starting point there are two things on which we are, or must be, agreed.

(a) That things in this world and life are not as they ought to be; things violate our sense of right. There is contradiction, unrest, doubt, discontent, and a duality of forces in constant conflict.

(b) For our explanation and enlightenment we are bound to the Bible. We refuse human philosophy because it never has given, and never can give, a satisfactory answer. We repudiate the wisdom of men as a means of solving the problems of life. The Bible alone gives the answer, and provides the required light. So we come to the Bible for our answer, and we find that it focuses everything upon three points:—

(i) The eternal intention of God. That is, that Christ is the horizon of all things; the ultimate range and limit; the scope, sphere, and character of all things.

(ii) The historic rift in Heaven and earth which is answerable for all the discord in the creation, and explains every other rift.

(iii) What really happened when that rift and rupture occurred. (This last is really the key to our whole consideration.)

(I) GOD'S ETERNAL INTENTION

The Bible teaches that, in the Divine intention, all things were summed up in God's Son.

" . . . whom he appointed heir of all things "
(Hebrews i. 2).

According to the context, this appointment must have been made before all things were created, because it is also said that ". . . all things have been created through him, and unto him . . ." (Col. i. 16). The end revealed and declared is ". . . to sum up (gather together, reunite) all things in Christ" (Eph. i. 10). Primarily, all things were in God and vested in His Son as "Heir".

The rift and rupture by a revolt resulted in a fall out of God. However, it was not a fall into nothingness, but into Satan—the Adversary as the erstwhile and—for the time being—"Prince of this world".

It was a fall
from love into enmity;
from light into darkness;
from purpose into frustration and 'vanity';
from life into death;
from content into discontent;
from harmony into discord.

We leave many details given in Scripture as to the causes of, and reason for, this revolt and disruption, and just note that we find ourselves with this explanation of a creation shot through and through with the sense of there being a fundamental disorder, and that, therefore, "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth . . ." (Rom. viii. 22).

The inclusive explanation is that everything, including man, is out of its true and right Sphere, Orbit, or Horizon. This can be tested and proved any day. Immediately a life is brought into Christ, this sense of unrest and unreality gives place to a consciousness of right adjustment, peace, and of all being 'reconciled'. It is all a matter of Christ being in His divinely-appointed place.

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So we come to see and consider

JESUS CHRIST — GOD'S ETERNAL HORIZON

The characteristic definition of the Christian life—in the New Testament—is “In Christ”.

To obtain the impression of its very great importance, every Christian ought to make it his—or her—business to do two things.

(a) To note the number of times this phrase—in various forms—e.g. “In Christ”, “In Christ Jesus”, etc., is mentioned.

(b) To note the numerous and various matters related to it.

This study will result in a rich education in what Christianity really is.

We are going to consider it now, in broad outline, in three main aspects:—

- (A) “In Christ” is a distinguishing definition.
- (B) “In Christ” is a descriptive definition.
- (C) “In Christ” is a determining definition.

(A) “IN CHRIST” — A DISTINGUISHING DEFINITION

“... all we who were baptized into Christ...”
(Romans vi. 3, R.V.)

“... if any man is in Christ...” (II Cor. v. 17).

The very term “In Christ” implies division of the human race.

(i) It is the pointer to the place and purpose of Christ in God's appointment. That is, to be the sphere of man in creation and redemption. The creation is said to have been in Him. It moved out of Him. The new creation—the redeemed from the old—is said to be in Christ. Redemption is therefore a return into Christ.

(ii) If men are not in Christ (and this is only possible through ‘new birth’—“born of the Spirit”) then they are in someone else or something else. Here follows all the teaching concerning man's falling away and alienation from God.

“... the whole world lieth in the evil one” (I John v. 19); “Ye are of your father the devil...” (John viii. 44), and other such Scriptures reveal where people are if not in Christ. The Word of God declares them to be “in the flesh”, “in darkness”, “in death”.

Redemption is recovery and restoration to and into God in Christ.

The Cross of Christ is the great divide (Romans vi, etc.) It reveals and declares what man is by nature. It shows what we leave by union with Christ's death. It discloses what we come into by union with His resurrection.

The Cross is the only opening into God's realm. By it, Christ brings man back to God.

(B) “IN CHRIST” — A DESCRIPTIVE DEFINITION

It not only indicates the sphere, it also defines and describes the character. Christ summed up in Himself all that God ever meant by sovereignty choosing the Hebrew race. To understand God's dealings with Israel is to come to a rich understanding of Christ.

(a) The beginning in Abraham.

In Genesis xiv. 13, Abraham is called “the Hebrew”. The word ‘Hebrew’ means ‘the man from beyond’ (i.e. beyond the river). He is spoken of as a ‘stranger’, a ‘sojourner’. In the world of his sojourn, which was to be his as an inheritance—by Divine covenant—he was, for his earthly life, a stranger. For that time he had no ‘abiding place’, no fixed residence, and ‘no continuing city’. He was not only a visitor, he was essentially different, of a different order and type.

Here we are introduced to all that Christ is spiritually and humanly. He was, and is, different and apart. In Him God works in contradiction to and repudiation of all that which has come into the human race contrary to His thought and intention.

In a fuller and altogether different way Jesus was the Man from beyond. How often He spoke of Himself as having come from above! How different He was from all others here! What a stranger He was on this earth! How homeless in more than the material sense! He was of another ‘order’ in the deepest reality of His being. The reality was known by demons; sensed acutely by His enemies; and felt by the common people.

Jesus—“the Son of Man”—was, and is, the norm of what will eventually be in the redeemed humanity.

(b) From Abraham in person look at Abraham in the nation. The great inclusive idea of Israel was their intended vocation as the servant-nation. All their discipline was related to this purpose. The personal history of the Patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David—was all directed toward servanthood in the highest, deepest, and fullest sense. It was a servant-sonship, and a

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sonship-servanthood which—in principle—lay behind God's dealings with them.

And what was true of the founders was true of the nation—not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and give their life' was their calling.

The loss of this conception of their existence as God's chosen, cost them their place in God. They fell out of God, and have ceased to be His 'servant' nation. Surrender and submission, not superiority and pride, are the laws of God's service.

Read and consider Christ and His life in the light of Israel's calling and vocation. It is very illuminating.

(a) Look at His birth.

His mother (Luke i. 26 - 38).

Think of the social embarrassment.

Think of the religious predicament.

Think of the personal dilemma.

Then reflect upon the grand renunciation!

Jesus was born of this grand triumph of the servant spirit—"Be it unto me according to thy word."

(b) The thirty years.

This is the period of life in which preparation and training for life's vocation takes place. School days and home training, followed by college. It is the period in which life's ambition governs everything.

In the case of Jesus, so far as the records go (and it is the unconcealed disappointment of Christendom that we know so little of this period), it was a *naturally* negative time. He came from it with no academic honours or distinctions; no status or 'references'. Rather did He come out with many handicaps. Not as a master and governor according to men's standards, but as a Servant, disciplined in a hard school for thirty years. He emerged as the suffering Servant of Jehovah.

Thus He inherited and took over the forfeited and lost vocation of Israel, but in a fuller and deeper way than Israel could ever have fulfilled it. The truest thing about Him was His surrender and submission.

(c) See, next, the Horizon of servanthood in His baptism—"... thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness". There is a very great range in those two words "all righteousness".

(i) John the Baptist—or Baptizer.

It is evident from the crowds that flocked to John that there existed a state of concern, weariness, frustration, and a sense of sin. His message was that of 'remission'; his cry, of 'repent'.

But, great as was the man and his mission, John

himself was labouring under a sense of limitation and tentativeness. "I"—"but he"; "water"—but "the Holy Spirit". The comparisons and contrasts show how insufficient John felt his ministry to be.

Moreover, in pointing to "the Lamb of God", John seems clearly to have included himself among those who needed to have their sins 'taken away'. He needed the Sin-Bearer. Further; John himself exemplified and embodied the servant-spirit in a way second only to Jesus. His whole life was one of discipline unto his great service, and his supreme declaration expressed that: "he must increase, but I must decrease".

(ii) Jesus baptized.

It is said of those being baptized by John that they were "baptized. . . confessing their sins". Other Scriptures tell us that Jesus was without sin. Yet the whole Gospel of Christianity rests upon His being "numbered with the transgressors" (Isa. liii. 12); upon the fact that "Him who knew no sin he [God] made to be sin on our behalf" (II Cor. v. 21). So Jesus took a place—not His own, but in our stead—among sinners, confessing the sin of the whole world, He bore it unto death. The range is "the world"; thus Christ, in death and resurrection, is the Horizon for the world's salvation.

(iii) The opened Heaven and the Divine satisfaction. Everything in the whole Bible shows that Heaven is closed to man by nature. It was closed when man fell out of God by disobedience. That man ceased to be under the pronouncement, "It is very good". Banished, he lies under the curse which is on the race and on the earth.

But

'A final Adam to the fight
And to the rescue came.'

Here is the Man in whom God is well pleased. To Him Heaven is open, and upon Him the attestation of acceptance rests. If His baptism—death and resurrection in figure—was representative and inclusive, so is His acceptance and His open Heaven.

But note, it is *in* Him that the good pleasure and open Heaven are found. Not elsewhere nor otherwise. He is the Horizon of an open way with God and Heaven.

Having touched upon the Incarnation, the thirty years, the baptism of Jesus, as God's appointed Horizon of all things, we proceed to the same relatedness of

THE TEMPTATION

That was not an incident, however wonderful, in the life of our Lord. It, like all the other special

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events, reached far back to the beginning and far on to the end. Indeed it ranged the whole horizon of human history and destiny. The first phase of the Temptation contained that primal issue of gratifying natural desire on the argument of 'necessity' at the suggestion of the Devil, or being prepared to risk all on obedience. It was a false idea of life which resulted in death, whereas abiding in God is the only *true* life. (More on this later.)

As to the second phase of the Temptation, the only possible way to adequately measure its force and rightly appraise its meaning is to read Mark xiv. 53 - xv. 15, especially in the New English Translation. The alternatives for Jesus are evident and obvious:—

- Acceptance (by the world) or rejection.
- An easy and cheap way or a costly and hard one.
- Reputation and popularity or being despised and discredited.
- Having all in this life or having all eternally.
- His own salvation or the salvation of the world.
- The local or the universal.
- Policy or principle.
- Compromise or singlemindedness.

All this was, and ever is, deeply testing. It is ever the battleground of the natural and the spiritual man; the soul in conflict with the spirit.

The heart of the temptation is faith relating to the long view. The history of the last nearly two thousand years has shown one thing; that when Jesus refused the quick and easy way and chose the long-view way, He became a spiritual power universally for ever; whereas, if He had accepted what Satan offered, one of two things could have resulted. He could have been killed by Romans, just as many zealots were killed in His day, and that would have been the end. Perhaps that was the hidden snare in the Devil's offer, and would have pleased him—the Devil—well. Or He might have become one of the dictators energized and inspired by the Devil, which have 'had their day and ceased to be', ending in ignominy.

He chose aright, and eternity will add to the vindication of time, but it was very costly.

In the third temptation the cosmic secret is uncovered. Foiled in the other two, the enemy seems to have become desperate and came right out into the open. "Worship me". Yes, that takes everything a long way back. To be 'equal with the Most High', 'worshipped as God', was ever his ambition. For this he is willing to give very much. Yes, he *can* give much! So often those who compromise, who let go God's fullest and best are peculiarly and uncannily prospered in their life. The ex-

change of the higher for the lower; the highest for the less high; the spiritual for the natural; the cross for a crown, is not always accompanied by immediately palpable disaster and a sense of loss. The Devil can give much, but Jesus saw through to the essential and supreme values. He reserved *all* His worship for God only. It was not so long after all. A little over three years; three painful years and an infinitely painful climax, and then—"All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth", "Wherefore also God highly exalted him". And the best is yet to be.

We return to our beginning. Not only by eternal choice, but by universal triumph, Jesus is God's Horizon, within whom and according to whom all things will be judged and determined. It is "... in the man whom he [God] has horizoned (literal Greek) that God will judge the world. (Acts xvii. 31.)

Before we leave the subject of the Temptation, it is necessary to recognise what was the heart of the whole conflict. In the earthly life of our Lord, there were three main features which govern the whole purpose of the Father in Him.

(a) His life in God.

There was immensely more in this than just seeking to live day by day with God in view; respecting and honouring God, and giving God His place. It reached right back to, and through, the great rift with all its involvements. It reached right on to the order and constitution of "a new heaven and a new earth". This is an essential and elemental factor in His being God's Horizon for all things.

It was necessary therefore that, from birth, through boyhood and manhood, there should be those features which postulated obedience. But in full manhood, at the age of thirty, He had to make His position *publicly* absolute in baptism. He may have been circumcised when eight days old, but that did not carry with it what He evidently recognised His baptism to mean. This was—in figure—a death, burial, and resurrection, and represented what His Cross would mean—absolute committal and subordination to the will of God.

For Him, life was in God, abiding in God. Only so was it possible for Him to reverse—"in man, for man"—the Fall out of God.

To be "in Christ" is to be in God

This is the main theme of John in his Gosepl and in his Letters. It is what Paul had seen and what led him to write so much regarding the significance of Christ from eternity to eternity, and of the final destiny of redeemed man and creation.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

Satan abode not in God. Christ abode in the Father. Hence He is the Mender of the universal rift and rupture.

(b) The life-long and many-sided effort of Satan to get between the Son and the Father.

We can never understand the persistent hostility to Jesus, both directly by Satan and indirectly by those influenced by him; the trials, temptations, sufferings, treacheries, disloyalties, and misrepresentations, until we recognise that one object which was the aim of them all. The object was to get Him to move out of God; to act in pride, self-interest, independence, resentment, or in any other way that would take Him out of God. To do, in the case of 'the last Adam', what he succeeded in doing with the first, would be a greater triumph of Satan than the former, for it involved much more. Satan's triumph is always in getting anyone, either in details or as a whole, out of their life and abode in God.

So the basic committal was put to the test continually right up to Gethsemane, and it was unrelenting.

(c) His full victory in the utter cost of the Cross.

His last words—"Father, into thy hands . . ."—contain the most sublime, the most tremendous, the most Satan-devastating triumph that this universe has ever seen. They explain the cry a little before: "It is finished". What an "it"! The first words at His committal were "My Son". The last word in His fulfilment was: "Father". It almost sounds like a call and an answer: "Son"—"Father"! The Father entrusted to the Son a great trust. The Son fulfilled that trust. He abode in the Father, although all hell strove to get Him out.

That looks on to the next main event in His life relating to His being God's eternal Horizon.

THE TRANSFIGURATION

The earthly sojourn of our Lord is marked by a series of mountain peaks, some literal, some spiritual. His incarnation is the first; His baptism the second; His temptation the third; His transfiguration the fourth. Here we stop for the present; while we look at the Mount of Transfiguration.

The sequence is in the right order. From each peak or eminence, the next comes into view with valleys between. From the temptation and full

victory there, it is right that we should espy this peak and let it be a link in the chain between the conflict in the wilderness and the travail on the Cross. The transfiguration *must* look back to the temptation and on to Calvary.

The transfiguration was evidently regarded by Jesus as a climax and a new point of advance. The climax pivoted upon who Jesus was. Everything past and future, hung upon that.

*"Who do men say that the Son of man is?"
". . . who say ye that I am?"*

Jesus felt that the time had come to introduce and press that all-important question and issue. The farthest point, both spiritually and geographically, had been reached. It is as though He said: 'You have seen and heard enough to resolve the question of identity; to get beyond all merely human deductions, conjectures, surmises, or acceptances. You must settle in your own hearts this vital and fundamental question. All that is yet to be will, for you, hinge, not upon the fact, but upon your certainty as to this matter.' From general speculation He brought them to personal apprehension. It is not good enough that men should be saying even the best things as to who He was (and the disciples only told Him the good things). Those who are to go on with Him must face the question more deeply and utterly.

Peter gave Him what He was requiring, and He immediately declared that to be the foundation of His future building activity, namely, His essential Sonship as God's Horizon. That, however men may interpret Peter's confession, is what it came to be. God never builds His eternal structures upon fallible man, however much His grace may have done in him, and it is necessary to *invent* the fallacy of infallibility to make either Peter or any 'successor' the foundation.

This surely is evident in the events which immediately followed the confession. The announcement by Jesus of His passion. "From that time began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed . . ." (Matthew xvi. 21).

This threw them all into confusion, consternation. They—including Peter—were completely disconcerted by this statement, and Peter comes out worse: of all.

This painful and almost devastating background became the setting for the Transfiguration.

T. A-S.

(to be continued)

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THE EYES OF HIS GLORY

(concluded)

Reading : Numbers xvi. 41 - 48 ; John xiii. 21 - 27, 30 - 35 ; Revelation xxi. 9 - 11, 23 ; Philippians ii. 5 - 11.

"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." (Ezekiel i. 29)

THE writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews calls this Throne a Throne of Grace.

In stating that fact we do not take away a single iota from the holiness of that Throne. It is impossible to overstate the holiness of the Throne of God. It is perfect—the holiness of God Himself—and no words, speaking of grace, or the word 'love', as commonly understood, must be thought to take away anything of the holiness and the awfulness of the Throne of Grace.

GLORY AND JUDGMENT

Let us consider the incident in Numbers xvi which follows on the destruction of Korah. It is something very true to experience, and something that may be a comfort to the heart where this is needed. God had judged Korah and his company. Moses did nothing. How could a man cause the earth to open and swallow up the company, or cause fire to come forth to consume the two hundred and fifty that offered the incense? And yet: ". . . on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the Lord."

The servants of God are very often charged with responsibility for that which God Himself has done. In the presence of such a situation, the glory of the Lord appeared to all the congregation. The point that we want to take up (there are other points) is this: The glory of the Lord appeared, and we must take that as being God's attesting of His two servants, not only in regard to what had happened up to that moment, but in the light of what was going to follow, inasmuch as the Lord knows the end from the beginning. He is saying, in effect: 'Watch these two servants of Mine; this is the exhibition of My glory.' They are two men who are charged with that which is no proper charge against them at all—the terrible charge of destroying the people of God. This is gross injustice.

Had we no rainbow round the Throne we should

say: Well, now we know what will happen; that Throne stands for utter holiness; and here an unholy charge is made against these two men; then the blazing glory of God will burst forth and smite these sinners who accuse them—but the Throne of Glory is the Throne of Grace. What also is the action of Moses and Aaron here? To stand up to justify themselves? To say virtually: 'God will give you what you deserve in this matter'? The attitude of Moses and Aaron in the face of the unjust accusation was to fall upon their faces before the Lord; and then, carrying that which spoke of the fragrance of Christ, to run in and bear this among the sinners, so that the plague was stayed. Though so grievously sinned against, their action was that of intercession in behalf of the transgressors. That at once reminds us of the familiar word in Isaiah liii. 12.

GLORY AND INTERCESSION

You see immediately what is here. In the presence of holiness violated we have intercession, and because of the pleading of the Intercessor, the operation of the plague, and the outbreak of that holy fire against these sinners, is stayed. You have the Cross of the Lord Jesus, the work of our blessed Intercessor in the Throne, converting the Throne from that of unmixed holiness into a Throne of Grace, in virtue of His own presence before the Father, pleading a righteousness which answers for the unrighteousness against which that holiness is burning. You see the type of the Lord Jesus, and it is in the presence of this that the glory of the Lord appeared to all the congregation.

We stay to ask ourselves: What constitutes the manifesting of the glory of the Lord? In our previous studies we have noted the following statements as answers to that inquiry: A life of faith, depending utterly upon God; a life of victory, standing in all the victory of Calvary over all the power of the Enemy; a life of perfect subjection to the will of God, having everything ordered according to Him who is in the Throne. These things are all true; but that which transcends them all, that which gathers them all up, and converts them all from being, shall we say, the terror of sheer holiness or strength, is this spirit of Him who, when He was wronged, made intercession for them that wronged Him. It is the love of God that turns away the fierce burning of the rays and tempers

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them—just as the blaze of the sun, which cannot be seen in all its full glory by the naked eye, can yet be viewed in its essential beauty when the full brightness is broken up into the colours of the rainbow.

GLORY AND SALVATION

Thus the Throne of Holiness need not be a terror to us, but through the operation of Divine grace we may gaze upon it, and have fellowship with it, in its rainbow glory.

Now let us briefly follow in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the principle illustrated by the attitude of Moses and Aaron in the incident before us.

In Isaiah xl. 5, we get this word:

“And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”

In Luke iii. 6, we get that same word quoted, with an alteration:

“And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

So that, instead of the glory of the Lord, we have the salvation of God. If we want to know what is the salvation of God, let us look back to the second chapter and verse thirty, where we see that Simeon said: *“For mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”*

Then the salvation of God is the glory of the Lord; and the salvation of God was the little Babe that Simeon held in his arms. That which Ezekiel saw, that awful glory of the Lord, is here in the person of the little Babe of Bethlehem. Veiled! Yes, that is the whole point! The blaze of that glory has now been broken up into its colours, that it can be seen: *“We beheld his glory”, “that which our eyes have seen, and our hands have handled . . .”* The glory of that Throne became manifest in the earth in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We know that in all His ways, works, and words on earth, without any variation at all, He manifested the glory of God. In all things He glorified His Father, doing His will, and revealing in everything His character. That is the glory of God—revealing His utter holiness; revealing His utter hatred of sin; letting it be very manifest that where any tinge of unholiness was concerned, He was utterly against it. But that was not all—and here is the comfort. While He was utterly apart from sin, utterly against sin as such, His presence in this world was not in itself merely to destroy sin, and all that was encompassed with sin. His purpose, first, was to deliver out from sin, to save from sin such as could be saved; and in the

one process of His Cross, we know that He both made a way of saving out from sin, and at the same time administered the death blow to sin. It was in His Cross that all this was wrought out, His purpose being to deliver from the power of sin. This is the glory of God walking the earth. This is the glory of God acting, suffering contradiction of sinners against Himself, as Moses and Aaron did. And even to the man who, more than any other amongst sinners, acted basely toward Him—he was one of the innermost company, and yet betrayed Him—He handed a sop as a token of the greatest honour; knowing that the hour was come, He loved even unto the end. This, please remark, is the glory of God in operation.

GLORY AND HUMILIATION

Note the operation of the glory of God again. We have been speaking of the eyes of His glory. Note the eyes of His glory at work in Luke xxii. 61:

“And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how that he said unto him, Before the cock crow this day, thou shalt deny me thrice.”

There are the eyes of the glory looking upon a man. What happened to the man? Was he shrivelled up by the awful terror of it? No! “Peter remembered the word of the Lord . . .” and repentance and forgiveness were the outcome; and we know what kind of man Peter became later on. You see the operation of the eyes of the glory here. They are operating in grace. They could look clean into the heart of a sinner, and break that heart unto repentance. It is the operation of the glory of God. He came not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.

Then what is the objective of the glory of God? It is not to destroy but to save. The activity of the glory of God is the activity of holy love, not terrible fierce wrath. And if in the end, or at any point on the way to the end, the glory of God acts destructively, let it be understood what that is; it is not merely terrible wrath venting itself, it is violated love in operation.

Then how may I have fellowship with that Throne? By responding to the Love that comes from the heart of God. Must I not be afraid of it? No! For the Word says: *“Perfect love casteth out fear, for fear hath torment.”* It is that very thing that John says in I John iv. 17:

“Herein is love made perfect with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as he is, even so are we in this world.”

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What is the day of judgment? The day of the unveiling of the glory.

Let us, if necessary, correct our ideas of the glory of God. If they have been up till now ideas of terror and dread, something of which to be afraid, let us put a rainbow round it all, and write over it: "God is love". The Gospels show us the character of that love. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends; ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." "As the Father hath loved me, I also have loved you . . . This is my commandment, that ye love one another . . ." How shall we reveal the glory of God? All-inclusively, by laying down our lives for one another in terms of the love of God. This is the consummate expression of Divine glory; and the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Are we afraid of those eyes of glory? We are told in Hebrews iv, that all things are naked and open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Those are the eyes of glory. But they are the eyes of Him who manifested that glory in grace. Do we fear to have our hearts searched by the glory of God? We need not fear; though, in any case, those eyes are seeing; there is nothing hid from them. If they were only eyes of blazing holiness, they would destroy every unholy thing they touched, and we might well run in terror from the wrath of the Lamb; but, praise God, in this day we may dare to come boldly to the Throne of Grace, with hearts wide open, daring to lay every part bare for Him to search with those eyes of flame; because they are eyes of flaming love as well as of holiness.

What the Lord is seeking, when seeking a people in whom He is glorified, is a people who are full of the love of God, and between whom and Himself there exists, not the relationship of an awful Potentate up there and of slaves down here, but as He Himself said: "I have called you friends". Do allow the Lord to scatter to the winds every grain of shrinking from the glory of God, every sense of: I dare not come into this! From one angle, that is a right fear. From another angle, how utterly it contradicts the character of the Divine glory, which is Love in its essence. And now the word is: As He loved us so ought we to love one another.

That brings us to the spirit of the Lamb:

"And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven eyes, which

are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth."

These, again, are the eyes of glory. The seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. Do we not read elsewhere, that the eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth? The eyes of glory are here identified with a Lamb as it had been newly slain! Yet only in the next chapter (verse 16) we read this:

"And they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb."

The day will come when the Lamb will be terrible to those who have refused Him, but let us remark again, it will be the terror inspired in the heart by the realisation that there was Love of that character offered, but persistently scorned and rejected. The wrath of the Lamb will create terror in the hearts of those who realise they have outraged infinite Love, and that there is now no opportunity of reconciliation with it, or of reaping the benefit that it offers. Hell will not be the terrible blazing out of God in dreadful punishment so much as the state brought about by a consciousness of a repudiation of Divine Love.

"And he shewed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God" (Revelation xxi. 10).

Here is the end: the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, having the glory of God. Here is the glory of God again, coming down out of Heaven. The eyes of the glory, then, must be associated with the City. What are the eyes? We are told the light of the body is the eye; that what lightens the whole body is the eye. What lightens the City? "The Lamb is the light thereof" (verse 23). It is the eye of the City which gives it its light, and its light is the glory. The light of the City is the Lamb.

THE GLORY OF THE LAMB

This is finality so far as we are concerned in the narrative, but you see what it implies. That which is the very essence of glory, and which glory will shed its light abroad in the whole realm in which it operates, is the Lamb, the One slain; the crucified Lord; the One who laid down His life for His friends; the One who took up His Cross in your behalf and mine, and suffered contradiction of sinners against Himself, and bled and died for our redemption; the One who loved us even unto the end. It is the Lamb. The essence of the glory of God, the supreme feature of those eyes of glory,

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that which will be the final light of all things, will be the Spirit of Calvary, the Spirit of the Lamb. We need not be afraid of that. On the contrary the whole exhortation of the Word of God is that the Spirit should be welcomed into our hearts. So we can say, finally, that the consummate manifestation of the glory of God is the showing forth of the Spirit of Christ as the crucified Lord. We reach high water mark there. What greater glory can you or I manifest than the glory of the Christ who gave Himself for us?

This is what Moses and Aaron in spirit displayed. They suffered contradiction of sinners, and their attitude was to plead for the pardon of those sinners, and to secure the staying of the plague. He lives to-day, that crucified One, making intercession for us; and in respect of every breach that we have committed against His holiness, every fault, every failing, every sin, every grieving of His Spirit, of which we repent in our hearts, His intercessions are effectual. Into that ministry they who share the glory are bound to enter.

Do we see our calling? It is to be in the world where we may suffer much contradiction of sinners against ourselves, and yet to make intercession for the transgressors, to be before God in behalf of the rest that the plague of death may be stayed, and that they may be saved and themselves brought into the fulness of the glory. We, in the mercy of God, may be as Moses and Aaron were. They were just two, out of a larger company, who represented God's thought. The larger company were

missing God's thought for them, and yet were intended by Him to come into it. There are multitudes of the Lord's people out for the good of the fulness of Christ, and there is death working among them. One plague that is working was revealed in this incident, the lack of discernment as to what was of God, and what was not. These people said to Moses: You have done this! But it was God who had done it. Paul says in Philippians i. 9: "This I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment; so that ye may approve the things that differ" (marginal reading).

Then perhaps one ministry for us is that of being exercised in the love of God, the love abounding more and more, that, in this evil day, we may discern the things that are of God, and the things that are not of God, and by our discernment be enabled to save many from death, from being swept away in deception. Is that not a need to-day? It surely is!

We come to the last passage. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus . . ." Then the story goes down, down to the death: "Wherefore also God highly exalted him . . . and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." The end is the glory of God the Father, and if we hear Him bidding us to take up our cross and follow Him, the end of the way is the glory of God the Father. May He grant us to enter into that.

G. P.

HORIZONED BY PURPOSE

CHAPTER I

THE consideration upon which we now enter follows immediately upon the former one, or runs parallel to it, namely 'Horizoned by Christ'.

When we speak of purpose being the horizon of all things, there is no contradiction of the other. We are not changing Christ for some *thing* called Purpose, we are only bringing into view the complement of Christ.

The Person and the Purpose are complementary, they form one whole. To rightly see the Person is to understand the Purpose. Purpose is not an abstract, detached, and impersonal thing, it is the extension of the Person, albeit something very definite.

We are now and here going to cite and link together two couplets of Scripture—Ezekiel i. 26; xlviii. 35, and Eph. i. 9-12; iii. 21:—

“. . . above the firmament . . . was the likeness of a throne, and upon . . . the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man upon it above.”

“And the name of the city from that day shall be the LORD is there.”

“Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him [Christ] unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ . . . according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will . . .”

“. . . unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus . . .”

In each of these two Scriptures two things are noticeable.

In Ezekiel, the beginning is a throne in Heaven

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and its Occupant—"a likeness . . . of a man upon it." The end of all the history contained in the book is a House, a Kingdom, and a City, with the final statement, "The LORD is there."

In 'Ephesians' (so called) the features are similar. The Letter begins with Christ exalted to the heavenly throne, and proceeds to the House, the Church, the Body, and the Lord as there—" . . . glory in the church . . ."

In Ezekiel, all that is between the beginning and the end is the expression of that throne. The end is the issue of the throne-activities, and it shows what all those throne-activities are leading to. The beginning is individual—one Man glorified and governing. The end is corporate, a people with the glory and the dominion.

The same is true of 'Ephesians'. The One in Heaven leads to the corporate Body in ascendancy.

These two main features of the books explain and justify our bringing them together, although there are many more corresponding features in them.

There are two factors which stand out in clear relief in Ezekiel and 'Ephesians' (and in many other places):—

(a) All-governing purpose.

(b) The mighty energies of the Holy Spirit in relation thereto.

The connections, of course, are different, but they are one in principle.

ISRAEL = historical, earthly, temporal.

THE CHURCH = eternal, heavenly, spiritual.

Both were chosen—elect—for one thing in their respective realms; namely, the testimony of God in the universe.

The dealings of God with both are shown to be with that purpose in view.

From the history of Israel and the history of the Church one thing springs into light and is unmistakably evident, that is that

THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR LIGHT ONCE GIVEN BY GOD

Unfaithfulness to light once given by God results inevitably and unavoidably in confusion, weakness, bondage, limitation, and tentativeness.

These are clearly the features of Babylon in Israel's case, and of the Church's case in the twentieth century.

Someone has said that

"The Church of the first century was powerless-conscious."

The Church of the twentieth century is problem-conscious."

We could not improve on that, but we might paraphrase it by saying that

The Church of the first century was PURPOSE-conscious.

The Church of the twentieth century is perplexity-conscious.

'Ezekiel' is peculiarly the Old Testament book of God's reaction in judgment to lost distinctiveness of purpose. 'Revelation' is its New Testament counterpart, with many similar characteristics in symbolism.

When anything becomes something in itself, turning, in doctrine and practice, into a circle instead of a way and a means, confusion, frustration, and bondage become its characteristics; limitation and powerlessness will mark its existence.

We are now going to look more closely at this matter of lost distinctiveness.

That distinctiveness of life and testimony is demanded by God is self-evident in the whole Bible. A word frequently used to express God's thought as to His people is the word 'peculiar'.

"A PECULIAR PEOPLE"

" . . . ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me . . ."
(Exodus xix. 5).

" . . . the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people" (Deuteronomy xiv. 2).

" . . . they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I do make, . . . a peculiar treasure"
(Malachi iii. 17).

The Hebrew word *segullah* denotes 'an enclosure', i.e. something separated, a preserve, a protected area. The Greek word denotes something acquired as out of the ordinary (Titus ii. 14; I Peter ii. 9).

So the Hebrews were a distinct race separated and hedged around for a distinct purpose. The time came in the days of the Prophets when they removed or destroyed their 'hedges', their spiritual boundaries, and the line of demarcation was obliterated so that all kinds of wild things grew around the 'choice vine'. This gave rise to the denunciations and warnings of the Prophets. The whole work of the Hebrew Prophets related to this one thing.

Each prophet had some distinctive feature of God's holiness for which he was fighting and suf-

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fering. The four—called ‘Major’—represented four major characteristics of God. The twelve—called ‘Minor’ (only because of the smaller size of the books bearing their names)—had each some particular feature of the testimony of God. Mixture is an abomination to God. The Prophets were a challenge and a call to recover distinctiveness of testimony through distinctiveness of life.

In the New Testament, Christians were known as the People of the Way. This was a distinguishing designation. Distinctiveness of testimony is not some testimony distinct from the whole purpose of God. Nor is it a special part of that whole. It only arises when the general state has lost its true character, its characteristic distinctiveness. It is not a system of teaching, a form of practice and procedure, an exclusiveness of fellowship. It is the life and lordship of the Spirit; it is the pure and powerful river of God vitalizing everything.

The whole battle rages around this distinctiveness of life and testimony. The Old Testament and the New are alike in this particular battle. The wall of Jerusalem was a symbolic representation of the Divine line of demarcation. Hence the sieges and battles. Hence the deeper spiritual meaning of ‘Nehemiah’. The first three chapters of the book of ‘Revelation’ are a return movement of the Lord on this line in relation to New Testament churches.

The feature of the Fall and the mark of Satanic interference with what is of God is loss of distinctiveness, purity, transparency. Hence, when Satan is finally cast down, as in the last chapters of the ‘Revelation’, “that which maketh a lie” has no place, and everything is “clear as crystal”.

So we come face to face with the major factor and the distinctiveness of the purpose of God.

I. THE INCLUSIVE FACTOR — THE ENERGY OF THE SPIRIT

Looking back at Ezekiel it is impossible not to see that both the Prophet and his book are par-

ticularly characterized by the energies of the Spirit of God. Ezekiel was himself a man of the Spirit. The word occurs some twenty-five times. He was moved, carried, led, strengthened, and, indeed, entirely governed by the Spirit.

The book is a record of the goings of the Spirit. In the wheels, the living creatures, the visions, the valley of dry bones, the River, etc., the Spirit is represented as the energy of everything.

The New Testament counterparts are ‘Acts’, ‘Ephesians’ and, in particular, ‘Revelation’.

The point is that in all this the Spirit is moving in relation to purpose in all the immediate diversities unto final completeness, the ultimate fulness.

Let it be clearly recognized that the end and object of *all* the Spirit’s energies is to reproduce that Man in *corporate* expression for glory and *government*. That will be the Spirit’s triumph and the vindication of the Man who ‘emptied Himself, was found in fashion as a man, took the form of a bondsman, became obedient unto death, yea, the death of the Cross, wherefore God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name which is above every name.’

Before we leave Ezekiel in this particular connection, that is, of the Spirit, it is important to note that such a vessel or vehicle of the Spirit’s energies unto purpose is a wholly and utterly committed man. Surrender and submission to the Spirit is seen all the way along. The same thing was true of the men of the New Testament from Pentecost onward. Only so can God reach His end. Only so can we have anything resembling New Testament progress. ‘Ephesians’ as the Letter of eternal purpose gives a very large place to the Spirit. The Spirit is the Earnest of the inheritance. The Spirit is the Revealer of the inheritance. Hence the demand there “Be filled with the Spirit”.

We suspend our consideration here for the time being, and then look at several distinctive features of the Spirit’s energies in relation to purpose.

(to be continued) T. A-S.

LOVE SO AMAZING

Reading: John xxi.

IN the first days of their discipleship, John and Peter were frequently together. In the times described by the early chapters of the book of the Acts they were still close companions. In their later years, although the providence of God seems to have caused their ways to diverge, John felt impelled at the end of his Gospel to devote a whole

chapter to matters concerning Peter. By the time that this chapter was written, Peter had already made the last journey forecast by Jesus, and had glorified God by laying down his life for his Lord. What a fruitful and victorious life it had proved to be! How amply had the Saviour’s commission to him been justified! We might say that in this addition to his Gospel, John discloses to us the secret of its success, and he does so in terms which

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are peculiarly his own, for to him it was all a result of love. "Lovest thou me?" "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

This is more than a favourite theme with John; it is the explanation of a fruitful life of service to Christ. Love alone can carry us through from the depths of our own failure to the heights of God's glory. But love—Divine love—can do it. It did it for Peter. It can do it for us also.

LOVE PERSISTS

Almost the last words which Jesus spoke to Peter were but a repetition of His first call—"Follow me" (verse 19). Only such amazing love as His could persist through all Peter's tragic breakdown and failure, and still come back with the original call to follow. Even the highest human love could not have withstood the terrible betrayal by one who had made such solemn and passionate avowals of his devotion. It was a miracle of love which gave Peter forgiveness, but this was more than forgiveness; he was honoured with the Lord's full confidence. Christ did not keep Peter at a distance. He did not offer him a period of probation. He repeated the original invitation and commission: "Follow me". The manifestation, so we are told, was a "third time" (verse 14). Then again, the command was given after Peter had been questioned "the third time" (verse 17). Whatever more is involved in this, it surely proves how determined the Lord Jesus was that His original purpose for Peter's life should be fulfilled. His love was so great that it refused to give up.

But if it was true that He persisted with His purpose, it was equally true that He made sure that the past failure had been thoroughly recognised and dealt with before Peter could go on. Gracious and tender though the love of Christ may be, it is never superficial, it never glosses over defects which need to be remedied. So it was only after this third time of confession by Peter that Jesus could again commission him to follow, a persistence which the apostle found most irksome. "Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me?"

Possibly he felt that he had said enough, and that there was no need for the Lord to keep dwelling on his past breakdown in the matter of love. Perhaps even the other six disciples were embarrassed by what was really a humiliation of Peter. They might have argued, as we often do, that it would be better to overlook and cover up this shameful incident in the history of the apostolic band. It is true that we must bear with one an-

other's faults, and never heartlessly expose them, but we must be prepared for the Lord, whose love—unlike ours—is perfect, to expose us to any humiliation which can clear the ground for future usefulness. How much better to be dealt with like that, if the glory of God can follow, as it certainly did for Peter.

See how the Lord persisted in uncovering the selfishness which had hitherto characterized Peter's discipleship. He had to do this, for selfishness and love cannot co-exist.

(a) SELF-CONCERN

Not for the first time was Peter suffering interrogation by the side of a fire. In the high-priest's courtyard, on the cold night of the Lord's betrayal, the servants made a fire of coals (xviii. 18), and Peter was ready enough to warm himself by the world's fire. He had already denied having any affection for Christ, denied that he was even a disciple, so that he had no hesitation in sharing the warmth of this Christ-rejecting group. Was it just because he was cold and wanted comfort? Or was it that he was anxious to avoid seeming to be different from the rest? In either case he was thinking only of himself. He was looking after himself, and the man who does that finds little room in his heart for the love of Christ.

This second fire was very different. It was lit by the Lord, and was reserved for the company of those who were lovers of Him. Notice in the whole story how Peter was now quite careless of his own interests, how he threw himself into the sea, and how he rushed back to be the first to draw the heavy net to land. Notice, also, that he made no complaint about the prophecy concerning his future sufferings, only wondering whether John would share them with him. "What is that to thee?", Jesus gently replied, "follow thou me" (verse 22). The second fire was for food, not for warmth, since love carries its own hot flame in the heart, a flame which burns up all self-interest.

(b) SELF-EFFORT

It seems evident that Peter ought never to have been in that courtyard. Jesus had already said to him: "Thou canst not follow me now . . ." (xiii. 37), only to be contradicted by Peter, who asked: ". . . why cannot I follow thee . . . ?" and insisted that he intended to do so, even if it cost him his life. It is John who tells us of this prohibition, and it is he who reveals that the hitherto unnamed disciple who had started the fight in the garden was

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also Peter (xviii. 10). Let there be no illusions about our ability to follow Christ. 'Thou canst not now', Jesus warns us, but in our foolish presumption we think that we can, and we make up our minds that we will, only to find that our sincerest efforts result in abysmal failure. In the midst of His many preoccupations and cares, Jesus had to stop to heal Malchus's ear, reminding us of how often our blundering attempts to fight for Him are not only useless, but make more havoc for His grace to rectify.

Before Peter could be energized by Divine love, he had to renounce this self-energy of his. There are some who consider that the opening verses of this story reveal that still he had not learned his lesson, and that his "I go a fishing" (verse 3) was a further outburst of that same feverish self-strength. If so, it was the last! And in any case it resulted in futility, for that night they took nothing. Against such a background came the call to a new and more effective way of service, self-strength despaired of, and love filling all. It was in the power of that love that Peter would henceforth follow Christ.

(c) SELF-WILL

The threefold temptation which so abjectly defeated Peter may be contrasted with the threefold temptation which Jesus endured so triumphantly in the wilderness. Jesus had all the concentrated attention of the prince of darkness focused upon Him, yet He emerged victorious. Peter, however, collapsed at the first feeble hint of opposition. The Gospels vary in their accounts of the details of his experience, but the four agree that it all began because of the remark passed by one of the high-priest's serving maids. How was the mighty fallen! The strong apostle who had boastfully insisted that he would be true at all costs, was completely overwhelmed by an idle remark from an ignorant servant girl.

Now we may rightly contrast the greatness of Jesus with the pitiful weakness of His best disciple, for it is true that Christ is so very much greater than all others. There is, however, a certain factor which should also be considered. One secret of spiritual victory is that we should be found in the place of God's appointing. Jesus was led of the Spirit into the wilderness; He was where He was by the direct ordering and guidance of God. Peter, on the other hand, was in a self-chosen location, and consequently failed to find that Divine support which every tempted person needs. It is a great mistake to imagine that good intentions, of which

Peter was full, are sufficient ground for help from God, and that we can go where we choose and still count upon that help. Even the Lord Jesus, whose motives were always pure, never presumed on the Father's aid, but was humbly careful to seek His guidance and to wait for His time. When we are in the place of the Spirit's appointing, then all hell cannot overthrow us; when we hurry off in self-chosen directions, then we become vulnerable to the tiniest attack.

(d) SELF-ESTEEM

One phrase in the Lord's question was not repeated. It was the one which challenged Peter as to whether after all he had been so much superior to those other disciples whom he half despised. "Lovest thou me more than these?" Peter did not refer to this. He was ashamed to have it mentioned. And the Lord Jesus did not repeat the question in that form, for the answer was self-evident. How prone we are to compare ourselves with others, and in foolish pride to imagine that we are more sincere or more devoted. There is no room for the love of Christ in hearts that harbour such conceit.

After all, the matter can always be put to the test. Not by us, for we choose the standards of judgment which suit us best, but by Satan when he receives permission to sift us as he sifted Peter. Apart from the Lord's mercy we shall discover that all our fancied superiority is swept aside to reveal us as the most faulty and guilty of all. So it was with Peter. "More than these"! Peter is thankful to have it believed that he even loves at all. More than these! They only ran away and hid. More than these! They failed, but at least they did not magnify their failure by big sounding words and empty professions.

Probably the last form of self from which we are delivered is self-esteem, but that must go too, if we are to be filled with the love of Christ. All that Peter could reply was to cast himself on the kindly scrutiny of his Lord—"Thou knowest all things . . ." He who had doubtless been in the forefront of those endless quarrels among the apostolic band as to who should be greater than whom, now has no delusions left about himself; he has no virtues to boast of, no claims to make, except the one simple plea that the all-seeing eye of his Lord would see that at least there *was* love in his heart. He did not remind Jesus now that he had left all to follow Him; no more did he boast that even the demons were subject to him through the name of Christ; he said nothing more about being willing to go to suffering and death for Christ. Actually

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these things were more true of him than ever they had been before. But he did not talk about them. All that he could say and keep on saying was that the Lord knew even without his saying it, that he really loved.

Perhaps Peter had set too much store by that new name which Christ had given to him at the beginning. Being called Peter, a man of rock, he wrongly imagined that he already was that. It is most noticeable that in this conversation the Lord Jesus completely ignored that name, and only addressed him in the simplicity and humility of his own beginnings, "Simon, son of John". Then in the narrative the evangelist describes him as "Simon Peter", and "Peter", but Jesus avoided using that name. Really Peter had forfeited the right to use it. It had proved an empty title so far. So love did not spare his feelings; it insisted on a complete emptying and humbling of the one loved, not just to emphasize his shame but to make possible the new future which would end in Divine glory.

LOVE PLANS

In the original call by the lakeside, John as well as Peter was invited to follow Christ. Other disciples were also called. Was this, then, some general vocation, or was there a particular purpose for Peter's own life? It is not surprising that he asked, "Lord, and what shall this man do?", since he might well have wished to know whether he himself was the object of a particular plan. If so, he found that he was. In fact we all are. There is a path marked out for each disciple, and love watches carefully over its fulfilment. It is not for us to know about others, nor to compare ourselves with them, but we can be sure that, like Peter, we have a complete design for our lives, from youth to age, all planned by the Lord whom we love.

Many think that this last chapter of the Gospel was written by John and left to be added to the rest after his death. This would explain the first ending with chapter xx and the phrase "we know that his witness is true" (verse 24) which could have been inserted by those to whom John had entrusted this obvious addition to the work. Those who remembered the "saying" might have been shocked that John had died after all, and this final testament of his could help them, by clarifying their wrong expectation and making it plain that Christ's plan for John's life had no more miscarried than had the plan for Peter. All this reinforces our conviction that within the general vocation of the Church, the Lord has a personal plan for each

individual life, for Peter, for John, for us all.

The other five disciples might well have enquired, 'And what shall I do?' It is certain that in due time each discovered that love also had a plan for their lives. There had been one of the band, the unhappy Judas, who, if there had been a plan, had tragically missed it. How? Because he was more unworthy than the others? No, not that! Because he fell into sin? No, for Peter also did that. How then? Surely because he alone deliberately closed his heart to love. He never permitted love to enter that selfish heart of his, and so for him there was no fulfilled plan and no glory.

Given its opportunity, love plans and love persists. Even when the disciple had broken down so badly, there was still recovery of that plan. Indeed there seems to be an amplification of it. The original call had been to become a fisher of men. This certainly was fulfilled in Peter's life. Now, as the further outworking of the Divine programme is revealed, Peter is first exhorted to feed the lambs—which, by the way, is a most vital part of the Church's ministry—and then later to tend and feed the more mature. Without staying to consider the various features of the different ministries, we merely observe that nothing was left to chance or to Peter's own ideas or inclinations. As he followed, so he himself would be led.

From the beginning, the Lord had marked out Peter's course right through to the end. If we can believe this we shall have found out one of the great secrets of heart rest. Why did Peter, later on, ignore the threats of the rulers, and seemingly remain so calm and unruffled by them? How could he sleep peacefully in prison when under sentence of death by Herod? Surely by remembering that his fate was not left to chance, it was not in the hands of men or devils. Love had marked out his course, and so long as he abode in love, he abode in God (I John iv. 16). What could be safer or more peaceful? And the end was to be glory. Glory, not so much for Peter, ignominy and shame for him, but glory for God. The last words which he wrote when the shadow of that painful death was already hanging over him, were: "To him be the glory, both now and for ever. Amen" (II Peter iii. 18). He had reached his goal. Love had seen him through triumphantly, and the eternal glory was already very near.

LOVE PROVIDES

Before the Lord Jesus even began this conversation with Peter. He had fed him with the bread and fish from His fire of coals. Jesus did not ask 'Do

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you love Me ' and then provide for Peter's needs if the reply was favourable. He made the provision first, and then asked the question, as He always does.

This is a sort of parable. It emphasizes our own emptiness, and reminds us that we have no strength even to love Christ, unless and until He first imparts it to us. The old Peter who so badly failed is not now a new Peter who is capable of succeeding of himself. No, the old essentially natural strength of Peter will always fail. The secret of the new success is to be the inward impartation of a new strength, the strength of Christ Himself. So Peter and the others fed, not on their own night's labours, for they had proved futile, nor on this miraculous catch which they had achieved by the presence of the Lord and His guidance. No, they fed on bread and fish which He had already prepared and kept waiting for them before they came to land.

It is true that love will carry us through, but it is also true that this must be Divine love, ministered to us and maintained in us by the Holy Spirit of Christ. It was only when they had broken their fast that the Lord Jesus entered into the con-

versation with Peter. Men must feed on Him first, and then go forth to serve and suffer for Him. And if at any time we fail to nourish our spiritual life on His provision there will be no love, no service and no glory.

Finally, we see by this miracle the Lord's guarantee that His servants will never lack provision for their work. It is true that lambs and sheep cannot eat fish, but it does seem that the miracle makes it clear that the Lord always has abundance to provide for every need. Peter might well have asked, 'How shall I feed the sheep, and with what?' The answer surely would be, Love will provide. You may labour all night to find suitable spiritual food—and sometimes to the Lord's servants it does seem to be like that—you may labour, and yet take nothing. But wait for the Lord. The morning will come. In a moment, when His time is come, you will find abundance suddenly to hand. And when you have fulfilled your ministry you will feel no self-congratulation, no sense of personal ability, but only say, as John did, "It is the Lord" (verse 7).

H. F.

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

V. THE PROCLAMATION OF THE KINGDOM

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew xxiv. 14).

LET us first analyse this verse, noticing its particular words.

"This Gospel [literally, 'good news'] of the Kingdom [literally, 'the royal reign'] shall be preached [this particular word means 'proclaimed', 'announced', 'heralded'] in the whole world [=the whole inhabited or habitable earth] for a testimony [=for a witness: Dr. Weymouth in his version translates that phrase—'to set the evidence'].

Now with that analysis, let us build it all up into its full literal statement:

'This good news of the royal reign shall be heralded in the whole inhabited earth, to set the evidence before all the nations; and then shall the end come.'

That is a remarkable verse, for it comprehends nothing less than the whole mission, work, mean-

ing and purpose of the person, incarnation, life, death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ, and it carries that through as the very meaning and business of His Church. It is a very comprehensive verse indeed.

But we must get behind this tremendous statement, try to get inside it. It is then to be noticed that what is called the Gospel, the good news—everything that Christianity has to say and to give—is defined in terms of a Kingdom, a sovereign rule, the outworking of a Kingship. Of course, we are so familiar with the language and with the idea that perhaps we have never really stopped to think what that means. Why is Christianity not spoken of as something else—'this gospel of the communal state', 'this gospel of the social state', or some other designation? It is called 'the gospel of the sovereign rule, the royal reign'; in other words, the gospel of the Kingship of Jesus Christ. It is that, and nothing less and nothing other than that.

CHRIST'S KINGSHIP OF HEAVENLY ORIGIN

And that leads us to a further enquiry and investigation. Where did that idea originate and come

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from? Now it is very difficult for us to trace back the idea of kingship so far as man is concerned. We do not know who was the first person to hold the title of king. We can see the idea in its primitive form evolving, developing, until it reached the full status of monarchy; we will return to that in a moment. But what we do know from the Bible is that this did not begin with man at all. It began in Heaven with God. The idea of royal reign, sovereign rule, was with God, and was transmitted to His Son Jesus Christ before ever this world was created, and before there ever was such a thing as kingship on this earth, either in principle or in actuality. The Bible tells us that God appointed His Son Jesus Christ as the Heir of all things (Heb. i. 2), and that God speaks of His Son as His King. It comes out in one of the psalms, where God is speaking: "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (Ps. ii. 6). That is a prophetic utterance concerning the Lord Jesus, as you well know. The idea of kingship originated with God and was centred in His Son Jesus Christ.

ANOTHER KING

The next thing that the Bible makes known to us is that someone was jealous of that. The highest created being among the angelic hosts found in his heart jealousy of God's Son and allowed that jealousy to take such a hold upon him that he projected a device and a scheme and a movement to supplant God's Son and to secure that rule in himself and for himself. That revolt against God's determination concerning His Son took place somewhere outside of this world, before the present order of creation was brought into being; but God proceeded according to plan and according to purpose, and through the instrumentality of His Son created this world to be the realm of His Son's dominion; and in it He placed man.

The next thing was that that being who had by his revolt, his rebellion, been cast out of Heaven, made his way forthwith to the realm of God's appointed and pre-destined King. The story is known how, for the time being, he gained his point through a subtle, deeply laid plan of deception—his appeal to man's soul-life. He gained his point by winning man over to his side; and thus he became, for the time being—as even Jesus recognised and acknowledged him to be—"the prince of this world" (John xii. 31, etc.) although illegitimately so. There you have the root of the whole matter, the background of our passage of Scripture.

THE VICTORY OF GOD'S KING

Of course, God is not going to tolerate that for ever. God is not going to be spoiled of His inten-

tion, neither is His Son going to be deprived of His inheritance. The story of the incarnation finds its explanation there: it was the coming of God's Son into this world in the flesh to take up this whole matter of God's intention, and of His own (the Son's) inheritance, and of man's place in that inheritance, and to fight it out to a final, glorious triumphant issue. And seeing that it was not something official, but a spiritual and moral matter, it went right to the depths of things—of the very nature of sin and wickedness, out of which it all came. It focused upon and dealt with all that evil, as personified in the Evil One himself. Jesus met it, He took up the battle of the eternal rule, the royal reign, and fought out all its implicates to a victorious issue. 'By His Cross He triumphed', and in His Cross He 'stripped off the principalities and the powers, made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it' (Col. ii. 15). He plucked the sceptre from the hand of the usurper, and cast out, as He said, the prince of this world (John xii. 31); and, rising triumphant from death and the grave, received at the hands of His Father the Kingdom, together with 'all authority in Heaven and in earth' (Matt. xxviii. 18), 'the Name which is above every name' (Phil. ii. 9), and the place 'far above all rule and authority, every name that is named' (Eph. i. 21). That is the great drama that the Bible contains and sets forth; and out of that issues what is called the Gospel, the good news—the good news of His royal reign in virtue of all that He has done.

THE NEED FOR HUMAN KINGSHIP

Now we come back to the human side, the history of kingship, rulership. It is quite clear that it commenced in a very simple way. First of all the principle was found in expression in a family. Trouble in the family has a very long and remote history. It seems that almost immediately the family existed there was trouble, and somebody in the family had to take authority. The first kings, although they were not called that, were heads over families. Thence their authority extended to the tribe, and from the tribe to the tribes, and from the tribes to the nation. And then, as far as they could, they tried to get kingship over a number of nations, and finally over all the nations.

But our point is this. This situation was brought about by reason of circumstances and man's need. A ruler or governor—a king in principle or in name—was a necessity, for somebody had to adjudicate in man's troubles and decide in matters of strife, whether in families or tribes or nations;

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somebody had to give the verdict of right or wrong. Because of the further circumstances of conflict in the world, antagonism setting people against people, tribe against tribe, nation against nation, somebody must take up the cause and lead out in warfare to victory. Because peace was not the normal state of things, but 'dispeace'—anything but peace—somebody must assume the responsibility of trying to provide man with peace, of trying to secure peace and establish peace.

Thus kingship has as its components these ideas of adjudicating, of judging, of determining the right and the wrong, of leading against that which threatens man's well-being, and the very integration of man, and of establishing peace. These are the constituents of kingship, as we find it in its development. The kingship exists because of the existent conditions, as something set over against them. This gives us the background and the principle of the matter.

KING OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

In a far, far greater realm than the temporal and the earthly, the Lord Jesus, as God's King, has taken up those very issues. These are components of His Kingship. In this world everything has gone wrong; a state of anarchy and iniquity—of 'inequity', unfairness, wrong from man to man—prevails. It is what the Bible sums up in one word: unrighteousness. It affects all man's dealings with man, all human relationships and transactions. The whole system of human relationships just is not right; it is not straight, it is not 'fair and square'—it is unrighteous. The whole question of unrighteousness is bound up with this matter of Kingship; and it is therefore very significant that, in a day when, in that marked-out nation of Israel, the Kingship, the sovereign rule, the royal rule of God was intended to be displayed, the worst state of unrighteousness existed.

But in the midst of it all—all this unrighteousness, yes, even of the kings themselves—a prophet rises up and shouts: "*A king shall reign in righteousness*" ! (Isa. xxii. 1). A beam of light is thrown right forward to this One who was coming. We know that the Lord Jesus, in His life and death, took up this whole question of righteousness—in the first place as relating to the rights of God. His first aim, His first task, was to bring God His rights, His due, to put things straight with God where man is concerned. How much Gospel is contained in that! Paul's whole wonderful letter to the Romans is really gathered into that idea of God requiring righteousness, of man being un-

able to provide Him with it, and Jesus Christ stepping into the breach and satisfying God in this matter on man's behalf. And having done that Godward, he proceeds to do it amongst men, and where this royal reign of Jesus Christ is found in men's hearts you have justice and truth and equity, 'fairness and squareness' and rightness—all that is meant by righteousness. He 'reigns in righteousness.'

KING OF PEACE

Then, as to this matter of conflict. It goes far beyond the wars amongst men. Whence come all these wars? They emanate from that Evil One who has struck this universe through with conflict, contention, strife, hatred, malice. This great warfare in the universe is first of all spiritual before it becomes temporal, and it was from Satan that it came. We know quite well that it is here. We know that in our hearts; before Christ takes them as His throne, there is no peace, and there is no peace there apart from Him. We know all about contention and strife within ourselves; we know, too, that it is the most difficult thing to live with other people for long without finding some contention, some strife, some antagonism. In the realm where Christ is not Lord, it is there. Perhaps Christians, more than anyone else, sense the antagonisms that are abroad. Satan has concentrated his forces and attention especially upon Christians, to destroy the testimony of what Jesus has done; to spoil this royal rule by undercutting and undermining its meaning of oneness, fellowship, unity. Fellowship and unity is a real battle in any realm, but perhaps more among Christians than anywhere.

But there is a King to lead out to that battle. This royal rule means that there need not be this state of things, that there can be victory over human strife and contentions and divisions and antagonisms and malice and all this. He has gained the victory over Satan's terrible work of rending this universe asunder and making it one mighty realm of conflict. Christ, we are told, has "made peace through the blood of his cross" (Col. i. 20). The idea of a King was, as far as possible, to keep and establish peace. No king has ever done that for very long, or within more than a limited realm, but Christ has entered that hostile kingdom, led forth into battle, and secured peace.

Here, too, while we know naturally, in our own hearts, the elements of strife and contention and warfare, in Christ we know the other side. We know that He has brought His reign of peace into our hearts. "We have peace with God through our

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Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. v. 1), and the peace of God passing all understanding garrisons our hearts (Phil. iv. 7), but while there is so much more needed, and we have always to be on our guard and always to be standing into His victory in this matter, nevertheless there is the glorious fact that we do know something of a fellowship, a blessed and wonderful fellowship amongst ourselves as God's people, which is unique, which is not known after its kind anywhere else in all the universe. The most precious and blessed thing that Christians have inherited through the sovereign Lordship of Jesus Christ in their hearts is their fellowship with one another. How much is bound up with that! How much we owe to one another in Christ, how necessary we are to one another, how impossible it is to get on without one another simply because God is against our getting on without one another. We find that to try and get on without one another simply brings the Lord into controversy with us.

Righteousness and peace—these are the elements of His reign. The enemy is overthrown, his captives and victims are released, peace is established; whilst the guardian within attends to the question of the establishment of righteousness. All this is our need, as it ever was man's need, and He has met it completely, fully. Now, that is all framed by this wonderful word 'Gospel'—good news. But there are multitudes—perhaps there is even one reading these lines—who do not know this wonderful work that Jesus Christ has done, who are not in the good and enjoyment of the peace with God, and peace in their own hearts, that we know. This all seems to them so strange, although perhaps they look on us wistfully and enviously. This fellowship among Christians is an impressive thing; it is not something feigned, put on or made up. We have known of unsaved people coming into Christian gatherings, and going away, if not actually saved, yet saying to one another, 'There is a wonderful atmosphere there. You feel that these people have got something that others have not got.' They speak of the impression made upon them by the wonderful fellowship of God's people, and that constitutes a testimony. It is, in fact *the* testimony; it is the evidence.

SETTING THE EVIDENCE

So I follow on at once. This good news of the royal rule or reign, in these terms of spiritual values—inward life, blessed fellowship, strife overcome, righteousness established—this good news is committed to the Church and to the heralds to

take into all the nations. But note that it is not just somebody going out and announcing it as a theory. We need to get hold of this quite strongly. There would be a very, very different situation in the world to-day, as the result of Christianity and evangelization, if this one point had been more firmly and clearly grasped. While it is the work of the herald to make the announcement, the passage we have been considering does not just stop there, with 'This good news of the royal reign shall be proclaimed in the whole inhabited earth'. It does not stop there, and that is just where the failure and weakness lies. It continues: 'shall be proclaimed . . . for a witness'. Weymouth's translation, which I quoted earlier, gives us the very heart of the matter. He says: 'to set the evidence'. The herald is not just announcing some abstract theory, or even fact, objectively. He is there actually to set or provide the evidence that it is so.

Go back to your New Testament, and what do you have? You have the heralds going into the inhabited earth, right enough: but what are they doing? Are they just walking into some city and getting up onto a platform and making an announcement, and then going off? Do they make the announcement, and then go on to the next place and the next place and the next place, till they cover the whole inhabited earth with the announcement? Did they do that? They certainly did not. They had a better apprehension of their business, and of what the Lord meant, than that. The meaning that was in their hearts and minds of being in any place was this: 'Something has got to be established in this place which will be concrete evidence that Jesus is on the throne!' Whereas the announcement of some teaching, some objective truth, might never have bothered anybody, when they went in on that ground and with that idea and motive, all Hell rose up to say, 'We will quench that thing here if we can!'

So you have an apostle going into a city and making the proclamation, and Hell rising up and stirring up men to stone him, drag him out of the city, and leave him for dead. When they have withdrawn, he rises; and what does he say? 'I have made my announcement in this city—I will go to the next one'? He goes back again into the city, right back there. Why? He says, 'We have not got the concrete evidence here yet. We have not got that which is the embodiment of this testimony; until we have, we hold on. The Devil is not going to have his way about this matter.'

And so in every place they left behind something that was concrete. It was not just a word thrown out into the air. There was something there which

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was the embodiment of the truth that Jesus is Lord, and that Satan's kingdom is not universal. It has been broken into here and here, and in that which is left behind is the evidence. Read about those churches again, those vessels of the evidence; read about them. There they were in that place, persecuted, assailed, going through a terrible time, and yet—and yet—holding the ground: because they knew that if they did not, Satan would have it, and they were not allowing that. They were committed to this royal rule. And so the proclamation was more than a proclamation. It had in view a setting of the evidence, the establishment of a witness there. It is good to hear local companies of the Lord's people speaking of themselves like this: 'We are here to have a witness in this place.'

Now, *that* is the purpose of the heralds, *that* is the function of the churches. That is why we are here on this earth, as Christians—namely, that wherever we are, at home, in business, or anywhere, we may provide the evidence that Jesus is Lord. That will be the explanation of the suffering and the opposition, and all the efforts of the Devil to quench us and drive us out. We are there as evidence of something. As I said a little while back, if only this had been grasped and held and understood from the beginning, what a different situation there would be. The preaching of the Gospel seems to have so largely resolved itself into giving out the truths, the doctrines, of Christianity; but there has to be something far more than that. There is need that everyone who felt themselves so called should say: 'Yes, but there has to be concrete evidence that this is true. There must be proof positive about this matter, embodied in something here that declares that Jesus is Lord.'

Have you set the evidence? Are you standing for that? That is the challenge in the proclamation of the Gospel. It is good news, but that good news has to be embodied in something that constitutes its very evidence and proof.

A CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIANS

It is a challenge to us as Christians, it is also a blessed, helpful explanation of very much. It does explain why the Devil hates us so intensely. It explains all the pressure that is brought to bear upon us by him. It explains that stirring up, that terrible stirring up, which is always the prelude to some activity of the enemy. 'If only we can prevent that, spoil that, in some way upset that—!' So it is an explanation and a help to know that. And it is a challenge to us Christians that we are not going to be moved until the Lord moves us. Yes, the Lord

may move us, the Lord may take us up, the Lord may lead us away, but by the grace of God the Devil never shall. We are not standing where we are just for our own interests, to get something that we want. We are standing in far more serious issues than that—in nothing less than this great cosmic conflict between the two princes, the two kings. We are there to set the evidence. It is a very great challenge to us.

A CHALLENGE TO THE UNSAVED

But it is also a challenge to anyone reading these lines who is not the Lord's. The challenge is this: *There are only two kings in this universe.* There is no neutral zone in this matter, there is no 'no man's land' here. There are only two rules, two kingdoms; Christ, God's eternally appointed King, and the Devil, the usurper from of old. We make the declaration, the announcement to you that: "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. ii. 11). God has appointed Him Lord, and He is Lord by right of His own conquest of the Devil. It is for you to decide in which of the two kingdoms, realms and governments you are. That is the challenge which has to go into the whole inhabited earth, and you cannot get out of it.

If you do not believe that you are in the kingdom and rule of Satan, if you are not definitely committed and given to Jesus Christ, I can give you the most perfect and complete proof of it, if you will accept it. Try to get out of Satan's kingdom! Try to become a Christian! You will find that it does not happen and go through automatically. You will at once discover that spiritual forces rise up, and the thing becomes full of complications and difficulties. They rise up from within you—either revolt or antagonism at the idea, or questions and doubts about it, or fears concerning it. Immediately you move in this matter you find that other things begin to move—not that you have moved them, but that they begin to move of themselves.

The Old Testament illustration of this is Israel, God's people, in Egypt. They were in bondage, but things were fairly quiet until the idea of their going out of Egypt was mooted. But immediately this thought of an exodus from Egypt began to take shape, then things began to happen. It seemed that the whole kingdom was in a ferment, working itself up to the final furore to prevent this. Now, you go on quietly without thinking of coming to the Lord Jesus, and, while you may have questions and may not be having an altogether lovely time, nevertheless your life may be comparatively easy.

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But when you begin to contemplate coming to the Lord Jesus and entering into His reign and kingdom, then you discover, without your doing anything at all, that things begin to work, things are happening to stop that. They come up from within, and they come from without. No one is born into the Kingdom of Heaven without conflict, without a fight; and what a fight it is for some souls—a long-drawn-out fight until they are through. As I said, you can put this to the test. You make a gesture toward Jesus Christ, and you will find that you are in a bondage that you did not know of before. It is there, it is a fact. But, blessed be God, there is victory for you with the Lord Jesus Christ, to get you out of that bondage, right through into His victory.

But my immediate point is this. We are declaring that Jesus Christ is God's King, and that the final rule of this universe is vested in Him. By nature we are born into the other kingdom, the kingdom of the Evil One, to whom we belong. The Bible says that we are 'children of darkness' and 'children of wrath'. We are children of the Devil by birth, for Adam put us all into his power and into his hand. Jesus came to rescue us, to get us out, to bring us into His own reign. Where are you? That is the issue presented. It is announced, declared. It is a tremendous thing, for eternal destiny hangs upon your response to this.

And it is a solemn thing—oh, that men realised it—to have in any neighbourhood a testimony to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The whole of such an area is going to be judged one day because that company was there with this testimony. Yes, it will mean judgment. The indictment will be: 'But you knew it was there: your house was visited, you were told, you were invited; Jesus Christ was right there in the midst of that people. You would not

have it. You either ignored it or rebelled against it or repudiated it. But it was there in evidence. You cannot say that you did not know.' It is a tremendous thing for God to plant in a district a living testimony to the Lordship of His Son. All in that district are going to be judged by their attitude to that.

Do not misunderstand or misinterpret this. It is a spiritual matter. This is God's method, to put down in the nations something which is a set evidence to the great fact of the Lordship of His Son, and to judge everything by it. It sounds stern, but we must be faithful, and we must warn as well as entreat. In love for your soul we would say, Do not abide under the flag of the usurper. Here is God's King, and we proclaim to you this good news of His sovereign rule.

And when the evidence for it has been set, says this word in Matthew, "in the whole inhabited earth", God's time will come for winding up the dispensation. I will not go further into that, but there is very much bound up with it. The dispensation waits for that, and therefore there is an urgency about things, because we never know, in a day like this, when the testimony will have found its last declaration in this world. Whereas the kingdom of Satan is ousting the personal messengers, they cannot close down the air, This Gospel of the sovereignty is getting through, for it is, in truth, sovereign.

May the Lord help us as His people to meet the challenge as to the real meaning and purpose of our being here on this earth. And if you do not belong to the Lord Jesus, if you are not in His Kingdom, may He help you to meet the other challenge—to forsake the false usurper's flag and dominion, and seek citizenship in the Kingdom of our Lord.

T. A-S.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

THE UNMISTAKABLE SCENT

MR. VIGIL awoke with a start. The alarm bell was ringing, and on the signboard in the corner of his room a light was flashing. Someone was in the factory! Was it burglars? At any rate he must go and see.

Mr. Vigil was general caretaker of a large factory in London. He lived in a house by the entrance gate, and one of his duties was to watch for thieves who might break in at night. The board on the wall of his room was a kind of plan of all the buildings, having electric bulbs so placed that they could

show a flashing light at the particular point where a door had been opened.

The alarm bell had now rung, and one of the lights was flashing, so it seemed certain that someone had broken into the works. In a moment Mr. Vigil had jumped out of bed, and hurried over to the telephone to dial 999 and call for the police. By the time he had his clothes on and had got down to the gate, the police-car had arrived, and without wasting any time Mr. Vigil led them through the gate. They rushed into the factory, straight to the

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room indicated by the alarm lamp, only to see a man running through the other door.

With a cry, they raced after him, out of another door, through a yard, round a corner, and on. Then they stopped. The man did not know the premises, and had run into a blind alley from which there was no escape. It did not take the policemen long to capture him, and lead him back into the room where his tools still lay on the floor.

The police sergeant felt sure that really there must have been two men working together, so he sent a constable with Mr. Vigil to look for the other one. Then he began to question his prisoner. The man kept saying that he was all alone: the signs were otherwise, however, and the very fact that he seemed so anxious to be taken off to the police station as soon as possible only confirmed the suspicion. The sergeant felt sure that there was an accomplice hiding somewhere around. Still the burglar denied that he had any companion, and when the others returned they had to report that they had found no traces.

The sergeant, however, was not convinced. There was one more thing he could do, and this he did. He telephoned for a police dog to be sent to help in the search. Before very long a second car drew up at the gate, and still another policeman arrived, this time leading a dog.

When the dog-handler had heard of the sergeant's suspicions, he led his dog to the men's tools which still lay on the floor, and immediately the dog began to sniff at them. "Where is he?", asked his master, and at once the dog walked over to the arrested man and indicated that this was the one. "Yes, I know", said the policeman, "but there is another. Find him!" Once more the dog carefully smelled the tools, and then he began to walk away from the group, with his nose well to the ground. The men followed him, and slowly he led them on, this way and that, over some packing cases, round a corner, then another, and all the time sniffing as he went.

Mr. Vigil had never had much confidence in this idea of using a dog, and as they went on he lost what little he had, for he did not believe that any dog could follow such a 'scent'. True he was a

bit surprised when they came to a dark corner of the buildings, and the dog stopped before a low door. It lifted up its head, sniffed some more, and then gave his handler the sign that the man was in there. When they tried it the door was locked. "Come out of that", cried the policeman, but there was no sign of movement, and Mr. Vigil felt more sure than ever that it was a fool's errand. But the dog did not care what Mr. Vigil or anybody else thought. He knew that he could smell what he had been told to track, and so he eagerly waited to be told what to do next.

Then the policeman (who knew a lot about burglars and their ways) shouted out in a loud voice, "Fetch him out then". The dog growled and began to scratch excitedly at the door. Almost at once a frightened voice came from inside, begging that the dog might be called off and promising to "come quietly" if only the dog were held back.

So the two thieves were captured. The policemen and the dog went on with their night's work. As for Mr. Vigil, he went home to his wife to drink a cup of tea and to tell her of the amazing way in which the dog had tracked a man simply by the scent left on his tools. She, too, could hardly believe it, but then he explained to her that the dog-handler had told him that we all have our own special scent. It is not something that we put on, nor do we gather it from the atmosphere around, but it is part of ourselves. Only a dog has a sufficiently delicate sense of smell to detect it, but it is there all the same.

Is it true that we carry around the scent of what we are? It is certainly true that Christians ought to carry around the scent of what Christ is. 'We Christians have the unmistakable "scent" of Christ . . .' 'God makes our knowledge of Christ to spread throughout the world like a lovely perfume' (II Corinthians 2. 14, 15; J. B. Phillips). The fragrance of the love of Christ is very precious to God and can be a great blessing to men, and this fragrance should be in us. We cannot 'put it on'; it is the result of having the Lord Jesus living in our hearts. It is a scent which cannot be hid, and is an unmistakable scent.

H. F.

SEPTEMBER — OCTOBER, 1961.

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“Now the God of peace be with you all.”

Romans xv. 13, 33.

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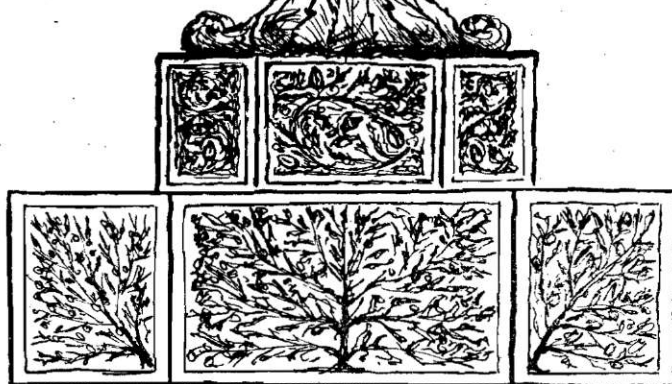
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NOVEMBER — DECEMBER, 1961.

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EDITORIAL

To speak of the Coming again of the Lord would not be introducing something new and fresh into Christian belief, although there is something new and fresh in this truth for the believer. For long years, in the middle and dark ages, as they are called, the light of this testimony was very dim and small, and only glowed in the heart of a faithful remnant of suffering saints. A time came, however, more or less clearly defined as an event or an epoch, when this truth was restored to its place in the forefront of teaching and expectation, and to-day it is pressing into the life and hearts—more than the heads—of multitudes of Christians in a way without parallel in history. It is true that world-conditions have always been the occasion for the strengthening and renewing of this hope and expectation. It was so in the great persecution days of Apostolic times. It is so to-day, very largely because, on a scale more immense than ever, the world situation is felt to be utterly without solution apart from a further intervention of God such as the Coming of Christ.

There is one thing that we would remark before coming to the real heart of this present message. It is this. The Lord, when formerly here, definitely said that He would return. The heavenly messengers at His Ascension quite precisely made the same statement. Henceforth, we have very little in the New Testament that is in the nature of a statement of the fact that He will come again; all that is there—or most of that very great *all*—is on the lines of an assumption that He is coming and of teaching relating to the matter. True, there is the “Behold, I come quickly”, and, “Behold, he cometh”, but for the rest it is mostly explanation, exhortation, admonition, warning, in relation to the event. The fact—so far as the Church is concerned—is taken for granted. What remained was to deal with related perplexities, relieve tensions, explain experiences, encourage and comfort, and point out the indications related to the Lord’s Coming.

This brings us to our immediate consideration. We focus it in a question. In the composite picture

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of this matter in the Scriptures ; that is, in putting together many parts and references related to the Coming again of Christ, is there one word that gathers into itself—more than any other—the portent and pointer to its nearness? Many *historical* “ signs ” have been made much of by schools of prophecy, and the whole subject has suffered quite a lot of discrediting by deductions and prophesyings which have proved mistaken or untimely. Again and again, these prophets have had to revise or adjust their conclusions. Be that as it may, there is that which presses upon the consciousness of true believers which is more than inductive or deductive calculations and conclusions. To answer our question from the mass of Scripture we are sure that there is such a word, and to mention it is to act like a key to so much, both in Scripture and in the world.

It is the word INTENSIFICATION.

Was not this the principle laid down by the Lord Himself in His parable of the Wheat and the Tares (or Darnel)?

Only, but surely, by the process of intensification, in which the true nature of apparent similarities and confused identities would be manifest, would the verdict and judgment be applied. There is no mistaking this feature in the relevant teaching of the Lord (such as Matt. xxiv, etc.), in the Letters to the Thessalonians, in Peter's Letters, and in the Revelation. Intensification to *breaking point* is the pointer, and it is seen to be the state in every aspect of life.

1. The intensification of spiritual antagonism, pressure, and conflict. Every time that the end comes into view in the Bible, this feature is most evident. The evil forces are felt to be pressing down and meticulously alert and active as though they had no time to lose.

2. Intensification of outward difficulties in Christian life and work.

3. Intensification of Satanic deception.

Counterfeits, confusion, mixture (of truth and error), misrepresentation (of Christ, His Church, and His servants). The lie—the great lie or “ working of error ”. All this to bring despair by confusion to the would-be-faithful people of God.

4. Intensification of ‘ religion ’ that does not give Christ His true and real place ; a ‘ Christianity ’ without Christ in *truth*.

5. Intensification of human sufficiency, importance, and independence.

6. Intensification of war-fever and anxiety and a temporary respite in which men cry “ Peace and safety ” and are put off their guard so that “ sudden destruction ” comes “ as a thief in the night ”.

7. Intensification of alternatives to the Truth. “ Many false prophets ”, and false teachings.

All these can be noted in the Scriptures relating to the Lord's Coming.

“ Knowledge shall be increased ” ; what an eye-opening phrase that is for the present time. “ Many shall run too and fro ” ; such a word needs no comment.

That Peter in his letter should have perfectly described the nuclear and atomic age and its effects as marking the approach of the end is startling when it is remembered that such things were unknown in his time.

Surely we have said enough to give evidence that rapid and unprecedented intensification in every realm—nature, human life, spiritual realms, phenomena, and particularly ungodliness—is the most pronounced indication of the near approach of His Coming. If this is true, we can appreciate the appeal that vigilance, devotion, and faithfulness, shall correspond to the demand. Surely, when the forces of evil and the world are so energetic, there can be no room for slackness and falling off on the part of the saints.

The Coming of the Lord is ever made the basis of an appeal for watchfulness, preparation, faithfulness, and purity. Everything will make it so easy for the Lord's people to lose heart, let go zeal, and feel helpless and worn out.

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Now is the time to lay hold of the prayer of the Apostle Paul and make it ours continually—"that he would grant you ... that ye may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man" (Eph. iii. 16).

"When these things begin to come to pass ... lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke xxi 28)—not 'your destruction', 'your shame', 'your end', but your "redemption", and the word means 'your way out'.

EDITOR.

HORIZONED BY CHRIST

CHAPTER TWO

WE have now reached so far on in our consideration as to make wise and profitable a brief review before we take the next specific steps.

We began these meditations by noting that the Bible focuses everything upon a primal rift and rupture in Heaven and then on earth, or, before the present created order and after.

The cause of that universal rupture is shown to be insubordination to the will of God; independent action, issuing from a desire for superiority, ascendancy, and power. This is the evil brood of pride: arrogance and conceit.

While there may be no specific statement to this effect or conclusion, there is much in Scripture to lead us to conclude that it was the 'appointment' of God's Son as "heir of all things" that were to be created that inspired this jealous revolt, and resulted in the long-term bitter enmity of Satan against that Son, and, since He could not be seduced, ultimately led to His murder.

We have defined all this as the fall out from God. Whereas, originally, there was but one realm, the realm of God, through the rupture there became two realms, and these in perpetual hostility to each other.

God, the Father, had horizoned everything by His Son, and, henceforth, everything of God was to have the Son as its sphere. So, the Son would be the measure, range, scope, nature, and constitution of all that is of God.

When we have recognized the eternal fact we have the key to the Bible, to history, and to experience.

There follows the twofold work of God "concerning his Son".

(a) The judgment, discipline, and undoing of the infected and disordered creation, particularly man.

(b) The reconstruction, reconstituting, and conforming of men of faith to the image of God's Son.

This is foreshadowed in God's sovereign choice of, and dealings with, Israel—the seed of Abraham. Israel was elected as the channel through which God would eventually bring His Son into this world, and—through redemption—ultimately 'reunite all things in Christ'. Mark you it is only in Christ that this will be effected, and the Bible shows that the ultimate "all things" will be exclusively those who have re-entered Christ by faith, not force. Thus "when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son", and He as transfigured and glorified was to be, and now is, the full embodiment of all that is to be universal when the last vestige of revolt and revolters has been banished.

Having followed this horizoning of Christ up to His Transfiguration, we take up the matter at that point.

The Transfiguration followed closely upon the plain and unequivocal statement by Jesus regarding His death at Jerusalem, and the shattering effect of that statement on the disciples. The Cross and the Transfiguration go together hand in hand. Both in the announcement made to them, and in the conversation of Moses and Elijah on the mount, this is seen to be the case. They are mutually interpretive. The Cross is the way to the glory. The glory will justify the Cross.

In, and by, the Transfiguration the ultimate destiny of redeemed man is horizoned by "the Son of man" as such.

At the time it was but the act without any teaching or explanation. The disciples were still men in the flesh, as the Lord's so-recent rebuke to Peter shows. The mystery of ultimate destiny and glory would be one of those things referred to by the Lord when He said, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now". Not only would it be impossible for the natural man to understand the deep things of God, to speak of

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them to such would be to put them under too big a responsibility. These things need more than natural wisdom to 'discern', and to 'bear'.

Paul makes this very plain at the beginning of his first Corinthian letter. Only when there are "spiritual men" to 'judge spiritual things' can the Lord speak freely and fully. So, it was but the act of Transfiguration and not the meaning. But the act left an abiding and unforgettable impression, as seen in Peter's letter so long after.

When the Spirit had come, and there were men born of the Spirit—a "new creation in Christ" (II Cor. v. 17), then the meaning of the Transfiguration could be disclosed. The Spirit then 'takes the things of Christ and shows them', so that in I Corinthians xv we have this meaning given. There it is revealed that Christ risen and glorified is the Horizon of redeemed men—in body as well as in spirit—in transfiguration. In his second letter to Corinth, chapter iii. verse 18, Paul follows this up with an application to believers. "Like unto his glorious body" is the key to the Transfiguration, so far as we are concerned.

We are not forgetting the so-vital aspect of the Transfiguration to Jesus Himself. That it marked a climax in His life and ministry here, we have seen. For Himself and His personal relationship with His Father everything was "well-pleasing"—"In whom I am well pleased". The Father's satisfaction with His Son personally was perfect, and the glory was His *personal* right and due then and there. But, if He had gone through to glory then He would not have been the Horizon of the redeemed, for redemption was not yet accomplished. It has been pointed out that the words "Who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising shame" can be rightly translated "Who *instead* of the joy set before him [as His own right] endured . . ." Jesus had not to go to the Cross to get His *own* glory, but to get ours, and to become *our* Horizon in glory.

There is this touch of finality in the Transfiguration. Nothing had been made perfect—complete—up till then. That is the meaning of the appearance of Moses and Elijah with Him in the mount. They respectively represent the Law and the Prophets, a term which is used to embrace the whole of the Old Testament. They made nothing perfect, and their own perfecting awaited the coming, the Cross, and the resurrection of Christ—"apart from us they should not be made perfect" (Hebrews xi. 40).

Perhaps it would be giving too much play to imagination to try to define the ecstasy of Moses and Elijah on that mount. They must have felt—

'This is what we have waited for for so long. This is the crown of all our hopes, labours, sufferings, and the vindication of our faith.'

Glory was certainly at hand for our Lord as His personal right, but what of the "many sons"? The servant-spirit must again triumph, and so, He goes down from the mountain to the Cross. Not for Himself but for the sake of others were the Cross and the shame, but through that the way is opened to the still greater glory.

THE HORIZON OF THE RESURRECTION

This is a vast and comprehensive matter, with limitless prospects. These, in detail, it is not our intention to consider; we keep to the one all-comprehending reality—the Son of God as God's universal Horizon.

The Resurrection brings that into view in a supreme way. There are three aspects of this.

- (1) The changed condition and position of Christ by resurrection.
- (2) The essential meaning and nature of the Church.
- (3) The representation of man as he will be in the full meaning of the resurrection in the body.

(1) *The changed condition and position of Christ.*

Resurrection is not resuscitation. There is an essential difference from what He was before. This difference is too manifest in His appearances to need arguing.

He has a body, real and touchable, yet with capacities and abilities beyond anything known in our material world. Walls and doors; miles and time have no significance to *this* body. His knowledge is not by surmise, guess, or information; but, like true spiritual knowledge, it is intuitive. To try to describe it would only be to become more mystified. The theophanies of the Old Testament help in the matter of reality, but we are left to prove that reality by a knowing in spirit how truly He is alive *now*. He is the same, but different, and the difference is the great blessing of all believers in every part of the world.

The life given by Him is a deathless and indestructible life. It is a supernaturally intelligent life, i.e. a life which gives an intelligence which the profoundest scholarship cannot attain unto. It is a life which supports through superhuman adversities and sufferings.

(2) *The essential meaning and nature of the Church.*

Speaking of the Church, let us at once make it

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clear that we refer to the Church which was born on the Day of Pentecost and is the Church of the New Testament. To describe this is to make distinctions clear.

The Church takes its character from Christ risen. It is referred to as that which is 'risen together with Christ'. It is as truly a miracle as was His resurrection. It is a supernatural entity.

If Christ in resurrection can only be known spiritually, i.e., in a spiritual way by the Holy Spirit's revelation, that is also true of the true Church. It is inscrutable, it is a "mystery". Although it may have embodiment in human life it is not a temporal thing. If we had lived in the first days of the Church we should not have been able to identify it by special buildings, dress, ritual, liturgy, or such externals. While certain language and ways of life may have characterized it, the thing that marked it out most clearly was its life. This was a living entity. There was a life in it which was a spiritual power, a spiritual beauty, a spiritual joy, a spiritual influence. This was a self-propagating and reproductive life.

The one impression registered upon people who came into contact with it was this livingness, and triumphant livingness. If asked to explain it, the answer would invariably and exultingly be 'Jesus lives, and He lives within us and in the midst of us.'

If Christ was raised by the power of God, so the Church survived the most terrible ordeals of persecution and manifold suffering, went on its way overcoming immense difficulties, by reason of that same power. It was the embodiment of "the power of his resurrection".

Again, if in resurrection Christ was released from merely local and geographical limitations, the very life and progress of the Church had to be universal. Local testimonies and representations there would be, but only of the universality of Christ. The local is never the horizon in the New Testament. Christ risen, ascended, and reigning was the Horizon, and the Holy Spirit saw to it that when He was really in charge, the vision and passion was to the fullest compass of Christ. In the thought of God, nothing was to be smaller than Christ.

These are but a few statements of facts.. A very big volume would be required in which to do justice to the true nature of the Church.

(3) *The representation of man in his ultimate resurrection body.*

The Apostle Paul states precisely that the body of the believer in whom Christ dwells will be changed, and the new body will be "like unto his

glorious body" or "body of glory". The Resurrection links with the Transfiguration. "This corruptible must put on incorruption" (I Cor. xv. 53).

Christ in resurrection is the norm of what will be true of all born-again children of God when redemption is consummated. This is the issue of all the travail in the groaning creation, the adoption of sons, the redemption of our bodies (Rom. viii. 22, 23).

All this resolves itself into certain very obvious things.

If the Resurrection of Christ is the supreme demonstration of Divine power, as the Word says it is, namely, "the exceeding greatness of his power" (Eph. i. 19), then the very great power of sin, Satan, and the world against the Church is transcended by the risen Christ who dwells within. If the death of Christ is the expression of the great people are gathered together, the kings of the power of sin and evil, His resurrection is in power "exceeding".

On one side of human history, death is the most powerful force in creation. The unceasing and unrelenting battle in man and in nature is with death.

The testimony of Jesus raised from the dead is that this most powerful force has been destroyed in Him personally. The Church is the elect Body in which that testimony is meant to be deposited and demonstrated; "Glory in the church by Christ Jesus" (Eph. iii. 21). The Resurrection was—and is—the release of that mighty life which, until then, had been in Him alone, and its transmission to, and residence in, the Church which is His Body, a life shared with Him organically and corporately. The vocation of the Church is to be, in itself, a testimony to the power of that life, and a vehicle through which the life is passed on to others. Thus, Christ as "the Living one", in the power of resurrection, is the Horizon of all things in the energies and activities of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Life.

The next peak is very near, indeed it is joined to this one by a very narrow neck. It is the peak of

THE ASCENSION AND EXALTATION.

There are some twenty-five references to this in the New Testament. This is the climax of the cycle from emptying to filling, from humbling to glorifying. It is also a climax in His mission and work.

Keeping in view the inclusive truth of Christ as the Horizon of all things we can see some of the major "all things" in this particular connection. Out of these all else will issue.

Inclusively, the Horizon is enthroned, and is

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

therefore all-governing. We have mentioned that the characteristic definition of Christianity—"In Christ"—is finally a governing definition. That means that it governs everything.

Here then we see

(1) VICTORY ENTHRONED

Psalm xxiv is the psalm of the ascended triumphant Lord; it celebrates His re-entry into glory. Verse 7 describes this King of Glory as "the Lord mighty in battle". Therefore, His enthronement is the enthronement of victory in battle. Here, then, the Horizon is seen in all its dimensions.

There is the far-back view reaching to the revolt in Heaven and then on earth, and all the following entail of rebellion. There is the far-round view, earthly and cosmic—"the heathen rage, the earth take counsel" (Ps. ii. 1, 2; Acts iv. 25, 26); 'principalities, and powers; world-rulers of this darkness; hosts of wicked spirits in the heavenlies' (Eph. vi. 12). There is the far-on look, unto the day when "he shall come whose right it is, and it shall be given unto him" (Ezek. xxi. 27), when He is present as "King of kings and Lord of lords". That universal triumph is with Him as "by the right hand of God exalted" (Acts ii. 33).

(2) REDEMPTION ENTHRONED

Here is the counterpart of the Transfiguration. The symbol covering this is 'the Lamb in the midst of the Throne'.

Christ enthroned means:—

(a) Redemption from the authority of dark-

ness—He led His captivity captive" (Ps. lxxviii. 18; Eph. iv. 8).

(b) Redemption from all iniquity. This (as the root-meaning of the word 'iniquity' means) is redemption from complicity with, and involvement in, Satan's rebellion.

(c) Redemption 'unto God' (Rev. v. 9).

It is the return into God as the true environment and life.

(3) IT IS MAN'S PERFECTION ENTHRONED

He was made "perfect through sufferings" (Heb. ii. 10), and presented to God "without blemish" (Heb. ix. 14). He was the Priest and the Sacrifice, sinless and perfect, spotless and complete. As Priest in Heaven—"... a priest upon his throne" (Zech. vi. 13)—He makes intercession prevailing because of His own perfection.

He is where He is representatively of all 'whom He sanctifies'. He is the Firstfruits of our perfection.

(4) MAN GLORIFIED ENTHRONED

We are to be "glorified with him" if "we suffer with him" (Rom. viii. 17). He, *the Son*, is "bringing many sons unto glory" (Heb. ii. 10). His glorification is the guarantee of ours.

Thus, Christ exalted and enthroned is not just an objective truth, but the Horizon within which the Holy Spirit is at work to bring us to "reign together with him" (II Timothy ii. 12).

(to be continued)

THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID

Reading: Ps. lxxxix. 28, 29; Isa. lv. 3; Acts xiii. 34.

YOU may have passed rather easily, if not carelessly, over such a phrase as this, "The sure mercies of David", "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David". We need to know, and the Lord needs to show us something more of the range of the possibility that is bound up in such a phrase as that. Yes, it is the Gospel call, "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David". When we turn to the book of the Acts of the Apostles, and find men and women in the first flush of the glory of their knowledge of

salvation, and of their life as God's people here on earth, we find that again and again emphasis is laid upon the fact that the Christ in whom they trust and whom they preach has this intimate, this close relationship with David. It matters to them. It is of supreme importance to them. I think it is no less than eleven times that the name of David crops up in the book of the Acts, and that surely means that, for those who had eyes to see and hearts to understand, the sure mercies of David meant something of value.

A TRANSFORMING TRUTH

It is not that they were merely interested in an intellectual way in the fact that prophecy had been

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fulfilled. There is a handling of the Word of God, a studying, a comparing of texts and portions, a fitting of prediction into history and history into prediction which provides a great deal of interest in the mere fact that the Word of God has been literally fulfilled. Of course, that is perfectly true. Praise the Lord for every fresh time when we discover how true His Word is, but this mention of David meant something more than that certain verses in certain chapters of certain prophets had been fulfilled. It was something more than a mere mental enlargement and exercise to place alongside of what they found in the experience of Jesus Christ, what had been promised concerning Him. This to them was not so much in their minds as in their hearts. It was not so much that it held an interest for them as fulfilled prophecy, but that it was a Divine truth which, laying hold of them, transformed their lives and brought vigour and hope, strength and life into them, to know that their Saviour, the Lord Jesus, was the Son of David.

While, of course, as Jews they were doubtless well aware of the earthly prospects and hopes and glory that revolved around that most honoured of the kings of Israel, it was more than that. It was nothing merely national, nothing merely earthly. Perhaps that is where we have lost, or are liable to lose, the values in apportioning it to merely earthly circumstances, to a nation in which we have no part, to a land which is not our land. However true that could be with regard to an earthly fulfilment as to a literal throne at Jerusalem, it was not that that brought such enthusiasm, such joy, such energy, such vitality into the lives of these men. It was rather that now they knew that in this present moment in a most practical and patent way the wonderful sure promises of God made to David and displayed through him had reached a glorious fulfilment in their risen Saviour. It was the Gospel.

A FACTOR OF THE GOSPEL

Passing now from the days of the 'Acts', we turn to the Letter to the Romans, in which the great truths of the Gospel are so comprehensively treated, and we find that the Apostle immediately opens up that whole subject in this way:

" Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God . . . concerning his Son . . . of the seed of David . . ."

The Gospel has in it, as a most powerful working factor, that the Saviour who is preached is of

the seed of David. To Him have been given the sure mercies of David.

We pass on beyond that early stage of the Church. There seems to be rather a Jewish atmosphere about it in some respects, but it is the Church, it is the Gospel. But when we pass into the later stages of things as we find them in the New Testament, we find the Apostle Paul using a possessive pronoun with the Gospel, speaking not in generalities but speaking of "my Gospel". We do not think for a moment that that was because it was another Gospel. There is only one Gospel as he himself was quick to insist, but the Gospel had become so much a part of him, and he was so closely identified with it, that he called it "my Gospel". If we find some clearer view of the essentially heavenly nature of the Church in his Gospel, we shall still find that it is closely identified with the matter of Christ's relationship with David.

" Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, of the seed of David, according to my gospel"
(II Tim. ii. 8).

So this is no mere chance association of Christ with one of the many in the Old Testament who spake of Him or who were typical of Him. This is a matter of paramount importance for us all. If we pass on into the Book of the Revelation, we find three references to David: in the Lord's own message to one of the churches; in the statement concerning One who was worthy to open the book, in that great scene of redemption; and again in the closing words of this last book of the inspired writings, it is Christ presented as the Seed of David. He is the "root and the offspring of David" (iv. 7; v. 5; xxii. 16).

CHRIST — GOD'S KING

What does it all mean? It means this surely, that the purpose of God in redemption was to provide for Himself relationship, that relationship in the first place being vested in His true Son, our Saviour. We can never for one moment separate Christ's Saviourhood from His Kingship. He was exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, and never may those two be divorced, either as to their time or as to their scope. Christ is not Saviour now and King in the future. There can be no separation between the time of His Saviourhood and of His Kingship. Christ does not save sinners so that after years of knowing Him as Saviour they may suddenly be brought face to face with the fact that He is now to be King, though actually all too

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

often that is the human experience. But in the purpose of God there is no difference, there can be no distinction as to time. Christ is King as He is Saviour, and if He is Saviour then He is King. Nor is that merely so as to scope. He is not the Saviour of some and the King of others, the Saviour of His Church and the King of the Jews, the Saviour of a vast multitude and the King of only a few, though again, alas, that is too common in spiritual life. The Word does not present Him as such, and none of us may, even in some vague, uncertain, subconscious way, divide between the fact of Christ's Saviourhood in all its gracious reaching out to needy souls and His Kingship as the One into whose hands has been committed absolute authority over every part of every life.

Now this was not an onerous thing to the disciples; the matter of Christ's Kingship was no less glorious to them than His Saviourhood. Indeed they found their life, their joy, their power of endurance in this fact that in those first days they realised the wonder of it, that the One in whom they trusted was the blessed, glorious, age-long fulfilment of a Divine promise. God had given Him the sure mercies of David. That revolutionized their lives at the beginning, and it kept them as transformed men; and at the end as much as at the beginning, the Lord's people need to know in a practical way, in an experimental, ever-fresh and ever-renewed way, that the Saviour in whom we trust is the Son of David, He has an established throne.

THE 'MERCIES' MADE SURE IN
CHRIST RISEN

Now that is something more than just believing in Divine sovereignty. The disciples, so far as I know, never for one moment doubted that God reigned in His universe, they never lost that conception of deity that in some sovereign way God was first in this universe. And yet what help did they get from that knowledge when again and again they were found, in the face of circumstances and trials, to be powerless men. Nay, more than powerless; that were bad enough, but at the crucifixion and after it, they were despairing men. And yet they believed in God's sovereignty; they would never doubt it. What has happened now, that they are so different? What has wrought the change? The thing has been brought down from that remote, ethereal, intangible sphere and all centred in One whom they knew personally and intimately. Their eyes have seen Him, their ears have heard Him, their hands have handled Him, and now they know

that all authority in Heaven and in earth is vested in this Man, and they know Him, and so they become changed men; steadfast where before they were so wavering; full of energy and power where before they were so impotent; faithful whereas they had been faithless. Why? Because they had come to know for themselves in a personal and practical way that this One has received the sure mercies of David, He is the reigning, sovereign Lord of the universe by resurrection, which means that, though a Man, and truly a Man, He is entirely independent of earth's circumstances, earth's forces, earth's ways. By resurrection He has been removed from the realm where merely earthly things can touch Him, or earthly matters can govern Him, and so, having been raised from the dead, being a risen Man, and having the sure mercies of David, they can and do face anything and everything, and face it triumphantly.

Have we become anchored upon this sure fact, the sure mercies of David? It is not a question of whether we have heard this, thought of this, or read this before. It is a question of whether we live in the good of it, whether in our own lives and experiences we have really become anchored, grounded upon this fact. You know the Book of Judges, and what the trouble was there. Oh, the sad, tragic, dark story, the anarchy, the bitterness, the shame of those last chapters. Yes, and the shame to the Name of the Lord in it all. Oh, what a sad, sad story! And the writer puts his finger right on the point of what the trouble was. Four times we read: "In those days there was no king in Israel, every man did that which was right in his own eyes". Democracy had run to seed, and what happened there was the result of that.

So often that is the sad story amongst the Lord's people, and it is the sad story of many a human life. There is no King there. Oh yes, they are saved. They are knowing Christ as Saviour (if you use that term in the most limited sense of knowing Him as the One who has pardoned sin and who answers prayer and is very gracious), but not yet have they appreciated the fact and bowed to the fact—nay more, embraced the fact with joy and rejoicing—that this One is God's appointed and sovereign Lord to rule as King. For that reason the same sad history is repeated. It is not that we ever gather together to try to make Jesus King. It is not something that we are called upon to do at all, but to recognize that God has done it, He has given to Christ the sure mercies of David. We as His people are called upon to recognize, and by faith and with true submission of heart to come into, the good of what He is in that respect, to recog-

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nize His position, to yield to it, to glory in it. This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ raised from the dead, as the fulfilment of God's promise to provide not for the destruction of His people but for their good, not that they might be tyrannized over, but that they might find blessing; to provide a King, His chosen, His anointed.

THE 'MERCIES' ESTABLISHED IN FAITHFULNESS

The sure mercies of David! David himself is a picture and a type, and if we can somehow get into the life and experience of David we shall come to know some of the Divine purpose that he represented. He is not just a king who has a crown on his head and whom people obey because they have to. David is far more than that, and his whole history is ablaze with Divine light and revelation as to the particular purpose involved in God's idea of kingship. Just to take the simplest example, which lies on the surface of the words which we are considering, "the sure mercies of David", we see that David's throne is a great, abiding testimony to the faithfulness of God. You know his Psalms. You know how again and again there arises in them expressions of patience and waiting. It was like that with him; promises were given, the anointing was bestowed, he had glimpses of his destiny, but he had to wait, and in his waiting he proved what the Psalm that we are considering reiterates so many times, the faithfulness of God.

Then not only in his own experience but in the fulfilment in the person of Christ what a time lapsed, what experiences ensued before at last the voice could be raised saying concerning Jesus Christ that God had given Him the sure mercies of David. There were the promises, there was the hope, there was Solomon, a marvellous, blessed and wonderful foretaste of what might be, but how soon Solomon failed and how swift was the decline of the kingly family, how bad the fall. Things went from bad to worse, through the days of the division of the kingdom. Dark days indeed they were, filled with the weakness and faithlessness of God's children; a period of gross darkness which culminated in the time of the captivity, when Jerusalem was laid waste, and there seemed to be no prospect at all of either a people or a man to govern them. Out of the bitterness of those days Psalm lxxxix was written, and if you follow it through you will find that the greatest lamentation is made that in spite of all those promises there is nothing but failure and misery and darkness and death, till the Psalmist, out of a bursting heart cries, "Where is thy faithfulness?" Ah, where is

is it? The sure mercies of David, where are they? Poor David doubted that word at least once in his life; even he despaired, matters were so long-drawn-out and so hopeless. He said, 'I shall now one day perish by the hand of Saul; it is no use, I give it up.' Praise God that He did not take David at his word. Ezekiel speaks of the gracious recovering of the children of God, "I will give them one shepherd, my servant David, to rule over them". So the restoration came, and though it was a day of small things, nevertheless Jerusalem and the temple were rebuilt, and there again prophetic voices were raised concerning the Man whose name was the Branch, who should rule in righteousness. Yes, but it was just a voice here and there, a little glimmer in the darkness, and then those voices were heard no more, and for hundreds of years the matter was held in abeyance.

THE 'MERCIES' GIVEN TO CHRIST

We move into Gospel times, and a Child is born. Nay, before He is born He is promised, and concerning this the angel says in his promise to Mary: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David" (Luke i. 32). Ah then, God has not forgotten! Those hundreds of years of darkness did not mean that God had given up. Praise the Lord! After all these years the mercies of David are there. There was hope again, though so long deferred. And yet as the disciples went through with the Lord Jesus their hopes were again and again dashed to the ground. When the Lord knew that they would take Him by force to make Him King, He withdrew into the mountains. Oh, will He not be King? After all, is He not going to fulfil the Divine promise? Are the mercies of David sure? Then there is fresh hope; He is heralded in His entrance into Jerusalem: "Hosanna to the son of David" (Matt. xxi. 9). Praise in the very citadel of that which was opposed to Him, praise which could not be silenced! That was fresh hope, and then there followed fresh despair; rejection, betrayal, arrest, crucifixion. "We thought it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." No darkness was so dark as those blank days after the crucifixion. And *then*, the sure mercies of David were seen in resurrection.

Do you wonder that these men were so overwhelmed and overcome with the glory of it? It was true after all, it fulfilled His promise, the mercies of David were sure, God's faithfulness had not failed after all.

A WITNESS AND A TESTIMONY

It is that that is involved in the throne of our Lord Jesus set in our midst, because we too are called to a throne. We are not called to a throne apart from the Lord Jesus but in fellowship with Him. We too are passing through that painful and prolonged process of proving that the mercies of David are sure. We too, like David and like the disciples, if we are not very careful will give up and say, 'I shall one day perish; it is no good, I give up'. But if we have something of the beautiful wonder and truth, the faithfulness of God, not set down in words but exhibited in a person, then we shall hold fast. That is what matters, especially in the last days. God has been as good as His Word in Christ, the matter is proved beyond question, He has done the thing. What are hundreds of years to the Lord? What does it matter to the Lord if there is darkness everywhere? He does not give up. Nay, the wonder of it is that all through those episodes and experiences He has been working to His end, and Christ stands before Him risen from the dead, of the seed of David, to proclaim to the encouragement and strengthening of our faith that God is faithful, not just to save us from hell and get us through at the last, but to bring us to that purpose of His own heart which from all eternity has been bursting to find expression in redeemed humanity. God is going to do it. We are coming to the throne. That is the language of faith, and that must be our language. None other is permissible to those who have caught a glimpse of the fact that Jesus Christ risen from the dead is of the seed of David, for to Him have been given the holy and sure blessings of David.

Do you believe in the faithfulness of God for that? David remembers, and God reminds him again and again, that he did not belong to a kingly family, he was not chosen for the comeliness of his person, or the ability that he had naturally. God took him from the sheepcotes, and exalted him from a humble family. His kingship spoke first of all of the mercy of God. So it is with us. The sure mercies of David! Oh, this is not that which can be supplied by us or in which we may glory. The lack of anything in us is never to be the ground of our despair. God has not chosen those who would seem to be kingly in themselves, but He has chosen the weakest, most foolish, and most unworthy, and brings them onto resurrection ground, which is the ground where human values do not count and do not matter, human distinctions are not allowed. On resurrection ground He has brought us into the sure mercies of David.

Then there is the faithfulness of God, and it is in that realm that faith needs so much exercise,

for there will be every kind of attempt to shake us just there as to our holding fast to the faithfulness of God, not merely that we shall not be lost but that we shall come to the glorious and wonderful goal of redemption, not as found in our conceptions, but in the heart of God. Faith must come back to that and lay hold of it, and find in a risen Christ food for its maintenance.

THE 'MERCIES' ESTABLISHED IN RESURRECTION

Another mark, as we have said, is resurrection. So long as we come down to earthly levels we are out of running for the throne. So long as we are in bondage to earthly standards, so long as we are engaged in merely earthly pursuits, even if they be, as we would say, in the work of the Lord, we are not in the realm of things where the throne is brought into view. This is not for those who are bound to earth, who draw their life and take their characteristics from earth. The sure mercies of David are realised in Christ. In other words, the throne is established in Christ for ever, because He, though a Man, is not a man of this earth, He is a risen Man, a Man of resurrection, and so are we.

There is one other word which is so closely associated with this whole matter, it is 'holiness'. The speaker in the New Testament changes what we have in the Old Testament, and instead of "the sure mercies of David", says, "the sure and holy blessings of David". Holiness comes into view. Now it appears that in the Old Testament use of the word it is a translation for mercies, but clearly in the case of the Lord Jesus the speaker would have them know that this One is King, not only because of the faithfulness of God but because also of the intrinsic holiness of His own character.

Let us just in the simplest way seek to grasp with both hands this blessed fact that God is trustworthy to realise, not only in His true Son but in redeemed sinners, the full content and purpose of His redemption. He is able to do it. That we see little of it, and our experiences so often seem to contradict it, matters not at all. It is just in this very realm that we are being extended and exercised. David did not come to the throne in a day. After the first flush of realisation of his destiny he was battered and bruised and crushed. The last thing that he seemed to be was a king. That was all God's way of proving that this throne was to rest supremely on His faithfulness in all circumstances, not on favourable conditions, not on the

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will of man, not on David's honest opinion of his own personal merits, but on the faithfulness of God. And for us the word is spoken that though the way be dark and long, the conflict so intense, the goal so beyond us as it seems, we must beware of Satan's attempt to bring us to despair. This is a part of our exercise in the matter of the faithful-

ness of God, as to whether for His Church and for us as members of that Church, in the end it shall be said with triumph, not only of our Saviour but of ourselves in fellowship with Him, God's everlasting covenant has stood the test, and we have the sure mercies of David.

H. F.

HORIZONED BY PURPOSE

CHAPTER TWO

HAVING laid the foundation upon which to build, we proceed with the superstructure. We have noted that the Holy Spirit is committed to make real, in history, in an elect people, and in individual Christians, the meaning of the Man in the Throne (Ezek. i. 26 ; Eph. i. 9-23). Israel's history—in blessing and rejection—is solely interpreted by this fact. It is the historical, temporal, and earthly side of the all-embracing truth. The Church, from Pentecost onward, is the embodiment of this truth in a spiritual way, and its glory or shame is governed by the measure in which the Holy Spirit is allowed to have His place in lordship.

Our next step will be to consider some distinctive features of these energies of the Holy Spirit.

The first of these is:—

I. A DYNAMIC INCENTIVE

It is not difficult to see that men of the Spirit have always been in the grip of a captivating objective; mastered and dominated by a sense of Divine intention. In the case of Ezekiel, who is an example of all that we are saying, it is said right at the beginning of his vocation: "The word of the Lord came *expressly* unto Ezekiel". Here is the element of precision, urgency, and definiteness. The sense is traceable throughout his ministry. Dates, places, and measurements are meticulous. Discouragements, withstandings, and frustrations there were in abundance. Times were when he had to keep silence, but the fire flamed up anew, and the overmastering purpose carried him on again.

How true this was of the Apostles and of the Church in the earliest days. The Holy Spirit was truly in charge. He was the Custodian of God's eternal purpose in Christ, and Christ as the Divine Horizon was made the passion and dominating objective of all whom He mastered. It was so clear cut, so single-minded, so uncompromising, so all-consuming. Yes, Purpose was the dynamic-incentive of their life. That Divine Purpose came to them "expressly".

The next thing to note is:—

II. THE IMPACT OF PURPOSE

It was this dynamic of purpose which accounted for the impact that was registered upon people, situations, and the evil powers.

There was nothing tentative, indefinite, a beating of the air. Rather was there directness, deliberateness, and effectiveness.

This is more than a statement of fact, it is an explanation and it is a challenge. Can it be said that, in our time, because of an all-consuming and clearly-defined purpose, the Church is registering an unmistakable impact upon the world, locally and more widely?

The one all-important note which is so manifestly lacking in the Church at this time is the note of authority. This was a recognized and acknowledged feature of the Lord's presence and ministry when He was here in person. This also was an unmistakable characteristic of the Church in early days. The loss of this *spiritual* authority has let in many alternatives and substitutes, so that the present system is one of pretence, make-believe, show, striving after effect. The efforts and failures are pathetic.

But what is the essence of authority? It is not forcefulness of expression, neither is it strength of conviction. These and many other things may, or may not, accompany true authority, but they are not authority. The essence of authority is, that what is said or represented carries in its very truth the power of destiny. Sooner or later, that presentation will show itself to be a criterion. People and things will stand or fall according to the attitude taken toward it. In a time of upheaval, shaking, testing and trouble, people and work will stand or collapse, and the cause will be—in either case—that which God gave. The truth *will* be vindicated. This is borne out so evidently in Israel's history. This is what lies at the root of the first three chapters of the 'Revelation'. This is the explana-

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tion of the triumph or tragedy of so much that had its origin in God, and of many Christian lives. Authority is something that will have to be measured up to, you cannot get away from it. In spiritual things it is God. *There can never be something of God present for which we shall not have to give an account.* The Holy Spirit always speaks with authority, and when He speaks, destiny is present. As "all authority" has been given to Jesus, God's Son, in Heaven and on earth; the Holy Spirit presents and testifies to Him as the Horizon of judgment and destiny. There is impact when Christ is preached in the Holy Spirit. The proof of reality is not in the form of teaching, however orthodox and right. Neither is it in the form of practice and procedure, however correct. Isaiah was told to "declare unto my people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sins", and then was added, "Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways" (Isa. lviii. 1, 2). The truth and reality is in the spiritual impact that brings people face to face with God.

The next characteristic of the Holy Spirit's energies is:—

III. THE INTELLIGENCE OF PURPOSE

If, as we have said, 'Ezekiel' and 'Ephesians' are pre-eminently stamped with this element of Divine Purpose, it does not require deep investigation to see that spiritual intelligence is characteristic.

With Ezekiel it is: "I saw visions of God"—"I saw". The wheels that accompanied the "living creatures" were full of eyes. There was a continuous 'showing'. The element of clear, vivid, and meticulous perception was present in relation to the goings and purpose of God.

In 'Ephesians' we have, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation . . . that ye may know". The Letter itself is one of unparalleled spiritual intelligence, and this 'knowing' is exclusively bound up with "the eternal purpose".

An essential result of the Spirit's government and work is spiritual knowledge. Paul laid much emphasis upon this in both of his letters to Corinth.

Where the Holy Spirit has the ground of Christ to work upon there will be much light and intelligence among the saints. The tragedy of the average believer, and of many companies of believers, is their spiritual ignorance, their little understanding, the smallness of their apprehension of Christ. Why do not the Lord's people read such parts of His Word as, for instance, I Cor. ii; II Cor. iii, iv,

and 'Ephesians', with the registration that what is there is God's mind for them to have by the eye-opening, revealing work of the Holy Spirit?

IV. THE INTEGRATION OF PURPOSE

When we look at those parts—or that section—of Ezekiel's prophecies which have to do with the existing condition of Israel, we see a people disintegrated, scattered, and disrupted. God's view of them was revealed in the vision of the valley of dry bones: many—very many—bones: spread over the valley; unarticulated and unco-ordinated: bare, dry, and useless by reason of their dividedness. What a true picture of the state where the vision of God's all-integrating purpose has been lost! How true are the words we read in Proverbs xxix. 18: "Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint [fall apart; go to pieces]".

The mighty movement of the Spirit in the valley was not just motivated by the desire to have the bones together—"bone to its bone"—and clothed and covered. It was governed by the purpose of Israel's election, to be the channel through which—after the flesh—God's Son would come. Unity is always—in God's thought—to bring Christ in in fulness. To hinder that all hell is set on the disintegration of the people of God.

The real incentive to union is the recognition that by it the fulness of Christ will come in. This is 'Ephesians', and if 'Ezekiel' ends with the triumphant shout, "The Lord is there", it is the effect and result of the vision and apprehension of the Man on the Throne, and God's purpose concerning Him.

Immediately after the Cross the disciples and the followers of Jesus were very much like the bones in the valley. The metaphor is changed but the effect was the same. "I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad" (Matt. xxvi. 31). Scattered and peeled! Helpless and shattered! But note the effect of the Spirit's energies on the Day of Pentecost. Gathered and integrated! Co-ordinated and unified! Clothed and nourished! They were on their feet—an army. The integration was truly the effect of the energies of the Spirit, but the great feature of their integration was the vision and power of the Divine purpose concerning Jesus Christ. The book of 'Acts' is the book of Purpose energized by the Holy Spirit, and it is the book of concerted action on that basis.

No wonder Satan delights in and works so hard for division, especially where the vision of God's purpose in His Son is most fully and clearly present.

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GOD'S REACTIONS IN PURPOSE

History is marked by repeated reactions on the part of God. We have devoted a whole book to show something of these specific reactions (*God's Reactions to Man's Defections*), but it is necessary to mention it here in special relation to the Purpose. We have seen that God's method and instrument in this matter has been an elect people. Election particularly relates to purpose, it is not willy-nilly, nor arbitrary. To fail in the matter of purpose is to nullify the election and to lose—not essentially salvation, but certainly—the inheritance, i.e., that specific inheritance connected with the vocation.

The Old Testament representation of this is Israel. The nation was "an elect nation" for a particular purpose. The whole nation was called according to that purpose. When the body as a whole lost its vocational character it was rejected and sent into exile. The vocation was recovered in a Remnant. This Remnant was a rebuke and example to the whole. When eventually and ultimately Israel—the nation— forfeited their vocation among the nations by rejecting the very One who was to justify both their election and their existence, they were rejected and lost their place among the nations, as for the last nearly two thousand years.

The Church as the eternally elect body then came in in relation to a far greater and higher purpose than that related to Israel. Let it be emphasized that the existence of the Church is bound up with purpose. Failure here will mean spiritual Babylon, i.e., confusion, bondage, weakness, and frustration. But God reacts in a Remnant—"Overcomers"; and throughout history a thin red line of faithful and true witnesses—individual and corporate—is traceable, when the *general* state has been decadent.

It is very instructive to note the way of the Spirit in His movements to recover this government of purpose. The movements and their features are all so consistent and harmonious with the object.

Note, then

(i) THE SPIRIT'S SOVEREIGNTY IN FUNCTION

Ezekiel had his function entirely changed by the Spirit's government. The prophet was really a trained priest. Youths of priestly lineage were meticulously trained for their office up to the age of thirty years, when they entered upon the work for which the training was to fit them. At that age (Ezek. i. 1), when he should have taken up his

active priestly function, Ezekiel had all that particular training set aside and was called into the work of a prophet. This was a complete change of function for which he had received no special training. It is impressive to note that the same was true of the one whom Jesus called the greatest of the prophets—John the Baptist. John was of priestly lineage and family. His father was an acting priest. But the sovereign will of God and the energy of the Spirit changed all that and called upon John to function in another way. Jesus, although not of priestly tribe or lineage, was God's High Priest and essentially filled that capacity. But in His earthly ministry He was ". . . a prophet mighty in deed and word . . ." (Luke xxiv. 19). In each case the hour demanded the Prophet, and God sovereignly changed the function to meet that need. Strange, unlikely, and unexpected choices and means are made by God when He has a special *purpose* on hand. The instruments might complain of natural unfitness, lack of training or qualification, but the Spirit takes full responsibility and sovereignty is justified at the end.

Then note

(ii) THE ESSENTIAL VOCATION

In keeping with the purpose among the *nations*, and not as exclusive to the instrument, the *inclusive* title of the prophet is noted. Ninety times in 'Ezekiel' the designation "Son of man" is used. Among the Prophets this is peculiar to Ezekiel. We know that the favourite title chosen by the Lord Jesus Himself was "The Son of man". Only twice in the eighty-two times where it occurs was it used by others.

There is a similarity and a difference. Ezekiel has no article: he is just "son of man". Jesus always has the article "*The* Son of man". The similarity is not in Person, but in Vocation. The infinite difference is in Person.

The vocational similarity is found in the meaning of the title. It is that of identification *with* man; representation of man. The idea is a very large one; it brings into view God's concern for *man-kind*. Not Israel, but all mankind is God's concern. Man has ever been God's particular interest. It was when man was created that God found His rest and pronounced His satisfaction on all. There was no evening to that Day.

Israel's vocation was meant to be to all men. The Church's vocation is to "all the world". Christ is identified with and representative of man in the thought of God. This is the essential feature of the prophet's ministry, which ministry is to re-

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veal *the* Man, and to lead to Him. Anything that puts the minister in a separate class and marks him off as apart from other men is a violation of a principle of the Spirit's way, and will, sooner or later, prove to be a limitation among men. Ezekiel said that he "sat where they sat". That was not the condescending act of a superior, an official, one of a special class. No, it was a *man* amongst men, seeing with their eyes and feeling with their hearts, yet seeing with the eyes of God and feeling with the heart of God. Jesus adopted no garb, habit, tone of voice, or badge to mark Himself off as different or apart from others. There was ample prejudice, suspicion, criticism, and that kind of thing to question His authority, and He never tried to overcome this attitude or get any advantage by artificial, official, or formal means. Nothing was assumed, put on, or feigned to make an impression and gain acceptance. The Holy Spirit of anointing was His sole basis and source of authority. That was enough and the centuries testify to it. Note then again, the title chosen by Him and linked by Him with every phase of His life and history was not one that men would look upon with honour, respect and awe, but "the Son of man". Different indeed, but in *nature*, not in anything external. At the same time remember who He was! He "emptied himself . . . and being found in fashion as a man . . ." (Phil. ii. 7, 8). That is said of the One who, in His own right, was equal with God.

What we have been saying is still further conveyed in other designations attached to Ezekiel. God's method in relation to purpose is the matter which is before us.

(iii) THE VESSEL AS "A SIGN"

"Son of man . . . I have set thee for a sign".

"Say, I am your sign." (Ezek. xii. 6, 11; xxiv. 24). The prophet himself was a sign. There were many signs, but these were God's ways with the prophet

to make *him* the sign. Those ways of God with His servant were not ordinary and usual ways. They were unusual, singular, and often very enigmatical, incomprehensible, and inscrutable. The thing to note is that with God the history of the vessel was the history of the people *pre-written*. He went through their history in advance of them. He not only prophesied, he *was* the prophecy.

Paul, the Apostle, was a sign of this dispensation in this way. If Paul was "a chosen vessel" for the special purpose of bringing in *the* particular purpose of this dispensation, namely, the revelation of the Church, its nature, place, and vocation in the eternal counsels of God (the stewardship of the mystery, he called his ministry); then Paul's history ran along those lines from his conversion to his departure to be with Christ. We make the observation without embodying the great amount of evidence here.

Is this not a law of God when Purpose is in view? Those who are "the called according to his purpose", and especially those—individual or collective—who are instruments or vessels of the Purpose, are taken through quite unusual and, otherwise, inexplicable experiences. Theirs is no ordinary way. The Purpose unto which they are called, if they are committed to the Holy Spirit, will be wrought into their very beings. Theirs is no studied or second-hand ministry. They *are* the message before they speak it. For them to have to hand up their message would be to part with their very life. It is a very costly way, but would we have it otherwise? Such a ministry is only possible if a total break with all else has been made. Ezekiel had to do things that made him a laughing-stock to others. Sometimes they thought that he was mad. Whatever they thought and said, the time came when they could see their own experience in the light of his personal history. They *literally* went the way that he had gone symbolically. How effective was his life with God!

(to be continued)

THE full power and meaning of 'THE NAME' is summed up in Phil. ii. When a believer uses THE NAME, the whole finished work of Christ is embodied in it, as well as the authority of the Victor on the Throne, Christianity is Christ, a living person whose Name has power in Heaven and on earth. He Himself is at the back of His Name. A dead person has no living force . . . Calvary is the climax of His work, the uttermost proof of His love. Through Calvary He got His Name . . .

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THE AUTHORITY OF THE INTERCESSOR

"Thus saith the LORD . . . Ask of me things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me" (Isaiah xlv. 11).

So unreasonable to the natural mind seems the proposition of Jehovah to His people (Isaiah xlv. 11) that they should "command" Him concerning the work of His hands, that various alternative readings of the passage have been made, with the intent of toning down the apparent extravagance of the Divine offer. Men do not believe that the Almighty means what He says. Nor have they spiritual understanding to comprehend the purpose of the Father to bring those who are redeemed by the precious Blood of His dear Son into living and practical co-operation with that Son in the administration of His kingdom.

The people of Christ are revealed in the New Testament as "*the fulness of him who filleth all in all*". They bear a vital relationship to Him as members of His body, through whom His purposes are to be wrought out in eternity. It is not, consequently, a strange thing that, in the present time, He should make large revelations and offers of His grace in order that He may test and develop those who shall be sharers of the ministry of His throne through the coming ages. We need have no fear in accepting the fullest implications of the words above referred to, in spite of the critical attitude of even some devout scholars. The principle involved is set forth in other places of the Word, in different phraseology it is true, but with equal cogency and clarity. Our need is to draw near with the boldness of faith, and in the attitude of full obedience. Faith will prove a key to unlock every mystery of truth; obedience will secure our entrance through the door thus opened. In a new and deeper sense we shall discover ourselves to be sons abiding ever in the great house of the Father, partaking of all its relationships and responsibilities. Its many ministries will become vivid as we move about in them, speaking words of authority, and seeing behests of the Holy Spirit, which are *uttered through us*, carried out to their fulfilment.

In Psalm xx the coming Messiah is set before us. His humanity is depicted, with its pressing needs and dangers, and His vows and offerings are commended to God. Then follows a prophetic petition: "Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel". The desires and purposes of this Chosen One of God are promised full accomplishment. All of His heart plans are accept-

able to God; they are in full accord with the Divine ideals; therefore a second assurance is given: "Jehovah fulfil all thy petitions".

The King who is thus addressed is the Son of Man, the great representative of our humanity. Through Him the Spirit of God had unhindered liberty in carrying out the Divine counsel during His earthly career. His will was in constant and perfect alignment with that of the Father in Heaven. No shadow ever rose between Him and God, save that great cloud of our sins which enveloped Him on Calvary. At each step of His daily walk He could say: "I do always those things that please him". Because this was true there was no bar to the granting of the desires of His heart, or to the fulfilment of His inward counsels.

The deep reality of the union between Christ and His people is but little comprehended by the great majority of believers. It is compared by the Holy Spirit to the relationship of a head to the members of the body over which it is set. Where perfect health prevails, the members are responsive to the slightest impulses of the head; but if disease prevails in any part of the body, there is a lack of full co-ordination. The body of Christ differs from the human body in that each member possesses an individual volition which must be surrendered voluntarily to the will of the Head. Much schism exists, alas, in the body as a whole, and much self-will in the individual member. These things hinder healthy growth and the free outworking of the purposes of the Father. Yet, where any member dwells fully in his place, "holding fast the head", there is a true identity, and the Master's words find fulfilment: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you".

Note the significance of the statement: "Ye shall ask *what ye will*". There is frequently a submissive uttering of the words, "thy will be done", which is very far from the desire of God for His child. The spirit of the believer assumes a passive attitude that accepts whatsoever may come as being the purpose of the Father. This is not scriptural. The Holy Spirit teaches hearty co-operation rather than mere submission; *the active entering into God's plan*, instead of a vague yielding to circumstances; a positive claiming and appropriating of the promises which are set before us in the Word as being the will of God for His servants. We are to positively will the will of God; seek it out as He has revealed it; and maintain our place

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before Him until it has been accomplished.

That attitude will ensure the carrying out of the promise to the Head: "Jehovah . . . fulfil all thy counsel". The member of the body has come into complete intimacy with the Head; *he discerns the purposes of his Lord*; through his petitions Christ receives His own heart desires. Of not a few of the Lord's saints this has been true in a marked degree. It is not the fault of the Head that it cannot be said of all.

Matthew xxviii, 18 shows us the King on the mountain in Galilee which He had "appointed" as the rendezvous for His disciples. He is speaking to the group surrounding Him: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and in earth". The statement may seem strange to many Christians, but it is nevertheless a mighty spiritual fact that the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, is planned to reach its full development and manifestation in the Body of Christ on the earth. Much of the weakness of the Church is due to its failure to understand and appropriate this all-important truth. It is ours, as individual members of the Body, to seek that the authority of Christ shall come with full acceptance into our spirits. It is not enough to know and acknowledge that He is our fulness; there must be as well the apprehension of the complementary truth that we are also His fulness (Eph. i. 23).

THE REMOVAL OF MOUNTAINS

Serious difficulties often confront the servant of the Lord. They seem as deep-rooted as the everlasting hills, and as imposing in their bulk. They block the way to accomplishment. They shut out the vision ahead. They balk the disheartened worker with a grim assurance of immobility. They seem to laugh at his discomfiture and to mock at his prayers. And, as the months and the years pass, and no change is seen in their contour, he comes to accept them as a necessary evil, and to modify his plans accordingly. They loom up on every foreign field; each home district has its serrated range; few pastorates lack at least a 'little hill'. They are too varied in their nature to particularize, but they are genuine and heartbreaking hindrances.

Concerning all such, the Master has assured His servants that they need not continue as obstacles. The question of their removal is one of authority. The command of faith is the Divine means of removing them out of the way: "*Ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall obey you*". *It is not the quest-*

ion of an imposing faith but of an all-sufficient Name. The worker has no power of himself to accomplish aught, but he may wield the power of God. As he speaks to the mountain in the Name of Christ, he puts his hand on the dynamic force that controls the universe, heavenly energy is released, and his behest is obeyed.

Authority is not prayer, though the worker who prays can alone exercise authority. Moses lay on his face at the Red Sea, calling upon God to work, only to receive the strong reproof: "Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak to the children of Israel, that they go forward". And as he lifted his face in amazed protest, to assure the Lord that the way ahead was blocked by the sea, Jehovah spoke again: "Lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea and *divide* it". As the impotent arm of the Law-giver held out over the waters the symbol of the authority of God, there was immediate response. God delights to delegate His power to men, when He can find believing and obedient servants to accept and exercise it.

So, when mountains rise in our way, the Lord tells us to command them to depart into the sea. He gives no instruction to pray, although that is understood. There is essentially the same charge as was given to Moses: 'You have asked Me to work; I have granted your prayer, but choose to do the work through you; speak to the obstacle before you, and it will obey'. As we speak to our mountain, there may seem to be no immediate response. But, as day by day we maintain the attitude of authority, believing that God has commanded us, there will come a trembling and a shaking, and a removing, and it will slide from before us into the sea of forgetfulness. God is endeavouring to train workers for a future and a mighty ministry of co-operation with His Son. He therefore has conferred on them the privilege of sharing the authority of Christ. The burden of responsibility for its acceptance and its exercise lies with the individual believer.

THE BINDING OF THE ENEMY

A fact that is once more forced upon the consciousness of the Church of Christ is that a great and real warfare is being waged against her by unseen foes. "Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the authorities, against the world-rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies". In the life of the Christian assembly, in its doctrine, in the fellowship of its members, and in their bodies, subtle

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forces are working. The opposition is veiled, but it is real, and it is often tremendous. Because its source is unrecognized, it is the more effective. The powers of evil are allowed often to have practically free course in groups of believers. Troubles that might be easily diagnosed and overcome are laid to other causes, and because the remedy is not applied, the difficulties increase until the very existence of the congregation is threatened.

In one of the cities of Canada a pastor said to the writer: 'There are about four different troubles going on all the time among my people. As soon as I get one straightened out, the Devil has another ready to take its place'. The answer was made: 'Brother, you are right in your diagnosis of the source of the trouble, but you are wrong in your method of meeting them. What you are looking at are the coils of the old serpent through your congregation; and as you straighten out one kink, you may be sure another will appear. Leave the coils alone, and go for the head; put your foot on that in the authority of the Lord; recognize the active agency of the enemy and conquer him. The coils will straighten out of themselves.' The same advice will apply in many other cases. Let us learn the secret of victory . . . and our churches will come into the place of strength, and be able to take the aggressive against the enemy.

"COMMAND YE ME "

ISAIAH XLVI. 1.

We return to our starting-point. The solution of every spiritual problem is to be found in the working of the Divine energy. We long for its manifestation, and pray with intensity and with desire that it may be released in our midst. Yet there seems often to be an unaccountable delay that perplexes and discourages. Are we fulfilling the conditions? God is ready to bless, but we fail to provide the channels along which alone can flow His supplies.

It is true also that the Lord is demanding a closer adherence to His appointed methods. As the individual believer matures in the Christian life, he often finds greater difficulty in maintaining spiritual victory. He had expected opposition

to decrease, or at least to be more easily overcome, but he discovers that God is laying upon him heavier burdens and testing him for larger ministries. In like manner, as the age is advancing, the Church is being prepared for the final struggle by being taught lessons of individual responsibility that in the past were the property of advanced saints only. All believers might have known them, but only the few pressed on to their attainment.

For the greater struggles of our day and the thickening atmosphere into which we are entering, the Church needs intercessors who have learned the secret of *taking hold of the power of God* and directing it against the strategic advances of the enemy. She needs those who have understanding of the times to know what ought to be done amid the crashing down of old standards and the introduction of that which is uncertain and untried. God is waiting for those whom He can trust and use, who will have the discernment to foresee His steppings and the faith to command His power.

Authoritative intercessors are men and women whose eyes have been opened to the full knowledge of their place in Christ. To them the Word of God has become a battle-chart on which is detailed the plan of campaign of the Captain of the Hosts of the Lord. They realise that they have been appointed by Him for the oversight of certain sections of the advance, and they have accepted His commission. Deeply conscious of their own personal unworthiness and insufficiency, they yet believe God's statement concerning their identification with Christ in His throne-power. Increasingly they realise that heavenly responsibility rests upon them for the carrying out of the warfare with which they have been charged. Their closet becomes a counsel-chamber from which spiritual commands go forth concerning matters widely varied in character and separated in place. As they speak the word God works. His delight is in such co-working. They have caught His thought concerning the method of the advance of His Kingdom. Through them He finds it possible to carry forward purposes and to fulfil promises which have long been held back for lack—not of financial means nor of human labourers—but of *understanding spiritual labourers*.

J. A. McM.

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CORPORATE PRAYER

WHILE it is true that a very large place is given in the Bible to individual and personal prayer, it is also true that a very great value is put upon corporate prayer. Indeed, a value is given to corporate prayer which cannot be known in individual prayer. In the New Testament the prayer-meeting has a very vital place in relation to the people and the work of God. It can be rightly said that the prayer-gathering is the index and register of the church's life. Show us your prayer-gathering and let us hear how the believers pray, and we will tell you what kind of church that is.

But what is church-prayer? In other words,

WHAT SHOULD
THE PRAYER-MEETING BE ?

It may seem a truism to say that it should be

1. THE CHURCH AT PRAYER.

That is, the church as an entity, a corporate entity. Such a gathering together should be the solid expression of the organic oneness and spiritual unity of the local company of believers. The mere congregating of a number of individuals without an organic integration, and with so many personal interests to express or have expressed, may have values and would be better than nothing at all, but it would not be the solid and effectual prayer of the church as an entity.

There is a history behind the prayer of the church, as such. It is the history of a work of the Cross in which each member has been brought on to the ground of identification with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection, and by that common history has identical life and fellowship. Such a church has *gone through* something in experience and that something has become subjective.

If two people have gone through a similar experience which has deeply affected their inward life, they have a mutuality of understanding, and they can speak with one voice. So it was in the prayer-life of the New Testament churches. They shared and expressed locally what was fundamentally true of the Church universal. It was a crucified and resurrected Church, having been baptized into the sufferings and victory of its Head. That victory should be inherited by the local church, and be manifested in the effective working and issues of its corporate prayer.

There, in the gatherings—or coming together—

for prayer, the very nature and vocation of the Church universal should be in expression. Its nature is that of a spiritual organism because it has been born "not of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God", "born of the Spirit". Its vocation is to express the greatness, the rights, and the authority of Christ. Prayer is essentially vocational, and this is pre-eminently so in corporate prayer.

Vital relatedness, both of the persons and of the prayer, is indispensable to effectual prayer. How easy it is for someone to come in with something quite discordant or irrelevant, and so swing the prayer away from its strength of purpose and positiveness.

While many particular matters may occupy the foreground of required prayer, there should always be a looking beyond the thing itself to how it really relates to and touches those three factors just mentioned—the greatness, the rights, and the authority of Christ. We must have an adequate case in our prayer, and that is the Lord's glory.

2. CORPORATE PRAYER MUST BE AUTHORITATIVE

The church at prayer must be on the ground of absolute authority. It must not be in doubt, uncertainty, or weakness, but in assurance and confidence. There must be the ground of authoritative appeal to God. There must be the ground of authority over the evil forces at work in any given situation. The church must have the assured right in its position and in its intercession.

That right and authority is respectively the infinite virtue and efficacy of the Blood of Christ and its testimony, and the Name of Christ as above every other name.

The church—at all times, but—especially when at prayer must be consistent with all that the Blood of Christ means as a testimony against sin, condemnation, and death. These things mean a closed door to Heaven and God. The Blood of Christ has for ever been the ground, and the only ground, of "the new and living way" to the throne of grace. The Name of Christ is the very synonym for supreme authority. But even so, it is not just a title, but the embodiment of a nature wholly satisfying to God; of a work perfectly accomplished; and of a position fully accorded Him. These are the elements of authority, and the ground of authoritative prayer. On this ground the church has a right to pray and expect. It can do more than ask upward; it can challenge outward—"in the name".

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3. CORPORATE PRAYER SHOULD BE EXECUTIVE

When we use the word 'executive' we mean decisive. If you were a member of an executive body in any business concern, you would be a person marked by certain features, that is, if the concern with which you were connected was of a really vital character.

(a) You would be recognized as a person with a real business mind. That concern would give a seriousness to your demeanour and attitude. It would rule out diffusiveness and irrelevance, and knit you together with your colleagues as one with an integrating objective.

(b) You would be a person who would be marked by a will for decisions. Wasting of time; indecision; tentativeness; carelessness; and all such things would greatly disturb and trouble you. Your soul would be saying, "Don't let us be always and only talking about things; waiting for something to happen, and hoping that it will, some day. Let us *be* executive, and have issues settled, and conclusions reached. Let there be an element of decisiveness and conclusiveness about our transactions. Let us reach for and be set upon a verdict." Surely, such features are traceable in the prayers in the Bible, with Abraham, Moses, Daniel, Nehemiah; etc., and in the New Testament Church and churches!

Our praying in meetings is all too tentative and indecisive. We do not really go out for a verdict. We stop before we have the assurance that we are *through* on that issue. There is such a thing as taking as well as asking. We ought to go away, not wondering, to say nothing of forgetting, but rather expecting and looking for Heaven's answer. That answer ought to be already in our hearts. If what we have said is true of any Executive worthy of the name, who has a serious Concern to serve, should it be less or otherwise with the church which has the greatest of all interests to serve, responsi-

bilities to carry; and Name to honour? We should not go to the place and time of prayer just because it is 'prayer-meeting night'; or to do our duty to our 'church', or for conscience sake; certainly not to give certain others the occasion to pray while we listen and—more or less—agree. We *are* the church. We *are* in the greatest of all business! We should go thus-minded and with 'purpose of heart' determined to co-operate and—so help us God—to have outstanding, urgent issues settled for 'the sake of the Name'. On arriving our instant action should be to take the right ground and ask fervently that all should be taken into the hands of the Holy Spirit.

One word remains for this present.

(4) CORPORATE PRAYER MUST BE COMBATIVE

It is impressive that in that part of the greatest *Church* letter in the New Testament where its militant character is emphasized and its armour portrayed, the Apostle gives such a definite place to prayer (Ephesians vi).

There is nothing which draws out the "wiles" of the evil powers so much as corporate prayer. Everything is done to smother, blanket, confuse, divert, pre-occupy, disturb, distract, annoy, hinder, weary, waste time, and many other things, all with the object to see that there is no real impact of Christ's authority upon their kingdom.

If we realise this we shall 'gird up the loins of our minds', we shall 'stand and withstand'. Being alive to what is involved and what is happening, we can be no more passive than a soldier could be if he saw his country's interests and his comrades' lives involved in his attitude and action.

There is a real combativeness in corporate prayer, and we shall not get anywhere if our fighting spirit—not in the flesh, but in the Holy Spirit—has been let go or taken from us.

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS**MAKER AND REDEEMER**

GRACE put down her sewing with a sigh of relief, and also of satisfaction. At last she had finished the piece of embroidery on which she had been working for many weeks. She looked at it critically, but could see no fault. It was a fine piece of work. 'First prize for certain', she murmured to herself as she wrapped it up and put it away.

The girls at Grace's school were all busy with

similar tasks, for every year they had a needlework exhibition, out of which were chosen the best results which were put on display at Speech Day. Each girl designed her own work, so naturally they worked in secret, for no one wanted to have others copying her ideas. Grace had thought of a very striking design, had chosen her colours with great care, and had given to the work many hours of

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labour. The result pleased her very much. Next day she wrote her name and form on a label which she fixed to the material, and then took it along to the Secretary's office, where all the efforts were being collected.

In due course the names of the prize-winners were announced. "First prize", said the Head, "goes to Felicity, for an original design, beautifully worked". Grace gasped with surprise. She knew how idle Felicity had been lately. It was true that she was clever, but talent without industry is not of much use. Since she had wasted all her spare time on other things, Grace could not imagine how on earth she had gained a prize. And first prize at that! Her surprise grew still more, and her disappointment too, when the rest of the prize-winners were named, and she was not among them.

Articles which had not gained prizes were returned to their owners. Most of the girls received their work back again quite cheerfully, for they had hardly expected to win a prize. Imagine, however, Grace's indignation when she was handed back a piece of sewing which she had never seen before. It certainly was not hers. In a way it was clever, but it had been sewn badly and in a hurry, and was very unlike that on which she had worked so hard.

She took it to the Headmistress, complaining that there had been some mistake, but the Head pointed out that the label which it bore was clearly marked with her name and in her handwriting. Grace could not deny this, but argued that the labels must have been changed. The Secretary was then called, but she insisted that this was what had been handed to her by Grace. Indeed she was annoyed at the idea that she had permitted any mistake. There seemed nothing more to be done. Grace was very angry. Her worst suspicions were confirmed when the prize-winning efforts were displayed, for there she saw her own beautiful work, marked with 'First Prize', but bearing the name of Felicity.

Off she rushed, to find her and to charge her with cheating. Felicity only laughed, and dared her to prove it. This, of course, Grace could not do. She took the matter to the Head, but Felicity kept saying that she herself had done the embroidery and taken it to the Office. Again the Secretary was asked, but she took Felicity's side because she did not want to have her efficiency doubted. So nothing could be done, though to Grace it was now quite clear that Felicity had sneaked into the Office and changed the labels.

Those were black days for Grace. She had been robbed both of her prize and of her own handiwork. She wrote home to her mother to complain about this unfairness. Grace's mother did not feel

that she could interfere, but she tried to comfort her, and said that she would still hope that Grace might get her work back again, even if she missed the prize. This gave Grace an idea. Why not buy back her work?

It was a custom at her school that, after Speech Day, the prize-winning exhibits were sold in aid of charity. Those who had made them had the first right of purchase, but otherwise anyone else could buy them. Would Felicity want to exercise her right? Grace very much doubted it. In any case from that moment she began to save every penny, in order to have enough money if the chance came.

It did come. Felicity had planned to buy a very smart coat with her prize-money, so she had no intention of spending any of it on what she called 'silly embroidery'. This gave Grace her chance, and she took it.

Now the Headmistress already had her doubts about Felicity but she could prove nothing, still less could she accuse her own Secretary of having made a mistake, though she feared that this was what had taken place. When she saw how anxious Grace was to buy the piece of work, she felt certain that wrong had been done. She would have liked to have given it to her free of charge, or at least to have made the price less. This, however, might have seemed unfair to those who did not know the whole truth, so she felt it best to let Grace pay the full price. But when she gave Grace the work, she spoke very kindly to her, saying how pleased she was that she had been able to 'redeem' her property.

The word 'redeem' means to buy back what was once yours. Grace knew this, and was comforted to realise that, even though she had not been able to intervene, the Head understood it all and sympathized with her. It was a great joy to know that after all she was trusted, and more, that the Headmistress would now have a much higher opinion of her because of what had happened. She could only feel sorry for Felicity. Her deceit had done just the opposite for her, for it was unlikely that those who knew could ever trust her again.

As for the embroidery, well it became much more precious to her than ever it would have been if she had not lost it. She had paid the price for it, even though it had really been hers by right, and now she felt that it was doubly hers. What she had passed through made her able to understand God's Word: "But now thus saith the Lord that created thee . . . and he that formed thee . . . Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, *thou art mine*" (Isaiah 43. 1).

Grace had redeemed her work; though it was

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hers by right, yet she had been forced to pay a price to get it back again. She had planned it. She had made it. She had been cheated of it. But now she had bought it back again. She, too, could say, 'I have redeemed thee . . . thou art mine'.

This is what God has done for us, He thought of us, and He made us, but sin robbed Him and took us away from Him. So He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus, to redeem us, that is, to buy us back for Himself. In our case the Lord Jesus did not pay

money, but He paid for us by the sacrifice of His own life.

He made us—He is our Creator. He also bought us—He is our Redeemer. Then we must be His. That is what He wants, and that is what He is waiting for us to believe. How gladly we ought to hand over our lives to Him who so loves us and has paid such a great price that we might belong to Him for ever.

H. F.

THE LIVING GOD

ONE of the supreme distinguishing titles by which God is known in the Bible is "The Living God". This title not only distinguishes Him in a general way from the dead gods of the heathen, indeed it does, but it relates Him *in a practical way* to many aspects of human life. There are gods many in this world; philosophic, aesthetic, artistic, idealistic, deistic, etc., which, if they have any value at all, never—at best—reach beyond the psychological, that is, the auto-suggestive effect.

We have only to look at the varied context of the occurrence of the title—The Living God—to see the uniqueness, the difference, and the livingness of the God who is our God, and is the only wise and true God (John xvii. 3; Rom. xvi. 27).

1. HE IS THE GOD WHO SPEAKS (Deut. v. 26)

"For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire . . . ?"

This is the most outstanding feature of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. Everywhere, in almost every book—the exceptions are *very few*—the God of the Bible is a God who speaks. Indeed, it is largely a record of what God has actually said—" . . . by divers portions and in divers manners" (Heb. i. 1). Supremely, comprehensively, and finally God has spoken in His Son, and in His Son again and again by His Spirit to this very time God is known to speak as personally and intimately as any one human person could speak to another, and with greater effect. This God speaks livingly and powerfully, and unnumbered men and women can testify to the fact that He has spoken—actually spoken—to them.

2. HE IS THE GOD WHO GIVES EVIDENCE OF HIS PRESENCE (Joshua iii. 10 - 17).

"And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you . . ."

In this piece of history, the evidence of the presence of the Living God was His making a dry passage in and through a river inundating all its banks, and a great host of many thousands of people quietly marching through its deep bed at such a time with dry feet. Moreover, five strong and terrible nations were successively and irresistibly subdued and destroyed, not by the natural or trained superiority of this people, but by the presence and power of the Living God enabling them. This is history. But how many impossible situations have been negotiated by the power of God in the lives of His people and the experience of His Church *in all ages* because they trusted in the Living God!

3. HE IS THE GOD WHO CONTROLS THE FORCES OF THE UNIVERSE (Jeremiah x. 10).

"But the Lord is the true God, he is the living God . . . at his wrath the earth trembleth . . ."

Here, the context relates to cosmic and terrestrial upheavals and preservations attributed to the Living God, or to the voice of the Living God. God speaks in phenomena. God can be known in tempests and in the quelling of them, whether they be in nature, in nations, or in personal human affairs and experiences. What a record could be written by many, such as missionaries in wild and dangerous places, of the hand of God in both raising 'stormy winds' and quelling them in the interests of His Name and testimony!

4. HE IS THE GOD WHO DELIVERS HIS SERVANTS AT HIS WILL (Daniel vi. 26).

"I make a decree, that in all my dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever . . ."

This was said, as is seen, when God had closed

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the mouths of the lions and delivered Daniel from them right in their den.

This Living God is the God who delivers when He chooses, and miraculously so. The people of God have known not a few dens of lions, both in number and variety, and their history is strewn with miracles of deliverance. There are many books written of these deliverances, and the facts are unassailable. "He is the living God, and steadfast for ever", and although that was said by a very fickle and inconsistent king, he at least spoke the truth then.

5. HE IS THE GOD WHO SAVES THEM THAT BELIEVE (I Timothy iv. 10).

"For to this end we labour and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of them that believe."

Here the Living God is attested as such by His power and grace to save men, and to save *all* men, if they will. A library would be required to house the evidence here. While we ourselves live, a vast number of souls are the living proof of this truth, and the final picture is of "a great multitude which no man can number". These have "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. vii. 14). They are the evidence that—unto salvation—He is "the Living God".

6. HE IS THE GOD OF RECOMPENSE (Hebrews x. 30, 31).

"For we know him that said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

We conclude on a sombre note. The Living God will vindicate His own people and bring to judgment their enemies and persecutors. History again has a long and vivid record of both of these aspects. There have been more than a few who have found that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God". The Bible has many instances of this, but even recent history holds very conspicuous evidences.

It may be a long-term working of recompense in many connections because, on the one side, faith and patience have to be perfected, and on the other side, God is very long-suffering and not willing that any should perish. His 'vengeance' must have an unquestioned ground.

So, both for the comfort of the Lord's own, and for the warning of those who work contrary to Him, we say:

'He cannot fail, for He is God.
He cannot fail, He's pledged His word.
He cannot fail, He'll see us through.
'Tis God with whom we have to do.'

He is the LIVING GOD !

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